

# **WEAR YOUR IDENTITY ON YOUR SLEEVE**

Integrative Project 2019

By Adrianna Kusmierczyk



## INTRODUCTION

I was at my grandma's lake house in Poland when I googled the term *psychogeography* which I soon learned meant how human emotions and behaviors are shaped by places and our surrounding environment. I was reading *Off the Maps* by Alastair Bonnett, sitting on a wooden swing at a cottage built by my grandpa who I never met. In high school, my mom threw summer parties here, and about 10 years later my cousins and I grew up playing in the sandbox hidden in the corner of the same backyard. Now, I'm 21 years old traveling by myself to this place in another country that I consider my second home. Places play an important role in shaping who we are as they are related to how we were raised and our cultural background. The way we visually communicate our different identities comes in many verbal and non verbal forms. In addition to where we are from, what we wear also reflects our identity.

For centuries, clothing has been used as a medium through which we communicate messages to others. Fashion has the power to evoke emotions, tell a story, and reveal an identity that can be used to create a sense of community amongst a group of people, as well as separate. We consciously and subconsciously create opinions of others based on attire and carefully choose what we wear depending on how we want to appear. Fashion allows strangers to form connections because we look for aspects in others that we relate to. Although clothing is already a powerful communication tool, I question, how can I make clothing that has more meaning and that truly reflects aspects of the individual wearing it? How can mixed media art be used to reflect identity through fashion?

In my Integrative Project, *Wear Your Identity on Your Sleeve*, I explored the relationship between places, cultural identity, and fashion. Through the process of conversation and collaging historical maps with found imagery, hand embroidery, painting, and using other mixed media techniques, I created a collection of repurposed garments that reflect the identity of First Generation Americans. This series of collaged "identity maps" incorporated into clothing represents the way in which children of immigrants view specific places and their childhood in relation to their identity and personality. The layered collaged garments reflect the hybridity of identity, something especially experienced by children of immigrants who are affected by multiple cultures and geographies. By repurposing clothing to reflect how people's identities are shaped by places and their pasts, I encourage more individuality and diversity within the fashion community. This project helped me explore how clothing can become a meaningful part of our every day life and become a greater tool for storytelling.

## IDENTITY AND PERSONALITY MAPPING

The map, a tactile functional object that provides directions from one place to another, can become more than useful directions but records of moments in time and memories. According to Kris Karzinski, directional maps are “so utilitarian they often find their way not into a book or an archive but directly into the trash, even though they offer a unique point of view on a particular place”.<sup>1</sup> As human beings we are always mapping, whether we are conscious of it or not; mapping our days, mapping our walk to work, mapping our conversations. The maps that move beyond the expected utilitarian directional form, “are maps that find their essence in some other goal than just taking us from point A to point B.”<sup>2</sup> They become a vehicle for the imagination, taking you on the voyage of the mind. In *Wear Your Identity on Your Sleeve*, the process of mixed media “identity mapping” allowed me to take the tactile directional map that is used to get us from point A to point B beyond the expected utilitarian form.

The coded visual language of maps is one we all know, but in making maps of our worlds we each have our own dialect.<sup>3</sup> The language of the map has evolved over time and is filled with artistic potential. Textile artist Christine Mauersberger embroiders what she describes as “densely stitched together maps” onto fabric. She explains that the pieces “are not maps you would recognize, and most people wouldn’t. The map for me is where every map is a walk through my thought.”<sup>4</sup> Mauersberger says, “I can’t know the whole world but going out into the world is really important to me, to try to know it through a kind of micro-mapping”.<sup>5</sup> These methods of mapping allow us to make connections between places and sentiments attached to specific places. In *You Are Here*, Katharine Harmon writes, “Mapmaking fulfills one of our deepest desires: understanding the world around us and our place in it”.<sup>6</sup> Harmon explains that “cartographic rules give artists whole networks of assumptions to exploit and upend”.<sup>7</sup> Through the process of mapping we subconsciously become psychogeographers, as we discover ways that places shape our emotions and behavior. After learning about the many forms a map can take, I began to explore ways that I can map the identity of each of my peers in an abstract form. Mapping became an important process when developing this project because it allowed me to form connections between places, culture, identity and imagery.

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<sup>1</sup> Harzinski Kris, *From Here to There* (Princeton Architectural Press: 2010), 10.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Harmon Katherine. *You are Here* (Princeton Architectural Press: 2004), 63.

<sup>4</sup> Claire Smith, *Slow Stitch: Mindful and Contemplative Textile Art* (Pavillion Books Limited: 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Harmon Katherine, 63.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

## SELF IDENTITY AND STORYTELLING IN FASHION

Clothing is more than an object. As discussed previously, clothing is a communication tool. Just like a map, it acts as a marker of who we are and how we present our identities. Fashion psychologist, Carolyn Mair, explains that “fashion is one of many vehicles for self identity” because cultural meanings and values are connected with clothing.<sup>8</sup> “It provides a visual and readily available vehicle for self-expression whether one is seeking novelty, individualism, or belonging through the concept of in-group and out-group”.<sup>9</sup> What we wear is an outward display of our self and identity because “our possessions can become external repositories for particular events within our lives”.<sup>10</sup> Specific garments often hold symbolic meanings and meaningful memories, that we may often not be aware of, allowing clothing to transcend its utilitarian function and act as a nostalgic connector to memories.<sup>11</sup> Although clothing does allow us to define our identity, the degree to which we can do this is complex. Despite the fact that specific clothing has cues and perceived meaning, not all clothing is expected to be related to identity and personality which inspired me to create clothing that truly reflects the identity of the individual wearing it.

With the rise of fast fashion and emphasis on the trend cycle, it is becoming more and more difficult to find meaningful clothing. As a result, fashion is becoming homogenized and textile waste is increasing because consumers don't place high value on the clothing that they own. Although following style trends is not always problematic, many trends in fashion and media also exclude a diverse population of people who range in body sizes, ages, ethnicities, disabilities, etc. My goal is to fill this gap in the fashion industry. **How can a model for wearables that celebrate eclecticism, diversity, and individuality be created? And how can garments become personal to the consumer and reflective of their self identity?**

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<sup>8</sup> Carolyn Mair, *The Psychology of Fashion* (Routledge: 2018), 63.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

Brands and designers are questioning how to engage consumers amongst the vast number of other companies producing the same or similar designs. Fashion brand consultants explain that *storytelling* is the “winning formula for consumer engagement”.<sup>12</sup> Designers and brands are honing in on the art of creating compelling content and telling immersive stories that instantly hook people in.<sup>13</sup> This helps the consumer that is looking for the un-filtered and the authentic “dress for what they stand for and subtly tells their story through what they choose to wear”.<sup>14</sup>

In the Spring of 2015 Raf Simons created a provoking Menswear Collection (fig.1 and fig.2). The front and back of the coats and jackets in the collection, revealed collaged fragments of his personal history – “the actual and the imagined”.<sup>15</sup> Old photos of his parents, the roller coaster he rode decades ago with his friends, Mt.Fuji painted by Hokusai in tribute to the first Japanese retailer that supported him, and more visual cues of his personal life and identity appeared on the clothing throughout the collection.<sup>16</sup> Raf Simons mapped his past and identity by collaging these images onto clothing to reflect his identity and tell his story as a designer. In *Wear Your Identity on Your Sleeve* I used this context to inform the ways I reflected the identity of children of immigrants and tell their stories through clothing. My subjects were able to personally connect to the elements that appeared throughout the garments and will be able to share their stories with a broader audience when they wear their personalized article of clothing.



Figure 1



Figure 2  
Photos of jackets from  
Raf Simons SS 2015  
Menswear Collection

<sup>12</sup> Alexander Coste, “The Art of Fashion Storytelling,” Social.shorthand.com, May 16, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Tim Blanks, “Raf Simons Spring 2015 Menswear Collection,” Vogue.com, June 25, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

## IDENTITY OF FIRST GENERATION AMERICANS

Before telling the stories of children of immigrants through clothing, it is important to understand the complexity of how children of immigrants think and self identify. As I began the process of “identity mapping”, explained later in the Methodology Section, I questioned how children of immigrants experience self identification? While interviewing Lily Sun for my project she expressed, “Sometimes I feel more Chinese, but sometimes I feel more American.”<sup>17</sup> Her simple statement revealed the complex sense of imbalance felt by children of immigrants in relation to self-identification that will be unpacked in this section. In addition to general identity development that all young adults deal with, children of immigrants must deal with ethnic identity development. Maintaining a meaningful connection to one’s heritage culture while learning to maneuver in the host culture is known as bicultural acculturation.<sup>18</sup> Several studies explain how children of immigrants experience bicultural acculturation and ethnic identity development, known as the conflict between the dominant culture and heritage culture.

Ethnic identity can be, and has been defined in a multitude of ways. It can be described by the “feelings, attitudes, or sense of connectedness towards one’s group as well as the knowledge about the cultural aspects of the ethnic group”.<sup>19</sup> Identity exploration, is often sparked by a specific event or epiphany, characterized by an interest in one’s ethnicity, and immersion into one’s cultural heritage.<sup>20</sup> When children of immigrants enter this period of identity exploration their experience with self-identification and bicultural acculturation varies depending on age, gender, race, class, surroundings, etc. It is important to analyze the different experiences of First Generation Americans in order to discover the many factors that influence their identity. This section unpacks three, of many, ways that children of immigrants deal with ethnic identity development that I found specifically related to the people featured in my Integrative Project.

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<sup>17</sup> Lily Sun in discussion with Adrianna Kusmierczyk, December 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Cynthia Feliciano and Ruben G. Rumbaut, “Varieties of Ethnic Self-Identities,” (RSF: 2018).

<sup>19</sup> Sari Arel, “Ethnic Identity in Children of Immigrants,” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2014), 3.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 42.

## Lived Hybridity

The term “lived hybridity” is used to describe ways that second-generation youth create a hybrid culture that defines who they are and how they fit into the contested racial and ethnic hierarchies of U.S. society.<sup>21</sup> Research suggests that children of recent immigrants “no longer choose to emphasize one identity over the other but that their identities are more fluid and multifaceted”.<sup>22</sup> They face a unique experience of reworking cultural meanings from their parents’ homelands while incorporating the values and behaviors of the countries to which their parents emigrated.<sup>23</sup> Identities are theorized to be contextual, meaning that they are influenced by one’s environment and immediate surroundings, especially by the people we surround ourselves with as we grow up.<sup>24</sup>

Lived hybridity can best be described in the sphere of college and university life. In college, children of immigrants who often grow up with traditional expectations of their heritage are released from the parental management of those obligations in a college setting.<sup>25</sup> First Generation American Scholar, Purkayastha, suggests that campus ethnic organizations become not only a place of belonging but also a space to disengage or “valorize versions of ethnic identities.”<sup>26</sup> My subject Mario Dresaj, stated that “Coming to college made being Albanian a bigger part of my identity”.<sup>27</sup> Several other students I featured in this project explained that moving away from home to a college campus made them more self aware of their identity amongst their peers. Coming to college also allowed them to explore their identity more without restrictions. Understanding lived hybridity shows how children of immigrants are able to create a hybrid culture when they are in a different context or place.

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<sup>21</sup> Faith Nibbs and Caroline B. Brettell, *Identity and the Second Generation: How Children of Immigrants Find Their Space* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press), 66.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Caroline B. Brettell & Faith Nibbs (2009) “Lived Hybridity: Second Generation Identity Construction Through College Festival.” *Identities* 16, no. 6 (2009), 682.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 682.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Marjan Dresaj in discussion with Adrianna Kusmierczyk, November 2018.



## Homophily

Homophily refers to the idea that interaction between similar people is more likely than contact among dissimilar people.<sup>28</sup> In a study about the experiences of First Generation Mexican American youth, the students described reasons why “it is just more comfortable” to be friends with someone who is “Mexican too.”<sup>29</sup> The most commonly cited reasons included the fact that this kind of friend “speaks your language,” “faces the same experiences,” “feels more at ease around your family, and “just understands your culture better.”<sup>30</sup> One student says, “At school, I see Mexicans hanging out with Mexicans, black kids hanging out with blacks, and foreign kids hanging out with kids from their same country. I think it’s just because they have more in common and feel more comfortable around each other.”<sup>31</sup>

Understanding homophily provided me with context to the way that the peers featured in my project described their childhood and who they surround themselves with. When I spoke with Umama Chowdhury, she explained that she was raised in Shelby Twp, MI, a predominantly white area, so she didn’t always feel comfortable hanging around all of the kids at school. Her best friend was her cousin and a girl named Anjana who also spoke Bengali. When my parents moved to America they formed what we call “our Polish group”. I spent most of my childhood with this group because of our similar culture and upbringing. The concept of homophily provides evidence to how children of immigrants choose who they to surround themselves with. Although Umama felt different from a lot of the children growing up, she expressed in her interview that she still feels lucky. She explained that being surrounded by other Bengali Americans showed her how lucky they all are to be able to receive an education and have the opportunities presented to them in the United States as opposed to their family members living in Bangladesh.<sup>32</sup> This is why I chose to include the word “lucky” on the jeans I created for her in the project.

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<sup>28</sup> Faith G. Nibbs and Caroline B. Brettell, *Identity and the Second Generation: How Children of Immigrants Find Their Space*, (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press: 2016), 72.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Umama Chowdhury in discussion with Adrianna Kusmierczyk, December 2018.



## Cultural Alternation Model

In the cultural alternation model, the person is knowledgeable about two or more cultures and is able to switch between them depending on the context, “much like a bilingual person switches between languages depending on the conversational partner”.<sup>33</sup> The optimal pathway in this model is also one where both maintenance of the heritage culture and participation in the dominant culture are valued, leading to integration.<sup>34</sup> This pathway has not only been found to be the most common identity profile in immigrant youth, but it has also been linked to more positive outcomes than having either of the cultural orientations remain separate.<sup>35</sup>

After having interviews with the peers featured in this project, and reflecting on my personal experiences, I found that the cultural alternation model became highly relevant in our conversations. Although “lived hybridity” and “homophily” also describe their experiences as First Generation Americans, the cultural alternation model seemed to apply to a majority of their responses. This model related to the way my peers discussed how places and environments play an important role in how they identify. Almost all of my subjects expressed that when traveling back to their parents’ homelands they feel more American. When in America, depending on who they are surrounded by, they feel less American because of their cultural and racial background. Lily Sun who stated, “Sometimes I feel more American, but sometimes I feel more Chinese” also said “I feel more American now because this is where I am now and what I am more attuned to. I live here, all of my friends are here, I grew up here. But, I definitely would not say that China is not a part of me.”<sup>36</sup>

These interviews and contextual research, reveals that children of immigrants are able to experience a quick shift in self identification thus showing the hybridity and complexity of the identity of First Generation Americans. Researching the experiences of children of immigrants provided me with examples of the complexity of ethnic self identification and influenced the way I would represent these identities visually. I was inspired to work in a multi-dimensional, fluid and complexly layered style.

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<sup>33</sup> Sari Arel, “Ethnic Identity in Children of Immigrants,” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2014).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Lily Sun in discussion with Adrianna Kusmierczyk, December 2018.

## METHODOLOGY

After analyzing the different ways that children of immigrants experience self identification, I took on the task of discovering a process that would best reflect these complex identities through clothing. I wanted to tell their stories, but not speak *for* them. As I began working I soon learned the specific steps I had to follow for each garment that would help me solve the creative problem I was tackling.

### STEP 1: INTERVIEWING

Having conversations with the individuals featured in the project was an essential first step that informed the rest of my creative process. The interviews that quickly turned into 40 minute conversations revealed aspects of my subjects' lives and personalities which inspired the visual elements that would be used to repurpose their old clothing. Each interview consisted of the same questions and followed with questions the related specifically to their responses. Some questions asked included:

**Where are your parents from? Where were you raised? What languages do you speak?**

**When was the last time you visited \_\_\_\_ and describe your experience there? Who did you surround yourself with as a child and what are some of your favorite childhood memories?**

I listened to the recorded audio and began taking notes that revealed stories while sketching imagery that visually depicted the stories that were told. Mario described the games they played as children in Montenegro such as “Kick the Can” and Leena told me about the times when her family in Jordan would gather around their “ugly orange dining room table” for breakfast every morning to have “cereal eating competitions”. Their childhood memories of growing up in the United States as well as traveling to visit family in their country of origin, helped me understand the effect that place has on children of immigrants, as they often discussed considering their parent’s home towns as their second homes.

Not only did the interviews solidify my understanding of the person and what I would incorporate into their repurposed garments, but they also became a source of primary evidence that helped me understand my research about the identity of children of immigrants from a personal perspective. Most importantly, the interviews allowed me to identify similar sentiments that children of immigrants feel in relation to identity. When my subjects spoke about their identity and attachment to culture the emotions ranged from joy and pride to shame and guilt. Almost everyone expressed how they wish they were more involved in their culture and the pressure they feel from their parents. On the other hand, they expressed

how happy they are to have this other part to their identity because it makes them feel unique. The most commonly discussed topic in all of the interviews was the feeling of imbalance when it comes to self-identity and how place plays an important role in identification. Taking this information from my interviews allowed me to incorporate specific quotes, words and use specific colors that reflected their sentiments.

## STEP 2: MAPPING & RESEARCH AT CLARK LIBRARY

During my time at the University of Michigan I've always been intrigued by the maps and atlases archive at the Clark Library located in the Hatcher Graduate Library. As I began working on my thesis I found that these archives would be a valuable resource that would expose me to necessary imagery related to each of the people being featured in my project. After conducting the interviews, I continued my research at the Clark Library by scanning historical maps of the countries where each person's parents moved from. The process of physically interacting with the old maps (Fig.3 and Fig.4) led to inspiration that I would not get from simply searching these places on Google Maps.

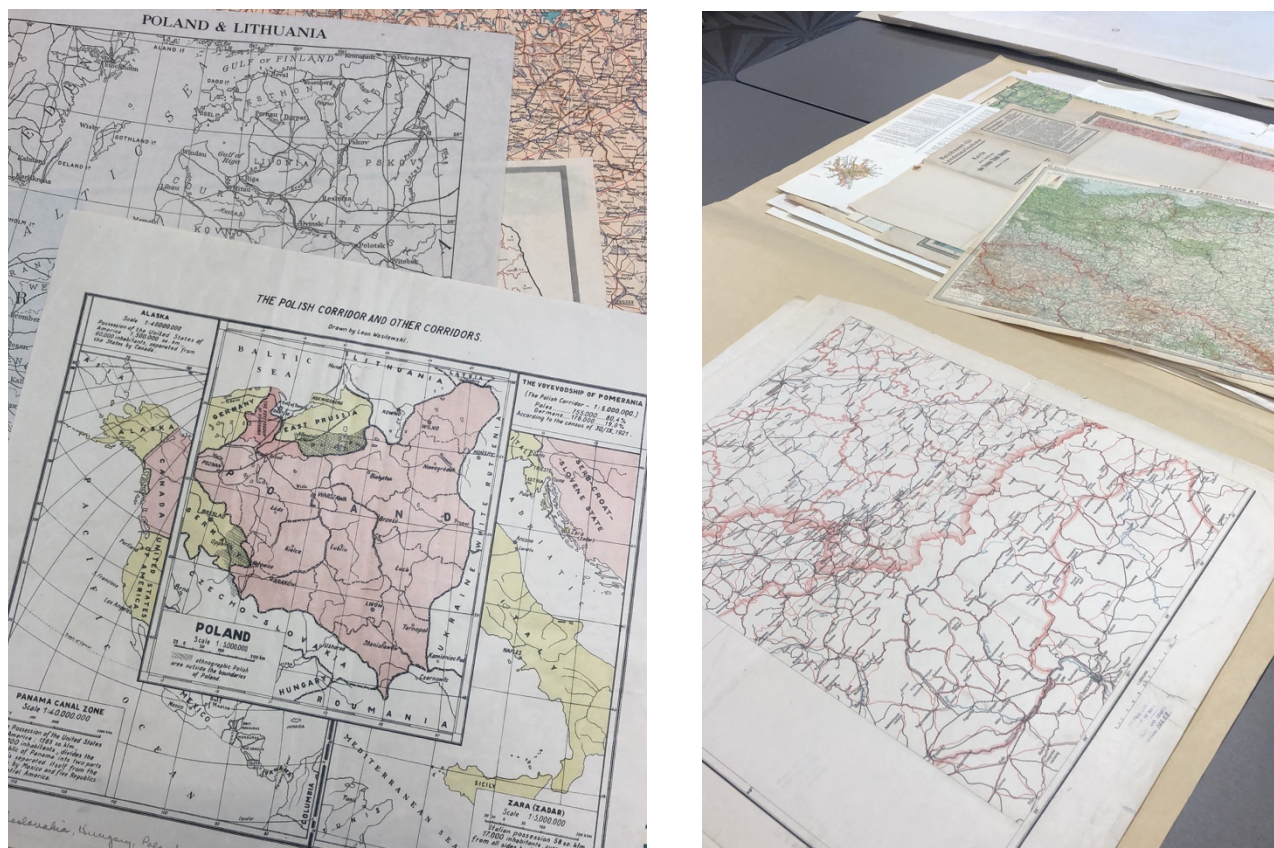


Figure 3 & 4  
Physical maps of Poland and China found in the Clark Library

The colors, textures, and designs on the maps inspired the aesthetics of the fabric patches incorporated into the clothing. The historical maps I found at the Clark Library have different borders, cities, roads, and features that changed over time. These old maps helped me understand the geography of some of the places discussed in the interviews. The map in Figure 5 shows a lake that lies on the border of Montenegro and Albania, where Mario's Albanian family lives. Although an old map dating back to 1943, this map best reflects the specific location of the stories Mario told and can continue to spark conversations amongst other Albanians who immediately recognize the significant landmark.

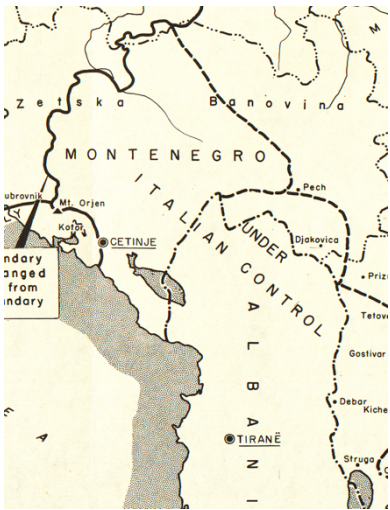


Figure 5: Map of Montenegro, 1943



Figure 6: Map of Childhood Home drawn by Umama Chowdhury

In addition to the historical map documents, each person was asked to hand draw a map of their childhood neighborhood. The hand drawn maps on scrap paper contrasted the precisely detailed maps found in the library. When asked to hand draw maps of their childhood homes, the subject's revealed their memories attached to place. Figure 6, shows the map Umama drew of her childhood neighborhood. The scribbled square houses and the squiggly roads, are highlighted with written memories such as "my bike fell in here once". In Mario's hand drawn map he wrote, "I wasn't allowed to go past these trees". Through this process, map making became a form of journaling, as they recalled specific memories and emotions, that may seem insignificant today, but were important enough that they remembered to include them in the maps. These different methods of mapping influenced me to push map making to a conceptual level throughout my project. The entire collaged garment became a map of the person. I called this overall process "identity mapping". As I made every paint mark and every stitch I thought about the person, putting together pieces of their identity and pieces of their stories. The garments became maps that can be interpreted as a representation of identity that encompasses aspects of their outer world as well as inner self and state of mind.

### STEP 3: UPCYCLING

Clothing holds memories and sentiments that link us to a specific time and place. My collaboration with each person continued when I asked everyone to give me old clothing that they no longer wear. Repurposing the articles of clothing was a significant aspect of the process and the development of my project. Since a majority of my process and research was focused on different forms of factual documentation, the use of an old article of clothing introduced a human aspect to the project. Each article of clothing used to be a personal item owned by the person, with specific experiences, memories, and sentiments already attached to it. Upcycling is a cost effective and creative process of creating something new and improved from something that already exists.<sup>37</sup> This process gives recycled clothing a new lease of life.

As I began to alter the garments, I realized that upcycling garments unexpectedly became a limitation. When I began adding elements to the clothing, deconstructing, and changing its appearance I reached a moment in the process where I felt stuck. My peers and professors noticed the sense of hesitancy I had when it came to fully transforming the clothing. What if the person doesn't like the aesthetic of the final garment? What if it does not reflect their style or represent who they are? What if I ruin the only piece of clothing they gave me? I was treating the articles of clothing too preciously and focusing on the final result instead of taking a more experimental, conceptual approach to the upcycling process. Knowing that they gave me a piece of clothing that they used to wear a lot made me hesitant to completely change it. As I kept researching, creating, and finding more inspiration, I discovered that I was more excited about the project when I spontaneously added more and more elements to the garments. This moment was a huge turning point in my creative process as I pushed myself to be more experimental with each article of clothing. So while upcycling garments felt like a limitation, this process encouraged me to explore creative techniques that would allow me to truly transform an already existing piece.

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<sup>37</sup> Mair Carolyn, *The Psychology of Fashion* (Routledge: 2018), 72.



#### STEP 4: DESIGNING & CREATING

Creating every different element that would be collaged onto the garments was the most spontaneous process of this project. After researching, interviewing, and collecting documents, I was able to step back and use all of the gathered information to create pieces that transformed the old article of clothing given to me. I screen printed outlines of maps, embroidered, ripped out pages out of magazines, hand painted directly onto fabric, and patched together old pieces of fabric. To transfer family photos and digital collages onto fabric I used a UV Printer. The methods of making the elements were different for each garment. Before sewing all of the pieces onto the garment, I laid the pieces out and moved them around like puzzle pieces. Piecing together elements of the person's identity. This process is seen in Fig. 7.

Decisions were made based off of the specific stories told by each individual. For example; if they told me a story that several different elements to it including, imagery, quotes, and specific emotions attached to it then I was inspired to create a digital collage that reflected the story. Figure 8 shows a digital collage created for Leena that was later transferred to fabric. A map of Amman, Jordan outlined in white is covered by old photos, including a photo of Leena's grandparents standing in front of a hotel they used to own in Jordan before they had to sell it in order to raise their kids. I included a telephone to represent the story Leena told of her family calling each other every morning to gather for breakfast. She remembers exactly what the cereal tasted like,



Figure 7: Process picture of creating Umama's pants.



Figure 8: Digital Collage for Leena's T-Shirt

“they taste kind of like coco puffs, but they’re not coco puffs, they’re Arabic coco puffs.”<sup>38</sup> Over the collage I wrote, “Some of the place that I want to to take you don’t exist anymore”, which is what Leena’s mother told her when she was visiting Jordan.

Every garment was created with very meticulous attention to detail in order to ensure that the imagery, colors, textures, etc. seen throughout the pieces were placed there with meaning and revealed stories of each First Generation American featured in my project.

## **STEP 5: PHOTOSHOOTS, TAGS, INSTALLATION**

In order to properly exhibit the garments, contextual elements were necessary. I documented all of the garments (fig. 6-7) being worn by the individual they were specifically created for in a space with a white background and stark lighting which created a clean atmosphere that brought more attention to the garments. In order to reveal the stories of each garment, I created custom tags that were attached to the articles of clothing. Each tag consisted of three parts. I designed a digital collage combined of maps and photos for the front of the tag. The back included a brief explanation of each person’s summarized story. Over the front, I attached an outline of a map printed on Clear Film. The tags provide context to a viewer who may be unfamiliar with the individual when the garment is seen in a gallery setting. Finally, I hand painted a mural in my exhibition space, pictured in figure 8. This allowed me to contextualize the space and bring in elements found throughout the garments into the wall. The color red was chosen as it appears in all of the garments. The color red also appears in all of the country flags (Poland, China, Albania, Bangladesh and Jordan) featured in this collection. Maps and other shapes were painted onto the wall to lead the eye from the photos to the wall rack displayed on the right side of the wall. The photos, painted wall, and tags allowed me to create a pop-up shop experience that fully immersed a viewer into the space and revealed more contextual information about each garment.

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<sup>38</sup> Leena Twal in discussion with Adrianna Kusmierczyk, November 2018.



Figure 9: Documentation of finished work in exhibition space at the Art & Architecture Building



Figure 10: Group Photo of Finished Garments



Figure 11: Umama wearing finished pants

## CREATIVE WORK

*Wear your Identity on your Sleeve* began as a project questioning the fashion industry and how clothing can become more meaningful by truly representing our identity. My goal was to create garments that become a tool for storytelling. Although the stories are not apparent at first glance, the colors, textures, patterns and images can be associated with memories and emotions that spark stories. Each collaged garment became a multi dimensional experience, traveling from color to color and texture to texture, subtly revealing pieces of each person's identity. Collaging helped me unpack all of the stories that were presented to me and reveal layers of identity. The process of putting together images, patterns, and textures resembles the act of piecing together identity as well as covering up aspects of it. These images are pasted on in layers and overlaid with color until a new shape is formed, just like a new sense of identity. Through this layering process, the identities of the children of immigrants became the collage and I was able to explore how mixed media can reflect personal narratives and self identification.

Figure 9 shows a detail shot of the back of the jacket I created for myself. The city of Warsaw, where my whole family currently lives, is outlined in black and presented in a circular form. A photo of my grandpa, who I never met, that is transferred onto fabric appears from underneath digital collages comprised of photos taken from some of my favorite places I have travelled to. The poppy, my favorite flower, which also happens to be the national flower of Poland, is incorporated throughout the back of the jacket. A photo from my grandma's cottage in Poland appears in the lower right side of the back. All of these images, shapes, colors, and textures come together as one. Each shape leads to another and images are revealed throughout the layers. As a whole, they represent my Polish-American identity, my interests, my personality, and my aesthetic.



Figure 11  
Adrianna's finished jacket



Every garment included specific elements that reflect every person's stories and experiences as a child of immigrants. The specific meanings of each detail in two of the five garments can be see in figures 12 and 13.



Figure 12  
Lily Sun wearing finished sweatshirt





fragments from hand  
drawn map of childhood  
neighborhood

old family photos and travel photos  
from France, his favorite place

the word "restart" represents Mario's  
stories about his parents moving to  
Montenegro almost every summer  
when he was young, then coming  
back in September and "restarting"  
their life in America

"kick the can": a game he used to  
always play with his cousins when  
visiting Montenegro

"cereal kids": what his Albanian  
cousins called the American cousins  
because Americans are known for  
eating cereal for breakfast

Figure 13  
Mario Dresaj wearing finished denim jacket



After finalizing the garments and displaying them in the gallery space, it was important to hear the reactions of the viewers as well as the people who the garments were customized for. When Lily first saw the finished garment she immediately pointed to the map of Mountain View. She recognized parts of the map and began telling me specific stories that related to different parts of the map such as her favorite park and the public library she always went to. This moment showed me that customized garments can truly become powerful communication tools. Another Chinese-American student viewed Lily's garment and while pointing to the transferred digital collage (fig.14), she said "I love the paragraph you chose. I don't know if you did that on purpose but I can 100% relate." When clothing is designed to reveal meaning and reflect identity, it becomes a stronger tool for storytelling and source to create connections with those around you.



Figure 14  
Digital Collage printed on Lily's sweatshirt

## CONCLUSION

Although every garment was customized to reflect a specific individual's identity and personality, the ultimate goal was to resonate with other people who see the imagery, patterns, and quotes throughout the clothing. A single mark, photo, word, or drawing could spark a memory or story for another viewer. After the work was created and presented in the gallery, I began to understand that other people are able to connect with different forms of imagery and mark making even when it is not directly related to them. This confirmed that different places and our pasts truly influence how we perceive imagery and how different forms of imagery resonate with different people. Even though the garments reveal the specific story and identity of the person they are designed for, my goal was for other people to form connections with their personal histories and identities, creating a sense of comfort with individuality in diverse communities. When I saw viewers interacting with the work, this goal was achieved. People became curious about my subjects' stories and began to connect elements of their own life to what they saw throughout the garments.

This project showed me that clothing can form connections. It is a way for us to communicate who we are and how we identify. Using a mixed media approach in textile design allowed me to develop a style that communicates specific messages about an individual. Showcasing identity and storytelling through the process of repurposing garments can be further explored by focusing on different identity groups. Individual pieces can be created for any person by following both the spontaneous and specific step by step process I discovered over the course of this year. *Wear Your Identity on Your Sleeve* is an interdisciplinary project that allowed me to visualize a concept for the future of fashion that focuses on diversity, storytelling, sustainability, and celebrating individuality.

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