

Gina (596)

Soft pink like the bottom of a baby's foot. Deep blue like ocean waves splashing across the shore. The soft cotton dissolves into her skin and forms to every curve of her body. A black triangle is intertwined between pink and blue colors of the print, making their love affair impossible. A closer look by anyone on the street brings further examination. People look at her and wonders. "*Is her jaw line a little too chiseled? Why are her arms so muscular?*" She provokes thought about gender norms with her clothing. She is vulnerable to these judges who may harm her verbally and physically. But, she desires to live the life she was meant to live. Each day, she pushes through these obstacles and threats, showing her inner strength and determination.

The fashion industry is known for tailoring to skinny models and designing pretty dresses for them to wear. However, I differ from this concept. I believe in the mentality that fashion is art with a purpose. As Socrates once said, "*I cannot teach anybody anything. I can only make them think*". Garments with bold images on a person who is not a model type make a statement. This pushes people to question their characterization of beauty.

A leader in this trend, Darkmatter, is a queer South Asian performance art duo comprised of Alok Vaid-Menon and Janani Balasubramanian. They use fashion to fight transphobia by performing spoken word, holding workshops and posting their photo shoots on social media outlets. They do not dress the way one would expect given the binary sex assigned to them. With their dark lipsticks, high platform shoes and beautiful vibrant printed dresses, it is hard to miss them walking in the streets of New York.

I believe that everyone should know that they are beautiful, but we live in a society that constantly puts uniqueness down. I want to change the way people view differences, I did not always have this positive mindset. I was my own worst enemy; I stood in the way of the life I wanted. Believing I was not good enough for anyone, I doubted my own ability and potential. I realized that the negative thoughts were not true. I was in fact a very strong woman. This led me on a path of learning how to love myself. It was a struggle to overcome my inner demons because I was so used to this behavior. Slowly, I started listening to my inner voice and following my passion. A girl who did not speak up for herself suddenly became a go getter. I even organized a citywide fashion show called Empowerment of the Fashions. It encouraged young women to embrace their race and culture by walking the runway in clothes that represent different ethnicities and nationalities.

I want to give the voiceless a voice with clothing to become an entrepreneur who rebels against ignorance. Nina Simone said it best; *“It is fashion’s duty to reflect the times in which we live.”* Whether that is for transgender people, minorities, curvy girls – or even using clothing to fight for animal rights. If fashion is viewed as a tool to convey meaningful messages, the possibilities are endless. Although, I am still discovering all that the world offers. Here are some things I know are facts: I am an activist, a leader in a movement, intelligent, confident and a risk taker. Most importantly, because I will never be a skinny model in a pretty dress. I will be designing for those of us who go unnoticed.