

CA²RE+

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FRAMEWORKS OF DESIGN-DRIVEN RESEARCH

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SENSORY NOURISHMENT CONSCIOUSLY CRAFTING SENSATIONS IN CLOTHING DESIGN TO SUPPORT DIVERSE SENSORY NEEDS

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My design-driven doctoral research (DDDr) collaborates with people on the autism spectrum to examine the connection between how they feel, both physically and emotionally, and the sensations that are crafted between their moving body and the clothing they wear. In many ways this connection might seem obvious yet its consideration is glaringly absent from both academic research and dominant fashion design practices. The traditional visual methods and language used, in both fashion research and practice, lacks attention to the felt experiences of clothing. Furthermore, I have been dismayed by the disconnect between fashion research and fashion design in practice. In particular, the static conception of clothing is at odds with the multi-layered multi-sensory lived experiences of wearing.



FIGURE 1. Sensory ethnography through wardrobe studies with participants

The aggressive and rapid processes that dominate commercial fashion design practices fail to see the value in slowing down to give attention to these felt experiences. I see my DDDr project as a very privileged opportunity that allows time and space to slow down to question and reflect on such felt experiences. I do so by borrowing from sensory ethnographic methods, which in itself is not original, however the insights gathered through such exercises are rarely assimilated back into the design process by designers. It is this link, that design-driven research facilitates, that I believe creates real meaning.

Human beings are complex. Real life is dynamic with continuous transitions between movements and emotional states. In many corners of academia,



FIGURE 2. Sensory ethnography through performative engagement with garments

I have found a desire to reduce this complexity to one specific problem. The CA²RE+ community's encouragement and support to embrace a holistic approach has been very significant. Through constructive conversations with my panel, I was challenged to dive deeper into the complexity. In my abstract I had stated that I was prioritising felt experiences over visuals, however, the panel's critique was that the visual sense cannot be ignored. I discussed these comments with my participants and they agreed that their clothing choices were always a negotiation between the appeasement of their kinaesthetic-tactile needs and how they desired to be visually perceived by others. Furthermore, they acknowledged the contribution of this visual perception to their felt experiences.

Within the CA²RE+ community, I have found great camaraderie with those daring and struggling to unravel the emotional well-being of their users within scientific frameworks. Through earlier conferences I was introduced to Silke Hofmann's *Needs Based Clothing Design* that elevates the voices of females affected by breast cancer. I am inspired by her determination to challenge the status quo and assimilate her insights back into fashion design practices to affect real change. My biggest take-away from CA²RE+ has been the realisation that DDDr should, by its very nature, pose more questions than it answers. The pursuit of these answers should extend beyond a doctoral project. It is a lifelong pursuit. Although I am working with a specific case study, my research should be collectively beneficial to universal well-being. The real value will lie in how my DDDr will inform my future design practice and hopefully that of other designers, disciplines and user groups.