

Soma-Expressive Diary for Embodied Knowledge in Fashion Design Education¹

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Abstract

This study proposes the Soma-Expressive Diary as a tool for incorporating body awareness into embodied design knowledge in fashion design education. The diary method (Bolger, Davis & Rafaeli, 2003) was chosen for this study as a distinctive qualitative research approach that allows individuals to document their daily experiences both instantaneously and repeatedly, thus revealing internal process knowledge. While current fashion design methodologies largely rely on external visual references, this study positions the designer's own soma—the lived, felt body—as a primary and legitimate source of design knowledge. Based on Höök's (2018) soma design principles and Halprin's (2003) Three Levels of Awareness framework, the study engaged twelve undergraduate students in a fashion design class in Istanbul in a ten-day diary practice, immersing them in a witnessing practice. Participants documented their daily clothing experiences by paying attention

to clothing-body interactions in physical, mental, and emotional dimensions then translated into clothing design proposals, demonstrating how bodily information influences design decisions. The daily practice revealed a three-stage process; self-witnessing, pattern recognition, and bodily design proposal. The findings suggest that the Soma-Expressive Diary offers a body-centered perspective by bridging the gap between bodily knowledge and design production, and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) reveals five themes: bodily comfort, emotional shielding, color performance, decision fatigue and visibility tension.

Keywords: Soma-Expressive Diary, Embodied Knowledge, Embodied Design, Fashion Design Education.

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1. Introduction

"What designers know about especially is the 'artificial world' - the human-made world of artefacts." (Cross, 2001:54) Nigel Cross (1982) pointed out that designers possess a unique way of knowing—an intelligence that operates by proposing, modeling, and solving poorly defined problems.

For the fashion design, the body is simultaneously the medium, subject, and canvas of design. In contrast, fashion design methodologies rely heavily on external visual references, trend reports, mood boards, historical archives, and do not give as much importance to other senses as the eye.

On the other hand, Merleau-Ponty (1945) describes the body as the vehicle of being-in-the-world and argues that perception and knowledge emerge through the living body. Macrine & Fugate (2022), cognitive processes occur through body-based systems such as perception and action. Perception is part of all senses experience and the body is an active subject that makes sense of the world and produces knowledge. Theories of embodied cognition point out that the mind cannot be considered as an abstract structure independent of the body. Also "Our bodies contain our life stories just as they contain bones, muscle, organs, nerves, and blood" (Halprin, 2003: 17). However, the body has often been examined at the discursive level; the felt and sensory dimensions of experience have been relegated to the background (Loke & Robertson, 2011). This discussion is critical in the field of fashion design, which designs clothing objects experienced directly on the body. In the literature on fashion design, there are various theoretical discussions on embodied design (Sampson, 2022; Robinson, 2022; Bugg, 2009) and multi-sensory bodily involvement (Stasiulyte, 2022; Kapur, 2020). Pedagogies that integrate embodied awareness into textile education, based on the approach that knowledge reaches the mind through the body (Salolainen, Leppisaari & Niinimäki 2018), are important examples. Furthermore, Tsaknaki and colleagues (2019), in their educational approaches developed within the scope of soma design, encouraged students to engage with materials through haptic interactions to develop sensory sensitivity towards materials and interaction processes.

Within this framework, structured creative tools that allow designers to systematically observe, document, and transform their everyday bodily experiences into design knowledge are quite limited. In particular, there has been a lack of positioning the sensory, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of a designer's everyday clothing experience as an epistemological source of creative production.

This study proposes that when fashion design students engage in structured embodied self-witnessing through the soma-expressive diary over ten days, they develop the capacity to identify recurring

bodily patterns in their clothing experiences and to translate these patterns into embodied design proposals. This demonstrates that the designer's lived, felt body can function as a primary and legitimate source of design knowledge, comparable in generative power to the external visual references that currently dominate fashion design education. The soma-expressive diary is proposed as a tool to address this gap and direct the designer's attention to their own experience. The diary tool is based on Kristina Höök's (2018) soma design principles and Daria Halprin's (2003) Three Levels of Awareness framework. Implemented as a ten-day self-witnessing task with twelve undergraduate students in a fashion design course, the diary invited participants to pay attention to their daily dressing experiences across physical, mental, and emotional dimensions and to transform these insights into a clothing design.

The diary method is defined as a unique qualitative research approach that allows individuals to document their daily experiences in an instantaneous and repetitive manner, bringing to the surface intra-individual process information (Bolger, Davis & Rafaeli, 2003). As Bolger et al. (2003: 580) state, diaries offer "an opportunity to examine social, psychological, and physiological processes within daily life." It also functions as a *reflexive autobiographical tool* (Hoskins, 1998:79) and creates an assessment method that allows participants to examine their daily experiences in their natural environment in real time.

This study brings this potential to fashion design education, positioning soma-expressive diary as both a data production tool and an embodied encounter space. It examines how this space enables the processes of self-witnessing, pattern recognition, and the translation of bodily knowledge into embodied design proposals. The term self-witnessing, drawn from Halprin's (2003) expressive arts framework, was deliberately chosen over self-observation. Whereas observation tends toward evaluation and correction, witnessing positions the student as a non-judgmental presence to their own bodily experience, creating the conditions for unfiltered bodily data to surface.

Although positioned within the context of fashion design education, the study proposes an approach whose fundamental principles can maintain their validity in any design discipline where the relationship between the body, material, experience, and the production process is central to the creative process. Within this broader context, the soma-expressive diary offers a concrete methodological response. It proposes a replicable research instrument through which bodily knowledge can be documented, articulated, and integrated into research processes. By highlighting the body as both a field of knowledge production and a source of knowledge, the diary presents bodily experience as an epistemic resource

in which the relationship between body, experience, material, and practice constitutes knowledge itself.

2. Conceptual Framework

In fashion design education, the tendency toward visual, implicit, and propositional forms of knowledge acquisition creates a body-centered epistemological void. The exclusion of the body as a source of knowledge narrows the available dataset for design research, disconnects the designer from the insights that their bodily experience can produce, and ties knowledge production to external reference systems. On the other hand, somatic epistemology creates a body-centered perspective on the way of knowing by arguing that the body is not merely a tool for action but an active producer of knowledge; bodily sensations, postures, and movements offer pathways to self-knowledge and creative expression by fostering awareness (Shusterman, 2008).

The term "soma" refers to a living, feeling, sensitive body, and somesthetics is a discipline that critically examines and aims to improve how the living body is experienced as a space for sensory appreciation (aesthetics) and creative self-fashioning. It advocates for a systematic approach to body consciousness (Shusterman, 2008). Focusing on the plurality of bodies from the concept of universalism through somatic design emphasizes the need for bodily differences not to be generalized or ignored, but rather to be highlighted and productive in their uniqueness (Höök et al., 2019).

Kristina Höök's (2018) soma design framework transforms these philosophical foundations into a design methodology. Soma design proposes that designers use their own bodies as primary design material from a first person perspective. Instead of designing for bodies from the outside, it invites designers to produce knowledge from within using their own body awareness and felt experiences as a resource for understanding comfort, movement, emotion, and need. Soma design primarily involves one's own experience, feelings, and engagement with that experience. Using a first-person perspective allows the designer to carefully develop an experiential quality that colors the entire design. Touching and feeling the materials, revealing their aesthetic potential and reciprocity, takes center stage (Tsaknaki, Fernaeus, Jonsson & Solsona Belenguer, 2019). Therefore, directing attention to interactions becomes important. Being in our bodies is so natural that it can sometimes disappear from our awareness; however, paying attention to our movements reconnects us with our bodies (Wilde, Schiphorst, & Klooster, 2011). Focusing on how to develop knowing bodies is a significant design strategy that can profoundly affect the way designers work (Wilde, Schiphorst, & Klooster, 2011).

In this context, Daria Halprin (2003), an expressive movement-based expressive arts therapist, prefers to observe the clothing experience within clothing-body interaction from a holistic body perspective. Her Three Levels of Awareness, integrating the individual's physical, mental, and emotional experiences, serve as a framework for understanding the experience within categories. "Physical; sensory sensations, breath, body posture, body parts. Emotional; feelings, such as anxiety, joy, calm, excitement, anger, sorrow. Mental; thinking processes, such as planning, remembering, worrying, imagining, and fantasizing." (Halprin, 2003:106).

Halprin (2003) emphasizes that these levels are not hierarchical but deeply interdependent while a physical sensation can instantly trigger a mental assessment and an emotional response, emotional states shape how the body moves and what the mind pays attention to. Through self-witnessing, individuals reach a deeper layer of self-knowledge and develop a capacity for making more conscious choices. Awareness can be developed by focusing on the body and witnessing what is happening within us; thus, one can work creatively with whatever emerges through the conscious use of expressive practices (Halprin, 2003).

Body awareness is a multidimensional sensory process encompassing proprioception, kinesthesia, and interoception (Craig, 2003). Proprioception provides information about the body's joint angles, muscle tension, and limb positions. Kinesthetic awareness is a prerequisite for recognizing body boundaries and one's attitude toward the body (Françoise et al., 2017). Interoception is the capacity to perceive and become aware of the body's internal states (Craig, 2003).

In the context of clothing, the reciprocal sensation among fabric, body, and space establishes body awareness as a relational process with the material environment. The soma-expressive diary operationalizes this disruption by asking students to attend to sensations they normally ignore; the pressure of a waistband, the weight of a coat, the restriction of a sleeve.

The diary cultivates interoceptive attention. As Farb et al. (2013) and Mehling et al. (2011) show, engaging interoceptive attention networks can alter the dynamics of attention and inhibition; when individuals systematically direct attention to bodily signals, the processing of those signals increases. In the context of clothing, this becomes visible through the student's awareness of how a garment affects their posture, breath, or movement.

Second, the diary cultivates pattern recognition through repeated experiences. The ten-day format enables what Bolger et al. (2003) term intra-individual process knowledge, the ability to see one's own

behavioral patterns across time. A single observation; "today I felt tense" carries limited weight, but when the same observation appears on different days, it transforms into a pattern. This temporal accumulation mechanism is the epistemological engine of the diary method.

The diary method makes this communication explicit by asking students to express bodily sensations in writing, thus generating information that helps bridge the gap between felt experience and design expression.

3. Methodology

This qualitative research aims to help fashion design students become aware of their own bodily knowledge through the act of writing in a diary as a reflective tool for their clothing experiences. The diary method was chosen for this purpose. The diary stands out for its capacity to generate intra-individual process knowledge, allowing participants to document their experiences with instantaneous and recurring reports (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003). Diary writing is a practice in which participants observe their own learning processes, develop an external perspective, and transform their experiences into meaningful patterns (Moon, 2006). Students are invited not only to record the experience but also to re-engage with that experience in depth.

The research was conducted within the context of an undergraduate elective fashion design course at a university in Istanbul, Türkiye. Participation was voluntary, and written consent was obtained from twelve fourth-year female fashion design students aged 21-24 before data collection. The fact that all participants were women carries significance for the the-

mes that emerged in the findings, such as bodily discomfort (menstruation, illness), visibility, protection, and emotional regulation. However, the homogeneous gender distribution also constitutes a limitation regarding the generalizability of the findings to other gender identities. All student names have been replaced with anonymized codes (S1–S12). Ethics approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee (approval no: E-97429853-050.04-90822).

The ten-day soma-expressive diary was designed as a home-based project assignment allowing participants to document their clothing experiences in their natural environment, in relation to three levels of awareness connected to the body (see Table 1). The diary was conducted during the fall semester, with autumn-winter clothing being the dominant theme. Participants spent a maximum of 5 minutes each day in their diaries, evaluating and documenting their daily clothing experiences at physical, mental, and emotional levels. The diary was designed as a self-witnessing assignment aimed at enabling students to encounter themselves lived bodily information as a source of design. Throughout the ten-day process, participants were primarily asked to pay attention to physical sensations, movement, and bodily reactions in their daily clothing experiences; mental processes, decision-making styles, and social influences affecting clothing choices; and the relationships between the emotions evoked by clothing and self-perception. During this time, participants had experience different life situations, with some going through various physical and emotional states such as illness, menstruation, travel, social gatherings, and academic presentations. This diversity allowed participants to observe and document their clothing experiences under different bodily and emotional conditions.

Table 1. Three Levels of Awareness in the Soma-Expressive Diary

Level	Description	In Diary Practice
Physical Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bodily sensations, - posture, - movement, - breathing, - multi-sensory feedback from material interaction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Noticing fabric pressure, - temperature, - restriction, - weight of garments
Mental Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Internalized social narratives shaping decision-making, - planning, - remembering, - imagining, - self-evaluation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognizing decision fatigue, - habitual patterns, - "should wear" vs. "want to wear" tensions
Emotional Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Felt states —joy, anxiety, trust, security, discomfort— arising from interaction between bodily sensation and social meaning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Color-emotion mapping, - protection feelings, - vulnerability, - confidence

Students did not answer individually structured questions during this process; Instead, they created written diary by freely and reflectively observing their own experiences within the framework of three levels of awareness through google forms.

Students were then asked to design a single garment that responded to the bodily witnessing they had accumulated over the ten-day period. The design brief was left open; students were asked to translate their own bodily insights into design proposals. The design outputs were presented along with short reflective texts explaining the relationship between embodied clothing experience and design decisions.

4. Findings

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was generated from data obtained from ten days of daily work. In total, the daily entries and design texts of twelve students were coded. Five main themes were identified within the framework of conceptual patterns (see Table 2.). Theme saturation was met by all students (100%) in bodily comfort and freedom of movement and eight students (67%) in body awareness and visibility tension. The findings were presented in three sequential stages; (4.1) self-witnessing, (4.2) pattern recognition, and (4.3) embodied design proposals. Each stage was supported by direct participant quotations illustrating the relationship between the themes and the design outputs.

Table 2. Main Themes

Theme	n/12	Sub-Patterns
Bodily Comfort & Freedom of Movement	12/12	- Fabric texture, - waist restriction, - arm movement, - feeling of weight, - temperature management
The Emotional Shield Function of Clothing	10/12	- Protective layering, - desire to become invisible, - feeling of security, - anxiety management
Color Performance	10/12	- Black = protection/power, - Earth tones = balance, - Bright colors = energy, - Monochrome = reducing burden
Decision Fatigue & Habit Patterns	9/12	- Repeating the same outfit, - abandoning the first choice, - need for familiarity
Body Awareness & Visibility Tension	8/12	- Comfort-aesthetic conflict, - concealing/emphasizing body lines, - feminine identity expression

4.1. Self-Witnessing: Encountering Bodily Experiences

Daily practice brought students' dressing habits into the realm of attention. The diary practice created a direct, honest, and continuous space for students to encounter their own sensory responses, bodily reactions, and internal conflicts.

The findings show that students began to position clothing as tools providing protection, security, movement, visibility, and emotional regulation. The findings show that the clothing experience occurs simultaneously on three levels, aligning with Halprin's three levels of awareness (2003) framework.

4.1.1. Body comfort and freedom of movement (12/12)

The most general theme at the physical level is body

comfort and freedom of movement. All twelve students mentioned physical comfort and freedom of movement in relation to their clothing choices on at least one day. Tight and restrictive pieces were associated with bodily tension and mental stress. Loose and soft fabrics emerged as elements that increased relaxation. For example, S9: *"Nothing felt too tight or heavy so I stayed comfortable."* (S9)

In S11's diary, the preference for oversized silhouettes was associated with both physical and mental comfort. S3 addressed the theme of comfort through layering; Layers functioned as a physical embrace and a sense of security before heat.

4.1.2. Emotional shield function (10/12)

In the daily records of ten students, clothing emerged as an active emotional regulation tool. Layering, color choice, and silhouette appeared as variables

shaped especially in states of anxiety, social exhaustion, and vulnerability. For S3 this pattern: a long cardigan and house slippers became anchor objects that reliably stabilized the emotional state. Layering served as a boundary protecting bodily vulnerability. S5 stated: *"Choosing to wear a more baggy cloth is like a self-defense for me; the cloth doesn't reveal my body, it almost makes me feel invisible and more comfortable."* This statement shows that the shield function transformed into a protective strategy of reducing the visibility of the body. A similar pattern is seen in S6: *"A deep purple scarf wrapped almost like armor... the coat gives me weight, which I've realized I actually crave."* S8 chose black as a protective shield on days with low self-esteem.

4.1.3. Color performance (10/12)

Color was a tool used to reflect or regulate emotional state. S8 defined this relationship most systematically: blue represented calmness, red represented empowerment, and black represented protection on days with low self-esteem. From S8's design text: *"Black is like a protective shield."* For S4, the return to black functioned as a cognitive load reduction tool. S10 consistently associated the burgundy tone with feelings of strength and self-confidence. For S7; bright colors served as a tool to enhance physical and mental alertness: *"The bright orange peplum top introduced vivid chromatic presence that heightened my physical and psychological alertness."*

4.1.4. Decision fatigue and habit pattern (9/12)

In the daily records of nine students, clothing preference functioned as a cognitive load reduction strategy. This theme manifested as a need for familiarity, the behavior of switching from a *"chic but uncomfortable"* garment to a comfortable one in a short time in the morning, a pattern of returning to a specific color and cut, and days spent in pajamas. S5 described this pattern through her morning ritual; *"Almost every morning I experience wearing a more chic but less comfortable garment first, then switch to a more comfortable one in thirty minutes."*

The body expresses the need for comfort through a behavioral choice before it is verbally acknowledged (Höök, 2018). For S4, consistently using black and neutral colors simplified the decision-making process and conserved cognitive energy. S1 reported that returning to a minimal silhouette and neutral color palette increased focus and reduced cognitive load; this situation demonstrated the emergence of comfort through predictability and mental order.

4.1.5 Body Awareness and visibility tension (8/12)

In the daily records of eight students, the tension between comfort and aesthetic visibility emerged as an internal conflict. S12: *"I oscillate between comfort and desire for visibility within a single garment."* Another day: *"When I woke up today, I longed to step away from the comfort-focused mindset of previous days and emphasize my feminine identity."* (S12). S5 reflected the conflict between the desire to become invisible with loose clothing and the desire for aesthetic identity expression in her clothing experience every morning. S2 developed the concept of *"effortless femininity"* as a framework for a solution that simultaneously meets both the need for comfort and visibility.

4.2. Pattern Recognition: Identifying Recurring Embodied Knowledge

Pattern recognition, a mechanism of intrapersonal process knowledge defined by Bolger et al. (2003), which differentiates from momentary impressions through repeated daily self-witnessing, becomes more apparent at this stage. The limited explanatory power of a single attention gains pattern quality through the repetition of the same observation on different days. For S3, layering crystallized as a protective strategy repeated on days experiencing illness and menstrual pain. S9 consistently recorded that movement restriction transformed into mental withdrawal in multiple daily entries. S11 consistently experienced that the preference for oversized silhouettes was associated with mental calmness beyond bodily comfort over a ten-day period. Color-emotion associations became particularly prominent in the emotional pattern recognition process. For S8, the associations between blue, red, and black and specific emotional states were repeated in different social contexts over ten days, transforming these associations from a random preference into a systematic emotional regulation strategy. For S6, dark tones and heavily textured fabrics were simultaneously coded as indicators of identity and security. S5 noticed the repetition of the behavior of changing clothes in the morning, turning this pattern into an object of conscious observation. S12, on the other hand, experienced the tension between comfort and visibility as a recurring internal conflict.

Another issue also emerged. The daily entries of students experiencing illness or physical frailty, especially S3, produced the richest testimonial content during these periods. Accordingly, when the body gives unusual responses, the threshold of awareness increases and the power of sensory cues increases (Halprin, 2003).

4.3. Embodied Design Proposals: Transforming Bodily Knowledge into Design Decisions

In the third stage, the bodily patterns identified by the students during the ten-day diary period were transformed into concrete design decisions. Thus, the design practice evolved from a process guided by external visual references to a process nourished

by each student's own bodily knowledge. Table 3. shows the transformation process of twelve participants, from self-witnessing to pattern recognition and design proposal. According to Halprin (2003:105) *"The more creative the interplay between the three levels of body, emotions, and mind, the more authentic, mindful, and integrated we become."*

Table 3. From Soma-Expressive Diary Entry to Design Proposal (n = 12)

Student	Self-Witnessing	Pattern Recognition	Design Proposal
S1	<i>"Wide-leg trousers... soft hijab... feel balanced."</i>	Modest, flowing silhouettes and neutral tones are essential for mental clarity.	The "Comfort-Flow Tunic": Mid-thigh length, soft knit, side slits for movement, in calming taupe or cream.
S2	Effortless femininity preserved with oversized pieces	Silhouette directly controls feeling of femininity and visibility.	Mini sweatshirt-dress with padded shoulders and corset waist: casual yet structured, balancing comfort and allure.
S3	Feeling safer when wearing layered garments during illness	Layering as emotional protection	Long cardigan in plush fleece, designed as a "wearable blanket" for thermal and psychological protection.
S4	Wearing black reduced decision fatigue	Familiarity as cognitive comfort	Minimal silhouette with limited colour palette
S5	<i>"Soft, loose clothes reduce tension... structure gives focus."</i>	Tactile sensitivity; need for garments that regulate sensory load based on stress.	Floating A-line maxi dress in soft chiffon/organza, with exaggerated sleeves and shoulders as a controlled "step out" of comfort zone.
S6	<i>"Heavy coat and scarf ground me... I feel held together."</i>	Weight and layering as somatic tools for focus and reducing social performance.	Long structured coat with a deep purple scarf – weight and enveloping form as a "thinking and feeling tool."
S7	<i>"Band tee and star tights... make me feel the most me."</i>	Authenticity and personal expression (music, playfulness) as emotional grounding.	Graphic hoodie dress combining a relaxed band-tee aesthetic with playful patterned underlayers, for home and casual wear.
S8	Associating colours with distinct emotional states	Colour as emotional regulation	Modular top with snap-on panels (red/black/blue) for pilates to social wear, adapting confidence levels.
S9	Restrictive garments reduced movement and social energy	Posture and breath are directly linked to garment looseness, affecting social confidence.	Relaxed-fit suit set in soft, breathable fabric designed to reduce physical tension
S10	<i>"Structured fit... helps me stay focused... Pink makes me feel cheerful."</i>	Polished clothing improves concentration; color lifts mood.	Two-piece knitted set combining tailored jacket with playful, bright tonal elements
S11	Oversized silhouettes created calmness and predictability	Softness and predictability as mental comfort	Soft-structured cocoon coat with a high collar and relaxed fit, providing a sense of security in stressful environments.
S12	Oscillating between comfort and desire for visibility	Comfort–visibility tension as dual bodily need	Soft-structured garment combining protective fabric with defined, confidence-asserting silhouette

These transformations followed a discernible translation pathway from self-witnessing to pattern recognition to design proposal. For instance, in S3's process, during the self-witnessing phase, she noticed that wearing layered garments on days of illness made her feel safer, this was a call from her body for protection and envelopment. When this observation repeated over ten days, the pattern recognition phase clarified that layering was not a random pre-

ference but an emotional protection strategy. Each moment of physical vulnerability triggered the same behavior, directing her toward enveloping and warming garments. This pattern ultimately transformed into a design object in the design proposal phase; a long, hooded, soft fleece cardigan in white-gray tones that functioned as a "wearable blanket," responding to the body's call by providing both psychological and thermal protection (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Design Proposal Illustration of S3

"Factors such as illness, menstrual cramps, sensitivity to cold, and social fatigue shaped my daily decisions. Layering became a recurring strategy, using shawls, thick cardigans, hooded sweatshirts, and jackets. These layers not only provided thermal protection but also acted as psychological barriers, helping me feel safe during moments of physical vulnerability. Soft, plush, and stretchy fabrics contributed to a consistent feeling of comfort and security, especially during days of intense menstrual cramps or illness. Certain garments, such as long cardigans and soft house slippers, served as emotional anchors, offering familiarity and stability. On days when I sought calm and invisibility, neutral and soft tones like gray, cream, and white predominated. This revealed a clear relationship between color, identity, and embodied security. My clothing functioned as tools for self-regulation within the context of pain, warmth, emotional exposure, and social context."(S3)

Similarly, S5 documented a recurring morning ritual: *"Almost every morning I experience wearing a more chic but less comfortable garment first, then switch to a more comfortable one in thirty minutes."*

In response, S5 designed a floating, relaxed A-line maxi dress in soft chiffon/organza that preserved this comfort-driven instinct while still allowing for aesthetic presence through its exaggerated sleeves and shoulders.

S8 systematically mapped color to emotional states across her ten-day diary; *"blue represented calmness, red represented empowerment, and black represented protection on days with low self-esteem."* This color-emotion association pattern materialized as a modular top with snap-on panels in red, black, and blue. The design itself became a flexible system that allowed the wearer to adapt confidence levels by choosing which color panel to display, suitable for contexts ranging from pilates to social settings.

The most prominent contradiction in the dataset was the comfort-visibility tension documented by multiple participants. S12 explicitly recorded this oscillation (see Figure 2). S2 addressed a similar tension through what she termed "effortless femininity": her mini sweatshirt-dress with padded shoulders and corset waist paired soft sweatshirt texture (comfort) with structured elements (visibility).



Figure 2. Design Proposal Illustration of S12

According to S12's own statement: *"In my design, I carefully aimed to combine comfort and elegance, which are my core values. As I evaluated my daily dressing habits, I realized that loose, fluid, and asymmetrical forms make me feel more free both physically and emotionally. Since I enjoy layering, I used two layers in both the upper and lower parts of my design; this structure will provide me with both temperature regulation and movement control throughout the day. For the fabric, I chose 100% cotton because its texture is soft, breathable, and offers all-day comfort. I made my color choice in favor of a burgundy tone, which has an elegant depth suitable for both daytime and evening wear. As a result, the outfit I designed brings together comfort, aesthetic texture, and harmonious color unity, forming a whole that truly reflects my style and needs".*(S12)

Additional translations followed similar pathways. S11's consistent orientation toward oversized silhouettes and earth tones transformed into a structured yet soft-feeling tunic design that balanced form and flexibility. S6's preference for heavily textured and dark-toned garments emerged as a structural coat with trench-like features. S1's minimalist silhouette and neutral palette choice materialized as a comfort-flow tunic that reduced decision fatigue and remained consistent with her identity, with the mock collar supporting both physical comfort and

hijab identity. S4's return to black and familiar silhouettes produced mental comfort through simplicity and stability. S5 designed her piece in line with the desire to overcome the urge to become invisible. S7's design anchored personal identity, music, and playfulness as emotional grounding. S9 translated the direct link between garment looseness and social confidence into a relaxed-fit suit. S10 combined structural focus with chromatic uplift in a two-piece knitted set. S12 resolved the comfort-visibility tension within a soft-structured garment that balanced protective fabric with a confidence-asserting silhouette. In every case, students could trace the lineage of each design choice back to specific diary observations, making the body's testimony the primary source of design reasoning.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study support the hypothesis that structured self-witnessing through the soma-expressive diary enables fashion design students to identify recurring bodily patterns and translate them into embodied design proposals. All twelve participants completed the ten-day diary practice and produced a design outcome. Given Tsaknaki et al.'s (2019) observation that sustained somatic attention presents significant challenges in the context of structured

design education, the current study suggests that the diary format, by spreading the self-observation over ten days, effectively lowers the threshold for such internal attention. Across the dataset, this effect operated through three discernible stages. In self-witnessing, a bodily sensation was noticed and recorded in its raw, situational form—as when S3 observed that layering felt protective on a day of illness. In pattern recognition, this single observation accumulated significance only once it recurred across multiple days, at which point it was reinterpreted not as incidental comfort-seeking but as a stable emotional strategy. In embodied design proposal, this now-named pattern was translated into a concrete material decision—in S3's case, a long cardigan in plush fleece conceived explicitly as a "wearable blanket." The three stages that emerge within the process (self-witnessing, pattern recognition, and embodied design proposal) demonstrate that the diary practice enables students to develop an external perspective on their own processes and transform their experiences into meaningful patterns (Moon, 2006).

As Van Manen (1991:98) points out in the context of pedagogical reflection, "to reflect is to think". In the soma-expressive diary, students deliberate on their bodily experiences. They document what they notice, make choices about which sensations are significant, and decide how to translate them into design language. Drawing on Schön's (1983) framework of reflection-on-action, which Zeller (2017) adapts to the ballet studio, the diary functions as a post-hoc reconsideration of bodily patterns once the day's experience has settled. Yet the diary practice also invites a deeper epistemic move. Hammersley (2004) distinguishes reflection from reflexivity, noting that while reflection involves documenting observations and thinking through key characteristics, reflexivity entails scrutinizing and questioning; asking why, what if, and how could it be different. In the current study, students record their bodily experiences; and they engaged in a critical interrogation of those experiences. When a student noted that a particular garment restricted arm movement, they did not stop at the observation; they questioned why this restriction was significant, how it affected their emotional state, and how the design could be altered to restore freedom without sacrificing form.

Unlike self-observation, which can easily slide into self-evaluation, self-witnessing invites students to attend to their bodily experiences without judgment (Halprin, 2003) noticing what is present rather than assessing whether it is correct, appropriate, or desirable. This non-judgmental quality is essential for genuine reflexivity. When students are conditioned to fear judgment, their inner voice is silenced (Zeller, 2017). The soma-expressive diary, by removing the external evaluator tries to restore this inner voice.

In the conventional design studio, designerly knowing is predominantly visual and conceptual, grounded in external references such as mood boards, trend forecasts, and digital image archives. The current study extends Cross's (1982, 2011) framework to embodied body ground. It demonstrates that the designer's living body constitutes an expressive and documentable source of design knowledge. As Polanyi (1966) shows through the concept of tacit knowledge, the body knows more than it can explicitly articulate; S3 could name the comfort her layering produced long before she could name it as a design principle. The soma-expressive diary provides the conditions for this tacit knowledge to become expressible and translatable into design language. The same mechanism is visible in S6's account of a heavy coat and scarf functioning to ground and "hold together" the body under social pressure, and in S8's use of color to regulate distinct emotional states across the day, both later configured into the modular, shielding, or weighted structures of their final proposals. In this sense, the diary expands the designerly ways of knowing from a primarily visual and conceptual domain to include the kinesthetic and proprioceptive intelligence of the designer's own soma. Sheets-Johnstone (2011) terms this kinesthetic thinking, and the bodily comfort and emotional shielding themes identified across the dataset are its clearest empirical expression: students did not first conceive of a silhouette and then test it against the body, but inferred the silhouette from the body's own repeated signal.

This same somatic awareness, the capacity to attend to one's own bodily signals, recognize patterns, and translate them into form directly parallels the competencies required to design responsive garments that interact with the wearer's physiological and emotional states. S12's design proposal resolve a documented comfort–visibility tension, the garment combines protective fabric with a defined, confidence asserting silhouette. When designers are trained to listen to their own bodies, they become more equipped to design garments that respond to the bodies of others (Höök, 2018). This capacity to design for the bodies of others is precisely what wearable technologies aim to formalize: systems framed as "development partners" supporting self-awareness (Çamiçi, Palabıyık and Bayramoğlu, 2025), and interactive textiles shown to support emotional regulation through body-centered feedback (Jiang, Nanjappan, & Liang, 2025). The decision-fatigue and visibility-tension themes identified in this study, evident in S4's reliance on a reduced color palette to lower daily decision load and in S12's oscillation between comfort and visibility, describe in lived terms exactly the kind of regulatory problem such technologies are designed to solve, suggesting that the diary's somatic vocabulary could productively inform the design criteria for future responsive garments.

The ten-day format realizes what Bolger et al. (2003) term intra-individual process knowledge, that is, the capacity of an individual to perceive their own behavioral regularities over time. A single diary entry recording physical constraint or color-based emotional response carries limited epistemological weight; when the same observation recurs across other days, it acquires pattern status, and as the design proposals in this study demonstrate, patterns can be directly transformed into silhouette, fabric, and structure decisions. This temporal accumulation is the fundamental epistemological mechanism and distinguishes the soma-expressive diary from one-off somatic exercises or single-session body awareness activities. The neurocognitive basis of this mechanism is consistent with Mehling et al.'s (2011) finding that interoceptive attention enhances the processing of bodily signals, and with Farb et al.'s (2013) evidence that attention directed toward bodily states alters attention dynamics more broadly. Increased interoceptive perceptual processing enabled students to access more embodied design information. Stimuli normally filtered by habitual perception, such as the pressure of a belt, the weight of a jacket, or the restraint of an arm, became insights under the structured attention of the diary.

This study specifically highlights the effectiveness of Halprin's (2003) Three Levels of Awareness framework in the context of fashion design education. The levels of physical, mental, and emotional awareness opened a door for students to evaluate their clothing experiences as a multi-layered bodily experience and to broaden their aesthetic or functional perspectives. This structure enabled students to recognize sensory, emotional, and behavioral patterns that have become normalized and invisible in daily life. The encounter with one's own image is not a passive reflection but an active dialogue (Hall, 2017). This encounter opens a gaze toward the unknown and the seemingly foreign (Halprin, 2003). In the soma-expressive diary, the written narrative functions similarly: they are records of bodily experience reconstructions through which the designer confronts, makes sense of, and translates their own embodied patterns into design language. Across the dataset, the physical level surfaced most consistently through bodily comfort and freedom of movement, the mental level through decision fatigue and visibility tension, and the emotional level through emotional shielding and color performance, demonstrating that Halprin's three-level structure provided a reflective frame and an organizing logic for the design outcomes.

The recurring cross-student patterns of comfort, protection, movement, and visibility align with Sampson's (2022) and Robinson's (2022) theoretical arguments for embodied design in fashion, suggesting that bodily observation can surface shared bodily logics that transcend individual preference and car-

ry implications for collective design practice. *"Truly and deeply attending to one's own soma ultimately cultivates a deep empathy and respect for other somas, which will benefit more liberating, less oppressive forms of design."* (Höök, 2018:23).

The sample was drawn from a single undergraduate course at one institution, which constrains the generalisability of the findings. Future studies might examine how the soma-expressive diary manifests across different design disciplines, institutional contexts, and student populations.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study indicates that the soma-expressive diary, as a reflective tool in fashion design education, can transform the designer's own bodily experience into a source of design knowledge. Against the external visual reference-focused approaches dominant in design research, the study proposes an alternative designerly way of knowing that places the sensory, emotional, and physical experience of the body at the center of the creative process. A ten-day bodily self-witnessing process conducted with twelve undergraduate fashion design students enabled them to become aware of their everyday dressing experiences at physical, mental, and emotional levels; to organize this awareness into recurring patterns; and finally to translate these patterns into concrete embodied design proposals.

Recurring themes such as comfort, protection, freedom of movement, visibility, and self-confidence emerged and are directly reflected in design proposals. It can also be noted that the Three levels of awareness approach offers an effective framework for structuring the sequential transformation of bodily awareness into embodied design knowledge. Developed within the context of fashion design education, this work may not be limited to the field of fashion in terms of its fundamental principles. Directed attention, pattern recognition through repeated self-witnessing, and the sequential transformation process of bodily experience into embodied design proposals have the potential to offer a fruitful methodological framework for other design disciplines focusing on the relationship between body, material, space, and experience. Therefore, it is important to examine how this soma-expressive diary process manifests in different design disciplines in future studies. Embodied design knowledge can emerge from a careful and continuous encounter that the designer establishes with the testimony of their own body. The soma-expressive diary proposes a practical epistemology that structures this encounter and allows the designer to rethink their own body as the source of design knowledge. Taken as a whole, this daily experience demonstrates that when bodily experience is systematically documented and reflected upon at three levels of awareness, lived expe-

rience can function as a productive epistemological resource; through this resource, the designer's own body becomes not the object but the source of design knowledge.

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