Background

Women over 50 are frustrated in their quest to find clothing they want to purchase and enjoy wearing. Few clothing lines are targeted to this market. Ones that do so are often quite boxy in shape in order to fit more sizes and shapes. For the larger in size and/or shorter in stature customer, these garments often render their wearers shapeless, serving to reinforce the “invisible-ness” often observed by this age group (Twigg, 2013, Townsend & Sadkowska, 2017). The dull colors often found in this clothing support “receding into the background” and imply that the wearer is not interested in fashion, color being a major component of the fashion system.

Introduction

The capsule wardrobe in this project was developed for women over age 50 who are unable to find appropriate clothing. The overarching themes of inclusivity and sustainability refer to body shape, skin color, height, size, and financial means. The problems addressed in their search are “age-appropriate clothing”, fit for a changing body (Lewis, Medvedev, & Seponski, 2011), fabrics that “breathe” to help regulate body temperature due to changing hormone levels, and “style” or fashionability. This customer values the following elements often missing from the market: natural fibers for their aesthetic and comfort characteristics; flattering silhouettes that are less body-revealing; garments that are enjoyable to wear, that feel good on the skin, are non-restricting, and enjoyable to look at i.e. colors that compliment aging skin and hair color. This customer tends to buy fewer apparel items and has a strong interest in sustainability which can be at odds with the fashion industry as it exists today. The current fashion climate is dominated by fast-fashion, trendy apparel that is created in a rapid process from inexpensive fabrics and production, thus ensuring built-in obsolescence. This system is not sustainable, at huge cost to laborers and the environment (Fletcher & Grose, 2012).

The capsule wardrobe created in response to the sustainability challenge is geared towards longevity in three important areas: high quality construction, designed for durability and alterability; high quality, washable natural fibers (or more sustainable man-made fibers such as lyocell); tertiary colors with interesting patterns and prints (Townsend & Sadkowska, 2017). Secondary considerations to the capsule collection but important from a sustainability standpoint are that a large portion of the textiles were colored or patterned through the use of natural dyes, indigo and coffee, cyanotype and marbling.
processes to achieve the tertiary or mid-tone colors most sought after by this age group (Twigg, 2013, Townsend & Sadkowska, 2017).

**Challenges**

Few clothing lines are targeted to this market and the ones that do are often so lacking in fit and shape, to fit a range of sizes, that they conceal the body. For the larger in size and/or shorter in stature customer, these garments often render an unflattering, boxy shape and serve to reinforce the “invisibility” often observed by (Twigg, 2013, Townsend & Sadkowska, 2017) women of the over 50 age group. The dull colors often found in this clothing support “receding into the background” and seem to imply that the wearer is not interested in fashion and does not want to be noticed. The object of the eye is color, the first thing we see, hence it is a major component of the fashion cycle/system. A frequent comment by women in this age group, on seeing these capsule pieces “I would wear that” ...

**Development**

One of the challenges faced with this project was that the original scope was too large for the specified time frame. The idea was to identify universally flattering shapes that are considered classics. In this case, classic means styles that can exist outside of fashion, not trendy. Often this leads to uninteresting generic styles found in the marketplace. Unfortunately, the word “classic” often connotes “dull, boring and old-fashioned.” Key apparel pieces were chosen to provide the core items for a flexible wardrobe: dress, pant, top skirt, tank, and ruana. Garment silhouettes were taken from classic styles known to be flattering to a wide range of body types and designed in a low-to-zero waste approach to fabric utilization. Fabrics were selected from those already in the collection of the designer and modified as needed for color and pattern:

- Linen/cotton burlap used for the ruana was made from repurposed curtains from the scrap bin and incorporated cyanotype printing for a reversible pattern.
- The rayon crinkle fabric used for the dress was another remnant from the scrap bin dyed with natural indigo.
- The silk charmeuse used for the tank was pieced together from scrap bin remnants and dyed with coffee grounds.
- 100% linen used in the reversible wrap skirt was salvaged from out of date prepared-for-digital-printing yardage and cyanotype printed.
- The cotton tweed used in the pencil skirt, the lyocell twill for the pant, the cotton/silk/wool tweed for the top were vintage off-cuts previously purchased from an estate.
- The black silk habotai in the evening dress was repurposed from a circle skirt, cut into strips, hand marbled and pieced back together.

The capsule collection was developed through flat patternmaking and draping, then fitting on a size 10 dress form and a size 8 model for a semi-fitted cut leading toward garments “where the body shapes the
clothes more than the clothes shape the body” (Aalto via Townsend & Sadkowska, 2017). Once muslins were finalized, slow(er) sewing construction techniques were used to allow for alterability and durability: wider seam allowances finished separately, uncut darts, deeper hems, metal components instead of plastic ones, and wooden buttons.

Results and Conclusion

The initial goals of this project were achieved: to create an inclusive yet sustainable capsule collection that is stylish, age-appropriate, and meets the needs of older women. The clothing is fitted but includes plenty of wearing ease and is constructed from breathable fabrics in a tertiary color palette. The accompanying booklet gives resources and wearing tips to encourage engaged, satisfying interactions with the clothes, leading to a wardrobe with a longer lifespan (Fletcher & Grose, 2012).

The process and end results acknowledge a woman’s beauty throughout her lifetime, made more visible by creating the appropriate frame and context, tailored to her needs.

Future Directions
This capsule collection concept can be further expanded to design for specific climates, ideally with a three-season wearing approach. While the initial collection was composed of woven fabrics, the natural progression would be to design a complementary line of knits, both cut and sewn and fully-fashioned, i.e. t-shirts, novelty knit pieces, and sweaters. An additional expansion could be made in creating season-specific items along with accessories.

References


