

# Arts-Informed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: 'Making', as a means of embodied fashion enquiry into older men's lived experiences

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## **Arts-Informed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: '*Making*', as a means of embodied fashion enquiry into older men's lived experiences**

**Keywords:** fashion research methodology; making and writing; creative practitioner, embodiment; knowledge co-construction; mature men

**Abstract:** This article draws on a practice-based project, in which I proposed a novel fashion research methodology, Arts-Informed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The methodology highlights the central role of a creative practitioner within research settings and processes. The aim of the project was to develop an in-depth understanding of how a small sample of mature men has experienced fashion and ageing. Working with such an open-ended aim allowed to develop a fit-for-purpose methodology that accommodated two components: the topic of the investigation and the theoretical perspectives that the creative practitioner brought into it. A particular research mechanism, which was based on the integration of fashion theory and practice, synthesized to activities of interpretative making and writing, was implemented to suit my epistemological stance, my particular way of being in the world and conducting research as a creative practitioner.

In this article, I focus on a series of three fashion artefacts I created in response to empirical data gathered via in-depth interviews and personal inventories with the five study participants. The making processes of the *Mirroring*, *Dis-Comforting*, and *Peacocking* suit jackets, involved de-construction of a series of second-hand garments, a scenario-based reflective performance, visiting clothing archives, and various practical experimentations. '*Making*', as a means of embodied, visual enquiry became an analytical tool that afforded the advanced insights into older men's lived experiences. Consequently, I argue that through my embodied interactions with objects and materials, as the creative practitioner, I co-constructed new experiential understandings and offered fresh perspectives of the phenomenon under study.

## INTRODUCTION

This article describes the processes of creating three artefacts, the *Mirroring*, *Dis-Comforting*, and *Peacocking* suit jackets, which I produced as part of a practice-based project (Sadkowska 2016). The aim of my study was to investigate the possibility of adopting the conceptual lens of fashion and clothing in order to explore the older men's experiences of ageing. In this vein, as a fashion practitioner, I sought to creatively explore the vantage point and the relationship between fashion, clothing, embodiment, and the physical and social processes of growing older in relation to individuals' experiences.

Building on the concept of the hermeneutic circle (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009), '*making*' as a means of embodied, visual enquiry became an analytical tool that afforded the advanced understandings of and insights into the study participants lived experiences, as compared to the standard text-based qualitative analysis. Throughout this article, I argue that merging the practices of *making* and *writing* into one analytical mechanism allowed me to produce extended understandings, both in form and depth, of the participants' interpretations of their experiences. This is closely linked to the widely used in postmodern social science concept of the double hermeneutic, which can be best described as the researcher interpreting the participant's self-interpretation of the phenomenon under study (Giddens 1976). Smith et al. (2009, 35) note that this explains the dual character of the researcher in the research process "*as both like and unlike the participant*". On the one hand, the researcher plays an active role in the unfolding interpretations, becoming a filter and a lens to the produced knowledge; here, the researcher brings into the process her subjective consciousness. On the other hand, the process of knowledge (co-)construction can only be catalyzed by the participant's subjective understanding of the phenomenon that is reported to the researcher in the first place, and to which she must attempt to stay objective.

## RESEARCH CONTEXTS

There are many different contexts surrounding this research, which impacted its form, processes and outcomes. To start with, this study has been conducted and presented at the time of important cultural and socio-demographic changes which have resulted in a stronger link between fashion and ageing than ever before, such as the growth of the British ageing population and maturing of the so-called baby boomer<sup>1</sup> generation (see, e.g., Gilleard and Higgs [2014]). Consequently, we have witnessed a particular transition in how age is represented within contemporary media including TV, radio and popular Internet weblogs, with the trendy approach of exploring 'the beauty' hidden within old age (see, e.g., Cohen [2017]; Walsh [2017]), and with mature models such as Daphne Selfe or Linda Rodin becoming more and more prominent features in advertising campaigns. Furthermore, in the recent years we witnessed a range of practice-based fashion initiatives such as the Emotional Fit project (Townsend et al. 2016; Sadkowska et al. 2015), or the First 50+ Fashion Week (Telegraph 2016). Although older men are not entirely absent from such the initiatives, it is the representations of older women that tend to be dominant (Sadkowska and Townsend, 2018: online).

Secondly, this study should also be understood in the academic context. Firstly, viewing ageing through the lens of fashion and clothing has now become a well-established approach within an on-going academic debate and changing social discourse on ageing. While this statement is supported by the vast literature available, especially from the sociologist Julia Twigg (see, e.g., Twigg [2010, 2013]), once again, the focus

seems to be mainly on older women. At the same time, men's fashion is an ever-growing field of study; yet, as Edwards (2011, 41) comments, it is still a problematic topic that is somewhat "haunted by the ghost of Flügel [1930] who asserted with some aggression that men had 'renounced' fashion in the early nineteenth century". Consequently, particular tensions (Edwards 2011, Sadkowska et al. 2017), such as the expanded focus on homosexual and/or younger men and their experiences, are still present in contemporary fashion scholarship, which was significant to the gap in knowledge to which this body of work responded. But, the timing of this study is also coinciding with that of the menswear branch of the fashion industry being the strongest it has ever been (Mintel March 2017), illustrated not only by the growing sales, but also by its recognition at the various fashion events, such as the London or Paris Fashion Week.

Subsequently, Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2008, 10) argue that there is an "*alarming gap between methods and theory – both within and across the disciplines*" which should be addressed through innovation and an interdisciplinary approach within the social and behavioural sciences. This relates also to fashion studies, wherein examples of empirical research analysis accompanied by the practitioner's creative response remain scarce. Likewise, Kawamura (2011) rightly argues that contemporary fashion studies need to embrace the empirical potential as well as clearly articulate the methodologies and research processes employed, and should not be "*distracted by fashion and fashion-related information (...), which lack objectivity, the very essence of social sciences*" (7). Much in the same vein, the designer Jessica Bugg (2009, 10) asserts that there can be "*alternative fashion strategies for fashion design and communication that are concept and context based, rather than being driven by commerce, the market, and trends*". Building on this, in this research, I explore the possibility of a novel fashion research and practice methodology based on the intersection of sociology, psychology, fashion and arts research practices.

To add to this, it is also important to highlight that the notions that I explored in this study, namely older men and ageing masculinities in relation to fashion and clothing, resonate strongly with studies of the body and embodiment. The body plays a central role in how men age and how they enact what it means to be a man (Whitehead 2002), and the intrinsic connection exists between ageing, masculinity and the male body. In my project, I explored the intersection of the embodied experiences of male ageing via analyzing the relationship between the body, fashion and clothing. I approached the body not only as the changing 'canvas' on which men's ageing is marked, but also as the vehicle for clothing and fashioning their appearances in response to those changes. Merleau-Ponty (1962/2002) famously asserted that experience occurs between the body and mind. This relates to the participants' embodied experience that I attempted to understand through the constant movement between the different elements of their interpretation of it; but on a different level, this applies also to the researcher's embodied experience of creating her understandings and interpretations.

Consequently, this project built upon the hypothesis that practices of engaging with materials and objects can advance my understanding of the human condition started in the process of engaging with text; and, furthermore, that *making* can be as important tool of interpretation as writing.

## **The researcher**

Underpinned by the qualitative and practice-based approaches, as the researcher-interpreter I played an instrumental role in the research process based on constructivist and subjectivist uncovering of the

possible meanings of the lived experience (Crotty 1998). Thus, it is important to explain my own context as the creative practitioner undertaking this interpretative investigation, including my understanding of what knowledge is and how this has impacted the study.

Firstly, I am strongly influenced by the work of critical realists, especially their acceptance of the multiplicity of alternative yet valid accounts of any phenomenon, the inevitable partiality of all knowledge (Maxwell 2008) and the possibility of discovering the remarkable in the mundane and prosaic (Silverman 2007 as quoted in Butler-Kisber 2010). Secondly, from the contextual constructivists, I take the notions of reality being socially constructed and mediated, and its inextricable attachment to the given context. I do not entirely reject the realists' claim that there is an objective and independent truth but I advocate for the impossibility of getting any closer to it than through the myriad of subjective and often interconnected accounts of it. Furthermore, I am inspired by the opportunity of deriving fresh understandings through alternative tools and languages (Vygotsky 1978 as quoted in Butler-Kisber 2010), especially various *artful* practices (Sullivan 2010). My aim, as a creative practitioner, cannot be, therefore, simplified to new knowledge production, but rather can be described as knowledge co-construction and accumulation.

To add to this, having trained as a fashion designer, it has quickly become apparent to me that my research practices do not fit neatly within this one discipline; instead they display significant over-laps with the disciplines of creative arts, phenomenological psychology and sociology. Thus, this research in part allowed me also to question my own practices as a fashion practitioner interested in lived experiences, and to investigate alternative ways of exploring these experiences.

### **The participants**

Due to the idiographic focus of this research, each of the five study participants provided the context for it. It is therefore important to explain, albeit briefly, their characteristics. Such an acknowledgment is important also because of my epistemological stance, which requires me not only to recognize the participants as the source of knowledge and inspiration, but as the active co-interpreters in the process.

All of the participants were recruited using word-of-mouth and snowballing techniques. All the study participants were white, British, heterosexual, middle-class men with a significant interest in their appearance, and especially in fashion and clothing, with the majority living within Nottinghamshire, UK (n=3), one participant living in Derbyshire, UK, and one in Leicestershire, UK (but who were both strongly linked to Nottingham, UK). The participants had various occupations, with two of them being linked in the past to the fashion industry, and another being at present connected to higher fashion education. Additionally, all the participants shared a similar fashion past, including being members of distinctive British youth subcultures from the 1950s onwards, such as Mods, Hippies, and Punks. Furthermore, they employed various body management techniques such as exercising and dieting, and embraced what, more generally, could be explained as a healthy-life style; these characteristics are significant also because they allow me to define this sample as homogenous, which is an important element of the project methodology.

The interview schedule consisted of eight open-ended questions about the different aspects of the participant's experiences of fashion and clothing, including questions about their personal definition of the term "fashion", their past and present practices, future expectations, about their current relationship with fashion and clothing, and how this has changed over time. Additionally, a critical incident technique was

employed during the interview whereby participants were asked to describe occasions when they felt really good/bad about the way they looked, their perfect fashion item, and fashion artefacts with personal meaning for them. Prompts and probes were used to encourage the participants to elaborate further when unexpected, but potentially interesting, areas of discussion arose, and to clarify ambiguities and avoid misunderstandings. Finally, it is worth noting that prior to, and soon after, every interview I completed an entry into my research diary in which I reflected on the interview process, including my observations from previous interviews. This was part of my reflexivity (Etherington 2004) and it allowed me to capture the process of my unfolding interpretations, initiated often at this early stage of listening to the participants during their interviews

## **ARTS-INFORMED INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

The main aim of my research was to explore how a small sample of older men have experienced fashion and clothing throughout their lives, and how they negotiate their ageing identities through those mediums. Undoubtedly, there is more than one suitable methodology on offer that could be effectively used for such purposes. However, the research methodology that I was aiming to develop for the study was tailored to fit my skills set and qualities as a researcher, designer and artist. Such research parameters required searching across disciplines including sociology, psychology and fashion design in order to establish the most appropriate approaches that could be merged together into one hybrid methodology affording a seamless fit between the topic under study, the research processes, and the researcher herself.

Given the parameters of my epistemological position, the research aim, and the qualitative and practice-based approaches to research, within which this study is located, the developed research mechanism was informed by two emerging methodologies. In developing an in-depth understanding of the small and homogenous sample of older men's experience of ageing in the context of fashion and clothing, I conducted an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith 1996). IPA is a qualitative approach to research concerned with participants' personal lived experiences (Alase 2017). The philosophical foundations of IPA lie primarily in phenomenology, which is the study of the structures of consciousness and experience, and especially its existential strand as present in Heidegger (1927/1962) and Merleau-Ponty (1962/2002). In similarity to Van Manen's (1990) approach IPA bridges phenomenology and hermeneutics, and supports the centrality of reflective writing. IPA's main currency is the first person accounts, perceptions, understandings and experiences of the phenomenon under scrutiny (Eatough and Smith 2017). This is a subjective endeavour and the investigator does not attempt to develop an objective, truthful reality about an experience, rather there is "*an appreciation that experiences are 'meaning-full' for a person*" (Wilde and Murray 2010, 59). This is relevant to my work because I am committed to the examination of how the participants in the study make sense of the major life experience of growing older, which is an on-going and transitioning process of continuous physical and social change. Drawing on IPA, in my study I utilized two complementary research methods, namely in-depth semi-structured interviews and personal inventories with five British mature men.

By extending the interpretative strategies through various creative practices and producing artefacts as a valid form of knowledge advancement and dissemination, I undertook Arts-Informed Research (Cole and Knowles 2008), which is an emerging approach located within the expanded qualitative approach to research. At the heart of this alternative qualitative approach lies the enhancement of the human condition

through creative processes and representational forms of inquiry (Cole and Knowles 2008). At the same time, arts-informed researchers aim at reaching beyond academic audiences in order to make scholarship more widely accessible. As Knowles and Luciani (2007, xi) assert:

We cannot stress more the importance of accessibility in research, in communicating complex understandings through multiple or alternative media for purposes far beyond mere artistic fancy and pleasure, and personal gratification.

It is this possibility of utilising art making as a valid research practice in order to enhance the internally consistent research process that I pursue in this project.

In Arts-Informed Research, various creative genres, such as literary, visual and performing arts, become “a *key methodological component*” (Cole and Knowles 2008, 65) and are used to stimulate the research process yet do not determine it (Butler-Kisber 2010). Cole (2004, 16) argues for the need to bring research practices closer to the arts by making them more “*accessible, evocative, embodied, empathetic and provocative*”. In this, arts can be utilised at the various stages of the research process, such as conceptualisation, data collection, analysis, or knowledge dissemination (Butler-Kisber 2010; Cole and Knowles 2008; Knowles and Luciani 2007). As noted by Cole and Knowles (2001), Arts-Informed Research merges the systematic rigour of social science with the creativity and imagination of the arts. In this view, this approach is holistic and responsive and can potentially extend the standard text-based discourse (Knowles and Luciani 2007). Informed by this methodology in my work I utilized a research method of practical explorations throughout the stages of data analysis and knowledge dissemination.

By fusing the two components, namely IPA and Arts-Informed Research, I have developed a novel hybrid methodology, Arts-Informed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Rooted in phenomenology and arts, this methodology put to the test the concept of *making* as a valid way of data analysis, equal to writing. My research process built on the concept of the hermeneutic circle; the subsequent activities of writing and making allowed me to constantly move between different elements of the participants’ experiences, which in turn facilitated the conditions for more in-depth and holistic understanding and enhanced interpretations. In addition, such an approach gave me the opportunity to utilize my skills and sensibilities as a creative practitioner and to blur the boundaries between the artificially disconnected domains of fashion theory and practice.

### **My hermeneutic circle**

Drawing directly from the IPA (Smith 1996), the key concept used in the methodology is that of the hermeneutic circle. The unique features of my hermeneutic circle (fig. 1) are the virtual ‘checkpoints’ and constant research actions through which I developed meanings. In this manner, there are five critical checkpoints on my hermeneutic circle: firstly, Text (I), which refers to the interview transcriptions; secondly, Images, meaning the photographs and sketches taken during the interviews; thirdly, Objects and Materials, consisting of the purchased second-hand men’s jackets and the various materials I used for my interpretative analysis; and, fourthly, Artefacts, which refers to the re-made men’s jackets. Finally, the fifth checkpoint, Text (II), encompasses the final written accounts illustrating and explaining my understanding and interpretation of the participants’ experiences.

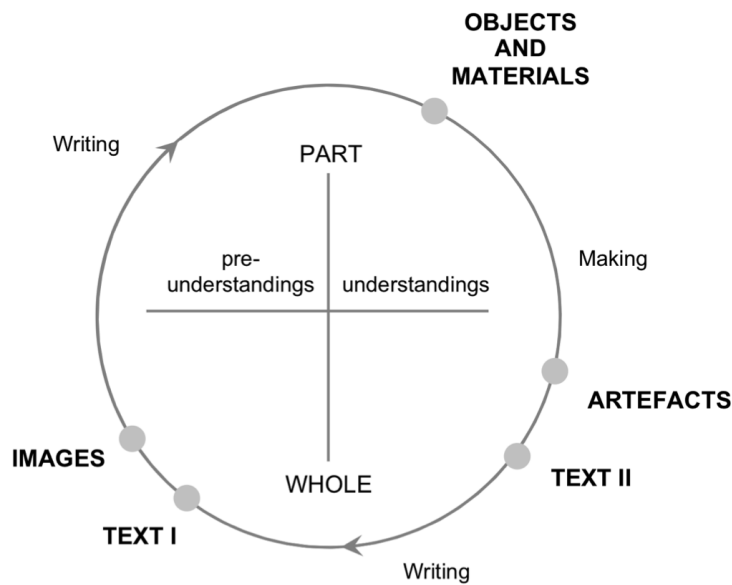


Figure 1. The hermeneutic circle developed for the study (Ania Sadkowska, 2016)

Tami Spry (2006 as quoted in Leavy 2008, 346) implies that, in accessing experiential knowledge, researchers should seek to ascertain “*enfleshed knowledge*”. This not only emphasizes the knowledge in the body, which is accessible through the bodily experiences, but also acknowledges the body “as a *powerful* [research] *agent*” (Spry 2006, 205). It is precisely by interlocking the activities of writing and making as equal elements of embodied exploring, understanding and co-constructing of meanings that this methodology enters the terrain of the “*enfleshed knowledge*”. Building on Merleau-Ponty’s (1962/2002) theory of embodiment, within this methodology, I sought to shed light on the lived experiences of fashion, clothing and ageing through my own embodied experience of its interpretation.

## Data analysis

The images documenting personal inventories and the interview transcriptions were analyzed following steps that were standard to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith et al. 2009). The stage of interpretative data coding, resulted in a series of themes describing the participants’ experiences of fashion and clothing, as they grow older, grouped and organized under three sets of superordinate themes (tab. 1).

Table 1. Final superordinate and subordinate themes in the study

SUPERORDINATE THEMES		
Learning Fashion	Defining the Fashion-Self	Fashion-Age(ing) Performance
SUBORDINATE THEMES		
Mirroring	Pioneering	Presenting
Dis-Comforting	Non-Conforming	(Un-)Fashioning
Peacocking	Distancing	Re-Materializing



The first superordinate theme, 'Learning Fashion', is concerned with the various past practices through which the respondents developed their fashion sensibilities, allowing them to engage actively with fashion. The three subordinate themes of 'Learning Fashion' are: 'Mirroring', which describes the participants' past practices of copying others' appearance, especially in relation to youth idols and other members of subcultures; 'Dis-Comforting', which outlines the active sacrificing of physical comfort in order to create the desired look; and 'Peacocking', a term used to highlight the pleasure derived from being recognized, praised, and admired for the way the participants presented themselves.

The 'Defining the Fashion-Self' superordinate theme is concerned with the ways in which the participants have constructed and defined their fashion identities, especially in relation to continuity and transition. It comprises the subordinate themes of: 'Pioneering', which is concerned with the participants' sense of being part of important social and cultural revolutions, including the creation and development of mass- and youth-oriented fashion; 'Non-Conforming', which describes respondents' often rebellious approach to fashion trends and certain social limitations; and 'Distancing', which is concerned with the importance, as expressed by the respondents, of not being associated with certain fashion looks and/or behaviors or even brands and individuals (Sadkowska et al. 2016).

The final superordinate theme, 'Fashion-Age(ing) Performance', focuses on the participants' social performance relating to ageing through the medium of fashionable clothing, with the main locus in the present. It includes three subordinate themes: 'Presenting', which relates to the participants' changing physicality and its influence on their social performance in relation to fashion; '(Un-)Fashioning', which describes the respondents' cautious navigation between various fashion styles, trends, and so-called 'timeless solutions'; and 'Re-Materialising', which focuses on the participants' reminiscing about unique fashion artefacts from the past and their desire to reconnect with them, consequently influencing the creation of a certain prism through which they currently experience fashion and clothing.

At the final stage of data analysis, each of the nine subordinate themes was re-analyzed using various creative artful practices, including different objects and materials, in order to enhance its interpretative capacity. This stage was based on a fusion of interpretative writing and making, and had a unique path of development for each and every theme. However, although each of these processes of practical explorations were different and unique, they all involved a selection of an *appropriate*<sup>2</sup> second-hand suit jacket. I decided to work with a series of suit jackets because, by many authors a suit is interpreted as a prime vehicle of masculinity (see, e.g., Hollander 1994; Hamilton 2007; Breward 2016). Suits were also present in the narratives of all of the participants, and most of them referred to the suit jackets as either their favorite items of clothing or as an item that carried a significant meaning or memory. I decided to use a previously owned men's suit jacket to highlight the participants' past experiences; metaphorically, any second-hand garment is already invested with a life of its own. In this vein each of the jackets was approached as a "canvas" that, on the one hand, was already meaning-loaded, but on the other, had a capacity to stimulate, as much as accommodate, my unfolding interpretations. Townsend (2011) in her study on denim garments explored similar creative possibilities and argued that 3-dimensional garments can successfully accommodate designer's creative thinking. In my work, each second-hand jacket was utilized as a starting point for the development of a new artefact. In this sense, these processes were indeed complex transformations from one artefact to another. In parallel to these physical transformations in the appearance of these objects, these processes were conducted to facilitate and stimulate

transformations in my unfolding understanding of each theme. In this article, I explain this in relation to the first set of subordinate themes: 'Mirroring', 'Dis-Comforting', and 'Peacocking', which was selected for its novel character and qualitative richness, as well as its unique procedural developments.

### ***Mirroring***

Following the standard IPA protocol (Smith et al. 2009) throughout the process of the initial reading and re-reading of the interview transcripts, I marked the intuitive points of interest and coded them in an exploratory manner in order to produce a basic understanding of the role that fashion and clothing have played throughout the participants' life courses. This iteration process made me aware of the strong emerging theme of 'Mirroring'; in many instances, the participants described how in the past it was important for them to mimic the appearance of others, as explained, for example, by Eric (60):

Going back to when I was very young, I don't know. Probably 14... I suppose fashion was important but it was very different then because being very young you tend to go along with what's happening. You're not really forming your own opinions of fashion. You tend to be going along with the crowd.

Significantly, each participant described such experiences very differently. While some of them related very strongly to the various subcultural groups, others referred to music idols, older siblings, or certain fashion designers. The role of gender seemed to be significant in relation to mirroring with most of the participants explaining it as a practice occurring exclusively amongst men, as previously discussed for example by Polhemus in *Street Style* (2010). This marked the first checkpoint on my hermeneutic circle: engaging with texts. Simultaneously, I began looking at how the concepts of mirroring and mimicry have been used in fashion, for example, in Hussein Chalayan's *Panoramic* (A/W 1998/9) or Alexander McQueen's *Voss* (S/S 2001) collections, as both used mirrors as elements of the catwalk (Evans 2003), and artists such as David Bowie, who often utilized such concepts within his stage costumes. These visuals were not informative in an analytical sense but provided me with a conceptual understanding of how such themes can function within the fashion context.

At the same time, most of the participants expressed the current significance of observing other men and being inspired by their look. This, however, as they reported, was different to their past 'direct' mirroring practices, or even copying others' appearance. All of these factors made me question how these past practices had influenced the participants' behaviors in the present. I felt very strongly visually inspired by this; I wanted to aesthetically explore the relationship, as well as the tension, between mirroring someone else's appearance in the past and a more settled and confident form of being inspired by another's image as a mature man in the present. Furthermore, I found it puzzling when looking at the images of the participants including the various artefacts that they brought to the interview; clearly all of them over the years have developed a very distinctive fashion sense and style, such as Henry<sup>3</sup> (54) who took great pride in his collection of very colorful and flamboyant suits, including many from designers Vivienne Westwood and Gresham Blake. Even more interesting was that, in my opinion, there was nothing ordinary about the way the participants presented themselves on the day of their interviews. This marked the second checkpoint on my hermeneutic circle, namely, engaging with images.

Intrigued by this developing understanding of the collected data, I began my practical explorations by purchasing a second-hand men's suit jacket. I was not searching for any distinctive shape, color or form;

just the opposite, I was subjectively targeting what I perceived to be an *ordinary*<sup>4</sup> jacket; one of many similar items available to buy in local charity shops. This was my first attempt to metaphorically experience and understand how it would be to purposely acquire a garment that is just like everyone else's, something that, in my opinion, had nothing distinctive about it.

I then spent several hours just observing this jacket placed on a mannequin while re-reading and re-listening to the corresponding passages from the interviews. In parallel to this, I completed a mind map exercise on what the 'Mirroring' theme might mean. Doing this allowed me to capture the early stages of my unfolding interpretations. At this point, I had also a very strong visual idea of using the jacket as a "pin board" for a large amount of similar, almost identical, elements and to see how these would influence the jacket. I chose to work with Lego™ plastic model men, purely because they directly related to a male figure. Inspired by this idea, I ordered 300 Lego™ men from eBay. Once delivered, I began to plan how I could incorporate them on to the surface of the jacket, through a series of visual notes and drawings. Importantly, while assembling the Lego™ men, I discovered that, for me, there was a metaphorical relevance between doing this process of surface placement/ decoration and men assembling their attire day-by-day.

In addition to placing the Lego™ men, I was experimenting with attaching reflective glass beads on to the surface of the jacket because they had a very strong visual resemblance to the silver surface of a mirror. However, while experimenting with them influenced my thinking about the data, I also realized that I did not find them aesthetically interesting and engaging in the sense that the connection there was too literal; so I decided to focus exclusively on attaching Lego™ men to the surface of the jacket. It also became apparent to me that the 'Mirroring' theme was not only about the individuals but even more so about their relationships, or in some cases, the bonds or tensions between individuals and their agencies in regards to the peer groups they belonged to and how they were defined by, or within, these groups<sup>5</sup> (Polhemus, 2010). For this reason, I started to experiment with wrapping clear elastic threads around the Lego™ men sewn into the surface of the jacket, and introducing tension by pulling it (fig. 2). Doing this significantly changed the shape of the jacket. By engaging with these objects and materials, I marked the third and fourth checkpoints on my hermeneutic circle, engaging with objects, materials, and artefacts.



Figure 2. 'Mirroring' theme, practical experimentations with Lego™ men (Ania Sadkowska, 2016)

All these practical explorations made me more aware of the complexity of the theme, and its many potential forms. Furthermore, through my physical engagement with materiality and manipulation of the fabric i.e. experimenting with bringing tension into play using the clear elastic thread and watching how it strategically altered the shape of the garment, made me realize more fully how strong the relationship between the participants' past mirroring practices and current behavior had become. It is through this duplicating of the appearances of others that they had developed their current fashion autonomy and/or gained the courage to pursue their individual clothing styles. I completed the *Mirroring* jacket (fig. 3) by spraying it with silver paint, enhancing its reflective quality.

It was at this stage that I began writing up the 'Mirroring' theme. It is only through completing different layers of analysis, namely, textual, visual and these highly metaphorical practical explorations, that I felt that I understood the theme enough to embark on writing about it, which marked the final point on my hermeneutic circle, re-engaging with text.



Figure 3. *Mirroring* jacket, front and back (Ania Sadkowska, 2016; Photo: Fraser West)

### ***Dis-Comforting***

The processes of initial textual coding brought my attention to several passages in which the participants referred to their physical comfort i.e. the 'Dis-Comforting' subordinate theme. This included various aspects of physical and mental comfort; for example, while some of the participants discussed physical comfort as a result of their mental comfort (feeling good wearing a certain garment), others discussed it in the context of their past participation in various youth subcultures (comfort as a result of fitting within a group's standards). However, the biggest 'surprise' for me as a researcher was the realization of the presence of the body dis-comforting practices in the participants' past and present fashion behaviors. This was opposed to my pre-conception of older men's relationship with fashion; I entered the study with the belief that older men value highly their physical comfort and they would not sacrifice it for the sake of the fashionable look; dis-comforting practices, in my understanding, were reserved to youngsters, and perhaps even more specifically to young women.

At this stage, I re-approached the images of the participants on the day of their interviews and the images of the artefacts they chose to bring with them including their favorite fashion items and old photos. I looked for the connections between the interviews, images and my field notes. Since some of the artefacts that the participants brought along were photos of the artefacts that no longer existed, I quickly discovered that some of these photos carried special memories of the dis-comforting caused by those garments. This understanding emerged through the interplay between what the participants said about dis-comforting their bodies, the garments and images they showed to me, and what I thought this might have meant; this was the first step of my unfolding interpretation and it marked the first and second checkpoints on my hermeneutic circle: engaging with text and images.

I then sought to process this data further. I wrote about it, testing my ideas on paper. I tried to stay reflexive and to acknowledge my pre-conceptions and how they were influencing my developing understanding. As a result of this, I noted some of the ideas of what the 'Dis-Comforting' theme might mean in my sketchbook. I became strongly driven by one of the passages, in which Henry (54) discusses his willingness to wear a corset in order to get into fashionable clothing:

Comfort... no. Style first. I will breathe in, and fasten anything, and live with it for the day, if I have to. I would probably consider a corset, if I had to get into something.

Inspired by this, I experimented with materials that corresponded to my unfolding understandings, such as metal corset wire, while developing the theme further. I chose this material because, to me, it metaphorically represented the stereotypical ideal of masculinity, strength and roughness hidden within its hard metal structure; historically, however, it was an innovative material for the female corset in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Britain and Germany (Eleri 2010). I drew in my sketchbook some ideas - I tried to understand. I felt lost and I realized that I did not understand enough to write up the theme.

Intrigued by the passage from another participant, Kevin (63) in which he provided a description of his past trip to Greece, I began to question the consequences of the participants purposively dis-comforting their bodies:

[T]here is this funny fashion story. I went to Greece in 1975 (...) [A]nd I rather foolishly bought a pair of boots, not the kind of boots you would imagine for hiking around Greece but 3-inch Cuban heeled boots (...) and so I spent about 6 weeks walking on craggy hills and mountains of Greece with these boots on and lost all sensation in my big toe. And it's never come back.

Accordingly, I decided to utilize the method of a scenario-based reflective performance; I asked a male model to wrap the metal spiral corset wire around his body. This proved to be a stimulating and thought-provoking exercise as it allowed me to observe the physical signs left on his body by the metal wire in the process of the direct body dis-comforting. It resulted also in the set of photos and a written account given by the model (fig. 4) in which he reflected on his bodily experience, which was captured and documented via a short film; this was, I believe, the key moment allowing me to more clearly formulate my ideas about the theme. At this stage I purchased a second-hand men's suit jacket and I started planning how I could incorporate the metal wire within it, which marked the third checkpoint on my hermeneutic circle: materials and objects.





Figure 4. 'Dis-Comforting' sketchbook pages, scenario-based reflective performance; photos and model's account (Ania Sadkowska, 2016)

I re-read and re-listened to the relevant passages. I started to 'make' my design (fig. 5); I tried not to impose myself on the data; instead I let the data lead and stimulate my making. Correspondingly, making this jacket proved to be a physically painful process for myself, causing bruises and cuts on my hands. It was only when I completed the *Dis-Comforting* jacket (fig. 6), which marked the artefacts checkpoint on my hermeneutic circle, that I felt that I could finally understand the various experiences of men dis-comforting their bodies that my participants told me about. As the result of this iterative process of *making* and writing, I finished writing up yet another draft of the 'Dis-Comforting' theme. This marked the final checkpoint on my hermeneutic circle, text II.



Figure 5. 'Dis-Comforting' theme, practical explorations; inserting a spiral metal corset wire within the second-hand men's suit jacket (Ania Sadkowska, 2016)



Figure 6. *Dis-Comforting* jacket, front and back (Ania Sadkowska, 201; Photo: Fraser West)

### ***Peacocking***

Through the textual and visual analysis of the interview transcripts and the participants' outfits, the 'Peacocking'<sup>6</sup> theme emerged as one of the strongest. After completing these stages of data analysis, it was clear to me that it was important for the participants to be recognized and appreciated for their clothing style, including attracting women's attention, as explained, for example, by Grahame (61):

And I think, you know, I am pretty sure that there is, you know, a big connection between fashion and being a peacock. It's what attracts the girls when you're a teenager, or when you get older, or whatever. It's all part of that.

Intrigued by this idea, I extended my analysis by looking at the images of various artefacts that the participants brought in to the interviews, which marked the first two checkpoints on my hermeneutic circle: engaging with text and images.

While it is justified to say that most of these artefacts were rather flamboyant, one stood out especially strongly, a shirt brought in by Ian (58). This shirt by Paul Smith (from the 1980s) was not only very colorful, including intense oranges, pinks and violets (fig. 7) but was also covered in a loud flower pattern. At the same time, Ian commented "*I can't believe I did wear it*". Indeed, while comparing this shirt to the garments that Ian wore on the day of his interview, there was a sense of a strong visual discrepancy. This could simply be explained by changing fashion trends, or clothing for different occasions (e.g. Entwistle, 2015); this shirt was perhaps suited only for special occasions, such as nights out, as opposed to a garment that is worn as a part of an everyday outfit. However, I also found interesting the time that had elapsed between Ian's past and present garments being produced/purchased and worn, which I wanted to explore further.

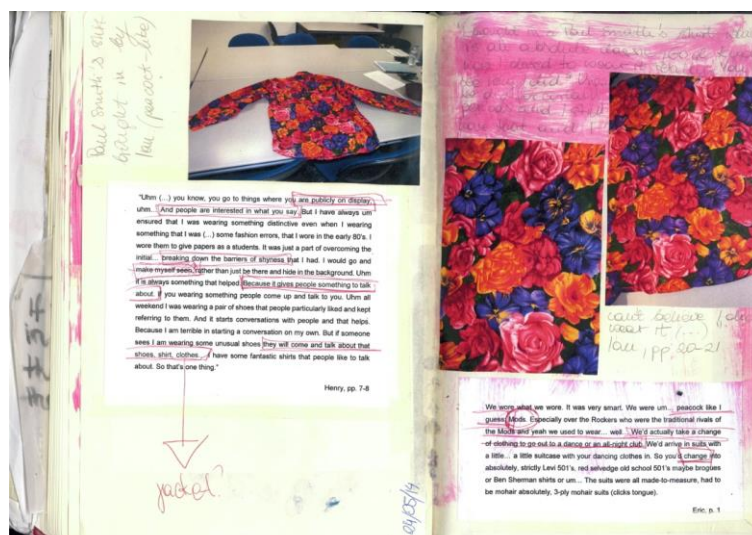


Figure 7. 'Peacocking' sketchbook pages, shirt by Paul Smith brought in by Ian (58) (Ania Sadkowska, 2016)

Consequently, I began the process of practical exploration by purchasing another second-hand suit jacket from a local charity shop. This was interesting because, while on the outside the jacket was plain dark grey fabric, inside it was fully lined with bright purple translucent viscose fabric. I spent several hours looking at its inside and outside and trying to understand why the flamboyant part of this garment was hidden inside where it was invisible to the external viewer. I intuitively felt that this held a metaphorical resemblance to the peacocking that my participants told me about. I decided to unpick the back of the jacket and arrange it in a way so that half of it was showing the outside of the grey shell, while the other half of it was showing the purple lining, which marked the third checkpoint on my hermeneutic circle: engaging with objects and materials. This was an inspiring exercise that triggered completing a short mind map exercise in which I noted my initial ideas regarding the 'Peacocking' theme, including the idea of the constant negotiation between the "private" and "public" modes of peacocking.

However, at the same time, I felt that the jacket that I was experimenting with was not quite reflective of the flamboyant character of the experiences that I was attempting to understand. At the same time, when visiting a charity shop I found a jacket by Ted Baker, which similar to the jacket I had previously selected had a settled striped grey exterior shell, but a colorful and intricate lining inside. I was intuitively driven to it, as visually the lining fabric was very similar to the shirt by Paul Smith brought in by Ian that had sparked my interest in the first place. I purchased the jacket and followed the steps I had undertaken with the previous jacket; unpicking the back seams and twisting it around so half of it was inside out. I completed more writing and started to plan how I could "finish" the jacket. It was important for me to further explore its wearable qualities in the sense that an individual, while wearing it, would have a chance to conceal or reveal the flower pattern of the lining. I felt that this was directly corresponding to how my participants felt about their peacocking practices: that it was their initiative to embark on it or not; something they have learned how to do throughout the years of practicing it.

Next, I decided to neatly finish all the unpicked seams as well as adding extra buttonholes and buttons in order to enhance the multiple possibilities of wearing this garment. It then could not only be worn inside out and half inside out, but also back to front. This encouraged my thinking about the importance of the participants' (fashion) agency, not only when selecting clothes to wear but also in the way they decided to



wear and style them, developed through years of their active engagement with fashion and clothing. Intrigued by this idea, I visited the clothing archives (Collection Resources Centre<sup>7</sup>) in Barrow-upon-Soar, where I had a chance to see various historical menswear artefacts, including highly decorative jackets (fig. 8) and waistcoats from the 18<sup>th</sup> century; interestingly this re-marked the third checkpoint on my hermeneutic circle. This was significant because I became more familiar with the historic context of decorative menswear, something to which some of the participants referred in their interviews.



Figure 8. 'Peacocking' sketchbook pages; jacket seen in the Collection Resources Centre in Barrow-upon-Soar, and collages and experimentations with beads (Ania Sadkowska, 2016)

Although at this stage I had completed the final draft of my written interpretation of this theme, I still felt that the jacket was not yet finished, that it was simply not fully corresponding to what I was trying to describe in words. I began a series of experimentations with various beads and collages (fig. 8). My final step to finish the jacket was to embellish one side of the lining with translucent beads (fig. 9). These corresponded to the color of the lining and it added yet another option to the wearer of the jacket; this was to show the 'hyper-peacocking'<sup>8</sup> embellished side of the garment, or to hide it, so remaining the only one who would be aware of its existence. This marked the final two checkpoints on my hermeneutic circle, however, in a reverse order: text II and artefacts.



Figure 9. *Peacocking* jacket, multiple wearing possibilities (Ania Sadkowska, 2016; Photo: Fraser West)

## CONCLUSION

In this article, I described the processes of creation of three artefacts, the *Mirroring*, *Dis-Comforting*, and *Peacocking* suit jackets, which were produced in response to empirical data gathered via in-depth interviews and personal inventories with the five study participants. In doing so, my aim was to articulate clearly the research process, which in fashion practices usually remains invisible. Consequently, I explained the unique research process in which ‘*making*’ as a means of embodied, visual enquiry became an analytical tool that afforded the creative practitioner the advanced understandings and insights as compared to the standard text-based qualitative data analysis.

Firstly, I must reflect on the relevance and function of the concept of the hermeneutic circle within this research process. The concept of the hermeneutic circle is useful in explaining how the researcher gradually develops interpretive understandings; the concept is based on a constant movement between various elements of the phenomenon, including movement between parts and whole. In IPA, this is applicable because the researcher constantly progresses her analysis from elements such as single words and sentences via passages and full interviews from a single individual, and finally towards a sample of participants (Smith et al. 2009). In this study, I adopted the basic concept and extended it by adding virtual checkpoints corresponding to the activities of writing and making, which I utilised during my interpretative analysis. These checkpoints were: Text (I); Images: Objects and Materials; Artefacts; and, Text (II) and

corresponded to my reading and coding the interview transcripts, describing the outfits the participants wore on the day of their interview (personal inventories), engaging with different artful practices, such as drawing, hand and machine stitching, or embellishing, as well as with second-hand men's suit jackets leading to the writing up my final interpretative accounts. However, as I indicated earlier in the article, within this overarching model of my hermeneutic circle at the final stage of data analysis, namely practical explorations, each of the re-interpreted themes imposed a secondary hermeneutic circle in a distinct way. So, while common starting points were the selected passages, the following processes had very unique dynamics. As evidenced by the three processes of practical explorations described in this article, the checkpoints were marked at different stages, and often they were re-visited several times before the final writing up occurred.

Secondly, this research process, including the role and form of the practical explorations, responded to the 'character' of the empirical material that I gathered from the sample of the study participants. In this vein, this research methodology and its processes were flexible and accommodating and allowed the researcher- interpreter to respond to the selected material in a creative, yet transparent way. In this sense, the making processes were never dictated or limited by fulfilling a *design brief*, but were, instead, about facilitating and stimulating my understandings; the practice of *making* was about finding a metaphorical fit between the participants' experiences and my embodied sensitivities to, and readings of them as a creative practitioner. My role as a maker can, therefore, be compared to a filter through which the unfolding interpretations were produced. And, although I have been aware of many technological and technical possibilities and advancements within the field of fashion and textiles design, my making practices were not determined, or even driven, by these. Instead, I chose to focus on the elements and aspects of the participants' experiences that inspired me as a creative practitioner and, consequently, chose to engage with materials and techniques that I felt embodied and reflected the character of these experiences. In line with my epistemological stance, the making processes, techniques and materials that I utilized, were meaningful only when understood through the context of the participants' experiences to which they corresponded.

Thirdly, such a methodological mechanism required the researcher to have certain skills and sensitivities to human experiences; this particular research mechanism was created and implemented to suit my particular way of being in the world and conducting research as a creative practitioner. In this sense, this research process was about finding a balance between my research subjectivity and objectivity; this constant negotiation played a significant role in the unfolding interpretations. Furthermore, it is not a coincidence that this research used fashion and clothing as a lens to access the participants' experiences, a field that I hold professional training and experience in. This once again required me to strive for a balance between my skills, expertise and sensitivities and the qualities and requirements of the research material. Various fashion- and clothing-oriented making practices were always partly about the empirical material and partly about the researcher and practitioner who was analyzing it; there is no doubt that a different researcher with a different set of characteristics would select different ways of implementing such a mechanism.

To follow from the previous point, throughout the project my intention never was to develop an objective stance and I am distant from the positivistic exploitation of data as a quantifiable matrix of an existing external (to the researcher) world. My constructivist understanding of the world around me and the role of research and researcher is close to Law's (2004, 2) insightful comment:

if we [researchers] want to think about the **messes of reality** at all then we're going to have to teach ourselves **to think, to practice, to relate and to know in new ways**. We will **need to teach ourselves to know some of the realities of the world using methods unusual to or unknown in social science** [my emphases].

Indeed, in this article I described and explained my attempt “*to think, to practice, to relate and to [get to] know in new ways*.” Moreover, my intention in this article was not only to explain practical explorations as an analytical research tool, but also to explain the role of my subjectivity within it, as explained by Crotty (1998, 9): “*meaning does not come out of an interplay between subject and object but is imposed on the object by the subject*”. Consequently, the series of three practical explorations are indeed the series of my subjective attempts to make sense of the *messy* reality, resulting in the intuitive production of visuals (jackets), that are charged with my often metaphoric understandings. My aim in being transparent about these is, thus, to explain my own role as the creative practitioner within this research process not as a subject, but as an inherent and significant element of it.

Fourthly, this body of work allows for a new possibility for fashion studies, integrating both theory and practice to be clearly outlined. Such a research methodology, by intertwining the two creative research activities of making and writing, acts as a challenge and alternative to the current division between fashion researchers and practitioners, and demonstrates that embracing both positions may be meaningful, transparent and trustworthy. Furthermore, such an integrative approach to research methodology more generally has the potential to be easily transposed across other disciplines, given the sensibilities of the researcher and the conditions of the research require it. The utilisation of the methods of in-depth interviews, personal inventories and practical explorations within one coordinated research mechanism expands the array of research procedures typically used in fashion studies. Such an integration of methods has also potential significance to the field of fashion design, and especially customised, bespoke services where the key is the in-depth understanding of customers' experiences, needs and expectations, but which remain outside the mainstream commercial fashion settings.

Finally, it is important to reflect on the roles of the artefacts within this research process and in regards to the co-construction of experiential knowledge. Brown (2003 as quoted in Sullivan 2010, 79) notes that “*considered as the outcome of research, artworks are represented as the product of poetic, technical, and other measures of cultural investigation*”. In a similar vein, the series of fashion artefacts discussed in this article are the results of my investigation into older men's experiences of fashion and clothing. Such an analysis was based on a certain mode of “thinking through making”, and, was often based on exploring metaphorical references and connections. Moreover, these processes of interpretations involved utilising my skills and sensibilities as a designer and artist by “*employ[ing] experimental and hermeneutic methods that reveal[ed] and articulate[d] the tacit knowledge that is situated and embodied in specific artworks and artistic processes*” (Borgdorff 2006 as quoted in Sullivan 2010, 79). Here, I argue that these artefacts metaphorically embody my understandings.

Furthermore, the produced artefacts are a peculiar form of the ‘side-effects’ of my interpretative processes. Unlike side-products, however, they are fully integrated within the composition of the body of work and were presented as part of the study findings (Sadkowska 2016). Each of the artefacts I produced is an independent aesthetic solution; tangible and meaningful outcome of the research process, and in many respects equal to the parallel written interpretations. Therefore, the status of the artefacts produced in this research can be described as embodying certain knowledge (through enabling certain understandings to

be developed) and, simultaneously, as forms of metaphoric visual representations of this knowledge (Frayling 1993/94). Bye (2010, 213-215) offers a useful “*Framework for Clothing and Textile Design Scholarship*”, in which she distinguishes between “problem-based design”, which follows stages of a fairly standard research process and where an artefact is a direct result of the practice and its critical evaluation; “research through practice”, where practice is initiated in response to a problem/question that is derivative from practice, resulting in creation of an artefact; and finally, the least straightforward “creative practice” defined as “*scholarship initiated from an aspiration, the desire to express an idea, or simply create [and where] the resulting artefact does reflect the culture and designer*”. At the same time, Bye (2010) notices that the artefacts produced via the last form of design scholarship do not constitute research per se, and that some reframing of such a scholarship as research through practice is needed. Responding to this, the series of practical explorations offered me as the creative fashion practitioner, a conceptual space and creative vehicle to stimulate my thinking and interpretations of the various aspects of the researched phenomenon, therefore bridging these two categories of scholarship.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the UK Office for National Statistics the demographic post-World War II term 'baby boomer' applies to the peaked live births between the years 1946 and 1964 in UK. UK Office for National Statistics (2011) Statistical bulletin: Births and Deaths in England and Wales [WWW]. Available from: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/birth-summary-tables--england-and-wales/2011--final--sb-births-and-deaths-in-england-and-wales--2011--final-.html#tab-Key-trends-in-births-and-deaths--numbers-and-rates-> [Accessed 7/12/2012].

<sup>2</sup> I use the word 'appropriate' here as a representation of my own subjective selections; a jacket that to me *felt* relevant and appropriate.

<sup>3</sup> All names have been changed in order to protect the participants' anonymity.

<sup>4</sup> "Most of the meaningful references in fashion are submerged in the look of the ordinary dressed persons at any given moment, because fashion is mainly engaged in acting out its own formal history, and reacts most vividly only to itself (...)" (Hollander 1994, 16).

<sup>5</sup> The groups most often mentioned by the participants were Mods, Rockers, Hippies and Punks.

<sup>6</sup> The term "peacocking" has a got threefold significance here; firstly as McDowell (1997) notes: "throughout history, the peacock male – memorable, magnificent or assertively confident – has strutted across the pages of men's fashion"; secondly, it relates to the so-called "Peacock Revolution of the 1960s" first initiated by Teddy Boys who "began to emancipate themselves from traditionally sedate dress and donned more prismatic colours" (Sadako Takeda et al. 2016: 208); thirdly, the term was often used by the study participants themselves to explain their behaviours and practices.

<sup>7</sup> Collections Resources Centre, 31 Hayhill, Barrow upon Soar, Loughborough LE12 8LD

<sup>8</sup> The idea here was that it was the "male dress [that] was always essentially more advanced than female throughout fashion history, and tended to lead the way, to set the standard, to make the aesthetic propositions to which female fashion responded" (Hollander 1994, 6).