

Exploring Selfhood in an Era of Computational Optimization

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Abstract

This thesis critiques “the self-optimization ideal,” which describes the social and cultural ideal of relentless self-improvement. The self-optimization ideal encompasses predominant beauty, bodily and lifestyle ideals that individuals, under neoliberal governmentality, are incentivized to strive for. Promoted and dispersed via everyday technologies, the subtle enforcement of the self-optimization ideal often goes unnoticed. My research aims to bring these things to the fore, asking: How can design unsettle the ideal of computational self-optimization upheld by neoliberalism? And, where does self-optimization begin to negatively impact perceptions of the self? Through critical design praxis, involving the construction of a parodic athleisure brand and product, I begin to answer these questions. Informed by feminist theory, as well as a historical analysis of the production, consumption and mediation of athleisure clothing, my research works to problematize and encourage critical thought around the self-optimization ideal, as well as the everyday technologies that promote it.

Keywords: Parody branding, critical design, feminism, neoliberalism, ideals, athleisure, computational self-optimization, technologies

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Introduction

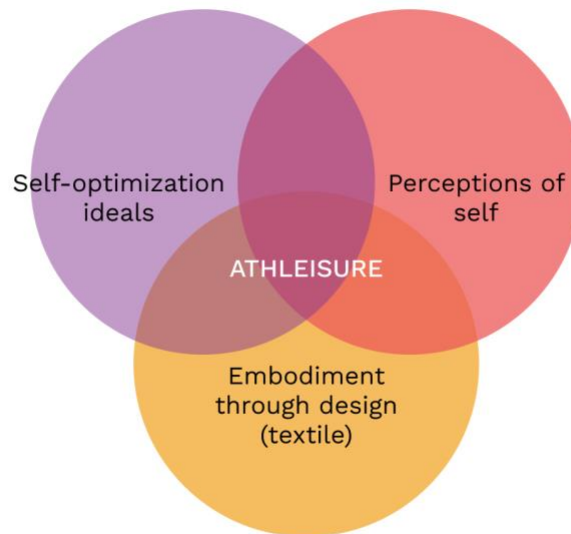
We have something deeper burrowing now—not a beauty myth but a lifestyle myth, a paradigm where a woman can muster all the technology, money, and politics available to her to become that idealized self, and where she can understand relentless self-improvement as natural, mandatory, and feminist—or just, without question, the best way to live. (Tolentino, 2020, p. 81)

The relentless pursuit of self-optimization—is it ideal? Throughout this paper, I refer regularly to “the self-optimization ideal,” which describes the social and cultural ideal of relentless self-improvement. The self-optimization ideal encompasses predominant beauty ideals, bodily ideals and lifestyle ideals that neoliberal citizen subjects are incentivized to strive for. It is propagated through “social and cultural intermediaries,” which can include everyday technologies like computational self-tracking devices and athleisure clothing (Ouellette & Hay, 2008, p. 473). For beauty ideals, bodily ideals and lifestyle ideals alike, failure to meet them produces feelings of shame and often dissatisfaction with oneself (Figure 1).

My thesis explores the following: How can design unsettle the ideal of computational self-optimization upheld by neoliberalism? And, where does self-optimization begin to negatively impact perceptions of the self? Through the design of a faux athleisure brand and product, as well as the analysis of athleisure as a design historical artifact, I begin to answer these questions. As a technology, athleisure optimizes both the performance and the appearance of its wearer. In the process of its production, consumption and mediation, it has built upon and fuelled beauty, bodily and lifestyle ideals.

Figure 1

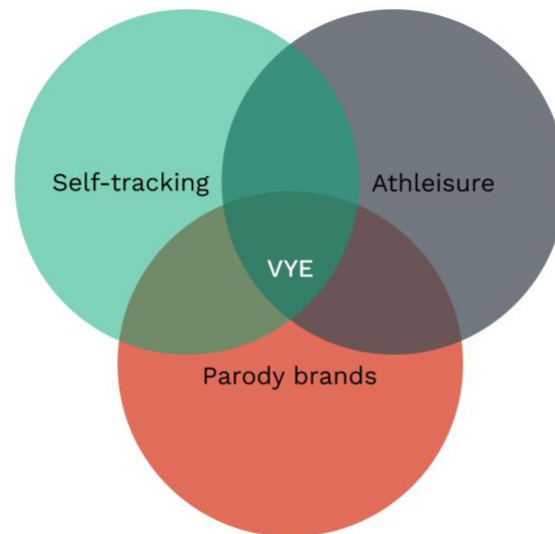
Athleisure Venn Diagram



With the writing and critical praxis outlined in this paper, I hope to problematize both athleisure and computational self-tracking devices by highlighting the ways in which they impact perceptions of the self. My critical design work brings together self-tracking, athleisure and parody branding in the form of a faux athleisure brand, Vye, and a prototype of its clothing (Figure 2). Built on neoliberal tenets, Vye leverages negative reinforcement to motivate its wearers (Vybers) through public shaming. It explores an alternate present, in which a mechanism of clearly negative reinforcement like public shaming could be rationalized through marketing and sold to the masses. Parodying existing technologies and commercial brands, this thesis aims to promote questioning around the self-surveilling practices we regularly engage in, as well as the levels of self-optimization we are consistently incentivized to strive for.

Figure 2

Vye Venn Diagram



The component parts of my thesis work together to help viewers uncover the neoliberal forces behind everyday technologies. They also bring to the fore tensions within the discipline of graphic design, between design that furthers the neoliberal agenda and design that critiques it, by showing how graphic design has been implicated throughout the development of athleisure as a design historical artifact. If there is to be a single term emphasized in this description of my thesis, let it be *parodic*. There is no world in which I would actually want a brand like Vye to exist; rather, I created it as a critique of modern society, to warn about what could happen if we continue to accept the demands of neoliberal subjecthood as natural, neutral and/or inherently good. I locate my work among other speculative critical works in the areas of graphic design, fashion history, science and technology studies and feminist surveillance studies.

I also recognize the subjectivity of my knowledge and experiences as a designer and researcher, and situate myself as a cis-gendered, white and able-bodied Christian woman. I was raised in Ontario, Canada, by middle-class parents, and presently identify as straight-sized (i.e., if I walked into a women's clothing store, I would likely be able to find something off the rack that fits my body). My own experience with the self-optimization ideal can be described as, from childhood, perceiving my body as a project. Even as I've researched this topic and the notion of neoliberal governmentality, I find the self-optimization ideal to be deeply ingrained in my psyche as a desirable one. This realization has only cemented for me the importance of my praxis.

Self-Tracking and Computational Self-Optimization

My thesis research began as a critique of the Quantified Self movement: that it encourages self-surveillance under the guise of self-enlightenment. Schaffzin (2017) defines the quantified self as “self-tracking for the purpose of self-improvement,” (i.e., the improvement of an individual's health, productivity and/or physical appearance) (p. 3). Self-surveillance can be described as “intense metricized self-scrutiny,” also for the purpose of self-improvement (Elias & Gill, 2018, p. 63). Technologies that enable and encourage self-surveillance make this self-scrutiny palatable by presenting themselves as “useful, pleasurable and ‘fun’” (Elias & Gill, 2018, p. 63). However, as Kranzberg (1986) writes, “technology is neither good, nor bad; nor is it neutral” (p. 545). My thesis brings to the fore neoliberalism as a greater force behind society's collective obsession with self-improvement. It engages with existing discourse regarding self-optimization and the notion of “choice,” asking: to what extent do individuals truly *choose* to engage in self-monitoring practices?

The twenty-first century Quantified Self movement employs statistical thinking to “seek meaning in sets of biometric and environmental data” (Schaffzin, 2017, p. 6). It manifests physically in the form of consumable, computational self-monitoring technologies,

such as phone applications (apps) and wearables. These technologies serve as tools of biopower by incentivizing individuals to construct themselves into entrepreneurial subjects. Biopower and governmentality (an amalgamation of “governmental” and “rationality”) are both Foucaultian concepts; they describe how bodies are governed and classified (Kaiser, 2023, p. 33). Biopower refers specifically to the deployment of “technologies to control the life of populations” (Schaffzin, 2017, p. 10). Governmentality describes how “problems and solutions are framed” to control the conduct of individuals and populations (Kaiser, 2023, p. 33). Under neoliberal governmentality, the market is framed as “freeing,” and self-confidence is presented as the dominant solution.

The neoliberal governmentality that we live under promotes computational self-optimization—that is, legibility to computational self-tracking devices—as a moral imperative. By engaging in self-monitoring practices, individuals “are regarded as fulfilling their obligations to society, and they appear to be doing so voluntarily” (Kaiser, 2023, p. 109). David Harvey describes neoliberalism as a “political project carried out by the corporate capitalist class” in the 1960s and 70s, in an effort to “curb the power of labor” (Risager, 2016). Part of this project was remodeling “the welfare state through dispersed networks of privatization and self-responsibilization” (Ouellette & Hay, 2008, p. 473). Self-responsibilization translates to citizen subjects producing the ends of government “by fulfilling themselves” (Rose et al., 2006, as cited in Lavrence & Lozanski, 2014, p. 79–80). In this type of society, self-betterment is a matter of integrity. Importantly, Ouellette and Hay identify that “techniques of governmentality” (which incentivize individuals and populations to self-optimize) cannot “be traced to any singular power center” (2008, p. 473). Rather, they are dispersed into the fabric of everyday life by “social and cultural intermediaries,” such as self-tracking technologies, social media, makeover television, beautification apps, etc. (Ouellette & Hay, 2008, p. 473).

The graphic design industry contributes greatly to this dispersion, in part by churning out interfaces for self-tracking devices and apps. Interfaces are crucial elements of self-tracking technologies; they “connote an authoritative neutrality” by making the “mechanisms that translate ‘world’ into ‘data’ disappear” (Kaiser, 2023, pp. 53–54) (Figure 3). Data visualization, in the context of user experience (UX) design works to “suggest to a user that qualitative phenomena are themselves actually quantitative in nature, and, furthermore, that their behaviors or mental states ... are themselves computational” (Kaiser, 2023, p. 55). In other words, information and UX designers work to legitimize the notion of quantitative everything. Because of UX design’s role in presenting self-optimizing labor as a moral imperative, Kaiser calls on designers to take responsibility for “how users encounter ideas about themselves ... at the interface” (2023, p. 127).

Figure 3

Apple Watch Series 9 Interface Showing Biometric Data



Note. From [Image of Apple Watch Series 9 interface] by Apple, n.d., Apple (<https://www.apple.com/ca/apple-watch-series-9/>). Copyright 2024 by Apple Inc.

Entrepreneurial, or neoliberal subjecthood is characterized by computational legibility, consumption and self-optimizing labor. In the realm of aesthetic self-optimization, Widdows (2018) describes “the beauty ideal” as an ethical ideal, “in that it sets ideal standards to aspire to and presents working toward such standards as a moral duty” (p. 2). On the narrative of individual choice, she writes:

To choose not to conform is harder as the ethical beauty ideal embeds and extends. Resistance is more costly—both internally in terms of self-esteem, shame, and disgust, and externally in terms of failing to attain the goods of beauty. But even if I, despite the cost, do reject the beauty ideal ... and generally to “make the most of myself,” I can do nothing—as an individual—to alter the beauty ideal. (Widdows, 2018, p. 211).

In a neoliberal society, that individuals “choose” to engage in aesthetic labor and strive for ideals is primary. Failure to self-optimize is viewed as a failure of the self, and is followed by shame and self-condemnation (Widdows, 2018, pp. 30–31). As such, to endorse a framework of wholly free choice would be to wrongfully ignore the immense pressures of neoliberal governmentality.

Gill (2019) writes that “aesthetic labour must be *regarded* [emphasis added] as freely chosen rather than culturally demanded – with the implication that in undertaking body and beauty practices women are simply ‘pleasing themselves’ rather than being subject to external pressures” (p. 151). Giovanelli and Ostertag describe the cosmetic “panopticon” as an extension of Foucault’s metaphor for a surveillance society, where many are watched by an elite few (Gill, 2019, p. 155). The cosmetic panopticon theory specifically highlights how women are incentivized to discipline and control their own bodies:

The cosmetic panopticon pressures all women to participate in creating the “ideal feminine body-subject.” Women who refuse run the risk of being rejected by others and may develop a sense of shame and insecurity resulting in various formal and informal repercussions that pressure them to change their behavior. ... The ultimate result is that the demands on the body become so ingrained in the socialization process that women become, to themselves, their own jailers. (Giovanelli & Ostertag, 2009, p. 290)

Choice rhetoric surrounding self-optimization practices works in favor of the neoliberal agenda by positioning the individual as an “empowered chooser” (Widdows, 2018, p. 231). Widdows identifies three “problematic consequences” of choice rhetoric, including “the false polarization of empowered agents and passive victims, the silencing effect” (where any critique of individual choice is dismissed as paternalistic), “and blaming individuals” (2018, p. 230). While there is debate regarding the *degree* to which consumers truly choose, failure to do so, which “is regarded as moral failure ... evokes judgment from others and shame and disgust in and with the self” (Widdows, 2018, p. 108). Effects of “disgust in and with the self,” or body dissatisfaction, can include “lower self-esteem, diminished well-being, disordered eating, lower activity, risky behavior” (like cosmetic surgeries) and “mental and physical health issues” (Widdows, 2018, p. 60). In fact, “so chronic and extensive is body dissatisfaction” under neoliberal governmentality, “that some have called for it to be recognized as a public health problem” (Widdows, 2018, p. 60).

Gill and Elias identify an uptick in self-monitoring, “as the capabilities offered by smart mobile technologies meet a neoliberal culture ... concerned with tracking an ever greater variety of personal characteristics and experiences” (2018, p. 61). Increasingly, individuals are incentivized to adopt computational devices that promise to know them intimately. The gazes of these technologies are “ever more fine-grained, metricized and

forensic” (Gill and Elias, 2018, p. 60), making it harder to attain “what are presented as minimal standards” (Widdows, 2018, p. 119). Smart clothing, for example, has gained traction in recent years as a newer mode of tracking biometric data and/or fitness goal progress. But a smart shirt or pair of (VyeTech™) pants only becomes “smart” “through pervasive surveillance and data capture, undermining the ‘freedom’ it supposedly confers on its inhabitants” (Kaiser, 2023, p. 33). Smart clothing can be described as a union of computational self-tracking devices and athleisure, both technologies with strong ties to self-surveillance. Self-tracking devices and athleisure are also both design historical artifacts, with lesser-known legacies of perpetuating the self-optimization ideal.

Production-Consumption-Mediation Framework of Athleisure

Lees-Maffei (2009) identifies the production-consumption-mediation (PCM) paradigm as a non-linear paradigm through which design historical artifacts can be effectively analyzed. Building on Walker’s production-consumption model, she adds mediation as a third consideration, “which brings together issues of production and consumption ... through the analysis of the cultural and social significance of designed objects, spaces and processes to reveal shared ideas and ideals” (Lees-Maffei, 2009, p. 366). The purposes of this framework in my thesis paper include problematizing athleisure as an embodiment of the neoliberal self-optimization ideal, as well as contextualizing my critical design work, which hinges on a faux athleisure brand. This framework focuses on the development of athleisure clothing primarily in Canada and the United States. It also centers women, because women have traditionally comprised athleisure’s target market. It should be noted, however, that “as athleisure has grown in popularity” it has expanded to include menswear (Lipson et al., 2020, p. 5).

Athleisure: The Uniform of Self-Optimization

Serlin (2018) writes: “Any bodily ideal that seems to capture the zeitgeist is not exclusive to a single historical period; rather, it reflects many historical elements that precede

it, which in turn influences the numerous historical elements that will follow it” (p. 137). This production, consumption and mediation framework explores athleisure as a material embodiment of neoliberal expectations and ideals. Characterized by its unique ability to blur boundaries, athleisure bridges fashion and sport, optimizing both performance and appearance for the everyday wearer. It is designed to be comfortable, resilient and flattering; it is simultaneously quotidian and an indicator of capital, a signifier of the “desire to have an optimized life” (Tolentino, 2019, p. 82).

Craik writes that “athleisure is an example of a clothing genre (sportswear) which was designed for a particular material context ... but has been repurposed for other activities and contexts” (2019, p. 216). In this section of my thesis paper, I argue that athleisure was always designed to perpetuate a singular, thin-fit ideal and control bodies. Tracing the development of Lycra for the purpose of shapewear, to the shame-inducing ideals wielded by a burgeoning women’s fitness industry, a narrative of aesthetic labor and governmentality emerges. Throughout this abridged history, it becomes clear that the shift from top-down surveillance to self-surveillance was deceptively liberating for women in the twentieth century, exemplified primarily by the shift from the lycra girdle to lycra leggings.

Artifact Description

Athleisure clothing is not contained to a single form; it can manifest as yoga pants, sweatpants, joggers, leggings, athletic skirts, sports bras, tank tops, t-shirts, hoodies and jackets. Athleisure’s look and feel borrow from performance wear to varying degrees. Its fabric moves with its wearer for maximum comfortability. Athleisure is available in a variety of styles, ranging from tight-fitting, cropped tops and leggings to baggier jackets and hoodies (Figure 4). Its material composition is often a blend of synthetic fibers like Lycra, nylon and/or polyester, but it can also be made of cotton or semi-synthetic fibers like Tencel and Modal. In terms of material properties, athleisure can be form-fitting, loose, soft, stretchy,

breathable, sweat-wicking and/or compressive. Its design can include unique details, such as mesh panels, straps, zippers, cutouts and/or fabricated textures. Its fabric can be patterned or dyed solidly in any shade or hue.

Figure 4

Sample Athleisure Pieces from POPFLEX



Note. From [Photograph of POPFLEX activewear] by POPFLEX, n.d., POPFLEX (<https://www.popflexactive.com/pages/newsletter-signup>). Copyright 2024 by POPFLEX.

Appearing Sporty

The term “athleisure” (a blend of “athlete” and “leisure”) was first used in a 1967 advertisement for Athleisure Shoes by Dunham (Bain, 2015), and made popular by a 1979 issue of *Nation’s Business*. This, with the coining of “activewear” in the 1980s, marked the normalization of performance wear as everyday clothing for women (Craik, 2019, p. 216). Women’s activewear, however, dates to the emergence of sportswear in the late nineteenth century. Sportswear materialized as “a new kind of clothing for women, based on a widespread interest in sport” (Campbell Warner, 2013, p. 45). From the start, both sportswear and athleisure have been characterized by their dual function of aesthetic signifier and practical dress, “for those who actually participate in sports — and those who just want to *look* as if they do [emphasis added]” (Velocci, 1979, p. 32). Craik, citing Angus (2013), calls athleisure “the result of the desire of ‘fashion designers [to] deconstruct the iconography of sportswear mainly for visual impact and also, possibly, to imply participation in sport’” (Angus, 2013, p. 528, as cited in Craik, 2019, p. 219). Its existence, in other words, can be attributed to sport and fashion entwining.

The Gibson Girl’s Confidence

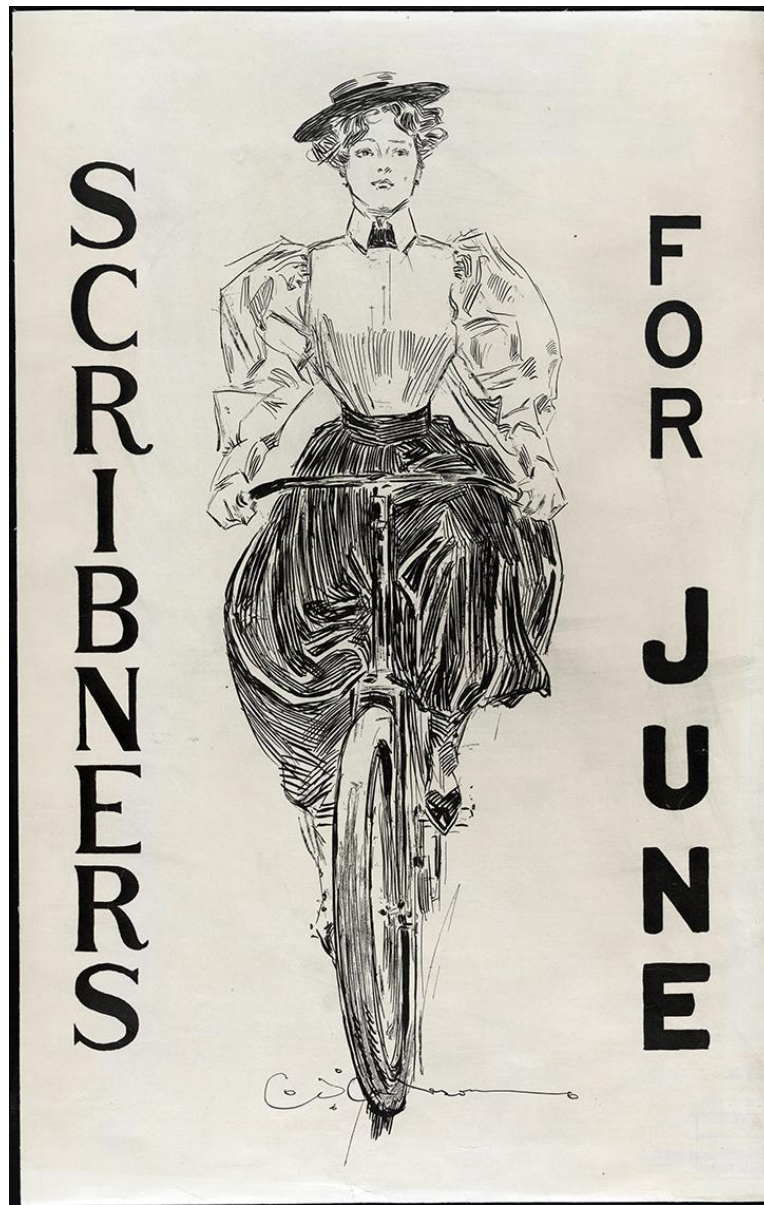
Until the late nineteenth century, French fashion dictated what Americans wore (Campbell Warner, 2013, p. 47). It was ready-to-wear separates that won the United States distinction in the fashion industry; key to this was the casual, sporty shirtwaist, which emerged alongside women’s basketball and became “the necessary item for fashionable women — indeed, even for women who merely aspired to being fashionable” (Campbell Warner, 2013, p. 47). Skorich notes that, while industrialization was a factor in the rise of ready-to-wear items, “the fashion itself was fundamentally a response to social, not industrial, imperatives” (1997, p. 18). The shirtwaist, a simple blouse borrowing from the aesthetic of menswear, could be worn year-round and was perfect for work and participation in sport

alike (Skorich, 1997, pp. 18–19). It was “businesslike but casual,” easy to move in and democratic (Skorich, 1997, p. 19). The shirtwaist became the marker of the “new woman,” also known as the Gibson girl.

The Gibson girl originated from sketches by artist Charles Dana Gibson of “professional models, family and friends,” and idealized “white, middle-class American womanhood” (*The Gibson girl’s America*, 2013). The Gibson girl was self-assured, her face “flawlessly beautiful” and her body “slim-waisted yet voluptuous” (*The Gibson girl’s America*, 2013). She was educated and enjoyed an abundance of leisure time, engaging in cycling, tennis, golf and other sporty activities (*The Gibson girl’s America*, 2013) (Figure 5). Her beauty was, in part, accessible; it centered on confidence and an athletic body, both of which could be worked on (Campbell Warner, 2013, p. 48). In Craik’s words, “a strong sporting body was understood as the physical representation of a strong inner self” (2019, p. 217). So, while sportswear helped evolve social norms for women, it also laid the foundation for an ideal still prevalent today: that of the self-monitoring woman, who must rely on “confidence” to thrive in a neoliberal society (Gill, 2019, p. 152).

Figure 5

Gibson Girl Poster Advertising Scribner's Magazine, June 1895



Note. From *Scribner's for June* [Lithograph and Letterpress Poster] by C. D. Gibson, 1895, The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Art & Architecture Collection, The New York Public Library (<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47df-f7ef-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>). Inconclusive determination of copyright status from The New York Public Library.

DuPont and the Birth of Synthetic Fibers

Prior to the establishment of its portmanteau, athleisure pieces were referred to by the revolutionary synthetic fiber(s) that comprised them. Among these is Lycra, also known as Spandex (an anagram for “expands”). Lycra was developed in the mid-twentieth century by E.I. du Pont de Nemours and Company, more commonly known as DuPont: a highly influential corporation known for manufacturing chemicals and textile fibers (O’Connor, 2011, p. 18). DuPont pioneered the synthetic fibers industry with its invention and/or patent of six other textile fibers, including rayon, acetate, Dacron (polyester), Orlon (acrylic), Neoprene and nylon (O’Connor, 2011, p. 54). Without DuPont and its “family of fibers,” modern-day athleisure could not exist (O’Connor, 2011, p. 54). Having originated as a major gunpowder supplier, in the post-World War I years DuPont looked to distance itself from associations with destruction. Pivotaly, “in the 1920s and 1930s, recognizing that wives now had ‘asking power’ in their homes, it saw pleasing women as a lucrative business strategy” (p. 122). It was during this time that DuPont developed nylon stockings, or Nylons, which sold out of shops the same day that they were launched (O’Connor, 2011, p. 62).

Shapewear and the Notion of Normal

In the 1940s, DuPont set out to improve the composition of a particularly painful undergarment for women: the girdle. “Hellish” to wear, girdles were a painful requirement of womanhood in the early twentieth century, as “the most disapproved-of natural features ... were fat, sag, bulge, and jiggle” (Friedman, 2022, p. 121). As such, this elasticized version of the corset was developed to keep women’s bodies within the uniform bounds of “normal,” though “nothing is self-evident ... about the category of ‘typical’—except, perhaps, its compulsion to seem that way” (Serlin, 2018, p. 138). O’Connor, discussing how girdles were central to the 1940s and 50s mindset of “great conformity or ‘normality,’” describes the experience of wearing one in detail:

There is no parallel in modern textiles to the stiffness of rubberized girdle fabric, which compressed the body in a way that would now be considered intolerable. ...

This was the case even if the wearer was of normal weight or even thin, because to be effective the rubberized girdle had to fit very tightly, and fastening it up was awkward. ... in the process the flesh often got pinched painfully. ... Once encased in the girdle, normal body movements like bending and sitting became awkward, eating was uncomfortable, and performing basic body functions could become problematic. (2011, p. 76).

For decades it was unacceptable for women to leave their houses without a girdle on. The normalization of this level of aesthetic labor exemplifies how ideals must be accepted and invisibly championed to prevail, since, “as a shared participatory fiction, the typical depends on the passively accepted and actively enforced consent of a given society” (Serlin, 2018, p. 138). Aiming to capitalize on this ideal of bulge-free “normality,” DuPont spent millions of dollars developing a new synthetic fiber with which to craft more comfortable girdles. Recognizing “the potential market for a producer who could devise a superior stretch fiber...to use in foundation garments,” it sought after something that would simultaneously move with and compress the body (O’Connor, 2011, p. 81). It took the company fifteen years, but the stretchy shapewear fiber it discovered, Lycra, drastically altered the scopes of undergarments and activewear forever.

Norma’s Proportions

Serlin traces American bodily ideals to the Normman and Norma statues created by sculptor Abram Belski and eugenicist Robert Latou Dickinson in 1945 (2022, p. 135). While reflective of celebrity bodies of the day, these statues were built primarily to enforce biopolitical norms grounded in “choreographed” statistical data (Serlin, 2018, pp. 137–141). Norma, in particular, was crafted to mark boundaries of normativity around the American

female body. She was substantial but lithe, and “clearly fertile” with “slender, but present, hips” (pp. 114–115). Norma’s able-bodiedness and “just right” trimness can be attributed to the fact that she and Normman were created for an agenda of “positive eugenics”, that is, positive reinforcement regarding “which Americans ... should be procreating” (Radke, 2022, pp. 114–115).

The data used to dictate Norma’s size were gathered by home economist Ruth O’Brien, who had been working to create more accurate standardized sizing for ready-made clothing. She employed “measuring squads” to gather the measurements and weights of 15,000 volunteer women across six states (Radke, 2022, p. 117). To the delight of Belski and Dickinson, O’Brien only kept data from young, white women, who had exactly the physical features that eugenicists were looking to promote. Norma, as a result, symbolizes “midtwentieth-century American biopower, nourished by the legacies of eugenics” (Serlin, 2018, p. 143). Debuting in New York’s American Museum of Natural History in 1945, she and Normman served as a benchmark for visiting individuals of how they should aspire to look. Their lasting influence exhibits how insidious the notion of normal can be, as it “is not about averages or commonly occurring traits, but instead about an unattainable ideal” (Radke, 2022, p. 120). This idealized notion of “normal” carried on into the late twentieth century, even as girdles fell out of favor and women took up more vigorous exercise to remain “strong, flexible [and] attractive” (Friedman, 2022, p. 15).

Out of the Girdle, Into the Flexatard

The invention of Lycra is credited to Joe Shivers and his colleagues at DuPont (Friedman, 2022, p. 123). In 1959, they presented their discovery to the public as the perfect fiber for girdles: soft and resistant to sweat, perfume and oils, with “two-to-three-times as much restraining power” as rubber thread (O’Connor, 2011, p. 88). Demand for the Lycra

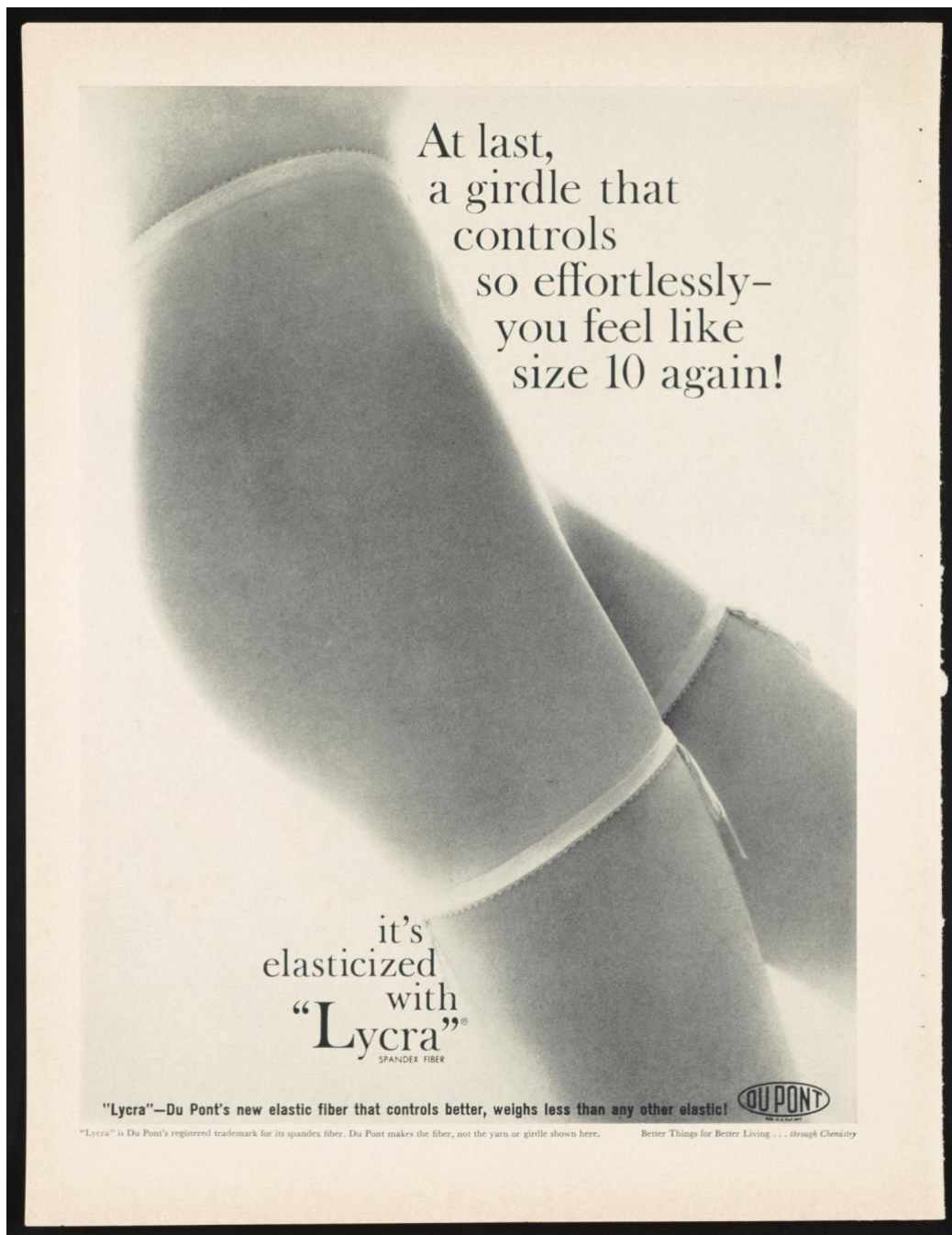
girdle initially outran DuPont's supply, in part because of the big-budget campaign it was launched with:

To the consumer, Lycra was presented as a fiber of modernity, facilitating the 'new' modern way of life, and creating the ideal body ... in a striking example of cultural blindness, few in the mainstream seemed to realize that the beloved 'new' stretch fiber was the very stuff of which the hated and rejected girdle had been made. Or that leotards and leggings looked identical to the new all-in-one foundation garments. (O'Connor, 2011, pp. 99–126)

DuPont relied heavily on print ads in women's magazines and newspapers to market Lycra. One of their campaign themes, "at last," highlighted the materiality of Lycra, using "at last" statements to inform the consumer about how it felt to wear (Figure 6) (2011, pp. 95–96). These described the experiences of working, eating and playing sports comfortably while wearing Lycra girdles, as well as the elusive feeling of existing in a smaller body ("At last, a girdle with such comfortable control – you'll scarcely know you're wearing it!") (O'Connor, 2011, p. 96). Each featured the same, close-cropped imagery of gauzy Lycra on a thin woman's body, with slight variations in posing. The "at last" text followed each pose's curvature, wrapping around the body to emphasize the smooth lines that Lycra girdles were advertised to create. Dupont also designed and produced booklets for retail employees that sold them on the idea of Lycra, while illustrating how to effectively sell it to others. With titles like "*How to Promote 'Lycra' Spandex Figures – and Have Better Sales Figures Too,*" some of these included a chart of body types (i.e., "well-rounded" and "under-endowed"), delineating what each required in terms of girdles and bras to look their best (O'Connor, 2011, p. 96).

Figure 6

Lycra Girdle Advertisement



Note. From *At Last, a Girdle That Controls so Effortlessly—You Feel Like Size 10 Again!* by E.I. du Pont de Nemours & Company, 1960–1969, Science History Institute (<https://digital.sciencehistory.org/works/q237hs110>). No copyright – United States.

Girdles continued to be a linchpin in women's fashion until the 1960s, when a sharp departure from restrictive silhouettes "both complemented and accelerated women's simmering desire for liberation" (Friedman, 2022, p. 37). This movement was championed by Mary Quant, a British fashion designer looking to uproot stiff, traditional styles. The clothes she created implemented brightly-colored synthetics and were reminiscent of the 1920s: fun, flowy, youthful and scant (Worsley, 2011, p. 112). Most notably, she created the miniskirt, which exploded in popularity and incapacitated girdles in one fell swoop.

In an act of emancipation, "'getting rid of the girdle' emerged as a significant cultural moment" alongside sexual liberation and the birth-control pill (O'Connor, 2011, p. 104). Somewhat paradoxically, it also accelerated a blossoming fitness industry, as new clothing designed to showcase women's bodies motivated them to "shape up fast":

In liberating women from the tyranny of undergarments, the miniskirt also exposed them. *Before, women's fashion was designed to flatter the body; now the body had to flatter fashion* [emphasis added]. Quant knew this. 'I didn't get fat even when I was pregnant,' she told Britain's Telegraph in 2012. 'You have to work very hard at staying slim ... But it's worth it.' (Friedman, 2022, p. 39)

Despite DuPont's efforts to keep women in girdles, by 1975, its sales declined to half of what they had been in the 1960s (Friedman, 2022, p. 124). Women's disposal of constricting foundational garments acted as a catalyst for engagement in more vigorous forms of exercise, as the slimming power of exercise became a primary selling point for the earliest fitness influencers. This shift from top-down surveillance to self-surveillance was deceptively liberating for women of the twentieth century.

A Snuggness of Fit

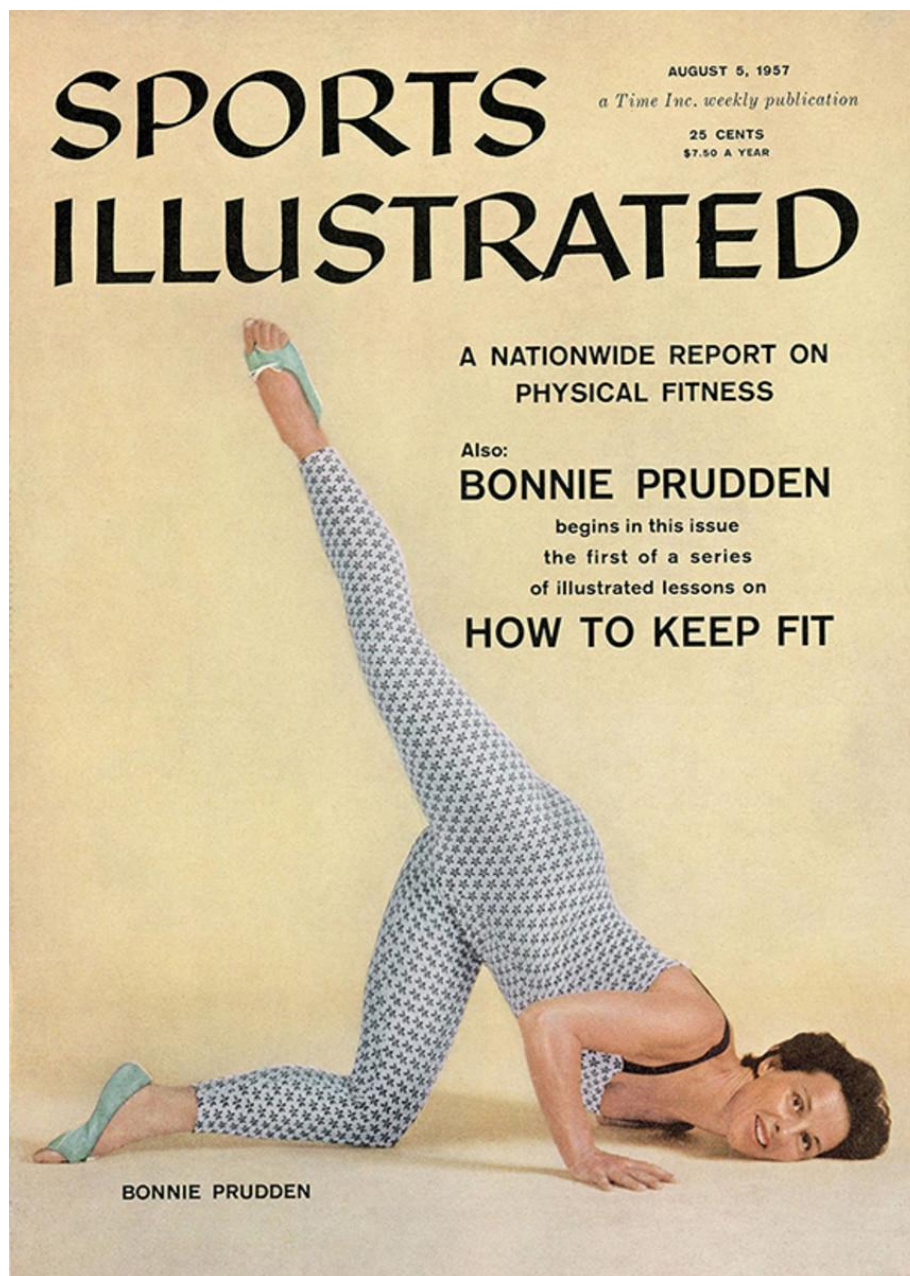
Prior to Lycra's invention, fitness enthusiast Bonnie Prudden drew up the wool-blend leotite as an early version of women's activewear (Friedman, 2022, p. 2). After World War II,

women were expected to return to quiet homemaking. It became socially unacceptable for them to appear masculine in any sense of the word; they were bombarded with messaging concerning their appearance but discouraged against appearing muscular. Rather, women in the 1950s were steered to reduce themselves through dieting, as “home scales became widely available ... calorie counting became common practice. ... [and] diet pill sales surged” (Friedman, 2022, p. 23). Prudden’s promotion of exercise as slenderizing helped make the notion of a woman sweating “palatable for a country obsessed with women’s femininity” (Friedman, 2022, pp. 19–24). She dedicated her career to countering common misconceptions about health and physical exertion, though her methods of “empowering” women relied heavily on enforcing bodily ideals. “In the same breath in which she [Prudden] proselytized about the importance of women being strong, she also sold the power of exercise to shape, or reduce, one’s figure” (Friedman, 2022, pp. 19–24).

Prudden’s brand catered primarily to mothers and housewives; she even, in her book *How to Keep Slender and Fit After Thirty* (1961), included a chapter on exercises to improve their sex lives (Friedman, 2022, pp 28–30). Believing in the power of performance wear, Prudden designed the first-ever line of fitness fashions for women (Friedman, 2022, pp. 24–26). They were featured in a 1975 issue of *Sports Illustrated*, wherein she appeared on the cover with her leotite-clad leg in the air (Figure 7). It was Prudden’s belief that athleisure should make women feel lithe and enticing, while also highlighting what they needed to change: “a snugness of fit that reveals every bulge on the body” (Friedman, 2022, p. 26). Her influence was cemented through her designs, as today’s athleisure commonly motivates women to exercise through the emphasis of “flaws” (aspects of women’s bodies that do not align with the fit ideal) and resulting production of body dissatisfaction (Lipson et al., 2020, p. 9).

Figure 7

Bonnie Prudden and her Leotite on the Cover of Sports Illustrated



Note. From *August 5, 1957 Table of Contents* [Magazine Cover] by Sports Illustrated, 1957, Sports Illustrated Vault (<https://vault.si.com/vault/1957/08/05/45616-toc>). Copyright 2024 by Sports Illustrated.

In 1975, Gilda Marx married Lycra and performance wear to craft the Flexatard (Friedman, 2022, p. 125). An early fitness entrepreneur, Marx and her husband ran Body Design by Gilda, a high-profile aerobics studio in Los Angeles (Friedman, 2022, p. 119). Her goal was to develop a better-fitting leotard that would inspire women to move: “a uniform for exercise success” (Friedman, 2022, p. 120). Utilizing excess Lycra (girdle fabric) from DuPont, she experimented with blends to create a second-skin garment. The Flexatard was more supportive of the chest than traditional leotards, and was a hit with her celebrity clients (including actress Jane Fonda, who went on to revolutionize at-home fitness with her aerobics tapes). The Lycra leotard’s explosion in popularity foretold the future of performance wear and athleisure (Figure 8):

By the early eighties, Lycra leotards and leggings would burst out of the studio and onto the street, as Gilda and other designers introduced tops, skirts, and shorts that allowed women to come and go from aerobics class without having to change. Leotards also became popular among women who didn’t exercise but liked their fresh, edgy “fashion look.” (Friedman, 2022, p. 126)

Marx’ Lycra fashions initiated a new era of women’s perceptions of themselves, wherein, more than the clothes they wore, self-confidence would be rooted in their body shape (O’Connor, 2011, p. 125). And, while aerobics was invented for the purpose of “emotional release,” the form-fitting nature of Lycra cemented it as “a vehicle through which women were more explicitly encouraged to strive for a standard of physical perfection unattainable for most” (Friedman, 2022, p. 127).

Figure 8

Gilda Marx Flanked by Models in Flexatards, 1978



Note. From *Kathy Smith with others in Flexatards* [Photograph], 1978, Gilda Marx (<http://gildamarx.net/career38.html>). Copyright 2011 by Gilda Marx.

Enclothed Cognition

Thoughts of present-day athleisure invoke images of leggings and sports bras, both of which were developed in the 1970s. While leggings evolved naturally with the emergence of Lycra leotards and tights, the creation of the sports bra was entirely innovative. Developed for running by Lisa Lindahl, Hinda Miller and Polly Smith, the first successful prototype consisted of two jock straps sewn together (Friedman, 2022, p. 88). Lindahl, Miller and Smith launched their invention as the Jogbra in 1977, laying the groundwork for the sports bra to become “an icon of women’s fitness and liberation” (Friedman, 2022, p. 90). Held just as favorably by consumers, “new exercisers found the experience of wearing ... leggings of Lycra exhilarating, liberating and revolutionary” (O’Connor, 2011, p. 126). Having

interviewed “Boomers” about leggings in the age of aerobics, O’Connor quotes one woman: “leggings made me feel fitter, even just to put them on” (2011, p. 126). This sensation can be described as encloded cognition, where “the performance of bodies can be understood as choreographed by the garments that clothe bodies” (Craik, 2019, p. 217)

The theory of encloded cognition was brought forth by social scientists Adam and Galinsky (2012), who conducted a study with lab coats to test how articles of clothing can affect their wearers’ psychological processes (p. 918). Adam and Galinsky’s experiments involved presenting lab coats as “doctor’s coats” to one group of participants, and presenting the same coats as “painter’s coats” to another. They found that the group wearing “doctor’s coats” showed “increased sustained attention” compared to the group wearing “painter’s coats” (Adam & Galinsky, 2012, p. 919). Adam and Galinsky’s conclusion, that people internalize and act out the symbolic meanings of the clothing they wear, extends far beyond lab coats. In the case of athleisure, as Bonnie Prudden and Gilda Marx intended, its cultural scripts include fitness, discipline, affluence and attractiveness. As described by Tolentino, “the real trick of athleisure is the way it can physically suggest you were made to do this” (2020, p. 84).

From Lycra to Lululemon

By the 1980s, with the proliferation of exercise tapes and aerobics studios, Lycra leggings filled American shops and streets (O’Connor, 2011, p. 128). The next big development in athleisure pants would come in the early 2000s, from sportswear entrepreneur Chip Wilson. Inspired by a yoga class he took in 1998, Wilson founded lululemon, a Canadian yoga apparel brand which has since grown into a multinational, multibillion dollar retailer (Boyd Thomas & Peters, 2015, p. 102). Compelled by the ineffectiveness of the baggy, cotton gym clothes his classmates wore, he set out to design technical apparel for yoga that would incorporate better fabric and “address camel-toe” (Wilson, 2021, p. 61).

With help from outerwear designer Amanda Dunsmoor, the resulting yoga pant utilized flat seaming to avoid chafing, a higher rise in the back to accommodate for bending over and a “diamond crotch gusset to solve for camel-toe and make pants approachable for women to walk to the studio in public” (Wilson, 2021, pp. 68–74).

Super Girls and the Responsibilized Self

From its entrance into American fitness culture, yoga was aligned with bodily ideals of the twentieth century. Friedman describes yoga’s mainstream expansion in the 1990s as a response to the high-intensity workouts of the 1970s and 1980s, where women were exhausted and “disillusioned that exercise couldn’t, as promised, completely override their genes and turn them *into* Jane Fonda” (2022, pp. 207–208). Yoga was the solution for a lower-intensity workout – it exploded in popularity as “an exercise regimen, beauty ritual, path to inner calm, lifestyle of the rich and famous, and multibillion-dollar industry” (Friedman, 2022, p. 208). This was also a time when, though women had more rights than ever before, they were also “stressed like never before, and popular culture suggested it was all their fault—for daring to want lives outside the home, for cultivating professional ambition as well as personal ambition” (Friedman, 2022, p. 229). The westernized, often whitewashed yoga industry promised them inner peace *and* a supermodel body, causing tension between yoga’s spiritual roots and the materialist society it was adopted into (Friedman, 2022, p. 231). lululemon exemplified the latter by presenting the consumption of athleticwear as a mode of “spiritual activism rooted in bodily improvement,” (Lavrence & Lozanski, 2014, p. 77).

Wilson, in defining his early target audience for lululemon contrived the “Super Girl”: an empowered, athletic, 32-year-old woman who valued time to the extent that she didn’t want to have to change between yoga and the coffee shop (Wilson, 2021, p. 77). She was the idealized self-monitoring entrepreneurial subject. In stores, he hired employees who

exemplified the Super Girl look and feel to cement the specificity of lululemon's target audience (Wilson, 2021, p. 99). In 2013, during a now infamous interview with Bloomberg, he blamed an ongoing issue with the sheerness and pilling of lululemon's leggings on the sizes of his customers, stating, "some women's bodies actually just don't work for us" (Boyd Thomas & Peters, 2015). In actuality, Wilson had moved lululemon's manufacturing outside of Vancouver to cut costs, which had resulted in a reduction in quality (Boyd Thomas & Peters, 2015). His displacement of the shortcomings of lululemon's product onto the individual consumer is representative of neoliberal self-responsibilization.

While Wilson (2021) claims that his comment was "spliced and diced" (p. 192), his words were backed up by the Super Girl ideal, as well as the sizing available in lululemon stores. At the time, lululemon did not sell sizes larger than an American size twelve, the "larger" end of which were purposefully hidden under tables in stores (Boyd Thomas & Peters, 2015). In the last 10 years, lululemon has expanded its size range up to a size twenty, or 2X. The core tenets of its brand identity, however, have remained the same. Lavrence and Lozanski identify that, "in the meaning system underpinning lululemon branding, the body is a site upon which success and mastery are to be mapped" (2014, p. 83). Its iconic visual manifesto (Figure 9) comprises a series of motivational statements promoting self-improvement, such as "sweat once a day to regenerate your skin and your mind" and "do one thing a day that scares you" (Pentagram, n.d.). Utilizing modular blocks of expressive typography, the manifesto is designed in a way that aesthetically bombards its reader with "one-line prescriptions" in an effort to halt any "excuses" regarding daily self-optimization (Lavrence & Lozanski, 2014, p. 77).

Figure 9

lululemon Manifesto



Note. From [Image of lululemon manifesto from the lululemon brand identity system] by S. Samson, n.d., Samson Design (<https://samson.design/lululemon-Brand-Identity-System>). Copyright 2023 by Shaun Samson.

Athleisure’s Long-Standing Effect: Activewear as Everyday Wear

O’Connor writes that, “at all times and in all places, clothing, grooming and other bodily practices signify participation in society and acceptance of its values, or their rejection (p. 2011, p. 77). Today’s global athleisure market, which, in 2022 was valued at approximately USD \$319 billion (Smith, 2023), demonstrates how neoliberal society values an optimized lifestyle and the aesthetics that accompany it. As Weigel identifies, “lululemons announce that for their wearer, life has become frictionless. It clothes us in an ideal that merges work and play to the point where they become indistinguishable, and effort feels like pleasure” (2016). If women’s sportswear in the twentieth century implied participation in sport, modern-day athleisure implies participation in the self-optimization ideal. It is the daily uniform of the hyperproductive entrepreneurial subject, because of its appropriateness for

almost any occasion. “Since roughly the early 2000s, athleisure has moved out of the gym and into everyday life, seen in a multitude of different public spaces” (Brice & Thorpe, 2021, pp. 228–229).

In recent years, the paradoxical term “workleisure” has emerged to describe the blending of workwear and athleisure at the production level. With workleisure, items of clothing traditionally associated with corporate office attire, including blazers, blouses and trousers, are remade in stretchier, sport-like materials that “feel like pyjamas—because work is already hard enough” (LEZÉ THE LABEL, n.d.) (Figure 10). Workleisure, then, moves further away from performance wear and closer to comfort. This could be a lingering effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, which merged work and play substantially. At the same time that overall apparel sales declined during COVID-19, athleisure skyrocketed; in the second quarter of 2020, lululemon reported a 157% increase in online sales (Meyersohn, 2020). Even prior to the pandemic, in 2018, athleisure accounted for 24% of clothing sales in the United States (Lipson et al., 2020, p. 5).

Figure 10

LEZÉ THE LABEL's Workleisure



Note. From *Chloe Pant - Grey* [Photograph], n.d., LEZÉ THE LABEL

(<https://lezethelabel.com/products/chloe-pant-grey>). Copyright by LEZÉ THE LABEL.

At the time of writing, the average cost of a pair of lululemon leggings ranges from \$98 to \$138 CAD. Though the price of leggings today can fall anywhere between \$10 (Temu) and \$1,520 (Louis Vuitton), athleisure is considered a premium product and connotes luxury (Lipson et al., 2020, p. 5). It epitomizes the notion of consumption as self-care, where care for oneself involves consuming products that aid in the self-optimization process. This is exacerbated by social media and the modern influencer industry, which markets the self-optimization ideal through regularly churned-out short-form content. Hund (2023) identifies influencers today as “aspirational lifestyle exemplars” (p. 99). In a study on athleisure and body image conducted by Lipson et al. (2020), participants identified “the athleisure lifestyle

ideal” as “unattainable,” critiquing it for “the unrealistic body standards (n = 19, 95%); the extreme nature of the athleisure lifestyle (n = 15, 75%); and the sexualization of the female body in athleisure culture (n = 10, 50%)” (2020, p. 10). Still, the participants “appeared to self-blame for what they felt was an inability to meet this cultural norm for both body and lifestyle” (Lipson et al., 2020, p. 10).

The self-optimization ideal is deeply ingrained in neoliberal society. For the individual, donning athleisure signals to the world that they are working toward self-betterment, as, “under the beauty ideal, the body is never mere body, but always full of potential” (Widdows, 2018, p. 3). In the meantime, present-day athleisure acts as a shaping apparatus. Having intimate historical ties to the girdle, it continues to parallel other shapewear made of Lycra, like Spanx. Weigel writes that athleisure pants “nag” individuals to exercise; “they encourage you to produce yourself as the body that they ideally display” (2016). This is essentially how Vye clothing operates, but instead of nagging or encouraging its wearer, it *shames* them into exercising. More than displaying their body, it puts their *failure* on display.

Design Processes and Deliverables

The design outcomes of this thesis include the creation of a parodic athleisure brand, Vye; a prototype of its product, VyeTech™ pants; and a promotional video showcasing both. The approach I took in developing these deliverables can be described as critical or speculative making. McCarthy et al. (2018) define critical practices:

Involving a speculative approach to design (experimental, expressive, future-oriented), critical practices combine an authorial point-of-view with research and the tangible aspects of media, technology, materials, and process’ ... Resulting prototypes may serve as types of primary research in that they can address research questions in theoretical terms. (p. 169)

Knowing that the goal of my thesis was not to solve a problem, but rather to incite critical thought and discourse, I chose a design method characterized by wonder and skepticism (Hendren, 2023, p. 29). “In the strongest [speculative] works,” Hendren writes, “both wonder and skepticism are held suspended, unresolved, each suggesting the other in turn” (2023, p. 30). The purpose of Vye is to invite skepticism concerning the way things are, through a prototype that promotes wonder about the way things could be, in order to jog “viewers’ perceptions *awake* in a new way” (Hendren, 2023, p. 30).

Parody Branding

Vye brings together self-tracking, athleisure and parody branding in the form of a critical design piece. I utilized parody branding as a mode of critical design to explore and invert tangible aspects of existing media that are familiar to many. Having been exposed to the concept of neoliberalism in the first year of the MDes, I started noticing how often brands push neoliberal values in the advertising of their products. Especially in the beauty and wellness industrial spheres, notions of consumption as freedom, self-discipline, self-confidence and self-sufficiency have all been sold to me under the umbrella of self-care. As I learned about self-surveilling practices, I began to realize how often I “choose” to engage in them. For most of my life, I’ve subscribed to the reduction of myself as a never-ending self-improvement project, conflating conspicuous consumption with self-responsibility. Similarly, I’ve embraced surveilling technologies, allowing apps on my phone to feed me passive aggressive and shame wielding “motivational” messages daily. These tactics used to cultivate neoliberal subjecthood are quotidian in modern society, much to the benefit of retailers and any entity with a capitalist agenda.

Developing Vye’s brand identity, my aim was to make it similar enough to existing wellness and apparel brands to maintain familiarity, while pushing its neoliberal messaging

enough to unsettle viewers. On the quotidian nature of subtle neoliberal messaging, Kaiser writes:

There are not Ayn Rand quotes on billboards, or wheat-pasted pasted on every street corner ... Instead, the “common rationality,” our neoliberal governmentality is embedded within the products and services we use every day—exactly those products and services that purport to be convenience-enhancing, making us more productive or efficient, helping us save time. (2023, p. 33)

Johannessen (2018) identifies two types of scenarios in speculative critical design: alternative presents (to critique society’s current form) and possible futures (to critique the direction it's going in) (p. 9). Because the neoliberal ethos is so deeply embedded in modern society, I found it necessary to critique society’s current form by designing an alternative present. I also chose to make the alternative present more dystopian than utopian (Figure 11), asking, “what if there existed an athleisure brand that leveraged shame to motivate its users?”

Figure 11

Johannessen's Utopian or Dystopian Alternative Presents or Futures

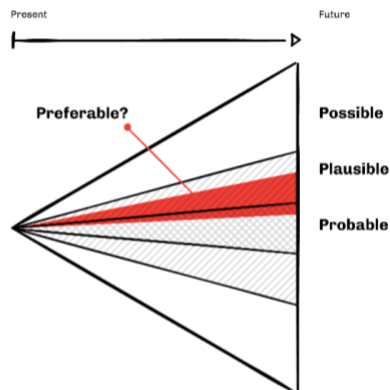


Figure 7: PPPP model by Dunne & Raby. Each cone represents a type of development for the future. Note how the "preferable" cone is misaligned with the "probable". The purpose of SCD is to create debate on the position of the "preferable" [9].

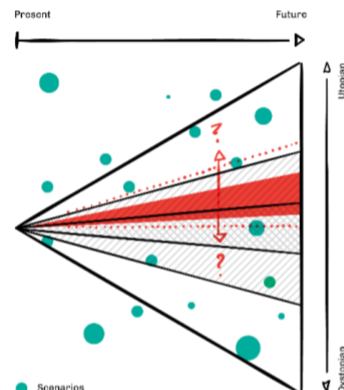


Figure 8: PPPP model with scenarios mapped over the cones. The scenarios are positioned as alternative presents or speculative futures and are to a varying degree utopian or dystopian. Adapted from Mitrović [7].

Note. From *The Young Designer's Guide to Speculative and Critical Design* (p. 9), by L. K. Johannessen, 2018, Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

<https://www.ntnu.edu/documents/139799/1279149990/16+TPD4505.leon.johannessen.pdf/1c9221a2-2f1b-42fe-ba1f-24bb681be0cd>.

In the process of creating a parody brand, I was inspired by Shawn Wolfe's anti-brand Beatkit, which functioned as a real brand from 1984 to 2000. Known for its useless products like the *Remover Installer*TM, Beatkit's advertisements and propaganda-like messaging (i.e., PANIC NOW) mimicked existing marketing strategies while retaining a level of self-awareness to disconcert viewers (Figure 12). It acted as a critique of the free market, consumption and advertising in the late 1990s; Darick Chamberlin wrote in 1999 that, crucially, "Beatkit invites us to take a closer look at our collective Right Now." Vye invites its audience to do the same. It turns the notion of striving for things to light up, which we

have been taught to do, on its head by pushing it to the extreme and leaving viewers questioning the self-optimization ideal.

Figure 12

Wolfe's Beatkit, "PANIC NOW" with the Remover Installer™



Note. From Via shawnwolfe.com #Shawn Wolfe #Art #Design #Illustration #Panic now #Remover Installer #Vending Machine [Tumblr post] by S. Wolfe, 1984–2000, GROSS NATIONAL (<https://grossnational.tumblr.com/post/3672845366>). Copyright 2010–2024 GROSS NATIONAL.

Vye Brand Guidelines

Vye is a parodic athleisure brand built on neoliberal tenets that sells athletic clothing customized with its trademarked smart clothing technology, VyeTech™. As a parody brand concept, it brings together athleisure and quantified self technology to explore shame as it relates to computational self-optimization. The brand unabashedly leverages public shaming to motivate its wearers, which it rationalizes as a new and effective approach to habit-setting and goal achievement. Vye's core values include transparency and accountability, optimization, innovation, excellence and community support. Its name derives from the word "vie," which means "to strive for superiority" or to "contend" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In naming the brand, the "i" was changed to a "y" for easier pronunciation. Additionally, the brand is highly "you-centric," as wearers are contending primarily with themselves for the purpose of self-optimization. Other names considered for the brand were Project Body (a play on the neoliberal "body as project" sentiment), Ascend and Ruly (highlighting the disciplining of "unruly" bodies).

Exploration and Processes

Prior to creating an identity for Vye (including a logo and visual identity, values, personality and voice), I wanted to define its purpose from the perspective of an imaginary founder and CEO. Coming from a graphic design background, I approached this by conducting a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis and putting together a design brief. The SWOT analysis helped me place Vye in the 2024 athleisure market, and was valuable in surprising ways; for example, under "weaknesses," I wrote: "Vye's strategy of leveraging transparency in public settings is only effective if the public knows what its light-up clothing signifies." This helped me realize that I needed a brand awareness component, leading to the prioritization of a promotional video.

Constructing the design brief helped me distill the imaginary founder's aspirations for Vye's logo and visual identity. I wrote it from the perspective of a graphic designer taking on the project. The brief includes the following sections (see Appendix A):

- Company values
- Company mission
- What do you do?
- Why do you do it?
- Why do you think it's important?
- What we are looking for

Theoretically, the graphic designer would have met with the imaginary founder to glean this information. Identifying the imaginary founder's motivations for launching Vye played a key role in developing its values and voice. For example, under *Why do you do it?*, I wrote:

“I, and many others I know struggle with creating healthy habits, even if I know they will benefit me in the long run. My team and I wanted to find an approach to daily fitness routines that would actually work. Shame is a powerful motivator, and, while positive reinforcement feels good, sometimes people need something stronger.

Accountability like this can go a long way.”

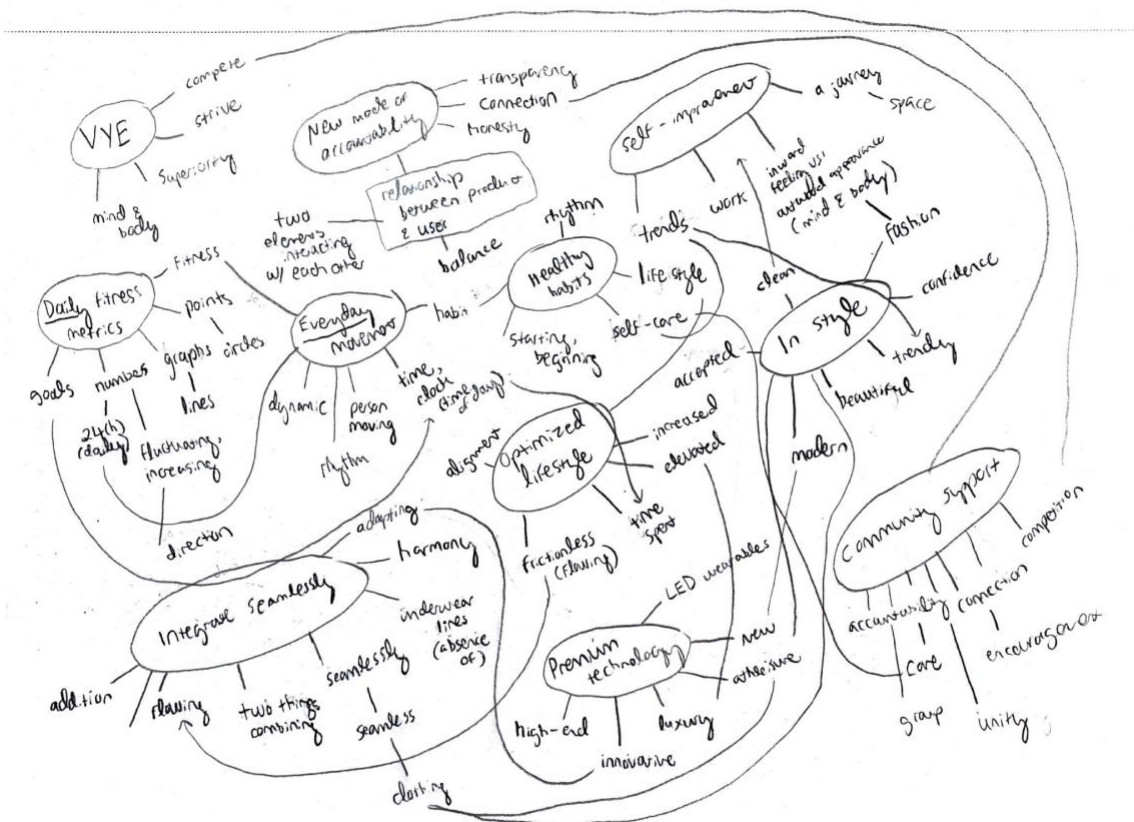
Equating shame and accountability was an initial step toward making Vye's reliance on public shaming palatable. Additionally, putting myself in the shoes of someone who believed wholeheartedly in a concept like Vye was immensely helpful as I wrote copy for the brand guidelines.

Vye's logo development began with mind mapping and sketches. From the design brief, I pulled ten keywords and phrases: new mode of accountability, daily fitness metrics, healthy habits, self-improvement, integrate seamlessly, everyday movement, optimized lifestyle, in style, community support and premium technology. These words were used to

generate a mind map of connotations and possible directions I could go in (Figure 13). From there, I sketched pages of typographic logo ideas, trying to empty my brain of concepts and ideas (Figure 14). Eventually, I settled on a sketch I had done of a high-contrast, serif logotype (for a premium, stylish feel). The “y” in this concept had a customized descender to reference circuitry (symbolic of electric power as well as Vye’s power to control its wearer). From my hand-rendered sketch, I recreated the logo digitally, using the typeface Operetta 12 as a base (Figure 15).

Figure 13

Logo Mind Map



The primary and secondary color palettes for Vye’s visual identity were inspired by the LED lighting on its clothing (green and red), but muted slightly in hue to emulate trending colors for athleisure. In particular, I referenced the Pantone Fashion Color Trend Report for New York Fashion Week Spring 2024, which included a swatch called “Mint” (Pantone 16-5938) that helped me choose Vye’s “Jade” green. The Pantone Fashion Color Trend Report is published as a color trend forecaster, and “serves as a color reference throughout the season for retailers and brands as well as fashion enthusiasts and reporters” (Pressman, 2023). Vye’s secondary typeface, Neue Haas Unica W1G, is a body copy-friendly, sans serif typeface which I chose to complement Operetta 12. I also picked Neue Haas Unica W1G for its Helvetica-esque letterforms. Helvetica is regarded as an embodiment of Modernism in graphic design, and carries connotations of standardization, “universality” and “neutrality,” which I felt aligned well with Vye and the value it places on norms and ideals. Graphic design is not neutral, and neither is Helvetica, just as self-tracking technologies are not neutral, and neither is athleisure.

Lupton and Xia (2021) identify graphic designers as being “in the norm business. ... We produce brand standards and corporate identity manuals to regulate the public image of companies and institutions.” Once I had the logo, color palette and typography figured out, I began assembling a set of brand guidelines to establish and regulate Vye’s public image. While writing copy for this, I referred to the beauty and wellness ads that appear on my social media feeds daily. In particular, I drew inspiration from lululemon’s manifesto, which emphasizes daily self-optimization as a path to self-enlightenment, as well as their brand identity system. I also thought about the messaging employed by Peloton, which I’m exposed to regularly via the app and stationary bicycle. Peloton tries very hard to foster a sense of community and friendly competition. However, because it offers studio classes in the comfort of one’s own home, there exists a tension between Peloton’s emphasis on community and its

isolated workouts. While completing a class, users are offered a rankings bar on the right side of the screen to motivate them, allowing them to interact with others in small ways.

There exists a similar tension with Vye; while its core values and messaging encourage users to focus on themselves (“at a time when we are constantly being pulled in different directions, it is more important than ever to focus on improving yourself”), the brand doesn’t exist in the vacuum. Rather, Vye relies on the members of its public, or community to exacerbate feelings of shame for those who fail to achieve their daily goals. While true community is antithetical to the neoliberal tenets of hyper-individualism and self-sufficiency, Vye boasts its own version of “community support.” This version, however, is shallow. Members of the Vye community are called Vybers, and the uniform they wear is VyeTech™ athleisure. Under the guise of transparency, the athleisure they wear forces them to function as peer surveyors of one another. The anxiety this false sense of community produces is what motivates individuals not to fail.

Meant to mimic real brand identity guidelines, the *Vye Brand Guidelines* ensure the consistency of its visual identity and communications by providing detailed instructions on how to approach each. For my thesis, creating a book of guidelines allowed me to flesh out all that Vye stands for while working on a marketing strategy. It also enabled me to test the logo and visual identity system I created. The digital PDF includes sections such as Our Logo, Colour, Typography, Brand & Voice and VyeTech™.

Artifact: Vye Brand Guidelines

Vye Brand Guidelines (see Appendix B) is a document that establishes a visual identity for Vye. It also outlines Vye’s core values and voice as a parody brand. Its dimensions are 8.5" x 11" for ease of potential printing. It begins with an introductory page that “breaks the third wall” by contextualizing Vye as a parodic brand. After the introductory page, the document resumes in its alternate present and works to present Vye as a real brand.

After the contents page, there is an overview of the Vye logo, which reads: “The Vye logotype is streamlined and elegant. It feels premium, much like the sensation of wearing our clothes.” Like a real brand identity manual, *Vye Brand Guidelines* employs guiding language and principles throughout for the purpose of brand standardization: “Each character in the logotype has been placed intentionally. It is central to our brand and must only be used in the proper forms to keep a consistent and clear visual identity.” Section 01, titled “Our Logo,” introduces Vye’s logotype. The overview page employs photographic imagery as well as text to explain the customization of the “y” in the logotype (Figure 16). This is also where its values and principles begin to shine through:

To “vie” is to strive for superiority. This is what unites our community: striving for excellence daily. As a company, we strive for excellence by designing athleisure that, literally and metaphorically, powers people. The “y” in the Vye logotype is customized to reference the technology that defines our revolutionary wearables.

The rest of the pages in Section 01 refer to technical specifications regarding the Vye logotype, including its structure and scale, color application (Figure 17), misuse and the use of the customized “y” as a graphic element.

Sections 02 and 03 explain the colors and typography chosen for Vye’s branding. Section 04, titled “Brand and Voice,” lays out Vye’s brand values and mission (Figure 18):

At a time when we are constantly being pulled in different directions, it is more important than ever to focus on improving yourself. Vye products are designed to integrate seamlessly into our guests' lives. We're like a built-in accountability partner.

We offer energy and discipline, because feeling premium is worth the chase.

Section 05, which is all about VyeTech™, explains the revolutionary nature of Vye’s athleisure and provides specifications for using the VyeTech™ wordmark in communications:

Connected to the Vye app, its computational abilities eliminate the fallibility present in human accountability relationships. From work commute to workout, VyeTech™ incorporates athleisure’s dual purpose of athleticism and leisure to count every step of your day, for you.

Figure 16

Vye Brand Guidelines – Section 1.1

1.1 Overview

Our Logo



To "vie" is to strive for superiority. This is what unites our community: striving for excellence daily. As a company, we strive for excellence by designing athleisure that, literally and metaphorically, powers people. The "y" in the Vye logotype is customized to reference the technology that defines our revolutionary wearables.

Vye Brand Guidelines

Figure 17

Vye Brand Guidelines – Section 1.2

1.3 Logotype: Application

The logotype appears only in black or white. With special permission, it can be set in the Vye gradient.

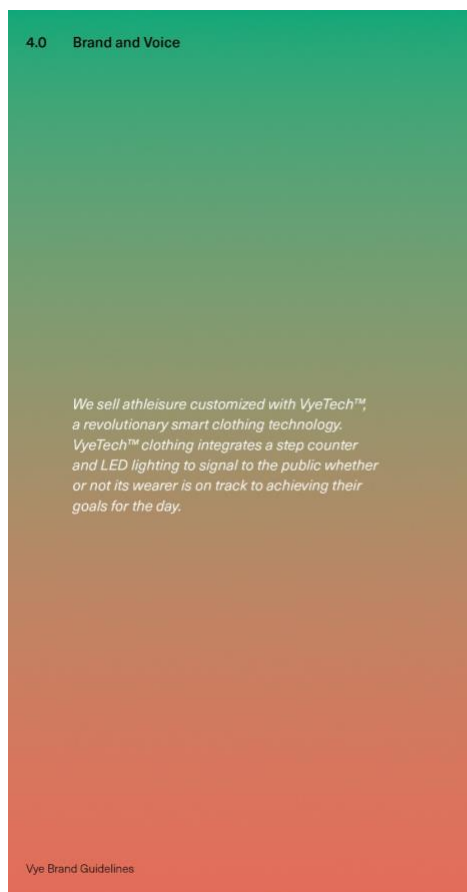
When placing the logotype over a solid colour or an image, contrast is of the utmost importance. The logotype should not be placed on a background that is overly busy or of similar shade or hue.

Vye Brand Guidelines



Figure 18

Vye Brand Guidelines – Section 4.0



Brand:

Seamless. Energetic. Premium.

At a time when we are constantly being pulled in different directions, it is more important than ever to focus on improving yourself. Our products are designed to integrate seamlessly into Vybers' lives. We're like a built-in accountability partner. We offer energy and discipline, because feeling premium is worth the chase.

Voice:

Bold. Aspirational. Persistent.

Bold. Confidence is key. We are confident about our product and we preach our core values.

Aspirational and persistent: There is always room for self-improvement, and part of challenging you to be better is never accepting excuses.

VyeTech™ Pants

VyeTech™ is a revolutionary technology that integrates a step counter with LED lighting, which changes color to signal to the public whether its wearer is on track to achieving their goals for the day. Developed for Vye, it parodies existing smart clothing technologies to make viewers think critically about the effects of computational self-tracking. The prototype I created of VyeTech™ clothing adds a physicality to the faux brand by bringing it into the three-dimensional world. As a wearable design artifact, it also invites discussions of materiality. Personally, when I put the VyeTech™ pants onto my own body, I did feel optimized, because the material was soft, comfortable and flattering. But feeling the

lighting and wires through the fabric, as well as knowing the word “fail” was on the back also made me feel exposed and watched. This is the duality of athleisure that the prototype explores.

Exploration and Processes

Upon conceptualizing Vye, I knew I wanted to create a prototype of its VyeTech™ clothing. I chose to prototype pants, in part because leggings were an important development in women’s athleticwear, but also because they’re what I picture when I think of athleisure. I have a varied personal history with leggings. At times, they’ve made me feel optimized and fitter, but they’ve also caused me to notice my own failures in embodying the self-optimization ideal. Athleisure pants, in particular, are agentic: they shape and produce feelings for women regarding their own bodies (Brice & Thorpe, 2021, p. 233). “Good” leggings tend to have a high and compressive waist, which slims and secures the body, as well as some sort of “booty” shaping or enhancing feature.

Brice and Thorpe cite Appleford in describing the twenty-first century feminine ideal as one that “celebrates full hips and a big bottom but places heavy emphasis on having a very slender waist, offering a middle ground between black and white ideals” (Appleford, 2016, as cited in Brice & Thorpe, 2021, pp. 237–238). This “middle ground” ideal derives, in large part, from the mainstream’s appropriation (i.e., “taking the parts that feel thrilling, subversive, or sexual without any acknowledgment of the broader cultural, political, or sociological context”) of Black culture (Radke, 2022, p. 196). It also, as presented by mainstream media, “fails to acknowledge the sexualized and racialized history of non-white bodies” (Brice & Thorpe, 2021, p. 238). The term “booty” itself has sexual connotations, as it can interchangeably refer to buttocks or sexual intercourse (Merriam-Webster, n.d., Definition 2). In the fitness industry, large, shapely butts are signifiers of self-control and

hard work. Exercise programs that target glute growth proliferate the space, promising to help women “grow a booty” (Chloe Ting, n.d.).

The neoliberal body-as-project ethos, then, invites “women of varying ethnicities and nationalities” to grow their buttocks and banish cellulite through targeted exercise (Brice & Thorpe, 2021, p. 238). Leggings and other athleisure pants on the market today are designed to help women obtain the perfect “booty,” at least temporarily. Features like the ruched “scunch bum” are meant to highlight women’s glutes, while curved seams around the buttocks aim to contour and lift. Often accompanied by images of disembodied and/or photoshopped models with enlarged bottoms and shrunken waists, advertisements for athleisure employ messaging that offers their product as a vehicle for achieving a “better” butt (Figure 19):

Give Your Booty A Lift. Every body is a work of art. The 7/8 leggings will make you feel more confident about that. Our PowerLift™ technology gives your booty an instant 15° lift and hold [*sic*] them in the right position all the time. (Fanka, n.d.).

Figure 19

Fanka's Disembodied Athleisure Model



Note. From *Body Sculpt 7/8 Leggings (Reversible Wear)* [Image], n.d., Fanka (<https://www.fanka.com/products/body-sculpt-7-8-leggings?variant=48911094874343>).

Copyright 2024 by Fanka.

This cultural obsession with butts provides a backdrop specifically for Vye clothing's failure metric, which illuminates the butt of its wearer via red LED lettering. Spelling out the word "fail" directly on the butt was an amazing suggestion from my supervisory committee. Reminiscent of a Juicy Couture tracksuit in that it draws attention, this element of the prototype is meant to be subversive. It helps keep Vye parodic by pushing its neoliberal tenets to a more obvious degree of extremity.

Technical sketches of VyeTech™ clothing were an integral part of my process. With my limited sewing skills, I opted to imbue a ready-made piece with e-textiles rather than

design it from scratch. Still, the technical sketches helped me determine how the lighting would function and where it might be placed on the pants. From the start, I wanted to have lighting on the sides of the pants that would act as a color-changing progress bar for the wearer (Figure 20).

Figure 20.1:

Early Technical Sketches for VyeTech™ Prototype – 1

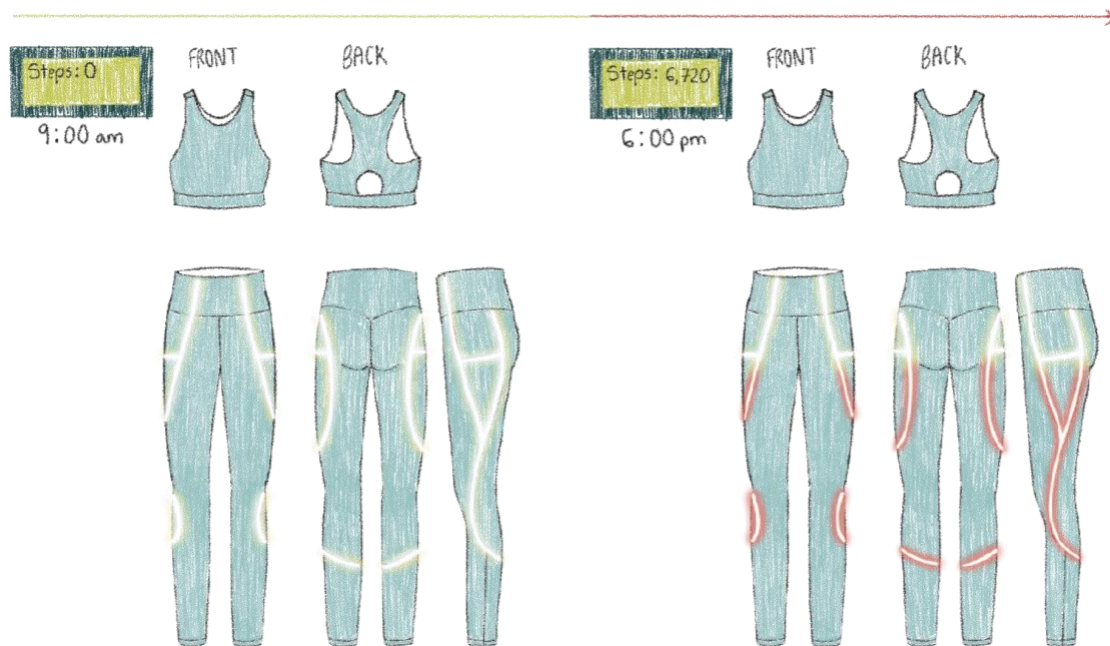
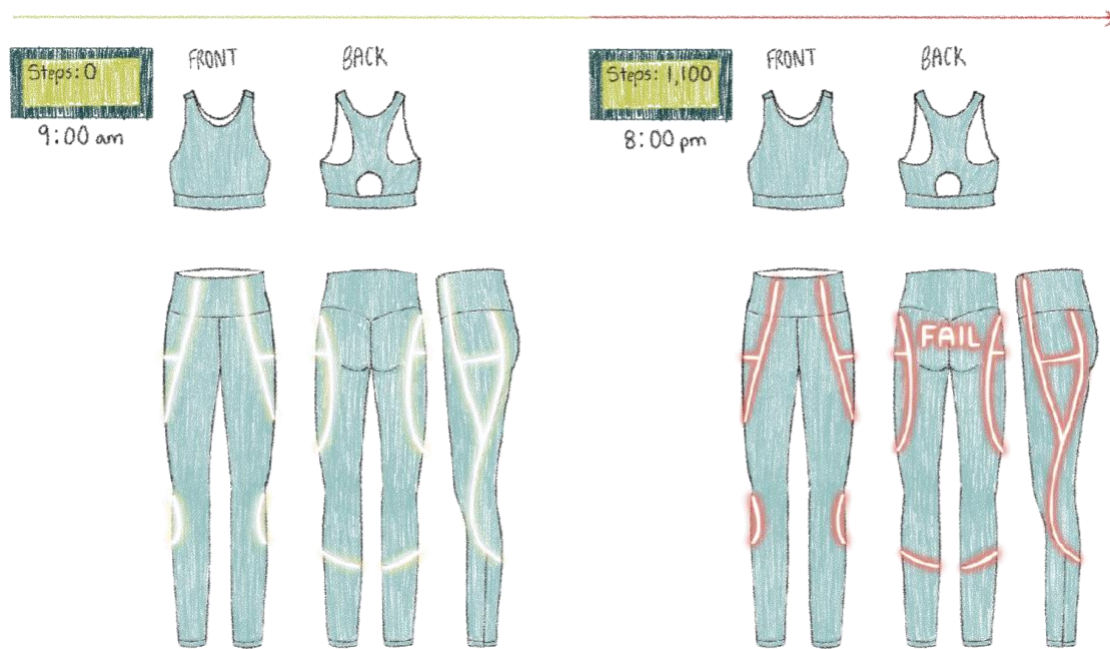


Figure 20.2:

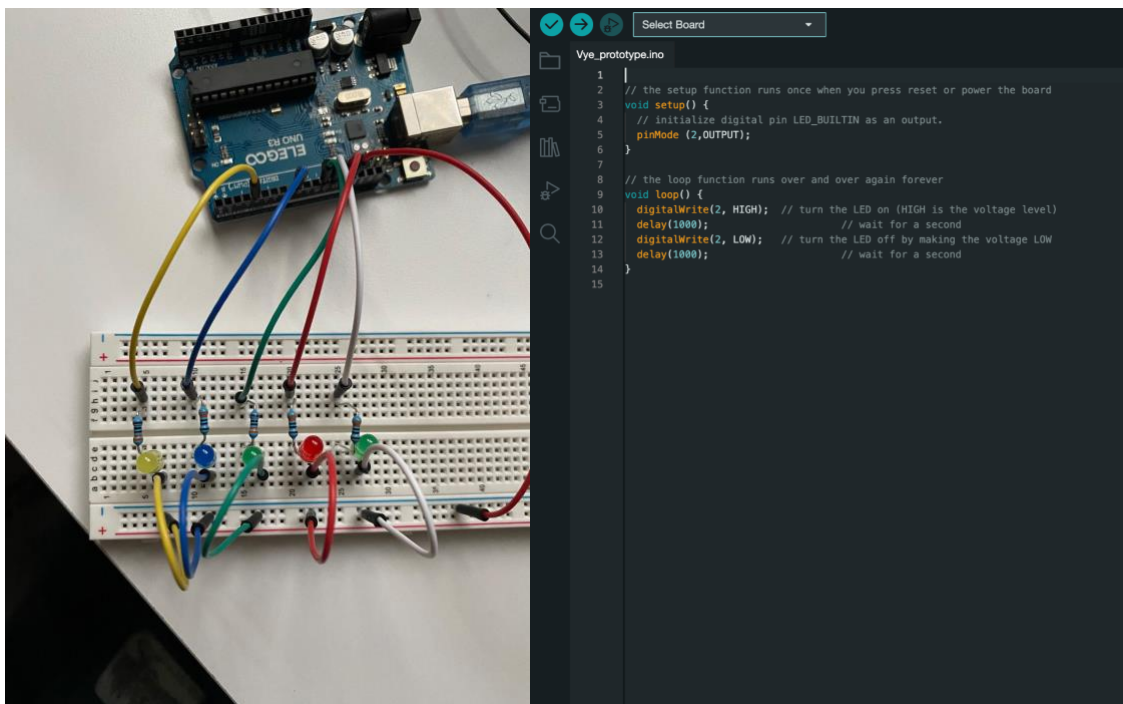
Early Technical Sketches for VyeTech™ Prototype – 2



An important part of VyeTech™ clothing is its integration of a step counter and LED lighting. The step counter tracks the user's steps as well as the time of day, dictating what color(s) the progress bar lighting on the legs of the pants should be at any given hour. Initially, I wanted the VyeTech™ prototype to be fully functional. This would have involved connecting a pedometer to VyeTech™'s LED lighting via an Arduino microcontroller. I spent a month in the Fall 2023 semester teaching myself how to work with Arduino microcontrollers, as well as Arduino's Integrated Development Environment (IDE) software (Figure 21):

Figure 21

Learning How to Use Arduino Microcontrollers



Launching myself into the world of electronic prototyping was rewarding in that it helped me understand the speculative inner workings of a Vye garment. It also caused me to reduce the scope of my project, from a fully functional prototype to a partially functional one. Revising my plan, I approached the progress bar lighting with remote-controlled LED strips. To simulate the failure metric, I planned on coding a LilyPad Arduino USB (designed specifically for e-textiles) with a blink sequence, and having it turn the “fail” lettering on and off demonstratively. The pedometer element of VyeTech™ could then be illustrated with animated sketches in the promotional video.

First Prototype

The first prototype I developed allowed me to test out materials, as well as where to add pockets to the pants for batteries and excess wire. The first material I tried for the “fail” lettering was a plastic fiber optic cable, powered by an LED emitter. Benefits of the fiber

optic cable included a near-even dispersal of light and a subtle appearance when turned off. Unfortunately, the cons of this material outweighed the pros. The cable's inflexibility made shaping and sewing down each letterform tricky, resulting in the word "fail" lacking legibility. For the final VyeTech™ prototype, I searched for a new lettering material, eventually landing on red Electroluminescent (El) wire. Comparatively, El wire is more flexible, and it delivered a cleaner, more legible "fail" (Figures 22 and 23). The use of cursive lettering for the "fail" was suggested to me by my committee, due to the continuous nature of available light sources.

Figure 22

Back of First Prototype



Figure 23

Back of Final Prototype



Switching to El wire for the “fail lettering” also opened a new avenue for demonstrating VyeTech™’s failure metric, so that I no longer needed to use a microcontroller. Instead, the El wire came with a built-in on/off trigger, which I was able to hide in the pants’ side pocket.

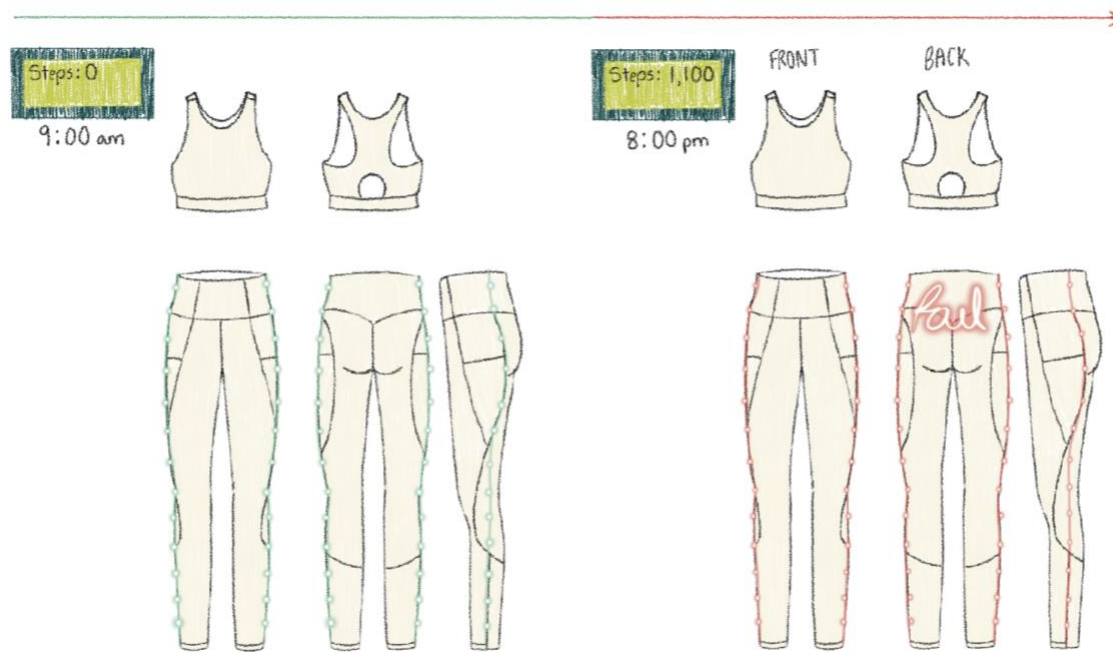
Final Prototype

Taking what I had learned from the first prototype, I revised my technical sketch with improvements in mind for the final (Figure 24). Because of the variation between stretchy, snappy legging material and only slightly bendy plastic, sewing the “fail” lettering onto traditional leggings was difficult. For the final prototype, I chose slim-fitting joggers instead, made of a fabric that would keep its shape even while unworn. I debated between black and

taupe for the color of the pants, but chose black in the end for its contrast against the neon LEDs.

Figure 24

Revised Technical Sketch for Prototype



In the process of shaping the El wire, I created a template to help with the proportions and spacing of each letterform (Figure 25). Additionally, upon presentation of the first prototype, it was suggested to me that I block out part of the “i” in “fail” with electrical tape to distinguish it from the “l.” These considerations helped produce a less distracting, and therefore more effective prototype. I carried the remote-controlled LEDs on the legs of the pants into the final prototype, since they worked well for demonstrating the progress bar feature.

Figure 25

Application of “fail” Template, Created with Handsome Pro Bold



Artifact: VyeTech™ Pants

VyeTech™ pants (see Appendix C) are representative of the selection of smart athleisure that Vye has to offer. Upon purchase of a piece of VyeTech™ clothing, it must be registered with its new owner's account in the Vye app. The new owner's daily step goal then sets the point(s) at which the VyeTech™ pants change from green to red (Figure 26). Setting a daily step goal on the app also involves setting a time of day by which they want to accomplish this goal. At midnight, the step count on the VyeTech™ pants resets. When their wearer dons them in the morning, the pants begin tracking every step they take. As the pants gather data, if they calculate that the wearer is on track to achieving their step goal, the side lighting will remain green. Deviations in progress calculated result in the slow climb of red lighting on the sides of the pants. If the wearer fails to meet their goal by the time they indicated, the word "fail" lights up their backside in neon red. Wearers can check their progress on the Vye app at any point to see numbers and percentages.

The final prototype for VyeTech™ utilizes a base of high-waisted, black jogger pants composed of 75% Nylon and 25% Lycra. Remote-controlled LED strips, which can change from red to green are used to simulate a progress metric on the sides of the pants. These are powered by 5V battery packs hidden in pockets on the inside of the ankles. The "fail" lettering on the back of the pants is spelled out with El wire, which is powered by 8 AA batteries (also hidden in a pocket). The word "fail" across the butt of VyeTech™ pants is, in large part, what pushes them to the place of parodic absurdity where viewers are unsettled. It subverts the common goal in fitness culture of emphasizing the "booty," by associating this emphasis with shame instead of pride. Importantly, the placement of the word "fail" on the wearer's butt signifies that, more than failing to achieve their daily step goal, they have failed in their pursuit of self-optimization.

Figure 26.1:

VyeTech™ Pants – Green

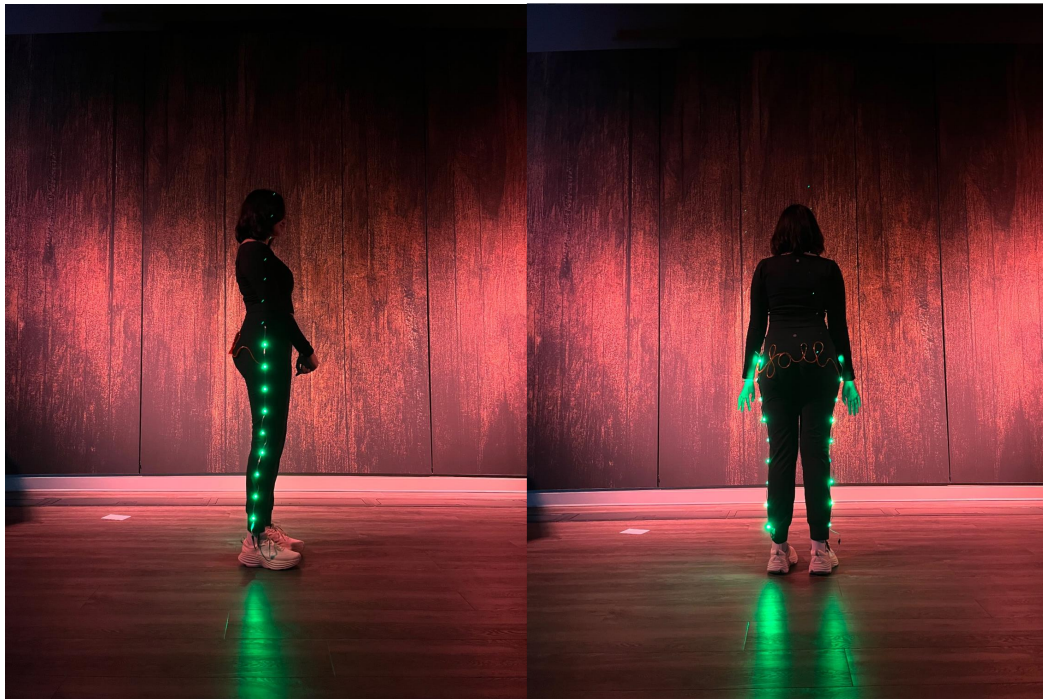
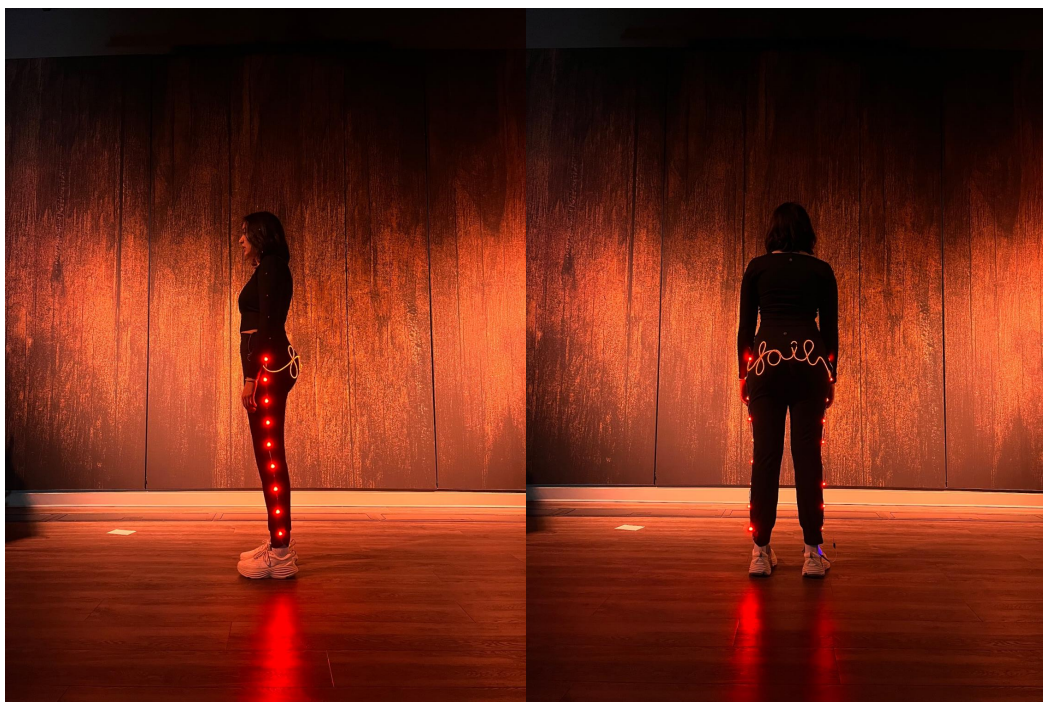


Figure 26.2:

VyeTech™ Pants – Red



Vye Promotional Video

Vye's promotional video is a culmination of Vye as a parody brand and the prototype of its product, VyeTech™ pants. Its voiceover extends the neoliberal language from the *Vye Brand Guidelines*. Like the brand guidelines, it leverages familiarity by mimicking existing advertisements, but ultimately the promotional video is meant to unsettle viewers through its extremity. Part of this extremity is offering to its audience the public shaming element as a viable approach to fitness accountability. The *Vye Promotional Video* introduces Vye to the world as part of a theoretical brand awareness campaign. It also bridges the demonstrational elements of the VyeTech™ pants to make them appear fully functional.

Exploration and Processes

I approached creating the promotional video by sketching out a rough storyboard, which was helpful to reference while shooting footage of the pants (Figure 27). In the development of the storyboard, I was inspired by two differing approaches to brand awareness videos. The first was a straightforward, origin story-type video, exemplified by Peloton's "Peloton is for Everyone" video. This video clearly states when and why Peloton was founded, and delineates exactly what they offer to consumers. The second was more artistic and abstract, which I felt would play into Vye's disruptive nature. For this I referenced Nike's "Dream Crazy" campaign. With Vye's promotional video, I wanted to find a middle ground between the two approaches. Specifically, I was interested in storytelling using slow motion footage, meditative music and a dramatized voice over.

Figure 27

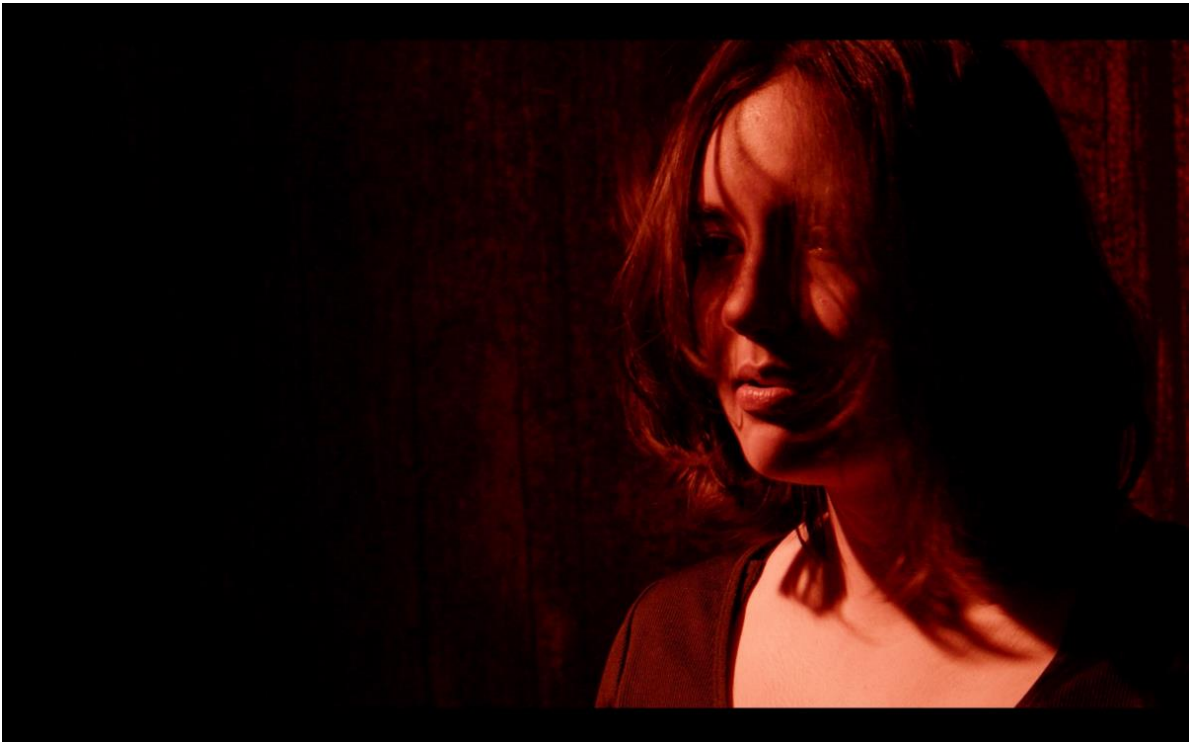
Vye Promotional Video Storyboard



For the filming of the VyeTech™ prototype, I recruited the help of my friend Ryan to shoot the video, and my other friend Miriam to model the pants. We shot most of the footage in the lobby of my church building, which I chose as a location for its café setup and natural lighting. The sanctuary also proved useful; because of the way in which Vye leverages public shaming, I wanted to insinuate that Miriam’s character was not alone in scenes where the “fail” lit up. Being able to have her walk up onto a stage aided in accomplishing this. Additionally, the dark room and spotlights bathing her in red worked to visually depict feelings of shame (Figure 28).

Figure 28:

Stage Lighting to Depict Shame



To write the voice over, I first made a list of bullet points that I wanted to touch on. It was important to me to incorporate dialogue on the Vye’s purpose, or mission; how VyeTech™ works; and the athleisure’s smart features. Once I had this list, I started recording voice memos of myself going through each point. This technique helped me capture a more natural speaking tone for the voice over. Through this process, I came up with a concept around Vye introducing itself as “the perfect accountability partner” (see Appendix D). The edited video makes use of some stock footage, as well as an updated, animated illustration of VyeTech™’s pedometer feature (see Appendix E). It also incorporates two screens from the app’s imagined interface, which I designed to parody existing fitness tracking apps (see Appendix E). These felt important to include, as they give life to and complement the prototyped pants, while cementing Vye’s twisted notion of community.

Artifact: Promotional Video

Vye's promotional video (see Appendix F) is part of a brand awareness campaign that introduces it to the world. Most of the footage is rendered in slow motion for dramatic effect. The music is aspirational and poppy, to contrast against the predominant theme of public shaming. The video is one minute and 53 seconds long. It begins with an opening shot of the main character (a Vyber) walking into a café while wearing VyeTech™ pants. The main character smiles as she interacts with the barista working, while the narrator begins describing "what makes the perfect accountability partner": "they know you. Really well." Following this introduction to the main character are stock footage clips of hands lacing up athletic shoes ("they motivate you to reach your goals"), and a woman wearing headphones while taking public transportation ("and call you out when you're holding back"). Throughout the video, what is shown on screen matches the voiceover, like the clip of espresso that plays while the narrator reads, "they spend time pouring into you." This use of coffee is representative of energy and productivity, while adding to the café atmosphere.

The main character reappears at 00:21:00, when the narrator begins to explain the purpose of Vye: "We created Vye, because we believe that the perfect accountability partner isn't a person at all. It's a wearable technology that knows you. Really well." At this point in the video, the voiceover restates the attributes of "the perfect accountability partner," this time in the context of Vye. The main character is shown sitting on a couch with her newly purchased coffee, opening the app, and scrolling through. The video cuts to an animation of VyeTech™ pants rotating. The side lighting becomes increasingly red with each 90-degree turn, until the "fail" on the back is previewed briefly. As the main character scrolls on her phone, a short walkthrough of the Vye app appears beside her, showcasing the home and community tabs. On the home screen, Vybers can see their live stats and metrics for the day, as well as a diagram of the VyeTech™ they are currently wearing. The top of the screen

reads “Let’s pick up the pace, Miriam!” Viewers can see that the main character has five hours left to complete her goal, and is falling short compared to the app’s benchmark pace. As a result, her pants are 12% “in the red.” It is also apparent that she failed to reach her goal the previous day. The effects of this are shown as she navigates over to the community tab and scrolls through notifications indicating that her failure was viewed by many people. Going through this list, the main character displays mixed emotions, her face rising and falling.

Building on the element of “community,” the video’s music swells as it features stock footage clips of “Vybers,” first staring at their phones, and then running to gather steps. At 00:58:00, the main character films herself in an influencer-esque fashion, showing off her green-lit VyeTech™ as the narrator explains that “Vye always has time for you, because it’s with you all the time.” Becoming increasingly unsettling, the voiceover describes VyeTech™ as “a second skin, designed to help you work on yourself.” At this point in the video, viewers can see that the main character’s pants have turned completely red. She walks away from the bright café, which symbolizes success-induced happiness, into a dark room in which she is silhouetted by the pants’ red lighting. As she walks further into the room and onto a red-lit stage, the narrator reads: “Life can get busy. Some days are harder than others. But when you fall down, Vye makes sure that you get back up.” Knowing that she’s failed, the main character shamefully puts her head in her hands while the narrator says, “it isn’t afraid to challenge you, or to put you on display.”

To the narration of “it celebrates your wins,” the main character is briefly shown celebrating in the café, as a friend excitedly points to her green-lit pants. Quickly, though, the video returns to the dark stage, in which the main character turns around to reveal the word “fail” lit up on the seat of her pants: “but it also makes sure you feel the weight of your failures.” The contrast between these two scenes is powerful, highlighting the different ways

in which Vye can impact a wearer's perception of self. The main character then turns around, breathing out in determination ("it keeps you accountable, so that you can be better"). She blows her hair out of her face anxiously. This action is mirrored by a second, more "put together" woman, who confidently looks in the mirror and zhuzhes her own, perfectly done hair ("Look better, feel better"). The final two scenes include a third, thin-fit woman stretching in the sunlight aspirationally, and the main character laughing with her friend: "Because, feeling premium is worth the effort. *You* are worth the effort." Vye's tagline, "supercharge your life," then flashes on the screen, followed by its logo, which animates menacingly from green to red.

Conclusion

My thesis works to unsettle the self-optimization ideal through the design of Vye, a faux athleisure brand that unabashedly leverages public shaming to motivate its wearers (Vybers). As a brand, it employs overtly neoliberal language in its manual and in its advertising (i.e., “you’re worth the effort”), highlighting how the tenets of “aesthetic labor as self-love” and “consumption as self-care” are paradoxical in nature. Its product, VyeTech™ clothing, illuminates with green and red lighting to publicize Vybers’ step goal progress. Most subversively, upon total goal failure, the word “fail” lights up in red lettering on the wearer’s backside. VyeTech™ upends familiar conventions, like working toward making things light up and showing off the body’s “assets.” The prototype employs athleisure as a catalyst for parodying computational self-trackers, problematizing both athleisure and self-tracking devices as everyday technologies. Vye’s culminating promotional video, which introduces and markets it to the world, parodies existing advertising while unnerving viewers in its extremity.

As a work of critical design, Vye attempts to deconstruct the self-optimization ideal through the imagining of an alternative present in which it has been amplified. Vye’s purpose is not to try and banish the ideal entirely, but to incite critical thought and discourse around it. Contextualizing my critical design work is an abridged production-consumption-mediation framework of athleisure, which outlines its historical participation in, and modern-day embodiment of neoliberal expectations placed upon women. Tracing its inception from sportswear to lululemon leggings and workleisure, themes of thin-fit bodily ideals, self-surveillance, self-responsibilization and aesthetic labor emerge. Informed greatly by feminist theory, I locate my work among other speculative critical works in the areas of graphic design, fashion history and science and technology studies.

My amalgamation of self-tracking, athleisure and parody branding to explore and critique the proliferation of neoliberal ideals in modern society is a unique contribution to the discourse. Potential to continue this research could include conducting user testing to uncover the effect(s) of spending a day in VyeTech™ clothing, or launching a full-scale marketing campaign to test how Vye is received by the general public. I believe that a positive reaction to a brand like Vye would only prove the importance of critiquing the self-optimization ideal. We aren't so far from a present like Vye's; it is plausible, and certainly not preferable. By stopping to question how and why the self-optimization ideal is branded as natural, neutral and inherently good, my awareness of neoliberal governmentality has been raised. I hope that Vye, as a subversive parody brand and work of critical design, can help in raising others' awareness, too.

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Appendix A

Logo Design Brief

Vye Activewear Design Brief

Company values

- Transparency and accountability
 - Optimization
 - Innovation
 - Excellence
 - Community support
-

Company mission

To provide consumers with a new mode of accountability that will help them boost their fitness metrics and achieve their goals in style. Fitness goals can feel daunting; we want our wearables to integrate seamlessly into users' lives, shifting their habits and instilling in them new passions for self-improvement.

What do you do?

We sell athleisure clothing customized with our revolutionary Vye Tech™, which integrates a step counter with LED lighting to signal to the public whether or not the wearer is on track to achieving their step goal for the day.

Why do you do it?

I, and many others I know struggle with creating healthy habits, even if I know they will benefit me in the long run. My team and I wanted to find an approach to daily fitness routines that would actually work. Shame is a powerful motivator, and, while positive reinforcement feels good, sometimes people need something stronger. Accountability like this can go a long way.

Why do you think it's important?

We can always be better. There is always room for self-improvement, but our busy lives can get in the way of prioritizing this. The first step to self-optimization is optimizing your life. This is why Vye wearables are designed to fit seamlessly into users' lives, logging everyday movement, like commutes to work, trips to the grocery store and walks with loved ones. In

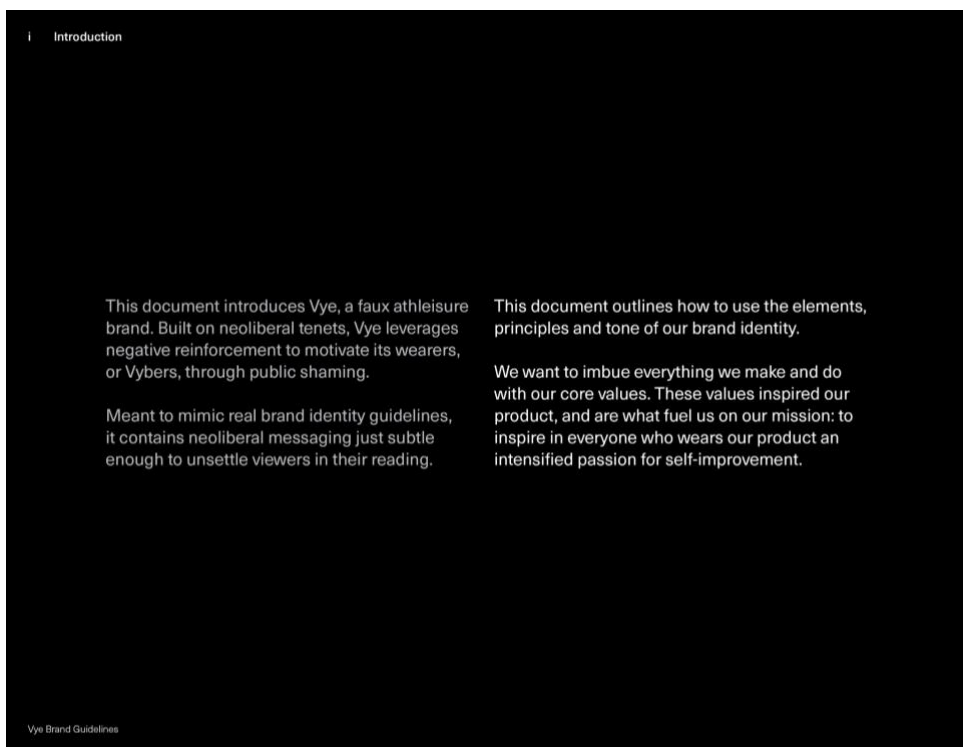
this day and age, with the technology available to us, there is no excuse to not have an optimized lifestyle.

What we are looking for:

- We would like our logotype and/or logomark to be energetic
 - We would like our visual identity to feel premium like our technology
 - We would like it to be uplifting and aspirational
 - We would like our colour palette to be fresh and trendy
-

Appendix B

Vye Brand Guidelines



i Introduction
ii Contents

Section 1: Our Logo

- 1.0 Our Logo
- 1.1 Overview
- 1.2 Logotype: Structure and Scale
- 1.3 Logotype: Application
- 1.4 Logotype: Misuse
- 1.5 Graphic Element

Section 2: Colour Palette

- 2.1 Primary
- 2.2 Secondary
- 2.3 Gradients

Section 3: Typography

- 3.1 Primary Typeface
- 3.2 Secondary Typeface

Section 4: Brand and Voice

- 1.0 Brand and Voice
- 1.1 Marketing Message

Section 5: VyeTech™

- 1.0 Lockup
- 1.1 Lockup: Structure and Scale
- 1.2 Lockup: Application



Our Logo

Vye's logotype is streamlined and elegant. It feels premium, much like the sensation of wearing our smart clothing.

Each character in the logotype has been placed intentionally. It is central to our brand and must only be used in the proper forms to keep a clear and consistent visual identity.

Typeface: Operetta 12 *The logotype letters having custom kerning and should never be altered. Although derived from a typeface, do not attempt to recreate the mark by typing it. Instead, use the official logo files.*
Weight: Demi Bold
Case: Sentence case
Colour: Black



To "vie" is to strive for superiority. This is what unites our community; striving for excellence daily. As a company, we strive for excellence by designing athleisure that, literally and metaphorically, powers people. The "y" in the Vye logotype is customized to reference the technology that defines our revolutionary wearables.

1.2 Logotype: Structure and Scale



To ensure legibility, when printed, the logotype should not appear smaller than 4mm in height. Digitally, it should not appear smaller than 16px in height.

Vye 16px
Vye 4mm



The "safety zone" refers to the visual zone around the logo which cannot be broken. This safety zone is designated by the "e" of the logotype.

1.3 Logotype: Application



The logotype appears only in black or white. With special permission, it can be set in the Vye gradient.

When placing the logotype over a solid colour or an image, contrast is of the utmost importance. The logotype should not be placed on a background that is overly busy or of similar shade or hue.

Vye Brand Guidelines

1.4 Logotype: Misuse

Our Logo



Consistency and accuracy helps build and protect the brand's image. Use only the official logo files.

Vye Brand Guidelines

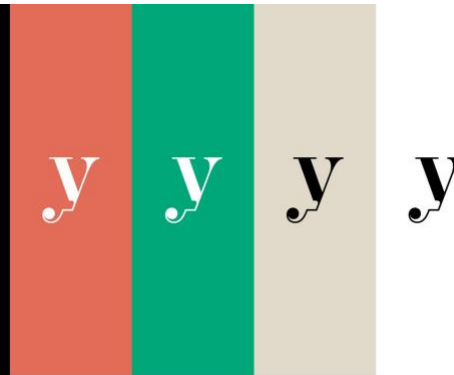


Vye Brand Guidelines

Graphic Element

Vye's graphic element is a customized "y," pulled directly from our logotype. We like the letter "Y." It's kind of our thing. It sets us apart, and we've made it our own. It's an integral part of our brand name and the terminology we use, like Vybers, Vytality points, etc. Like the careful formation of our graphic element, we prioritize the formation and perfection of You.

To preserve the novelty of our graphic element, we don't overuse it. We reserve it for situations where a symbol is more applicable than a full logotype. We never use it side-by-side with our logotype, and we never modify it in any way (see Section 1.4 on misuse).



The graphic element's safety zone is designated by the height of the ball on the end of its tail.

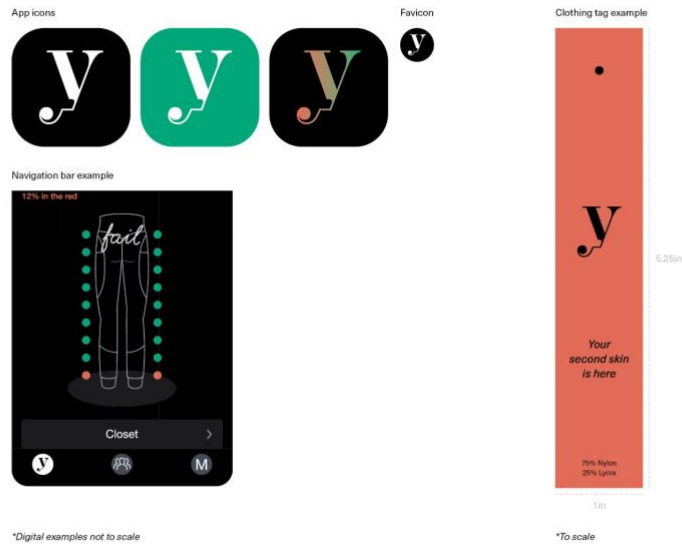
To ensure legibility, when printed, it should not appear smaller than 3mm in height. Digitally, it should not appear smaller than 10px in height.

y 10px **y** 3mm

Vye Brand Guidelines

The graphic element appears only in black or white. With special permission, it can be set in the Vye gradient.

When placing the logotype over a solid colour or an image, contrast is of the utmost importance. The logotype should not be placed on a background that is overly busy or of similar shade or hue.



*Digital examples not to scale.

*To scale

2.1 Primary

Burnt Sienna

C 7 R 226
M 71 G 109
Y 86 B 90
K 0

HEX: #E26D5A

White

C 0 R 255
M 0 G 255
Y 0 B 255
K 0

HEX: #FFFFFF

Black

C 100 R 0
M 0 G 5
Y 0 B 5
K 99

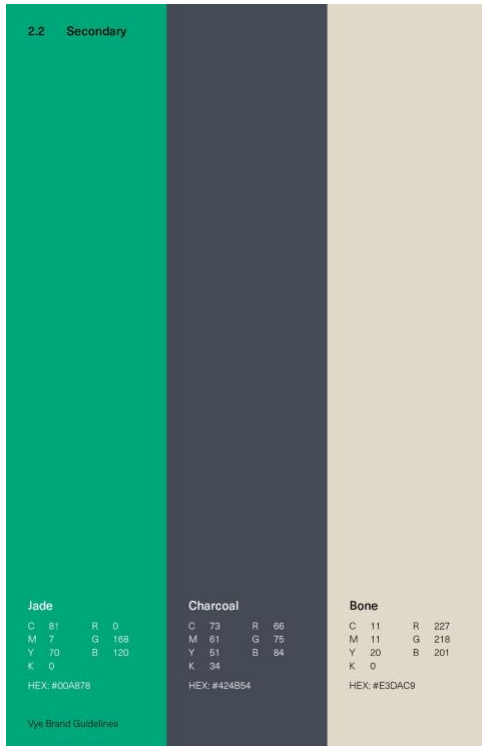
HEX: #000505

Colour Palette

Primary Palette

Like our primary palette, we tend to see things in black and white. You either succeed, or you don't. We make Vybers' failures transparent, because hiding your struggles from the world doesn't help you overcome them.

Burnt Sienna (red) is the accent colour in our primary palette. Red represents failure, real or potential, and is intended to motivate users.

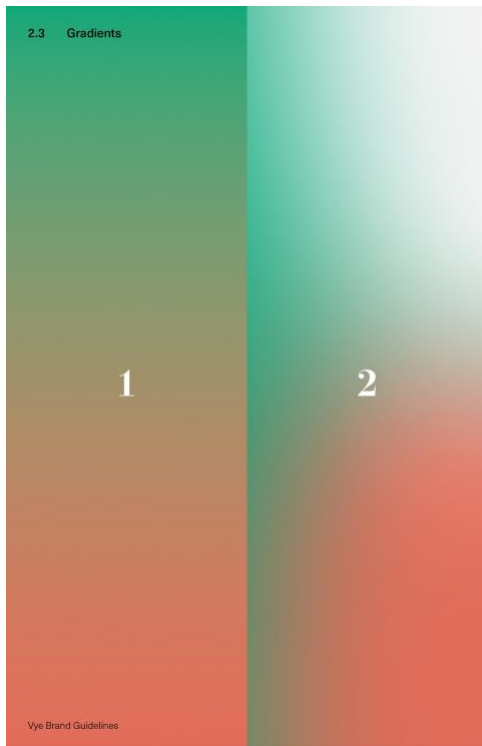


Colour Palette

Secondary Palette

Our secondary palette consists of Jade, (green), Charcoal and Bone. We like to use the phrase "stay in the green." Jade is our secondary accent colour, because it's the colour Vybers chase after. Green represents success and goal achievement.

Charcoal and Bone are included in our palette to add depth, and to provide options for creating hierarchy. Bone is also the official colour for VyeTech™.



Colour Palette

Gradients

The gradients in our visual language to represent the progress bar built into Vye products, as well as to emphasize the fluidity of time-based progress.

Two gradient files are available for use, including a two-colour Burnt Siena to Jade vertical gradient (1), and a three colour Burnt Siena, Jade and white converging gradient (2). Use Gradient 1 to indicate a linear quality. Gradient 2 can be used when you need something brighter and more abstract.

Our logotype utilizes the typeface Operetta 12 Demi Bold, which is an elegant, high-contrast neo-didone serif.

Operetta 12 should only be employed in the weight Demi Bold. It may be set in sentence case, primarily for headings, as demonstrated in this document. It should only be set in black or white, unless permission is given to use it in another brand colour.

Primary Typeface

Operetta 12 Demi Bold

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

Neue Haas Unica Q1G is a copy-friendly, sans serif typeface that complements Operetta 12. It's still elegant, but more understated than our display serif. It works well digitally and in print.

Neue Haas Unica Q1G will most often be used in a regular weight, but may also be used in a medium or light weight for the purpose of creating typographic hierarchy. Italics for each weight are also available. Neue Haas Unica Q1G can be used for subheadings, body copy, captions and/or descriptions. It should be set in sentence case, primarily in black or white and occasionally in other brand colours.

Secondary Typeface

Neue Haas Unica W1G Medium

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

Neue Haas Unica W1G Medium Italic

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

Neue Haas Unica W1G Regular

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

Neue Haas Unica W1G Italic

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

Neue Haas Unica W1G Light

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

Neue Haas Unica W1G Light Italic

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz0123456789

We sell athleisure customized with VyeTech™, a revolutionary smart clothing technology. VyeTech™ clothing integrates a step counter and LED lighting to signal to the public whether or not its wearer is on track to achieving their goals for the day.

Brand:

Seamless. Energetic. Premium.

At a time when we are constantly being pulled in different directions, it is more important than ever to focus on improving yourself. Our products are designed to integrate seamlessly into Vybers' lives. We're like a built-in accountability partner. We offer energy and discipline, because feeling premium is worth the chase.

Voice:

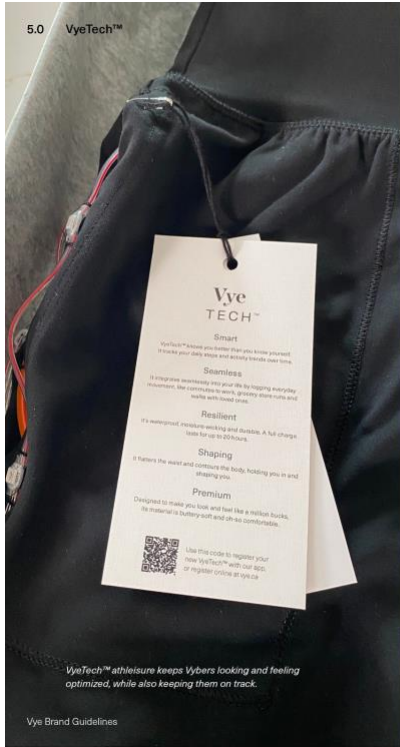
Bold. Aspirational. Persistent.

Bold. Confidence is key. We are confident about our product and we preach our core values.

Aspirational and persistent: There is always room for self-improvement, and part of challenging you to be better is never accepting excuses.

Supercharge your life

The biggest barrier to self-improvement is an unoptimized lifestyle. In the daily clamor, Vye reminds you to prioritize yourself.



Our Tech

VyeTech™ is our revolutionary smart clothing technology, which integrates a step counter and LED lighting to create intelligent, functional and stylish athleisure. Each article of clothing imbued with VyeTech™ is designed to form an intimate connection with its wearer, so that it knows them better than they know themselves.

Connected to the Vye app, its computational abilities eliminate the fallibility present in human accountability relationships. From work commute to workout, VyeTech™ incorporates athleisure's dual purpose of athleticism and leisure to count every step of your day, for you.



When printed or presented digitally, the lockup for VyeTech™ should not appear smaller than 12mm, or 34px in height. When center-aligning the lockup, use the Vye logotype as a guide.



The VyeTech™ lockup's safety zone is designated by the "T" in "TECH."

Clothing tag example



*To scale

Appendix C

VyeTech™ Pants – Final Prototype Images





**Vye
TECH™**

Smart

VyeTech™ knows you better than you know yourself. It tracks your daily steps and activity trends over time.

Seamless

It integrates seamlessly into your life by logging everyday movement, like commutes to work, grocery store runs and walks with loved ones.

Resilient

It's waterproof, moisture-wicking and durable. A full charge lasts for up to 20 hours.

Shaping

It flatters the waist and contours the body, holding you in and shaping you.

Premium

Designed to make you look and feel like a million bucks, its material is buttery-soft and oh-so comfortable.

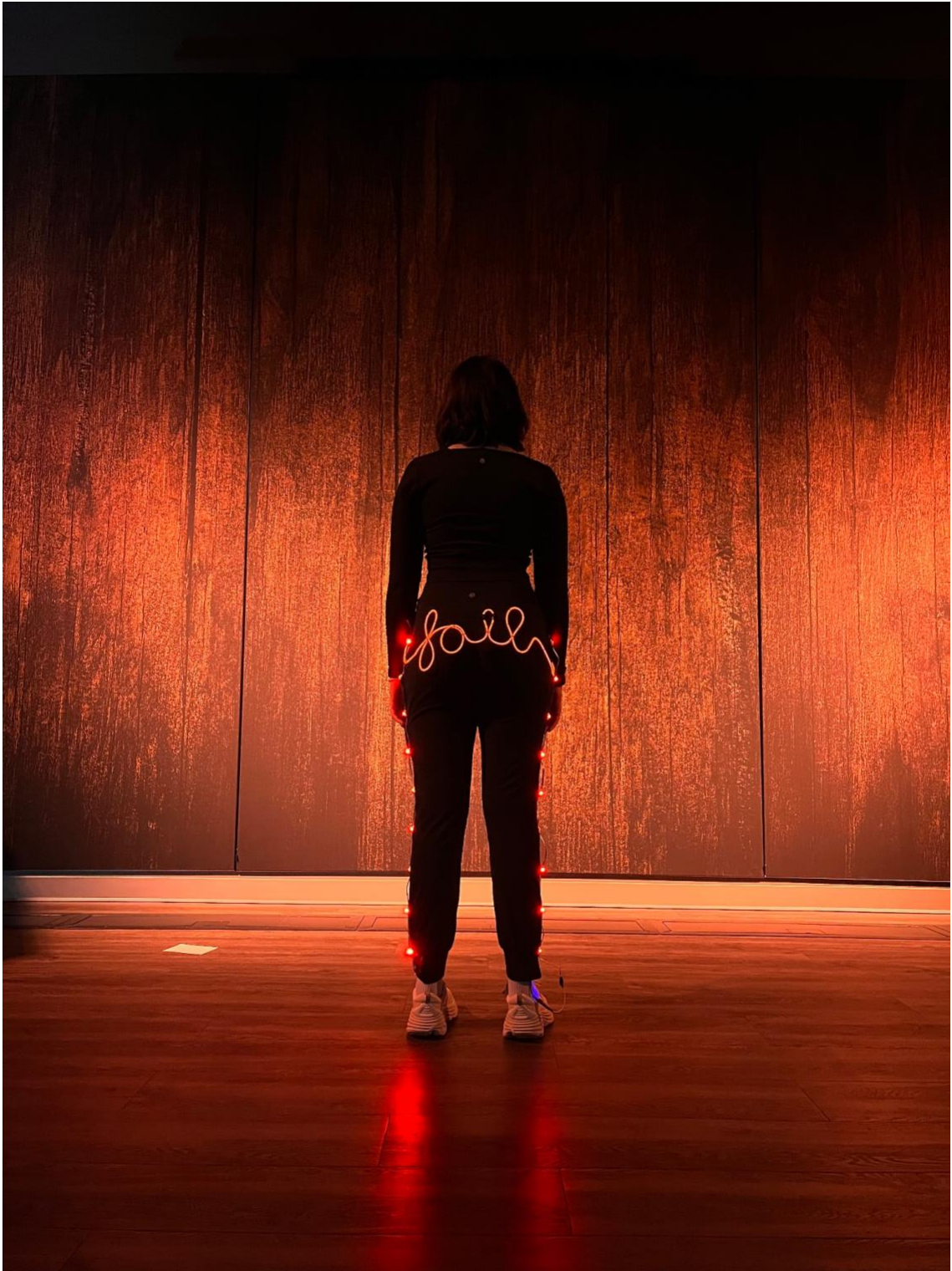


Use this code to register your new VyeTech™ with our app, or register online at vye.ca









Appendix D

Vye Promotional Video Voiceover Script

What makes the perfect accountability partner?

Well, they know you. Really well.

They motivate you to reach your goals,
and call you out when you're holding back.

They spend time pouring into you,
and you can trust them to keep you on track.

We created Vye,

because we believe that the perfect accountability partner isn't a person at all. It's a wearable technology that knows you. Really well. It integrates a pedometer to track your steps, and LED lighting to motivate you.

It calls you out when you're holding back. You can't hide anything from it. It's always honest with you, and it keeps you on track. It connects you to a community of Vybers, who are united through their determination to strive for excellence daily.

Vye always has time for you, because it's with you all the time. It's like a second skin, designed to help you work on yourself.

Life can get busy. Some days are harder than others.

But when you fall down, Vye makes sure that you get back up.

It isn't afraid to challenge you, or to put you on display.

It celebrates your wins,

but it also makes sure you feel the weight of your failures.

It keeps you accountable, so that you can be better,

Look better. Feel better.

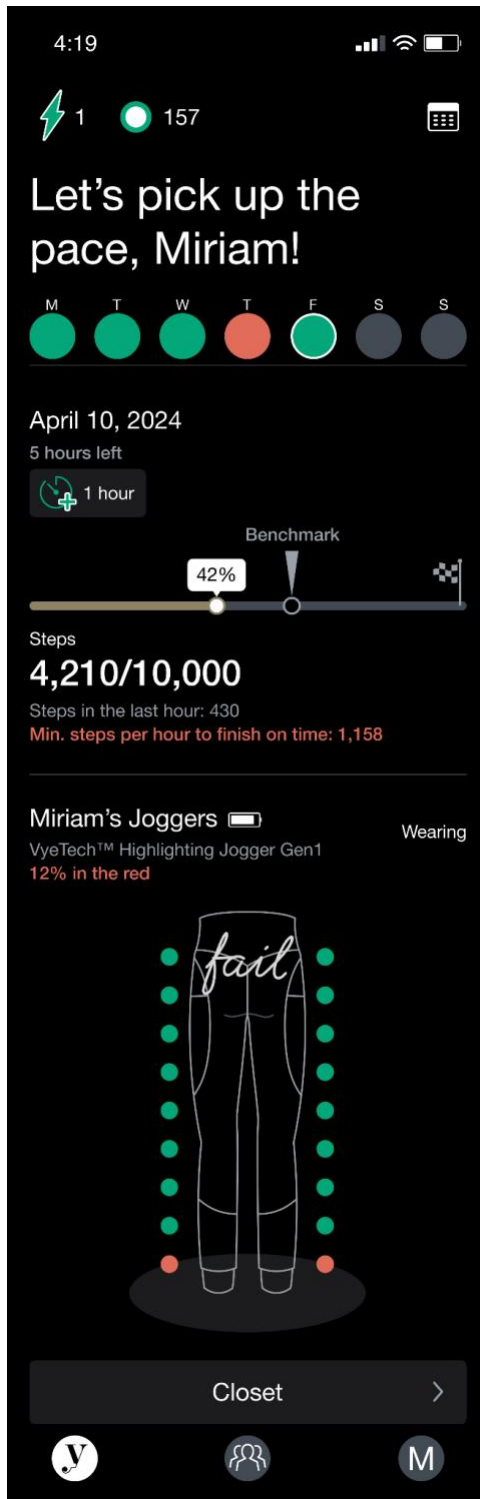
Because, feeling premium is worth the effort.

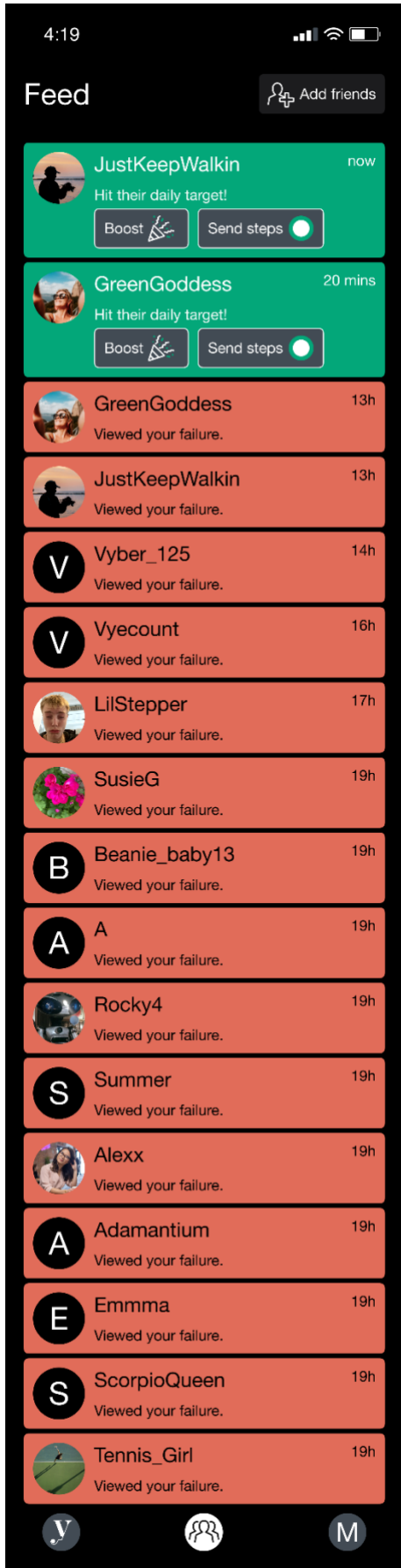
You are worth the effort.

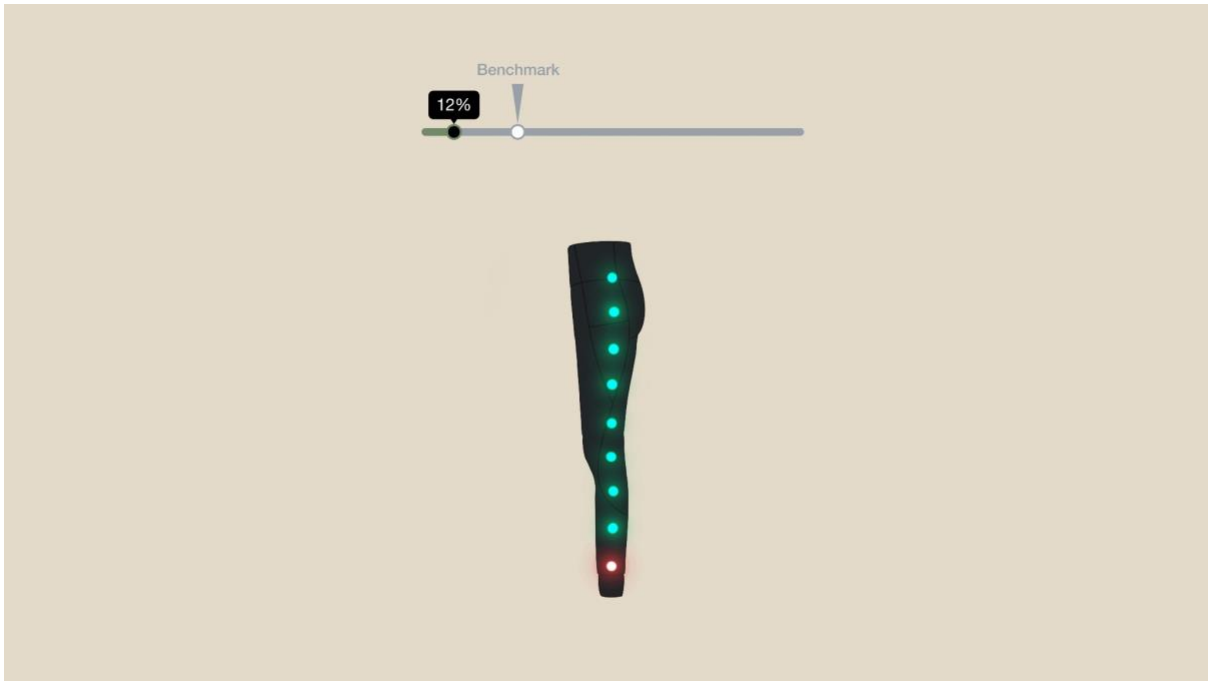
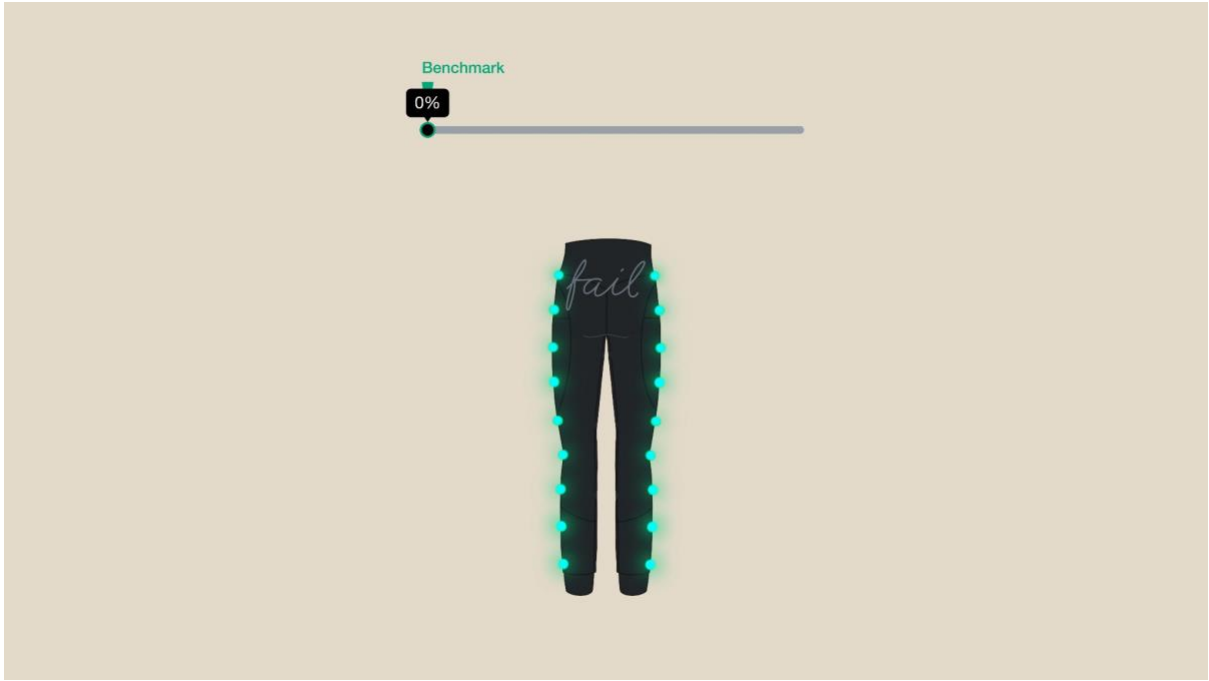
Supercharge your life, with Vye.

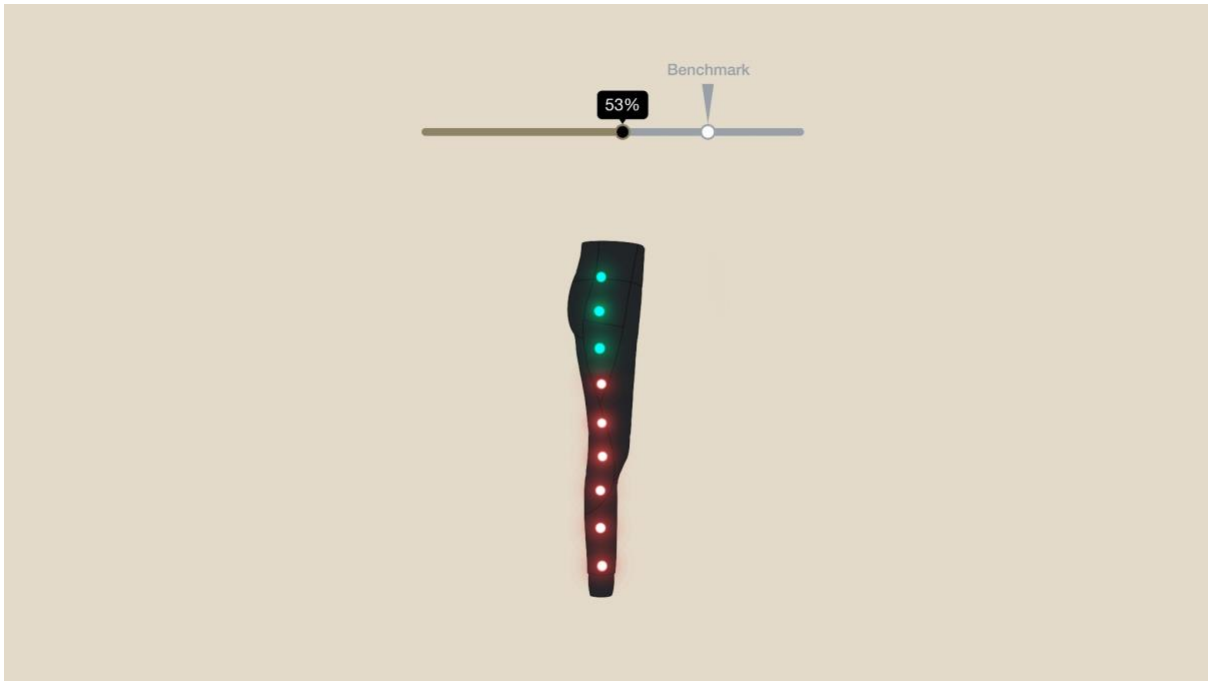
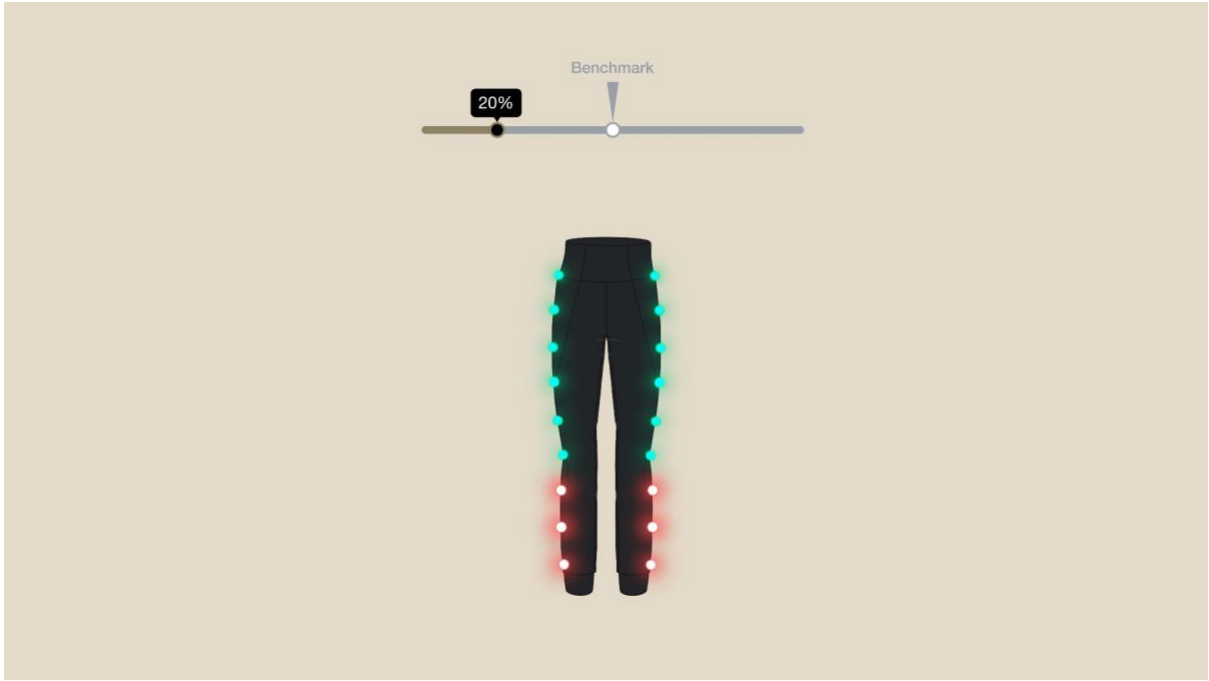
Appendix E

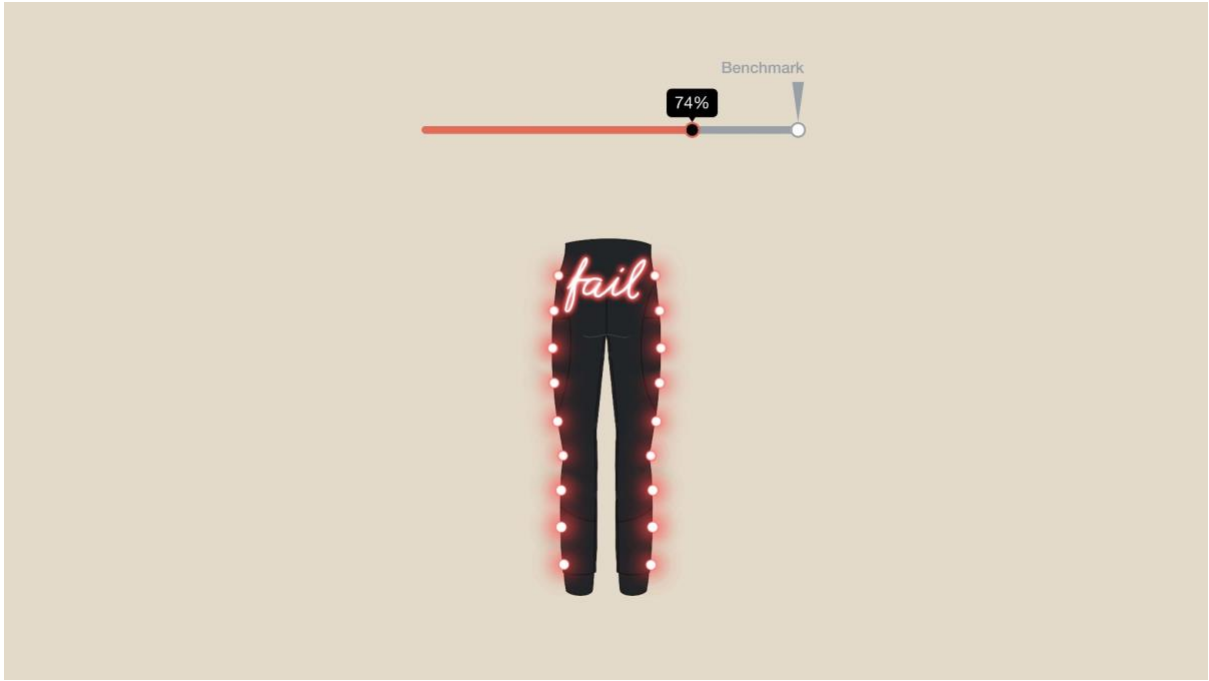
Vye App Interface Screens and Final Technical Sketches











Appendix F

Vye Promotional Video Stills

