

Can Textiles Improve Emotional Wellbeing?



"As a textile designer, I am very interested in challenging perceptions of what a textile can be," says **Kristen Tynan**, whose master's thesis, "Seeking Solace," explored the creation of textiles that provide specific tactile benefits.

It's known that tactile stimuli help calm negative emotional sensations. Thus, children may seek a favorite blanket or toy, and adults may use more reflexive, inconspicuous strategies like light foot-tapping or employ stress balls and fidget spinners. But those tools are primarily stand-alone objects marketed toward children or people with neurological challenges such as autism spectrum disorders.

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Kristen Tynan

"Now, imagine if this kind of sensorial input was a design criteria for our interior spaces. What would that look like? More importantly, what would that feel like?" Tynan asks. "I believe that as a main component of our interior spaces, textiles could be the vehicle with which to incorporate meaningful sensory input into our environments."

Thus, her project investigated the role textiles could play in enhancing emotional wellbeing by seamlessly integrating purposeful tactile-sensory input into spaces where we live, work, sleep, dwell, commute and wait. Toward that end, she created and evaluated a collection of fabrics with specific tactile qualities. "This collection is really just the beginning of my exploration of what it would mean for sensory fabric to be readily available in any space—not just auxiliary or 'therapeutic' spaces," she says, "and of how such fabrics could provide distinct emotional and physiological benefits addressing an individual's needs at any given moment." ■



Student Kristen Tynan is shown "in the field" conducting research about tactile benefits of textiles.