

Emotional Fit: Developing a new fashion design methodology for mature women

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Abstract: This paper reports on a user-centered methodological approach towards fashion design for mature women (55+). Referred to as the 'baby boomers' the women in this study are the product of the cultural revolution of the 1960s, who consequently have a strong sense of their own 'agency', as conveyed through their clothing and style, but now find themselves stepping into the unknown territory of a limited market. The majority of fashion brands and stores are aimed at younger consumers, and with some exceptions, it is only high and niche designer labels who are offering stylish garments that complement the changing bodies of an older generation women with strong aesthetic values. In response to this situation three researchers have developed an original research methodology which synthesizes fashion and textile design practices with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), resulting in an holistic, co-design and user-centred approach that responds to the emotional and physical needs of an ageing female demographic.

Keywords: ageing bodies, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), emotional durability, fashion methodology

1. Introduction

The term Emotional Fit has been assigned to this project to reflect the emotive and technical terrain the investigation is concerned with: the female participants and researchers are concerned about the current state of fashion for mature women and aim to come up with some innovatively designed, well-fitting garments that meet the aesthetic and emotional needs of this growing demographic. To contextualise the study, there are more than 12 million women aged 45-105 in the UK, one fifth of the population, who represent vast economic potential and a wealth of experiential knowledge in terms of the phenomenon of fashion. In spite of this, in most Western societies mature women have often failed to be considered as a prime market by designers and mainstream retailers resulting in a form of



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socio-cultural invisibility (Church Gibson 2000). Although this situation is slowly beginning to be addressed by the design world, the legacy of neglect is reflected by the high street and ready-to-wear collections offered by the fashion and clothing industry, who have continually overlooked (if not intentionally ignored) this segment of the population. This is a missed opportunity for the fashion industry that has resulted in dissatisfaction and frustration, particularly amongst older female customers who have a strong sense of their identity and 'agency' through their varied and tacit experiences of selecting, making, adapting, styling and wearing clothes. This has developed from their lasting relationship with fashion, which was influenced by the cultural revolution of the 1960s Britain and was the backdrop to their coming of age.

Returning to the reasons for the failure of designers to address the needs of an ageing demographic, Professor of Social Policy and Sociology at the University of Kent, Julia Twigg comments that "fashion and age sit uncomfortably together" (Twigg, 2013, p.1). Furthermore, she defines ageing as a form of "disruption", highlighting the lack of acceptance of this phenomenon within society. In response to this situation, the authors argue that in order to address this significant, specialist market sector through innovation, an holistic research methodology is required that both responds to and augments the aesthetic, physiological and emotional considerations informing this burgeoning area of design. In this paper we report on the working progress and preliminary findings stemming from the exploratory stages of the project, which are informing the methodology.

Our first steps towards developing the methodology required us to more fully understand and explore the relationship between ageing females and their sense of agency through fashion. In order to achieve this it was necessary to evaluate mature women's experiential knowledge of wearing fashion, resulting in the following initial research objectives:

- To explore how fashion and clothing is experienced and remembered by a sample of mature British women over the age of 55;
- To understand their issues with sizing and fit;
- To discover their aesthetic design preferences;
- To create a series of womenswear prototypes that reflect their emotional design needs and preferences.

The first three objectives have, and continue to be addressed through a qualitative investigation utilizing methods such as creative workshops and in-depth interviews, but the fulfilment of the last objective will be facilitated through the development of a series of potential design solutions encapsulating aesthetics, innovative garment shaping, fitting and sizing solutions. The project builds on related research into fashion and ageing (Sadkowska et al, 2014) creative pattern cutting (including zero waste) and sculptural shaping (Townsend 2013; Sissons 2010) hybrid technical and simultaneous fashion and textile design approaches (Townsend 2004b). The research also considers the role of emotion as a catalyst within practice (Niedderer and Townsend 2014) longevity and emotional durability (Chapman 2015) through collaborative (diffuse) design for social innovation (Manzini 2015).

Significantly, this research triangulates these design approaches with psychological insights into how mature women wear clothes, by considering how fashion products and feelings which once defined the past can potentially become the key to “un- locking” the present (Sadkowska, et al, 2014) and facilitate a dialogue between the wearer(s) and designer(s). This involves a conceptual and exploratory fashion practice, where an interdisciplinary methodology is developed through the balancing of theory and practice, which we explain below.

2. Research Context and Rationale

Growing old and the experience of it has become a significant topic in the contemporary social research agenda, due to increased human lifespans, which together with the presence of the post-World War II baby boomers, has impacted on the development of an ageing population. The post-industrial economy of improved healthcare, leisure opportunities and bio-medical technologies have affected both the biological and social spheres of growing old, improving opportunities but also producing new challenges for ageing identities across the gender spectrum (Powell and Gilbert 2009; Fraser and Greco 2005; Featherstone and Hepworth 1991). As Gilleard and Higgs (2005) note, the current ageing generation is the one that created a consumer culture built on youth and sexuality, “so that their attainment of the Third Age status marks a new stage in the cultural constitution of age” (Twigg, 2007, p.300). In this “contemporary age of aging” (Powell and Gilbert, 2009, vii) the postmodern approach disrupts the constrained perceptions of growing old, placing the emphasis on the individuals, their bodies and identities, experiences, actions, practices and dynamics.

“[P]ersons remake themselves over time, and thus their identities change” (Arxer, et al, 2009, p.46); human biographies have the potential to be translated as the relationships between personal and structural factors. Consequently, individual and collective experiences, where fashion and clothes, as the communicators and mediators between self and society (Entwistle 2002; Entwistle and Wilson 2001; Crane 2000), can become the key to analyse and particularly understand ageing identities. In the same vein, Twigg argues that “[clothes] offer a useful lens through which to explore the possibly changing ways in which older identities are constituted in modern culture” (Twigg, 2009a, p.93). The phenomenological approach, therefore, with its emphasis on practice and experience, enables “un-locking an understanding of what it means to be a human person situated within and across the life course” (Powell and Gilbert, 2009, p.5). When it comes to fashion and clothing, phenomenology provides the possibility to “uncover the multiple and culturally constructed meanings that a whole range of events and experiences can have for us” (Weber and Mitchell, 2004, p.4), and to establish the interrelation between the stories of individuals, objects and times they inhabit.

Through “Emotional Fit” we exploit these interrelations, with regards to mature women over the age of 55 who share common interests and enthusiasm for fashion and clothing. Their dedication has developed through various fashion related practices including purchasing,

adapting, dressmaking from patterns, creating from scratch, styling, customizing, recycling and more, in support of how they have, and continue to present themselves in their everyday lives. Moreover, as fashion and textile designers, practitioners and researchers, we aim to utilise our theoretical and tacit knowledge and skills in order to create a series of garment prototypes that cater for the stylistic (fashion) and practical/ functional (clothing) needs and expectations of mature women as identified by the sample.

For the purposes of this project we clearly distinguish between the terms of “fashion” and “clothing”. Furthermore, we subscribe to Teunissen’s rather conceptual definition of “fashion” as being “the product of a design that [is] ‘attached’ to the human body but that also [seeks] to research and explore its own relationship with the body, with identity, self-image, and the environment” (2013, p.201). Consequently, following Joanne B. Eicher we adopt the definition of clothing “as a noun refer[ing] generally to articles that cover the body” (2010, p.151). At the same time, however, we also recognise, following Kawamura, the existence of a commonly accepted simplification in which “fashion often functions as “clothing fashion, that is, the most trendy, up-to-date clothing that the majority of the people in society adopts and follows” (2011, p.9). This consideration is especially relevant when it comes to analysing and interpreting our informants’ accounts of their experiences of fashion and clothing.

3. Methodology and Data

Previous investigations into both ageing and fashion have often adopted a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews (Holland 2004, 2012; Grimstad, et al, 2005; Davis 2012) and have focused on specific aspects including older women’s clothing choices (Hurd Clarke, et al, 2009; Holmlund, et al, 2011). While these studies have revealed issues of relevance to the current research, they tell little of the meaning of fashion through the individual experience of ageing and identity in the lives of mature women. Few studies have attempted to establish the relationship between memory and clothing (Twigg 2009b, 2010). However, there are some interesting craft and design based projects that touch on the role of emotion, including Jane Wallace’s Dress Box (2009) from her Personhood in Dementia project, which utilized remnants of fabrics from dresses made in the 1960s and 1970s, to naturally trigger memories from this time (Neidderer and Townsend, 2014, p.16) and Stead’s (2005) PhD study, *The Emotional Wardrobe*, which focused on the integration of technology with fashion to stimulate and represent emotion. Some researchers have adapted a phenomenological approach by extending the traditional form of interview with the analysis of artefacts, such as, textiles, garments and photographs (Lerpiniere 2009; Weber and Mitchell 2004), and workshops for participants (Richards, et al, 2012). However, to date, only a small number of researchers have combined such methods, which makes this methodology particularly innovative with its equal emphasis on theoretical and practical research methods that seek to expand existing knowledge through an intergenerational dialogue and associated outcomes.

Accordingly, this project consists of three phases (fig. 1), and includes multiple case studies of members of the UK female population aged between 55-70. The three phases are, in order: Research, Design and Findings Dissemination. Each phase of the study is designed to build on the findings from the previous phase and at each stage we employ different, yet, complementary research methods, as presented below. In this paper our focus is on the first two phases of the project, especially the employed methods of workshops and interviews.

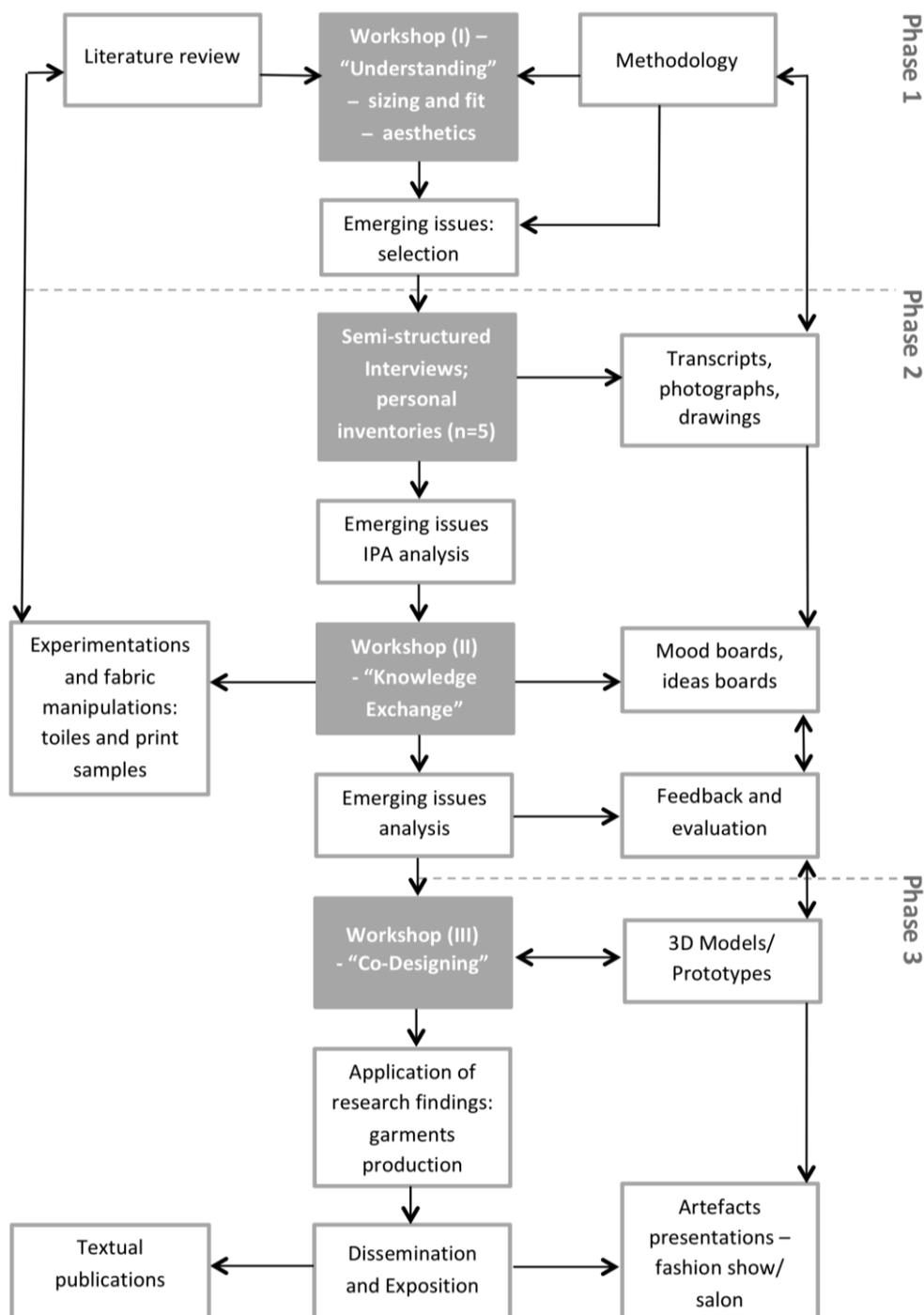


Figure 1: Emotional Fit project – research model. ©Emotional Fit 2015

3.1 Workshop (I): “Understanding” - May 2015 Nottingham Trent University

In the first stage of the project our aim was clear: we wanted to develop a primary understanding of what problems and issues older women have and share regarding fashion and clothing. In order to fulfil this aim we organised a workshop with 10 participants (tab. 1), with the three researchers as the facilitators and a research assistant. The workshop lasted 3 hours.

Table 1. Sample characteristics

| Name* | Age | Occupation |
|--------------------------|-----|---|
| Anna ^{1,2} | 64 | Retired |
| Barbara ^{1,2} | 65 | Semi retired/ part time university researcher |
| Christine ^{1,2} | 65 | Retired |
| Debbie ¹ | 62 | Retired |
| Elizabeth ^{1,2} | 67 | Retired |
| Fran ¹ | 66 | Retired |
| Gwen ¹ | 65 | Retired |
| Hannah ^{1,2} | 65 | Retired |
| Irene ¹ | 66 | Retired |
| Joanne | 65 | Retired |

*Pseudonyms were used to protect the participants’ anonymity

¹ Participants who expressed their interest in being interviewed

² Participants interviewed

In order to stimulate the process of understanding the complexity of the participants’ experiences we first invited them to introduce themselves and freely discuss their personal issues regarding their clothes (fig. 2). Interestingly, without prompting from the facilitators most of the participants discussed their issues to be located within two areas; firstly, that of ‘fit’, including problems relating to the inconsistent sizing system on the British high street; secondly, that of ‘aesthetics’. Here, the issue that caused our participants the most frustration were the recurrent fashion trends nearly all explicitly aimed at young bodies. Our participants felt especially disappointed with the high street, as well as some designer brands, not taking into account the physical changes, naturally occurring to female bodies as they age. The women in our study felt that it was somewhat socially “expected” of them to cover the neuralgic parts of their bodies such as arms and elbows, neck, cleavage and thighs.



Figure 2: Participants introducing discussing their clothing preferences. ©Emotional Fit 2015

They also related to the skin, and its changing texture, density and decolourization through ageing. The participants also felt that the colours widely available in the shops often did not compliment their appearances; black and white were their classic/ regular choices, however, this was often dictated by the unsuitability of other colours rather than the participants' specific preferences. As indicated by the workshop participants, problems seemed to lie not in the colours per se but in their tonal range. In contrast, all of the women present expressed rather negative attitudes towards colours such as grey or beige through related descriptors of "granny-ish" and "boring". These shades, or 'neutrals' are considered as part of the staple colour palettes for the mature fashion market. Discussion around this issue raised interesting psychological perceptions between ageing and semantics, particularly the notion that once past a certain age women become "invisible" or "neutralised" within Western culture, perpetuated by a feeling that commercial fashion is not designed "for them".

Secondly, we invited our participants to tell us about their favourite and least favourite items of clothing (fig. 3 a-c), which they were asked to bring with them in the flyer sent to every participant prior the workshop. Although this was designed as an individual exercise and we spoke to each woman individually about the items of clothing they brought in (recording their accounts), it quickly developed into a group discussion where the participants had a chance to discuss their preferences amongst themselves as well as compare and contrast their clothing within the sample group (fig. 4 a-b).



Figure 3: Participants and their favourite garments a. Christine (65); b. Barbara (65) c. Elizabeth (67) .
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Figures 4 a-b Participants discussing their favourite items. ©Emotional Fit 2015

Alongside this activity, the participants had a chance to look at current fashion magazines such as Another Magazine, Vogue and Elle, and relate their needs and tastes to the various images, editorials and adverts presented in these publications. This provided a platform for our participants to directly compare the fashionable clothes on offer with items of clothing that are actually present in their wardrobes. Once again, for many this was a chance to express their dissatisfaction with the fashion solutions currently available on the market. On the other hand, these women presented a high level of creativity and widely commented that in fact they would buy some of these products but modify them according to their own needs, for example, by adding sleeves or elongating the shape of a garment. Overall, the

women commented that they did not feel there was anything that was entirely suitable for their bodies as presented to them in the magazines, and in fact they reported that they rarely buy fashion magazines themselves. Once again, this highlights the women's disconnection with fashion and clothing as produced and sold by the British fashion industry in the so-called "grey(ing) market". The final element of the workshop was to take detailed measurements of each participant (fig. 5).



Figure 5: Juliana Sissons taking measurements of one of the participants. ©Emotional Fit 2015

The accrued measurements have now been utilised in the second phase of the project (fig. 1) as data for the production of a series of bespoke pattern blocks, devised by Juliana Sissons, which will inform the development of experimental garment patterns and finally, womenswear prototypes co-designed by the researchers in collaboration with the group. The garment prototypes will be produced in different size groupings to accommodate individual members of the sample. As well as being produced in plain and textured fabrics; Katherine Townsend will lead on the development of a series of digital textile prints in which to sample selected garment prototypes. The printed garments will be designed using a simultaneous approach (Townsend 2004a) by generating imagery in response to the 3D garment silhouettes modelled on the (moving and still) women's bodies and by engineering prints within the 2D pattern pieces (Ibid). This way of working responds to the notion of the individual's form (and agency) being articulated through clothing and that this can be achieved more effectively through the sculptural integration of print and cut, image and cloth to 'contour' and enhance the physical characteristics of a woman's body (Ibid).

3.2 Workshop (I): findings

As stated in the Introduction, the research question we aim to answer in this project is: how can womenswear be designed more effectively to meet the physical and emotional requirements of an ageing female demographic. In order to fulfil our research objectives, a key aim is to explore the potential of communicating messages between the project participants (wearers) and the designers. Similarly, Press and Cooper (2003) identify three areas of design research: understanding of the phenomenon, generating ideas and proposing solutions. The role of Workshop (I) was precisely to allow us to understand the ageing phenomenon as experienced and interpreted by the participants. Furthermore, Lawson (2006, p.125) describes the design process as “endless” and claims that designing, unlike completing mathematical operations cannot have a predetermined end and, therefore, it should be described as overlapping loops repeated within time intervals allowing for analysis and reflection. Chapman (2015) Niedderer and Townsend (2014) also argue that in order to design longevity into products, we need to incorporate lasting emotional and material as well as physical perspectives. Adapting these models is a crucial aspect of the proposed research model, with the constant evaluation of findings informing the design practice, through the testing and sampling of the developing solutions.

In this vein Workshop (I) had an exploratory as well as generative purpose, and was designed to “allow the designer[s] to see and understand the relevance of objects in a user’s life from the participant’s point of view, to inspire design themes and insights” (Martin and Hannington, 2012, p.130). The gathered visual information i.e. photos and images (such as tear sheets from magazines), were captured and stored in the form of mood and ideas boards, to serve as a direct introduction to the practical work (toiles and prototypes), which seeks to address some of the participants key design needs and preferences.

3.3 Interviews

The first element of the second phase of study was to conduct five in-depth interviews with selected participants. The interviewees were randomly selected from the participants at Workshop (I), who declared their interest in being interviewed (table 1). The interviews were designed to be semi-structured, face-to-face informal conversations, “so that the rapport between researcher and informant will be enhanced, and that the corresponding understanding and confidence between the two will lead to in depth and accurate information” (Kumar, 2005, p.124). Moreover, these interviews, conducted by Ania Sadkowska, were devised to enable each participant to explicate in detail about their individual experiences of fashion and ageing.

Each interview was conversational in style and lasted between 60 and 80 minutes, was digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim with consent from each participant. The interview schedule consisted of 16 open-ended questions about different aspects of women’s experiences of fashion and clothing, to find out about the meaning of fashion in the participants’ lives, their shopping practices and future expectations of fashion. The

participants were also asked to describe critical occasions when they felt really good/ bad (positive/ negative) about the way they looked. Themes emerging from the transcribed interviews have been meticulously analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), to build on the cultural context via the personal histories and experiences of the participants, which will be used as inspiration to create fashion prototypes. To date analysis of the material gathered through the interviews has revealed various tensions in older women's perceptions of the current fashion and clothing system as well as contradictions regarding their expectations towards it.

3.4 Sense of belonging

To begin, the majority of the participants asserted that they felt privileged because of the generation they were part of. This was present in the narratives of all 5 participants who on numerous occasions highlighted the personal connections with certain fashion practices and behaviours originated in 1960s. Furthermore they felt extremely positive about certain British fashion designers who started their design brands in the 1960s and 1970s and are still present in the fashion market such as Vivienne Westwood and Paul Smith. From international designers two the most commonly mentioned were Yohji Yamamoto and Issey Miyake. Overall, the tone of these cultural connections was that some designers, perhaps due to their own ageing, could relate and therefore design garments more empathetically for older women. In contrast, other labels such as Biba were often discussed with considerable nostalgia. In the following extract Elizabeth (67) explains the importance of wearing some of these labels through her personal reflections:

“So it was the sixties (...) that is when it [fashion] started to really affect, yeah change people really. Yes, I can remember buying my first Biba outfit and my friend got married in Biba. So we were... and of course they had mail order then. Also there was only one Laura Ashley shop, and again at the time Laura Ashley was kind of fantastic. We went to London especially to go to the one Laura Ashley shop. Then when it kind of comes to opening in all of the towns it's not the same. It's like Next, once it started to open everywhere it wasn't as interesting. It then became stuff for the masses and it wasn't individual somehow. You had to look very hard to find individual things.”

What is compelling in this extract is a certain sense of a shared generational uniqueness as well personal sense of individuality experienced by Elizabeth from being a teenager in a period when developments in fashion were particularly dramatic. In this vein, further on in her interview she reflects: “I feel I have been very lucky that there has been Mary Quant and Vivienne Westwood and Paul Smith. (...) And I still think that man [Paul Smith] is a hero.”

Similar reflections were present in all interviews. Of particular importance, is the shift in cultural and social perceptions relating to how women should present themselves. This was strongly connected to the contemporary fashion solutions of the time, as Christine (65) explained:

“I suppose... Somebody like Mary Quant was quite important for my sort of generation. Because she introduced, I mean it came with the development of tights, I

think (laughs). You could wear, as I did, we could wear very short skirts and tights. And not feel as we were revealing everything. And she has, I think, introduced more the shift style.”

These extracts convey that the interviewees shared a strong generational sense of belonging. Furthermore they shared positive attitudes towards certain fashion designers who they witnessed developing their brands as well as to other designers who are no longer present in the market or have changed direction.

3.5 Fashion awareness

As well as discussing their past interest in fashion, all the interviewees expressed a strong current interest in fashion trends. However, this was often discussed in relation to their own bodily conditions such as height or weight. In the following extract Elizabeth (67) explains how she finds out about changing trends:

“I love to kind of look at fashion in magazines and even when it was the fashion show at the time. And I suppose you look and I was interested in what was translated too, from the catwalk into the everyday. And it’s interesting, and I like to read in the papers and magazines how people have taken things. And how they have translated it into more everyday things, and it can be colours, it can be shapes, and it could be hemlines. I find all of that very interesting. But I suppose I, being small and round I have never been a fashionable shape.”

A similar picture is presented by Christine (65) who explains that her own body type has become a lens through which she filters suitable fashion trends:

“So I have always looked at magazines, uhm, I have always been interested in what’s been in the shops, but, uhm. In my early days I didn’t have a lot of money and I have always been in a way conscious of my body type. So I think that is as much as anything, it’s my body type that has determined my interest in fashion.”

This type of a “targeted” fashion awareness where women exhibit a life-long interest in fashion allows them to not only understand their aesthetic preferences but also the impact of their physical condition on how clothing is presented on and through their body. Furthermore, this is critically important when it comes to developing any potential designs that target these groups of women because this evidenced a clear understanding of their “dressed body” type (Entwistle, 2002, p. 133).

3.6 Bodily changes

Another important theme that emerged from the interviews analysis was the bodily changes occurring to and affecting women’s self-esteem (Church-Gibson 2000) and sense of identity (Crane 2000) as they grow older. Interestingly, one of the most common comments in the interviews was of the specific social limitations linked to exposure of the mature female body. In the following extract Elizabeth (67), who elsewhere in her interview highlighted the importance of being influenced by Mary Quant and wearing mini skirts when she was younger, comments on the unsuitability of such solutions for older women, regardless of

their physiques, who can be perceived as “mutton dressed as lamb” by “trying look young and it doesn’t work.”

Similar opinions were shared by most of the participants. In the following extract, however, Christine (65) presents a slightly different point of view:

“I am dressing for my generation of women. Who are... not wanting to look young. But who just don’t want to abandon clothes, which are perhaps more youthful, yeah. So I mean, I probably do dress for my age now, because for example, uhm, I would like my arms covered up. I don’t tend to wear... although I could wear lower necks (...) I don’t like to show a lot of flesh, let’s put it like that. So I wouldn’t reveal a lot of flesh. Whether that’s dressing for my age, or just dressing for me.”

Interestingly, here Christine, again highlights the importance of a certain generational identity amongst women similar to her age and social norms relating to how they should dress their bodies (Entwistle and Wilson 2001). However, despite recognising certain social limitations as to what older women should and should not wear, Christine attempts to detach herself from being restricted in this way, by explaining her clothing choices in regards to her current lifestyle – that is, she “could wear lower necks”, but chooses not to.

3.7 Personal trajectories

The final theme, which emerged from this series of interviews, was the influence of personal trajectories on our participants’ current interest and engagement with fashion. The personal histories our participants shared with us differed significantly from each other. For example one woman had experienced serious health issues affecting what kind of clothing she preferred to wear to conceal changes to her body. Another participant discussed the significant impact that the death of her husband had on the way she chooses her clothes. In her interview she explained that she not only lost a great and dedicated clothing advisor in her husband, but also that now, as a widow she does not want to present herself as a woman “searching for a new husband”:

“It’s almost as if they [some of her female friends] think I’ll jump on their husbands or something and there is a bit of... I kind of feel I need to be a little bit more conservative about what I wear. I am not looking for anybody else and I don’t want people to even think that I am, I was very happy. So it’s a silly thing.”

Consequently, we argue that these personal trajectories are important when it comes to design for mature women, especially when the aim is to achieve a state of equilibrium: a sense of emotional fit between the design and the wearer.

3.8 Interviews: findings and implications

Following Workshop (I), the semi-structured in-depth interviews had an exploratory as well as generative purpose; designed to allow the researchers to understand the psychological aspects of how mature women experience fashion and clothing more deeply. The interviews revealed various tensions, as well as contradictions in relation to the participants’ fashion behaviours and practices. Firstly, all of the participants expressed a strong, common sense

of generational belonging, which clearly influenced their expectations, in terms of perceived connections with designers and the designing process, which they clearly valued. Based on this finding we plan to make our presence and motivations as designers as accessible as possible, working with the participants as our co-designers and potential wearers. This approach supports an emotionally durable design ethos, where products are often 'user tested' prior to production. It is also in line with bespoke or couture practice, but challenges commercial fashion design and production.

Secondly, the participants exhibited strong awareness of current fashion trends, however, always in relation to their own physiques. Again, this highlights the need to develop new fashion design methodologies and solutions that consider wearers unique bodily features more empathetically while considering contemporary cultural conditions. Many women expressed an interest in clothing that can potentially enhance the way they present their mature bodies rather than masking them or creating the false impression of being a younger age. Finally, it is worth re-iterating that all the interviewed women have had very different life courses resulting in unique value systems and expectations in regards to fashion and clothing. In order to be successful, the design process needs to acknowledge these personal trajectories within the constraints of the proposed research model (fig. 1).

4. Conclusion

In this paper we have presented and discussed the preliminary findings from the first two phases of the research project entitled "Emotional Fit: Mapping the Aging Female Form". The research question, which we aim to answer through this project, is: how can womenswear be designed more effectively to meet the physical and emotional requirements of an ageing female demographic. In this vein our aim is to explore mature women's relationship with fashion and clothing. The first two phases of this qualitative project involved a workshop (I): "Understanding" with participants (n=10) and a series of in-depth interviews (n=5). Workshop (II): "Knowledge Exchange" has now been conducted (July 2015) with similar and new participants (n=12) to accrue further individual measurements, test the fit of initial specialist sized blocks and toiles and to generate additional feedback and inform the developing fashion methodology through the ongoing co-designing process. Workshop (III): "Co-Designing" is scheduled to take place in April 2016.

The initial results of the project have allowed us to develop an in-depth understanding of how the participants in the study experience, practice and engage with fashionable clothing on a daily basis. Furthermore the utilization of an exploratory workshop and in-depth interviews as research methods, enabled us to discover the complex nature of the participants' experience. The two key aspects identified were related to the women's aesthetic expectations, often developed throughout their life-long interest in and engagement with fashion and clothing, as well as problems with sizing and fit. Our next step (phase 3) of the project will be to continue to utilize the gathered information and measurements and respond to it via creative fashion practice including techniques of

geometric pattern cutting, textile designs that respond to both garment and body shape, computerized and traditional fashion and textile crafting techniques. A collaborative, diffused design approach will support the ongoing research and subsequent outcomes through a further workshops and a dissemination event presented to other researchers and key industry stakeholders. The originality of the research methodology and its potential innovative outcomes lies in its merging of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA); the analysis of the women's lived experience of fashion, with a simultaneous fashion and textile design approach, that holistically considers not only the size, but the physical and emotional shape of mature women.

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