

You're Too Pretty To Be Gay. Activism on the Body through Representations and Negotiations of Queer Femme Invisibility

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The 2013 FBI hate-crime statistics report indicates sexual-orientation based discrimination for homosexuals was the second highest on the list for single-bias hate crime incidents following race. I created this ensemble to utilize clothing as a form of activism to highlight inequalities in the queer community. Conceptually this design comments on the struggles of femme-identified lesbians by juxtaposing ideas of “passing” as heterosexual with the negotiations of presenting queer signifiers in appearance as a form of solidarity with the LGBTQ community. The design process continues the dialogue used in Reddy-Best’s (2014) ITAA design titled *An Exploration of Craft and Racism – Hand Tie-Dyed Materials and 3D Printed Embellishments with Inspiration from the Inequitable Human Condition* where discussions of inequalities are circulated through clothing.

These juxtaposed notions of “passing” and queer signifiers are found throughout the design in the embellishments, silhouette, fabric choice, and fabric placement. A body-hugging feminine silhouette was chosen to represent the connection femme lesbians often have with traditional ideologies surrounding femininity. Hidden within the silhouette and busy fabric pattern are asymmetric lines such as at the front neckline and the front and back skirt



as asymmetric aesthetics are often utilized as a signifier of queerness in the queer community. The printed fabric was chosen to engage with femme politics by exhibiting rainbow colors, a blatant-queer signifier, alongside flower motifs, which are often associated with heterosexual femininity. The pink, tulle underskirt was made with several layers and is secured with a straight waistband at the natural waist. The compression of this voluminous petticoat-like garment represents some of the pressures within the LGBTQ community to conceal their sexual orientation. The pressure of this skirt against the skin and the discomfort from the abrasive fabric leaves the wearer in a symbolic sense embodying similar negative feelings associated with concealing queer identities due to oppression(s) from the dominant society.

Despite the inequalities present in our society, there has been much progress as is evident in the 37 states currently

allowing same-sex marriage. This progress inspired use of new ideas in the form of new technologies, resulting in five 3D-printed, abstract-flower embellishments that were painted red. Their placement on the skirt's first asymmetrical tier above the tulle on the bottom right where they get lost in the background of the busy pattern symbolizes the LGBTQ community's past and current exclusion from society.

References

Reddy-Best, Kelly L. (2014). An exploration of craft and racism: hand tie-dyed materials and 3D printed embellishments with inspiration from the inequitable human condition. Juried fashion design in the International Textile and Apparel Association Annual Conference design exhibition, Charlotte, NC.