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SHAPE
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AMELIA HOPE



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ABSTRACT

This practice based design research questions the influence of body ideals and body categorisation methods on women's body shape, individual dress expression and wellbeing. Historical and current body type categorisation methods are conventions prevalent within the fashion industry. This research project questions whether these conventions of categorising women's bodies into simplified shapes and assumed fit and aesthetic preferences is problematic and even redundant in terms of women's wellbeing in light of changing attitudes towards dress, body ideals and gender. New understandings of wellbeing and identity, self-awareness and body confidence for the individual impacts fashion expression now and in the future. It is highly relevant for designers to understand body shape and the importance of fit preferences in all respects, both physical and psychological throughout the design process.

For this practice based research project two experimental design pieces are created that consider the diversity of women's body shapes and self-reflection of dress. In addition to relevant literature, this research includes design analysis of influential designers who explore the boundaries of the body and garment. My own investigation analyses responses from a small group of ten diverse women to gain insight to the relevance of defined body types and their own perceptions and choices of garment shape and design for personal fit satisfaction. This project informs a reiterative and integrative design process of mindful reflection, drawing, draping, cutting and construction to create new volume, shapes and silhouette to reflect the subjective perceptions of body and dress. This innovative design practice looks to new ways of design and pattern development processes to create new expressions of apparel outside of expected norms.

This research challenges preconceived ideas about body ideals and dress, in an attempt to open minds to the diversity and uniqueness of body shape and external projection of self.

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