

Research In Practice - Dissertation Proposal

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Within my proposal for my dissertation, I will be exploring three keywords that I resonate with as a person and as a designer to aid my research. These words include *Androgyny*, *Streetwear* and *Sustainability* as they all make up a large part of my personal identity as well as what inspires my style through my practice in fashion and textiles. I will look at how fashion is about expression of personality regardless of gender, and how design is essential to the progression of a sustainable future as well as educating on equality through fashion.

Androgyny

The word 'androgyny' plays a big part in my style as a creator and as a person because I believe that this term allows people and myself to blur the lines of gender stereotypes to express how we might be feeling on any given day. A succinct definition of the word 'androgyny' is 'an appearance that is not clearly male or female' (dictionary.cambridge.org, n.d.) but plays with the characteristics of stereotypical 'male' and 'female' clothing to create a personal style. A word that is directly related to 'androgyny' is 'androgynous'. I feel that this is also an important word meaning 'not clearly male or female', referring more to personal identification rather than the style you portray to others but still extremely significant to the way that people feel when dressing themselves. A huge inspiration of mine is Grayson Perry as he is an artist that identifies as a man but has always been openly comfortable with his fashion experimentation into flamboyant cross-dressing. In his book '*The Descent of Man*' he tells the stories of how he developed his own idea of 'masculinity' from various experiences with men in his upbringing. He says 'What if half the victims of masculinity are men? Masculinity might



Fig. 1: (Shutterstock, 2016)

be a straitjacket that is keeping men from 'being themselves', whatever that might mean.' (Perry, 2017). He is pointing out how within a 'toxic masculine' culture, masculinity is celebrated and expected from men but why must we have specifications for being more of a 'man' when people could be so much happier if there are no restrictions on who we can be.

Masculinity and femininity are more words that interest me as they refer to a traditional view of gender but associate more with personality traits, how you act or how you dress. People can be a man but be more feminine and vice versa. Grayson says 'I am a transvestite; I am turned on by dressing in clothes that are heavily associated with being female. This is perhaps some unconscious renunciation of being a man, or at least a fantasy flight towards femininity' This is a perfect example of how fluid gender is as he feels at his happiest when in clothing that would be titled as women's clothing because it allows him to be truly himself. It also displays his feelings from the experience of his stepfather who 'was a volatile and violent man', something deep within him wants to reject the negative role model that he was raised by so that he doesn't become in any way similar. Additionally, the ideals of being masculine were tainted for him which is why he feels more safe in feminine outfits.

Furthermore, he writes it so clearly when explaining that 'from a young age I have felt that masculinity was optional for someone with a penis.' as masculinity is a feeling that you can enhance or take away depending on your mood or even your environment, aided mostly by fashion and styling to transform feelings into a physical form.

Another person that inspires me is Lady Gaga because she faces androgyny from a slightly different angle as she is referred to with the modern term 'bio-queen' which means: 'A biological woman who identifies as or with drag queens' (Urban Dictionary, n.d.). Unfortunately this term can be seen as negative from inside the drag community as the original definition of 'drag' is 'clothing typical of one sex worn by a person of the opposite sex.' (Drag Official, 2013) but would largely be men transforming themselves

into women however Lady Gaga is a woman dressing as an exaggerated version of herself. Of course this can come across not androgynous at all but I feel that questioning the norm



Fig. 2: (Smith, 2020)

and pushing gender boundaries in a predominately male art is a great example of exploring androgyny. Most of her work and aesthetic are inspired by drag, from her polished, over the top makeup to her extravagant and skimpy wardrobe, she is seen as

a drag icon. She even appeared on an episode of Ru Paul's Drag Race as a guest judge as seen in Figure 2. Gaga has always been open about her support towards inclusivity and dedicated a large amount of time to attending various marches and events that protest the rights for the LGBTQ+ community and 'she would also refuse to accept any misogynistic or homophobic behavior in the music industry.' (Mathieu Deflem, 2019). Later she 'performed John Lennon's famous song "Imagine" at the Human Rights Campaign's National Dinner' but altered a few of the lyrics to '("And only Matthew in the sky")' referencing Matthew Shepard who was murdered in 1998 for motives surrounding his sexual orientation. This is spreading a huge message of acceptance and how people should be able to love who they want and be who they want to be without judgement or in this case being killed.

Streetwear

This leads me into my second word, 'streetwear'. In my opinion the whole idea of streetwear revolves around the notion of people dressing how they want to dress to fit in or to stand out. One definition of this word is 'fashionable casual clothes' (www.dictionary.com, n.d.), a true statement but in my eyes, it goes much deeper than that because there have been and are still so many different subcultures that are expressed through streetwear to show personal beliefs or interests. 'The message can be one of resistance, subversion, musical affiliation or a combination of all three' (Cox, 2017) explaining that streetwear is important for personal expression and a sense of belonging when they find 'a group of like minded individuals'. The word 'resistance' implies a

society of oppression in which people have felt that they can't show off who they are, but streetwear has allowed many people to break out into clothing that they connect with so they can metaphorically, and possibly literally, stick their v's up to social standards.

This area of fashion involves a huge amount of experimentation due to people and groups adopting styles and silhouettes from various era's of history as well as what is happening within designer catwalk fashion at that time. For example, 'the drape suit was a retrospective look harking back to the menswear of the Edwadian era (1901-10)' and later featured in womenswear designs by Christian Dior. 'In the hands of the teddy boy, the drape



Fig. 3: (Daily Herald Archive / National Science & Media Museum / Science & Society Picture Library, n.d.)

suit became a symbol of rebellion' for the boys that didn't grow up with lots of wealth; they could use old clothing to make these suits and still look as good as the people who could afford to buy them brand new. This again is an example of clothing having a strong importance to someone's identity while feeling important themselves.

Experimentation is also how a lot of the groups of people have evolved and come about when different people try out fashion aspects from the past which provides new

identities for others to pick and choose. Streetwear is also extremely fluid in that sense due to the amount of choice and varying directions you can take your style, changing from day to day depending on a person's mood. Furthermore, clothing can be an escape, much like drag, it enables people to present as whoever they wish while the term streetwear embraces all kinds of people.

Within streetwear and street style, there is seemingly less dedication to music related trends in the 21st century as people tend to wear what makes them feel good or from what is trending in shops. However, it can work in the opposite way as streetwear trends can inform what the shops stock in the first place, along with researching what is occurring in social media, politics and pop culture. Especially during a pandemic, people have relied on Instagram more than ever to access new colour palettes and silhouettes that they associate with in order to build on their personal appearance and identity. A trend Blogger that I follow said 'since the streets have been closed for the past year, I've now turned to Instagram to fill the void' (Girmay, 2021) displaying that social media is much more important for documenting the trends; Instagram is such a large platform that all types of style, people and posts can be accessed to piece together an idea of self. Girmay also wrote that she 'was very much inspired by what I saw strangers wearing on the subway, to the farmers market, or even to the bodega.'. This represents just a fraction of the amount of influences we have all around us hence everyone will have an altered perspective on the world, in turn making every person unique with their own tastes. Through this we find people with similarities to how we perceive the world and create our own diverse groups. Moreover, I feel that using what is around us to

inspire our looks will never go out of style and continue to tick over into the future, at the same time the recycling and reinventing of old looks allows us to be fresh and keep evolving.

Sustainability

The word 'sustainability' can be washed over so easily in the fashion industry without the meaning being taken seriously or understood properly. When in an environmental context the word means 'the quality of causing little or no damage to the environment and therefore able to continue for a long time' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019) whereas many high street brands green-wash by labeling a recycled garment as sustainable when that isn't the case - Yes it has been recycled but we are never told if that garment can be recycled itself, consequently we question whether it is sustainable at all. 'Eco-conscious, environmentally friendly, sustainable — these are just some of the buzzwords being used to promote the green credentials of brands and corporations.' (Chan, 2020) but she explains that it is difficult to determine whether these are true from a consumers perspective, therefore we must look at the 'numbers' as the statistics can speak volumes of how dedicated, or not dedicated at all, brands and big corporations are to the future of the planet. The new designers of the world have a responsibility to change the way that people are misled by innovating and creating new ways of upcycling or even creating new biodegradable materials from the waste that is produced.

There are already some brands that have been innovating; Figure 4 shows an image of three of thousands products produced by Zero Waste Daniel and his team, made from

100% recycled fabrics in a patchwork style. The name of the brand itself displays how conscious he is in making these garments 'zero waste' as well as to be unique, stylish and make clothing that people will want to wear. In turn, the demand for mass produced off-the-rack clothing should decrease. Moreover, Figure 5 shows an MDF wood



Fig. 4: (Zero Waste Daniel, n.d.)



Fig 5: (Chip(s) Board, 2018)

substitute made entirely from recycled potato peels, a highly accessible and common waste product in any home, created by the company Chip(s). Without having to chop down trees, the invention acts exactly the same as the wood product whilst it will have just as long of a life as it maintains the same level of durability as normal MDF. These brands are completely inspirational as this sets an amazing example of what can be achieved when designers truly care about the environment.

As a designer myself, I am always thinking about the consequences of my actions when producing new designs or making fabric samples. I find recycling to be the main way that I try to reduce the waste I make because using old scraps of fabric or old paper cut offs are better than buying new to create fresh motifs. The book, '*Recycling from Waste in Fashion and Textiles*', showcases a range of great points that I believe in myself. One

of the most disgusting facts is that 'all kinds of waste such as clothes, carpets, shoes, paper, food, and agro wastage ends up in the landfill.' (Pandit et al., 2020) while only a selected few of the products naturally decompose. For this reason landfills are completely clogged full of artificial rubbish which builds on the world's pollution. It is vital that we find new ways of using this waste to our advantage before 'the alarming levels of greenhouse gasses' build up so much that we kill off our species and every other living thing.

The population of the world is continuously rising so designers have to constantly keep up with the demand for new and trendy products; recycling could be the answer to this because 'Recycling is essential as a substitute for creating new things' at the same time, this would make it a low cost for production as the materials are already available in large quantities. Meanwhile, this would contribute to a '*Circular Economic Approach*', breaking the throw away culture that comes with the fashion industry. Moreover designers are the perfect candidates for this as creative minds will be able to invent new and fun materials, products and fashion.

To conclude my proposal for my dissertation, I have explained the importance of identity through the outlet of fashion while the idea of not conforming to one title but experimenting with who you are through clothing and style is vital for self expression. Additionally, I have looked at how we are influenced by what is around us to add to our uniqueness and the acceptance of a variety of styles mismatched together to formulate an aesthetic that mimics who we are. Lastly I explored how designers, fashion or otherwise, are necessary to creating change in the way that we accept others as well as

innovate to salvage the planet and the environment. And so, from this inquiry I have formulated a question that encapsulates my interests while it challenges the morals of the fashion industry; Can surface pattern and textile design, specifically related to a fashion context, break down gender stereotypes and enforce sustainable design practices?

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Images

Figure 1:

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Figure 2:

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Figure 3:

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Figure 4:

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Figure 5:

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