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In older men's wardrobes: Creative tales of affect, style and constraint

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Fashion in old age has been of increasing interest within various disciplines including social gerontology and fashion studies. However, there remains a scarcity of research concerning older men's everyday dress practices. This paper redresses this imbalance through a detailed exploration of the everyday dress practices of a group of three sartorially minded older men. A series of in-depth interviews revealed the conscious ways in which the men style themselves, the various constraints that structure their dress and above all, the men's emotional entanglements with their garments. The notion of wardrobe as a conceptual space (which is both mental and spatial) frames this study. Importantly, the older men's dress practices are considered as they contribute to and extend notions of everyday creativity. Typically, when creativity is considered amongst older people this has tended to focus on individuals who can be conventionally defined and socially labelled as 'creative' types (artists, musicians etc.). In contrast, this study helps to reveal the extent to which all aspects of social life, including the mundane act of dressing may involve creative practices. If creativity is de-coupled from 'high artistic achievement' we can begin to understand how all individuals possess diverse forms of creative potential and capacity.

Keywords: older men, wardrobe, everyday creativity, dress in later in life

Introduction

Although fashion scholarship still tends to focus on elite and glamorous topics, in the last two decades there has been increasing interest in the mundane, everyday and non-glamorous (e.g. Styles 2005; Woodward 2007; Twigg 2009, 2020; Miller and Woodward 2010; Buckley and Clark 2017). This trend parallels the growing interest amongst scholars of creativity in everyday expressions and manifestations of creativity (Benedek et al 2020, Silvia 2014, 2018). In this paper, we seek to contribute to both these bodies of literature, through the consideration of subtle forms of creativity expressed in and through the wardrobes of three London-based sartorially minded older men.

In our small-scale study, we understand the wardrobe as a micro-sociological space in which

various creative acts may happen. We therefore recognise that creativity need not be confined to high level artistic achievement (Amigioni and McMullan 2019), and that dress practices are a significant, vibrant and revealing area of study that can provoke new insights concerning the nature and role of creativity in later life. By bringing the study of wardrobes and the study of creativity together, we seek to provide new ways of understanding each.

In the following section, we discuss the conceptual nature of the wardrobe as recognised by fashion scholars before us, and then expand our discussion with relevant literature concerned with creativity. Thereafter, we cover relevant aspects of the (relatively limited) literature on older men, dress and fashion. Wardrobe studies as a methodological orientation, and wardrobe interviews as a method, will be discussed in the following section outlining our research methods and introducing our informants. After that, we present our data and findings in three empirical sections, before some concluding thoughts and suggestions.

The Wardrobe and Creativity

Wardrobe is more than a material space that stores and guards material objects; it is a space that is both intimate and publicly oriented, both purposefully organized and allowing for imagination. It brings together different elements of engagement with garments, which Cwerner (2001, 82) defines as "consumption, organization, individualization, care, and imagination".

Wardrobe practices consist of "a set of distinctive and identifiable *spatial practices*: forms of structuring, delimiting, and organizing clothes, as well as the social meanings and identities articulated by these forms" (Cwerner 2001, 80, emphasis in original). Wardrobe, like any space, is physical as well as psychological and social (Almila 2020). It consists both of garments, and of those practices that create and maintain an individual's garment collection. The wardrobe is about rationalizing the domestic space – ordering, simplifying, and optimizing. It is one of the most intimate areas of domestic space, with a potential for hiding and protecting – a place for keeping secrets, too (Bachelard 1994[1958]). At the same time, "[t]he wardrobe articulates, both spatially and temporally, a set of material and symbolic practices that are fundamental for the constitution of selfhood, identity, and well-being" (Cwerner 2001, 80).

Wardrobe can be seen as a space of self-construction through fashion, involving "choice, diversity, individuality, experimentation" (Cwerner 2001, 81). And the wardrobe is also biographical, containing garments that are no longer worn – although these garments may become "active" again when circumstances change. Wardrobe often encompasses "particular biographies that emphasize significant moments and dimensions of the life-course: birthdays, engagements, various relationships and rites of passage" (87). In this manner, "the objects people store in their wardrobes connect their past, present and future ideas of self" (Skjold 2016, 136). Wardrobes therefore also have *temporal* qualities – involving connections between time past, present and future and the possibility of travelling in time across these dimensions.

Part of organising the wardrobe is that garments fit different categories and exist for different purposes and seasonal requirements, such as work, leisure, sport, summer / winter clothes and so forth. Garments can be seen as "critically filtered through various personal criteria by every single person, [such as] bodily comfort, dreams and aspirations, local norms and values, or societal structures" (Skjold 2016, 143). According to Cwerner (2001, 89),

> If fashion is about self-expression and identity formation, then the wardrobe symbolizes the processual nature of the effort: to create or present a self as a laborious and ambivalent process. The wardrobe reveals one's sartorial limitations and, as a consequence, the arbitrary nature of fashion and dress codes. But it also enables one's creativity and struggle to overcome the "tyranny" of fashion.

This understanding of creativity resonates with more recent emphases on everyday creativity, which, especially in relation to older people has been theorised as involving those ordinary practices, which use imagination, improvisation, and inventive problem-solving in order to navigate everyday life (Bellass et al 2018). Everyday creativity highlights that creativity occurs across many and varied domains of human experience, that it is a "distributed" process (Glāveneau, 2014), and that it is not limited to those activities that are usually seen as explicitly creative (Csikszentmihalyi 1996). There is also an important emphasis on the process of creativity which involves "continuous interplay" and its collective and interactive characteristics. Thus, creativity, like co-creativity, is understood to be

separate from the producers, that is, not located within any single individual (Zeilig et al 2019).

In this paper, to take a wide and inclusive definition of creativity, we turn to the work of Godart et al (2020, 14.1), who state that creativity is "an intentional configuration of cultural and material elements that is unexpected for a given audience". The sort of creativity we discuss here stresses the processual nature of the endeavour. Creativity, when seen as a process, is an ongoing, negotiated practice. The extent to which putting garments together results in "unexpected" configurations is moot, but this also perhaps leads to queries about whether everyday creativity necessitates the unexpected, or to what extent something would need to be "unexpected" to count as "creative".

Cwerner (see above) seems to suggest that creativity is a way of "overcoming" the "tyrannies" of fashion. Creativity has indeed been considered to be at odds with fashion, or fashionability, which involves levels of imitation (Simmel 1904), and can, at worst, be seen as a sort of victimhood (Schiermer 2010)? But Godart et al (2020, 14.4) argue that "there is no creativity without imitation" (echoing Stein's (1953) work on creativity, which involves a "reintegration of existing materials").

Another element of creativity is connected with intentionality, which indicates a degree of consciousness when engaging in creative process. This does not exclude elements of randomness and chance, and the play of the unconscious, that are all necessarily present in creative processes and outcomes. This kind of intention would also be present when choosing one's outfit in a "creative" manner. Most of us do not engage in creative dressing continuously or even often – we are likely to wear "safe" clothes out of habituation, or to go back to "trusted" garments for a sense of security (see e.g. Woodward 2007). But those "safe" combinations may still originally have been creatively put together. One's "style", that which one considers to be "me" in sartorial terms ("this dress is just me!"), is often result of a cumulative creative process. The audiences for this process are always varied. Dressing for different audiences requires a certain amount of creativity, too, especially if a level of unexpectedness for a particular audience is desired.

The creative use of wardrobe is driven by both constraints and enabling factors: wardrobe collection is a limited resource, created through (more or less) limited factors of what is available,

accessible, desirable for each individual (Almila 2018). Similarly, it has been argued that a certain level of evaluative restraint is necessary for guiding a creative process (Runco and Jaegar 2012), and in this sense, the wardrobe functions to frame and guide individual creativity. Moreover, while the ways of putting garments and accessories together are practically endless, social and pragmatic notions restrain such assemblages.

Looks are rarely bought "ready" but are instead "created through novel combinations of what people already owned […] or as old items are recombined with newly purchased ones" (Woodward 2014, 133). Garments that are not any more or less "creative" than other garments may be used in ways considered to be creative, or the process of putting garments together may be creative in itself. The wardrobe can therefore be understood as a realm in which creative processes may happen, for it allows for a variety of different creative responses to situations. This kind of creativity is characterised by the ability to assemble dress, involving all sorts of combinations.

According to this understanding of creativity, the dressing individual operates within a network of people and objects, as well as within their personal wardrobe space, which facilitates levels of autonomy and individuality, and yet at the same time constrains free self-expression and presentation. These are the elements of "imagination" and "experimentation" connected with wardrobe, pointed towards by Cwerner. Wardrobe is built through creative practices, and in its turn enables everyday creativity, too.

Older Men, Dress and Fashion

Older men and their relationship with fashion and clothing is still a relatively underexplored field of inquiry (Simpson and Littrell 1984; Sadkowska et al 2015; Twigg 2020). There are a number of reasons for this neglect, which are connected with the gendered development of fashion, stereotypical views of men as not caring about their appearance, and the tendency to overlook older men even within social gerontological research (Bennett 2007; Edwards 2011; Frith and Gleeson 2004; Sadkowska et al 2015; Twigg 2020). As has been noted elsewhere, it has taken some time for scholars to come to the realisation that old men, as well as women "have gender" (Hoonaard 2007). In addition, the majority of work on masculinity has tended to overlook the experiences of older men

(Calasanti and King 2005). The resulting difficulty for older men is that they can experience a certain anomie due to the lack of a "masculinity script" that fits their experiences as increasingly vulnerable, ageing men (Hoonaard 2007, 278). After all, old age challenges hegemonic notions of masculinity. As Calasanti (2004) argues, dominant masculinity is associated with strength, wealth and emotional self-control. However, as it is constructed in Western Europe, old age is more closely associated with loss of strength, control and independence. Therefore, as Bennett (2007, 348), states "older men are already seen as 'Other'".

Consequently, there is a paucity of work on a whole range of experiences that older men may encounter, from widowhood, to grandfathering and caregiving. Particularly pertinent here is their engagement with their bodies and with dress. This follows partly from a bias persisting in fashion scholarship more generally towards female fashions and certain kinds of male fashions only, such as youth subcultures (Hebdige 1979), dandies (Wilson 1985; Edwards 1997) and suits (Breward 2016). The first male-oriented fashion journal, *Critical Studies in Men's Fashion*, only launched in 2014, while "general" fashion journals very much still reflect the general gender bias of fashion studies. This article seeks to redress this imbalance.

Methods and Informants

We chose our informants according to the principle introduced by Hennion (2007) in terms of understanding experiences of listening to music: one must ask the lover, the enthusiast of music, in order to fully understand the effect and affect of music. Therefore, we asked fashion-oriented men. While our sample of three sartorially minded older men is obviously limited, the interview data we collected during long wardrobe interviews is rich and illuminative. We use it here to make some points relevant and interesting for fashion scholarship, rather than to claim any wider representative significance.

The three men we interviewed are all white, married, middle class and relatively affluent. They are all based in South-East London and worked in white-collar professions. Anthony[i], at 80 years, is the oldest of our informants and has been retired for over a decade. Arthur and Bill are both in their early 70s. Arthur has recently returned to work in the financial sector as a consultant three

days a month, whilst Bill continues to lecture in fashion-related studies at a UK-based university. They are all still active, connected with their families and with lively social lives. Bill is also an artist, a maker of jewellery and sculpture, and Arthur in his later life has found time to pursue his love of painting. Although Anthony did not self-identify as being "creative", his interest in cooking and love of classical music and theatre going connect him to cultural and creative aspects of life.

As emerges in our discussion of the themes below, Arthur has an unbridled enthusiasm for clothes from purchasing to wearing them – his identity is clearly linked with his dress. Bill and Anthony have a more complex relationship with both fashion and the visual presentation of themselves. However, for each of the three older men, clothing is also a creative practice that is associated with emotion, a conscious styling of the self and the negotiation of certain constraints.

We found our informants using a targeted snowball technique through our pre-existing networks. Each interview took place in the informant's home, with both of the researchers present. The interviews took between 2 and 3 hours to conduct, were recorded, anonymised and then transcribed fully. One of the researchers also took notes during the interviews. The interviews were semi-structured, where a list of questions was followed flexibly. Part of the interviews took place within the interviewee's wardrobe space[ii] where we looked at garments in the older men's wardrobes whilst exploring a range of topics related to their dress practices, creativity and ageing (Lövgren 2016).

As in earlier work examining clothing and creativity for older women (Zeilig and Almila 2018), the interviews were analysed using a form of emergent thematic analysis. This is a form of content analysis that is more concerned with patterns than frequency, and which uses empirically emergent rather than theoretically generated themes (Dodds et al 2008; Searing and Zeilig 2017,=; Zeilig et al 2018). The analysis is not about quantity, as ours is a small-scale qualitative enquiry, but about the richness of the data gathered. As an essential part of this process, the interviews were transcribed and uploaded into Atlas.ti – qualitative software that was used to assist in the coding of the interviews.

Each interview transcript was coded individually – resulting in a total of 142 separate codes

relating to the men's clothing and dress practices. These codes were then discussed and checked by the researchers who merged and refined them. For example, there were a series of codes relating to ageing (including adaptation, age, age related changes, clothes and youth) and these were merged into a single code "age". The coded interviews were read by both authors and in an iterative and discursive process the two investigators, the codes were arranged into code groups and then further into three main themes which are discussed below: "styling and assembling", "affect and engagement" and "possibilities and constraint".

Styling and Assembling Appearance

Each of the men we discuss here take explicit interest in, and care of, their appearance, and so do not conform to popular stereotypes of older men supposed to be indifferent to how they look. Nonetheless, none of our interviewees has a simple or uncomplicated relationship to fashion. This may be because fashion's relationship with masculinity has been awkward, especially in more recent history (Edwards 1997). Contradictions associated with male fashion are likely to invoke the ambivalence that was expressed by all of the men about fashion itself. Notwithstanding the uncertainty in terms of how they relate to the mores of fashion, each interviewee had a strong interest in the active way in which clothing could be used to assemble desirable appearances, and they were comfortable when discussing details of their garments, such as cut, colour, design and fabric. Indeed, the careful way in which each of our interviewees managed their appearances, the intentionality of their visual presentation and, allied to this, their self-surveillance was notable.

We pay attention here to how these men assemble their appearances – the ways in which clothing is chosen by them, their awareness of certain brands and garments, how it expresses and facilitates the performance of identity and age, and is intentionally used by the men for this purpose, and how clothing is worn by them. Assembling can be understood to happen at two levels: when shopping, an individual is assembling a wardrobe; when dressing, he assembles an appearance. An important part of the assemblage is the individualisation of clothing (Cwerner 2001), that is, how a garment is combined with other clothes and accessorised. These are all factors contributing to the ways in which our interviewees consciously construct and style their appearance.

The men were aware of and had an interest in the design and provenance of their clothing. Anthony mentioned "Paul Smith" clothing and Bill referred to having purchased a "Peter Christian" suit. However, brand-awareness was most striking in the case of Arthur, whose sense of style was explicitly informed by certain brands and retailers: he shops at "Boss predominantly", and "otherwise Reiss. I get some things in Marks & Spencer, sensible things. Mainly those stores actually. I rarely go elsewhere, as you'll notice from my wardrobe". The brands Boss and Reiss did indeed dominate Arthur's wardrobe (although his painting clothes were from Marks & Spencer) and they seem to have become part of his identity.

In contrast, Bill stressed his complicated relationship with the fashion industry, how it is an "unsustainable model" noting that "the idea that something … would be artificially made obsolete and then a new offering be made in order to sustain an entire industry seems to me to be fundamentally destructive" – hence his preference for eschewing "normal" retail situations by shopping in second-hand stores and charity shops. Bill nonetheless displayed knowledge about and interest in the make and style of garments. His considered accumulation of clothes from charity shops, in which he spends lengthy periods of time searching for the right pieces, represents as conscious a form of wardrobe-building as Arthur's identification with certain brands.

Both brands and specific kinds of garments were also associated with age in various ways. For Arthur, Hugo Boss represents high quality design combined with a youthfulness that is appealing:

> I like the style of clothes in Boss and they're younger than I am so they attract me for that reason. One tries to stay young. [...] The clothes are trendy, as opposed to […] other stores where you're looking at more middle-aged clothes designed for people of 70 or whatever, 60 or 70.

Unlike the men in Twigg's (2020, 113) study, most of whom "denied that age was relevant at all", Arthur does see dress through the lens of age, citing an explicit connection between his choice of clothing and its youthful associations. This also forms an interesting contrast to research on older women and their clothing, which suggests women may be "haunted" by the dangers of wearing clothes that are "too young" (Twigg 2013), and that older women certainly do not use clothing to

appear younger (Zeilig and Almila 2018), as that might be socially risky behaviour.

Arthur, who is in his early 70s, deploys clothing as a direct and unembarrassed means of styling himself younger. He will positively avoid a "buttoned-up cardigan", as this is the sort of garment that he thinks one would expect to see "on a 70 or 80-year-old". Similarly, Anthony, who is in his 80s, notes that he associates jeans with a certain youthfulness: "there are friends and acquaintances […] who would never be seen in a pair of jeans, and I wear them when I go out with [these people]. I think it keeps one young. Why do you have to adapt?"

It is notable here that resistance to "adapting" takes somewhat different forms for these men, than it did for the older women we have discussed in an earlier study (Zeilig and Almila 2018). While one of the women in question cried "What does it matter now [what other people think]?" when discussing her dress choices, her exclamation did not concern "dressing young". Instead, her sense of liberty had more to do with becoming differently visible than she had been in her younger days. Therefore, the liberties the women were connected to creating a personalised appearance and avoiding the "invisibility" often imposed upon women in old age. For these men instead, there is a subtle resistance to ageing appearance in itself, through a continuity of garment choices and appearance and avoidance of garments they associate with older age.

Therefore, these older men are using clothing as means of deliberately resisting ageing, eschewing dress that is identifiably appropriate for older age groups. As noted in Twigg's (2020, 115) study on older men, engagement with dress might also be seen as a "form of self-respect, in face of the potential erosions of age". However, there are more tensions and complexity for Anthony in the relationship between his style and his age. He notes that his attitude "to what clothes I buy or wear is no different to what it was 30 years ago", stressing the stability in his appearance, and he insists that: "I have no intention of adapting my clothes to my age". And yet, at the beginning of the interview, Anthony described adaptations to his footwear as a result of the osteoarthritis that he now has. Consequently, whilst clothing for both Arthur and Anthony is partly about the preservation and maintenance of a youthful identity – and is thus a form of resistance – for Anthony, it also involves a confrontation with and need to manage and adjust to the physical process of ageing.

Whilst Bill did not discuss his clothing in terms of age-related norms, he openly reflected on the way in which he likes to put things together and the underlying aesthetic guiding his style:

I find myself being very finicky about certain things, like I will never wear a V-neck under a round-neck although the reverse is okay […]. So obviously, there is some aesthetic operating here but I don't know why that is, I couldn't tell you where that rule comes from.

This sense of having an individual aesthetic that informs the ways in which clothes are put together and chosen was evident for each of the men interviewed. This was perhaps above all apparent in their interest in matching garments and, linked with this, their use of colour and accessories. As Arthur showed us and discussed items in his wardrobe, he regularly paused to highlight how they work together: "This belt actually matches those shoes in there. If you wear a blue shirt then you wear blue laces. If you don't, then you change your laces".

He expresses a clear imperative concerning the need to attend to detail, and this also allows insight into the time and care that Arthur invests in constructing his appearance, which is carefully curated. Similarly, Anthony emphasised the importance of "things looking good together, matching" and agreed that this was something that he took into "consideration" – also double-checking with his wife if an outfit matches. Yet he stated that this is not connected with what other people think: "I don't give a damn what people think about what clothes I wear". To some extent, Anthony illustrates the male conundrum in relation to clothing and dress – whereby societal norms indicate that although men can be interested in clothes they should not be overly concerned with their appearance or look (Edwards 1997).

Arthur, who may be characterised as the "dandy" of the three men, given his unabashed and flamboyant interest in clothing, was, perhaps unsurprisingly, the most eloquent about the importance of accessorising outfits. He referred to his "array" of pocket handkerchiefs, matching shoes with belts, coordinating watches with suits, and ensuring that ties match shirts: "If I buy a new shirt and I think it's a different colour [from what I already have], then I look for a tie that goes with it at the same time".

There is a playful quality to Arthur's interest in accessories – which extends to the enjoyment

of finding a "tie" that goes with a certain shirt and the pleasure of creating and then wearing an outfit. Bill, too, used colourful shoelaces to customise his footwear, and expressed pleasure in his extensive hat collection, eagerly noting their subtly different styles, their age and good quality. In her study, Twigg (2020) also draws attention to men's interest in small details of dress. Indeed, attention to detail in male dress has a distinguished legacy. For instance, it is well documented that the iconic Beau Brummel, an arbiter of men's fashion in Regency England, was known for his attention to detail, with the intention of not seeming to have worked hard to have assembled his appearance (Edwards 1997).

Affect, Engagement and the Life of a Garment

Clothing helps to constitute identity not solely in relation to how it is worn and used to create style and appearance, but also, and importantly, in the feelings that it arouses. For each of the older men interviewed, the emotional qualities of clothing were evident, and they talked about certain items almost reverently. The men were also profoundly engaged with their clothes in terms of the meanings attached to these. If the wardrobe can be understood as a space that is simultaneously mental and spatial, so clothing also exists across several dimensions, containing as it does material, psychological and biographical elements (Almila 2018, 2020).

For our informants, there was also a visceral pleasure and fun to be had in the idiosyncratic details of dress. Thus, Arthur proudly showed off the lining in a reversible coat – "You can turn it inside out. That's fantastic, that is!" – and the elbow patches on a jacket. Although the fun to be had from clothing has been discussed in relation to older women (Lövgren 2014; Zeilig and Almila 2018), it has not been considered in connection with the way in which older men interact with their clothing, which was certainly a feature for these interviewees. The way in which clothing is actually worn can be fun – so Bill enthusiastically outlined the conscious way in which he wears some hats "with the brim up" as a means of creating a "gormless" look, or as he put it, a "disguise". As noted above, the ways in which these men put outfits together, paying attention to small details and creating novel combinations on a regular basis, exemplifies a process of ongoing creative engagement that is facilitated by dress.

It was also apparent that particular garments captured aspects of the men's lives and that their clothes are redolent of who they were in the past, as well as of who they are in the present. Clothing could also provoke feelings about *possible* selves. Thus, for instance, Bill wistfully introduced us to the "fancy" hat that he never wears but appreciates, an aspirational item, something that encapsulates an image that Bill is unwilling to relinquish. Similarly, Arthur displayed the numbers of cufflinks in his possession associated with formal and sporting events which are now increasingly rare occasions.

Dressing for these older men can therefore also be understood as a deeply personal process imbued with underlying emotion. Consequently, in our interviews, a shirt, hat or jacket, for instance, was quickly able to conjure stories and personal histories. These fragments of narratives emerged as the men reflected on the garments that they still have, but no longer wear regularly:

> I obviously remember this one from racing. I remember buying it when I was in Nottingham in a Cromby shop. That one I bought in Selfridge's. I can remember the origin of them and why I bought them. That was to go to a party. You can see it's got three buttons so it's out of date. Really, I was thinking of actually discarding that one now. It's not as important to me as the other old two. See I'm running out of space. (Arthur)

As Arthur recalls the place and the shops where he bought certain items and the specific occasion they were for, he observes that some garments are more important than others, and this may be connected with the associations they contain. Perhaps most notably, when Arthur refers to each garment's "origin", he is suggesting that a garment has a life, a purpose and a history that can be traced. Moreover, the life of a garment, in Arthur's case, is inextricably connected with the life and biography of the person who owns the garment (unlike in the case of Bill, who likes buying second-hand garments and can appreciate the life of a garment "before himself", as we will see below).

An impression that specific items of clothing may have their own existence – one that is both linked to the life of the wearer and also separate from it – is also explicitly mentioned by Anthony: "Now here's a shirt that I love but it's near the end of its life". Talking about another garment that has been retained over decades he notes, only half joking: "I'd have to have a special ceremony to get rid of it". This strong sense of attachment to certain clothes, especially those that are no longer

worn but still kept, was expressed by all the interviewees. Bill fondly observed about several Hawaiian shirts that he has kept for years yet rarely wears: "but some of these are masterpieces, these are really good. I guess it's a beautiful piece of fabric".

Each of the men talked about the importance of fabric, which formed an integral part of how they chose their clothing – equal in importance to the cut and appearance of a garment. Indeed, the quality of fabric was most marked for Bill in his charity shopping, when he revealed that he is something of a connoisseur in relation to material:

> I'm pretty attentive to good fabrics so I can touch something and tell you how much polyester is in it and not buy that. So, cottons and wools and those sorts of things, I think it's that that's the main issue.

The haptic quality of clothing was identified as a central part of its style, and closely associated with clothing feeling right and comfortable. So, Anthony mentioned how he dislikes "rough material" and materials "that get flaky" and Bill reflected on the soft nutria and beaver fur of some of his hats.

Bill also talked about a favourite Harris Tweed suit as an almost animate object which will "achieve" a "polished" look when it gets old – and for him it was even preferable, when possible, to buy a second-hand garment that already has that look. Thus, clothing is not simply a useful, functional covering for these men, but is also valuable because it contains and even animates a multiplicity of meanings, which are live and deeply resonant for the men. As expressed by Arthur when discussing an old suit:

> I think I wore it at four weddings and a funeral. I got to that count and I never wore it after that because [of] its three buttons [being out of trend]. It's a top range Zegna suit. I can't bring myself to throw away what probably was £1,000 worth of suit. As I say, I just can't throw it away.

While cost is part of what makes this garment valuable, for Arthur this is almost an afterthought, the suit's real value residing in the accumulation of layers of experiences. Likewise, Bill reflects when asked what characterises a favourite hat: "I don't know, it probably has associations from…". The garments conjure and hold the vicissitudes of the men's lives in distinctive, material ways, and this

is an essential part of what constitutes a favourite item. This recalls the biographical function of the wardrobe (Cwerner 2001), which contains garments that are no longer worn but have the potential to become "active" again. Our research suggests the significance of different kinds of positive emotions and associations (and therefore attachments) associated with choosing to keep garments – an affective aspect that risks being especially overlooked when discussing men, and perhaps older men in particular.

The intrinsic association of clothing with temporality for older women has been discussed elsewhere (Twigg 2013; Zeilig and Almila 2018). The inherently time-bound nature of clothing was also apparent for these older men, and this characterised their engagement with their clothing. However, the relevance of time for the older men was less connected with the temporal restraints of fashion or ageing than for women (Zeilig and Almila 2018, 139), and more about the ability of clothing to hold and recall past meanings. The value of the men's clothing therefore resides in the way in which it is a repository for embodied memories and feelings which are held and preserved by the garment, and primarily relevant to the individual. Although their clothes may have changed over time – Arthur in particular notes that he is acutely aware of when fashions alter, and is responsive to this – simultaneously the clothing itself represents an important continuity. This continuity is both in terms of tangible items of clothing that have been retained over decades – as Arthur observed of his racing jackets, "they're [racing jackets] 20 years old now" – but also and primarily as an enduring source of identity and meaning: "I've always had a huge collection of trousers and clothes of all colours and varieties so nothing has changed other than trends and styles" (Arthur).

Clothing for these men is part of their meaningful self-construction, it represents continuing attitudes and practices linked with their identity and the continuity thereof. Correspondingly, many of the separate items of clothes that these older men showed us, including cashmere jumpers, jackets and hats, are more than simply an item of clothing or accessory, rather, they are representative of particular times, and are inextricably linked with a distinct occasion and even with the past retail experience.

All the men also demonstrated their engagement with their clothing in the way in which they

cared for, stored, and even kept items, despite these being no longer worn. Arthur took time during the interview to explain how he stored his clothes so as to keep them in good condition. As he excitedly delved into his wardrobe, during our interview, he became particularly animated when discussing the care he takes of his clothes:

> These are jumpers, cardigans, as you can see, apart from those that are in the cleaners. […] As you can see, it's been cleaned and not worn since. What else is there? There is a jumper that I keep hung up here because I like it. I don't like it to go out of shape. It's on two hangers to keep its shape. That's great. […] What's this one? That's the dinner suit. I try to keep everything in bags.

Similarly, Anthony stated with pride that one of his sweaters had lasted at least eight years, commenting: "I look after my clothes, they last a long time".

The meticulous care given to cleaning and storing their clothes and the pride with which the men highlighted this, demonstrated that for them clothing was no flippant matter – on the contrary it is a rather serious issue. Caring for their clothing is an important part of their involvement, not only with their clothes, but also with themselves. These scrupulous practices of care challenge stereotypes of men who invest little in their appearance (Frith and Gleeson 2004), and the typical gendered patterns of garment maintenance (Cwerner 2001, 88), instead revealing the intensive work that these older men do to create and maintain their appearances.

Possibilities and Constraints of the Wardrobe

When assembling their wardrobes, the men also carefully organised and arranged their garment collections. In particular, Arthur and Anthony's wardrobes were thoughtfully ordered spaces in which clothes were graded according to careful systems of colour, function and brand. Although Bill's wardrobe was less clearly structured, he had particular places for his hat collection and his Hawaiian shirts, which were carefully stowed. For each of these men then, the wardrobe was at once an intimate biographical space (Cwerner 2001) but also one which (through its orderly collection of personal garments) facilitated the daily presentation and styling of appearance, thus creating pragmatic possibilities for dress assemblage. The wardrobe, therefore, can also be seen as a collection

elaborately put together by an individual, and a space of opportunities for possible assemblages of garments, that at the same time sets the material limits for an individual's self-expression. In other words, it is a space of and for creativity. In such a frame, it can be observed that although dress and dressing for these older men is full of possibility, part of their creative engagement with dress also involves an acute awareness of its restrictions, which guides the processes of their dressing.

For example, Anthony notes that "I remember years ago, when it was fashionable to wear flared trousers, I never wore them. I've always felt short people can't wear flares. It doesn't look good". Bodily restrictions were familiar to Bill, too, if differently. He described the dilemmas of finding suitable clothes already as a teenager: "the challenge was that at 13 I was 6 feet and 1 inch tall so there was all of this effort to try to get something on me". His "fairly affluent" parents took him to shop in a place he did not particularly like, but understood to be a solution to the challenge of his tallness.

Equally pertinent were the subtle restrictions imposed upon these men by social conventions and relationships. For example, Arthur is very confident in terms of experimenting and playing with colour: his wardrobe includes bright shirts, burgundy, pink and green trousers. However, he was clear that he would avoid "something really patterned and pink" that would maybe "look gay", and that when working in the city, black was the most appropriate colour for both shoes and suits. There are therefore strict limits to Arthur's engagement with colour, a sense of propriety about when it should be used. Bill, too, indicated his enjoyment of a dash of colour – pointing this out in his Hawaiian shirts – but emphasised his general avoidance of colourful clothes "because I don't particularly want to call attention to myself, and that's the fastest way to do it. So, if I arrived in a place wearing a yellow suit, I won't do that".

Anthony outlined his preference for subdued hues, such as blue, grey and black, noting that he doesn't feel "comfortable" in bright colours. Although Anthony indicated he has never felt comfortable in bright colours, this lack of ease in vivid colours also echoes normative cultural associations of old age with muted drab colours (Twigg 2013; Lövgren 2014), which is interesting given his relative resistance to age norms discussed above. Moreover, the older men's circumspect

use of colour (in contrast to the way some older women experiment with and relate to colour – Zeilig and Almila 2018) to some extent reflects the tendency for male clothing to remain removed from attention, comment or self-consciousness (Twigg 2020, 109). It seems that even for those men who pay close attention to their appearance, there are nevertheless some rigid boundaries they do not dare to cross – or perhaps do not even thinking of crossing. Thus, although moments of colour and pattern in clothing is acceptable (particularly for Arthur and Bill), this should not be excessive or too attention-grabbing. Therefore, colour is a feature of clothing that is both enabling (expressive of individuality and positivity) and restrictive.

Each older man's wardrobe was structured according to the specific role of the garments and their perceived appropriateness for certain contexts. Arthur was most articulate about how his choice of clothing is linked with certain activities or events, and that he selects his dress "depending on what (he) is doing":

> If I'm not going to work, I just put some trousers on, the likes of these, and a shirt and a jumper, or a t-shirt and a jumper, or whatever. I look in the wardrobe and whatever takes my fancy. If I'm doing any painting downstairs, […] then I put some old clothes on.

Although he claims here to simply look in the wardrobe and wear whatever "takes his fancy", the daily act of dressing for Arthur is clearly not just based on whim or fancy, but rather is much more considered and deliberate, depending on what might be happening in the day. As noted, Arthur has a carefully structured wardrobe comprising clothes for painting, social clothes (with a myriad of different connotations), and work suits. As he emphasised, "I've got something for every occasion I think". For Arthur, then, clothes have very clearly defined functions. For instance, black shoes are most appropriate in the city, whereas blazer and trousers are fine for sporting events. Thus, the way in which he styles himself is strongly dependent on context and on a potential audience. He considers the way in which one styles one's appearance to have significant implications concerning how other people perceive oneself: "Appearance is half the battle in life. If you turn up at a business meeting and you're looking the bee's knees then people think you know what you're talking about, whether you do or don't".

This notion that clothes have a particular social and communicative functions is discussed by Twigg (2020, 115) as a process of ensuring that there is a correctness in dress. Although there is dispute as to how fluent a mode of communication dress can be (see Carter 2012), it is undeniable that garments, dress assemblages, and appearance carry meaning, and are interpreted by their beholders. No matter how much an individual might insist they do not care what others think about their clothes, they nevertheless must be aware of others' eyes on their appearance.

For Bill and Anthony, clothing is not so directly tied to particular activities, but there are nonetheless notions of what is suitable or appropriate in their appearance. Anthony indicated that he had certain trousers, which he considered more appropriate for going to the theatre, and Bill said that he takes into consideration how he might appear in public: "There will be levels of tidiness, things like holes and things and stuff don't bother me particularly, but if I'm going to go out in public I'll wear the stuff that doesn't have holes in it".

In these discussions concerning the role of clothing, when it is worn and what should be worn on particular occasions, it became evident that as much as creating appearance is about independence and self-expression, it also happens within a frame of social expectations, which inevitably put restraints on an individual's garment choices. Individual expression in particular may become diminished for older men, as age challenges hegemonic forms of masculinity, and older men slowly become "othered" (Calsanti 2004; Bennett 2007). However, in their creative interactions with clothing and their wardrobes, older men not only exert some control over appearance management, and independence in terms of some social norms, but they also take pleasure in the fun to be had from their garments.

A further interesting, and highly gendered, element of these men's dress choices was the influence of their wives (see also Skjold 2017, 24). All of them mentioned their wife in some context, whether that be in relation to shopping – Anthony noted that his wife tries to get him shopping more often, but he is "happy with my clothes" – or the wives' views as to what the husband should wear. Anthony also gets encouragement to wear certain garments from his wife, who "always says, 'Why don't you wear that? It's such a beautiful pattern'", whereas Bill explains: "I have Hawaiian shirts,

which I hardly ever wear because my wife can't stand them". In Arthur's case, he admitted of one of his garments that "[my wife] doesn't know I've bought it". Their wives are both an audience for their clothes, offering help in the ongoing care of their clothing, as well as, often, constraining presences. Just as wardrobes are both intimate and social, appearance-building is a process which is both highly personal, and also a shared endeavour. Similarly, creativity – especially in later life, can be understood as combining relational, aesthetic and processual elements (Kontos and Grigorovich 2018).

The idea that others dress one, or even that one needs (physical) assistance with dress is particularly demeaning, and associated with what has been termed the "'fourth age": a period characterised by dependency, decrepitude and death (Gilleard and Higgs 2014). It is important to stress that these men are still in control of their appearances, that they are not at the fragile stage of later life, and that their wives are onlookers rather than helpers. While all three men are aware of the "gaze" of their wives, they express their agency and ongoing creative engagement with life through being very much in control of their individual dress practices.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have approached older men's wardrobes in light of styling and assembling, affect and engagement, and possibilities and constraints involved in the processes of choosing outfits. We have argued that these processes are creative in multiple ways and that, thereby, the wardrobe is a space of creativity, as well as being pragmatic and organised. By exploring the intimate and emotional connections that older men may have with their clothing, we have drawn attention to elements of male dress and dressing that fashion scholarship is often prone to neglect.

By using the micro-sociological concept of wardrobe as a frame to understand everyday dress and fashion, we have contributed to scholarly understanding of dress practices of older men in their complexity. We have drawn upon scholarship on age and ageing, acknowledging the importance of materiality and affect. Our work therefore contributes to the increasing interest in materiality within age studies, that is, the ways in which material objects such as clothes, operate within the social world (Twigg 2020). Through our focus on creativity in the dress practices of older men, we also respond

to a recent call for sociology to consider creativity in more detail, as an everyday practice that is connected with social processes (Godart et al 2020).

The interactions and engagement with their clothing that the older men expressed may be understood as ongoing interplay of various constraints (what is available within an individual's wardrobe and also socially acceptable) and also as intentional (throughout the interviews the older men demonstrated the conscious ways in which they style themselves). As emerged from a recent study on older women, creativity and dress practices (Zeilig and Almila 2018), the importance of the everyday contexts that may influence creativity and the expression of this, is apparent also in connection with the dress practices of these older men. The insights gleaned from our study support an understanding of creativity as a multi-faceted aesthetic and material process which may involve imitation, the reconfiguration and combination of elements, such as garments and accessories. It is also notable how such processes are intertwined with pleasure and emotional affectivity for men as much as for women. This is an aspect we strongly suggest has not received its due attention in previous fashion scholarship.

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[i] The names are pseudonyms chosen by the informants.

[ii] It is worth noting here that our interview technique was much looser than that promoted by Skjold (2016, 2017), for our research interests were also different from hers. We were interested in how the men themselves engaged with their garments and their wardrobe, rather than the more prompting, biographical approach that Skjold has used in her work.