

## Wearing well-being: Using context mapping toward the development of garment therapy for elderly populations

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Few forms of human behavior are more pervasive than the use of textiles. Shelter and clothing textile products play a vital role in meeting basic human needs. Clothes are imbued with memories, intertwined with our histories and identities, interwoven into the ‘fabric of our lives’ (Goett, 2008). Often in late stage/assisted living scenarios, care priorities shift from curative measures; the focus often changes to palliative care for the relief of pain, symptoms, and emotional stress. The purpose of this study is to better understand the impact of co-creative design approaches in late-stage eldercare through the development of wearable narratives, garment therapies that are visual, tactile and powerful to the user/creator. We concentrate on developing a design approach that assists in structuring and stimulating narratives. The objective is to understand the mechanisms by which co-creative design can engage “wearers” of design in the creation of wearable therapies that promote well-being. We hypothesize that the textile and garment creation is, in itself, a valuable therapeutic tool.

We used co-creative research methods, specifically contextmapping, to engage participants in creative activities for idea generation to help inform the design process. Contextmapping empowers participants by allowing them to make collaged artefacts and then tell stories about what they have made (Sleeswijk Visser et. al, 2005). It is one of several possible methods that encourage new ways for radical innovations by allowing participants to inspire design teams through the explanations of their created artifacts (Schifferstein and Sleeswijk Visser, 2013). Design toolkits using this method should allow freedom for participant interpretation which may include a variety of text, imagery, abstract two-dimensional shapes, fabric, clay pens, markers, scissors and glue (Sleeswijk Visser et al., 2005).

Data for this study was initially collected from seven participants. Upon receiving IRB approval, we explained the purpose of the study to the interested participants and provided information required in the informed consent guidelines. First semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant to determine personal iconographies. Common questions focused on their hobbies, likes and memories of garments. Based on the participants’ interviews, we found personalized imagery for a contextmapping exercise. We returned on a later date to have participants create a collage of favorite images that resonate with them. The participants were then asked to explain their choices and describe the arrangement of their imagery. The researchers used data from the interviews, observations and contextmapping exercise to create personalize textile designs for the participants. All participants completed the interview and additionally four were available to complete the contextmapping exercise.

Findings from the study revealed that using this design approach to create a textile narrative was a positive experience for the participants. We found interviews and observations of

the participants beneficial for generating individualized imagery for the contextmapping exercise. Allowing participants to express themselves through the imagery from the collages was an accessible method for them to contribute to the design process. We found this process both informational and inspirational in creating wearable narratives. There are limitations that must be considered when working with this population. Some participants were not available to complete the contextmapping exercise because of visiting family members, resting, or other unforeseen circumstances. Better scheduling may help in future, but patience and flexibility will remain important when working with this population. Beyond elderly populations, the proposed design approach might function to contribute to well-being in other populations in transition. As an example, this design approach could be used to build agency in immigrant groups and other disenfranchised populations. Future plans for research include increasing the number of participants and getting feedback from the participants and those that work with them on a daily basis regarding use of the personally designed textile.



Figure 1. Contextmapping exercise with an initial textile design idea for a scarf

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