

**A Practice-Based Action Research  
Self-Study:  
“How do I improve my practice as a bridal  
gown designer in a highly competitive  
market?”**

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**Submitted in partial fulfilment for MTech Fashion  
at the Durban University of Technology**

**Supervisor : Mrs Lee Scott**

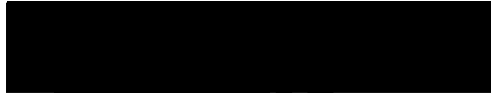
**Co-supervisor : Dr John Roome**

**2016**

**Declaration**

I, Casey Jeanne Walters, declare that this research project for the Degree of Masters of Technology Fashion, has not been submitted previously for a degree at the Durban University of Technology, or any other Institution or University, and that it is my own work in execution. Ideas, images, quotes and references taken from other authors have been credited to the best of my knowledge.

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## **Abstract**

In my practise-based action research self-study I have developed ways in which to improve my practice as a bridal-gown designer in a highly-competitive and import-driven bridal-gown market. My earnest intent was to improve my practice using action research methods whilst simultaneously developing a solution through critical reflection and practice-based approaches as an economically-sustainable designer of bespoke, cost-effective, competitively-priced bridal gowns. I realised the potential for professional influence and positive economic growth through entrepreneurial thinking, not only for me but for others; it was this which cemented a sense of values in me as an action researcher.

I have displayed a healthy marriage between equally important views of practice as theory and the theory as practice. I explored relevant literature that would validate my practice and aid in answering my critical questions, which became evident as validation chapters in my study. Carrying out internships with three bridal gown designers opened my eyes to the real world of business, a sense of theory as practice, where I could see, first-hand, the effects the import industry had on local designers and what they were doing to survive.

The conceptualisation of foundational bridal blocks was a solution to save time in my own creative process so that I could produce cost-effective bridal gowns at a competitive price, in a sustainable manner. Once I had explored and created my own interpretation of the foundation block concept that transformed into a small collection of bridal gowns, I used the foundation blocks as a starting point to design bridal gowns for 'real' bridal clients.

My study is personal in nature; by way of using self-study methods and also the personal 'one-on-one' connection I have with my 'real' bridal clients. I extended this 'personal factor' by holding a public exhibition to which I invited my friends, family, the public and my peers to view and give critical feedback on my work as a bridal gown designer.

# Table of Contents

<b>Chapter Title</b>	<b>Page</b>
Declaration	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Figures	xi
<b>Chapter One: My Study Unveiled</b>	
1.1 Inspiration: Stage one	1
1.2 Rationale	1
1.3 The context of the study and its significance: What are my values and why are my values relevant to my topic?	2
1.4 My world view and it's relevance to the study (paradigm)	4
1.5 The research problem	5
1.6 The aim of my study	5
1.7 Purpose	6
1.8 Critical questions	6
1.9 Limitations	6
1.10 Delimitations	7
1.11 Literature review	7
1.12 Conceptual framework	8
1.13 Research methodology	9
1.13.1 Self-study	9
1.13.2 Action research	10
1.13.3 Reflective-practice	10
1.13.4 Practiced-based research	10
1.14 Data collection, analysis, validation and credibility	11
1.14.1 Data collection	11
1.14.2 Analysis	13

1.14.3 Validation and credibility	14
1.15 Ethical considerations	14
1.16 Practical component - The story of my study	14
1.17 The structure of my dissertation	16

## **Chapter Two: Choosing The Fabric**

### **Practice As Theory And Theory As Practice**

2.1 Identification: Stage two	18
2.2 The history of the clothing and textile industry and the consequences of labour legislation in South Africa since 1994	18
2.3 Relevant entrepreneurial practices	21
2.4 Bridal gowns and their social meaning	25
2.5 Material culture and social comparison theory	27
2.6 The influence of Hollywood's red carpet events on a bride's choice of bridal gown	29
2.7 Social media and its relevance in the bridal industry	31
2.8 Concluding reflections	33

## **Chapter Three: A Bare Mannequin**

3.1 Conceptualisation: Stage three	34
3.2 What methodologies did I use and why did I use them?	36
3.2.1 Action research	36
3.2.2 Self-study	40
3.2.3 Reflective practice and the importance of being reflexive	41
3.2.4 Practice-based research	43
3.3 How did I collect my data?	44
3.3.1 Purpose of data collection	44
3.3.2 Tacit knowledge	44
3.3.3 Existing literature and research	45
3.3.4 Internships	45
3.3.5 The brides	46

3.3.6	Exhibition	46
3.3.7	Reflective and reflexive journal notes	46
3.4	Analysis and interpretation	47
3.5	Validation	47
3.6	Concluding reflections	51

## **Chapter Four: The Drafting (Internships)**

4.1	Exploration and refinement: Stage four	52
4.2	What is the importance of the methodology and methods used to gather my data?	52
4.2.1	Brown's seven questions	52
4.2.2	Informal, open-ended questions	53
4.2.3	Journaling	53
4.3	Lunar	54
4.3.1	What did I do?	54
4.3.2	Why did I do it?	57
4.3.3	What happened?	57
4.3.4	What do the results mean in theory?	58
a)	<i>Labour</i>	58
b)	<i>Entrepreneurship</i>	58
c)	<i>Hollywood influence</i>	58
4.3.5	What do the results mean in practice?	58
a)	<i>Labour</i>	58
b)	<i>Entrepreneurship</i>	59
c)	<i>Hollywood influence</i>	59
4.3.6	What is the key benefit for the readers?	59
4.3.7	What remains unresolved?	59
4.4	Biji Couture	60
4.4.1	What did I do?	61
4.4.2	Why did I do it?	62
4.4.3	What happened?	63

4.4.4	What do the results mean in theory?	63
	a) <i>Labour</i>	63
	b) <i>Entrepreneurship</i>	63
	c) <i>Hollywood influence</i>	63
4.4.5	What do the results mean in practice?	63
	a) <i>Labour</i>	63
	b) <i>Entrepreneurship</i>	63
	c) <i>Hollywood influence</i>	64
4.4.6	What is the key benefit for the readers?	64
4.4.7	What remains unresolved?	64
4.5	Kobus Dippennar	65
4.5.1	What did I do?	65
4.5.2	Why did I do it?	67
4.5.3	What happened?	67
4.5.4	What do the results mean in theory?	68
	a) <i>Labour</i>	68
	b) <i>Entrepreneurship</i>	68
	c) <i>Hollywood influence</i>	68
4.5.5	What do the results mean in practice?	68
	a) <i>Labour</i>	68
	b) <i>Entrepreneurship</i>	68
	c) <i>Hollywood influence</i>	68
4.5.6	What is the key benefit for the readers?	69
4.5.7	What remains unresolved?	69
4.6	Meta-reflections and the value of reflexivity	69
4.7	Conclusion	70

## **Chapter Five: The Toile (Foundation Blocks)**

5.1	Definition and modelling: Stage five	71
5.2	The application of theory to practice	73
5.3	Foundation blocks	74

5.3.1	What is a block?	74
5.3.2	What is a bridal block?	75
5.3.3	What silhouettes have become associated with my signature style as a bridal gown designer?	75
5.4	Tacit knowledge and reflective practice	75
5.4.1	Past experience	76
5.4.2	Internships	77
5.4.3	Online and social media	78
5.5	The process	82
5.5.1	Hollywood	82
5.5.2	Oscar	84
5.5.3	Vogue	86
5.5.4	Gala	88
5.5.5	Awards	89
5.6	Reflections and validation	91
5.7	Conclusion	91

## **Chapter Six: Tailoring The Couture (Brides)**

6.1	Communication: Stage six	92
6.2	Values, professionalism and the needs of a bride	94
6.3	Visual aids and the consultation process	95
6.4	Foundation blocks in action	97
6.4.1	Hollywood	97
6.4.2	Oscar	98
6.4.3	Gala	101
6.5	Reflections: Recognising the shortfalls of the Vogue and Awards foundation blocks	105
6.6	Before action and after action	106
6.7	Feedback	108
6.8	Conclusion	112

## **Chapter Seven: The Final Fitting (Exhibition)**

7.1	Final fitting: Stage Seven	114
7.2	Methods and methodology	116
7.3	How did I gather my data and select my evidence?	117
7.4	What tools did I use to evaluate the truth and comprehensibility of the exhibition?	119
7.5	What does this tell me about my practice? How does my practice generate my theory?	120
	7.5.1 Comments book	121
	7.5.2 Filmed documentation	122
	7.5.3 Feedback from the brides	124
	7.5.4 Comments made on social media	125
7.6	Synthesis of feedback	125
7.7	Concluding reflections	126

## **Chapter Eight: The Big Day**

### **Conclusion**

8.1	Conclusion	128
8.2	Recommendations for further studies	131

<b>Afterthoughts</b>	132
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<b>Reference List</b>	124
-----------------------	-----

### **Appendix**

Appendix A: Letter of information for internships	133
Appendix B: Consent for internships	135
Appendix C: Letter of information for brides	136
Appendix D: Consent for brides	138
Appendix E: Proposed open-ended questions to designers and brides	139

Appendix F: Comments book page inserts with filmed documentation of exhibition	142
Appendix G: Inserts from my creative journaling	145

## **List of Figures**

Figure 1:	Link between my values and my practice
Figure 2:	Strategy of research
Figure 3:	Practical exhibition strategy
Figure 4:	Diagram of the research process
Figure 5:	Traditional vs action research
Figure 6:	Stringer's action research interacting spiral
Figure 7:	The new bridal gown I designed for Lunar's ready-to-wear bridal rail in the boutique with the Lunar signature style
Figure 8:	One of the bridal gowns I worked on for a private client at Lunar
Figure 9:	The bespoke bridal gown I worked on for Biji's private client during the internship
Figure 10:	One of the 42 gowns I worked on for Kobus Dippenaar's MBFW collection. This is the finale bridal gown
Figure 11:	The finale of the show for MBFW in Cape Town for Kobus Dippenaar photographed backstage
Figure 12:	Three adaptations from one foundation bridal block
Figure 13:	The Dress Block, Winifred Aldrich "Metric Pattern Cutting for Women"
Figure 14:	Fitted, high-waisted skirt from BTech collection
Figure 15:	A variation of bridal gowns developed from the idea of using the discarded lining
Figure 16:	A screenshot of my Facebook page 'Casey Jeanne'
Figure 17:	A screenshot of the insights tab for the 'Casey Jeanne' Facebook page
Figure 18:	A screenshot of my website
Figure 19:	Sketches of the five foundation block developments

- Figure 20: A rough work-in-process technical drawing in pen of the Hollywood block.
- Figure 21: Foundation block front and back view of the Hollywood style
- Figure 22: Blake Lively wears a relaxed Hollywood fit on the Red Carpet at the Cannes Film Festival.
- Figure 23: Daria Strokous pictured wearing an emerald green sequined gown, similar to the Hollywood foundation block development, to the Cannes Film Festival
- Figure 24: A rough work-in-process technical drawing in pen of the Oscar block
- Figure 25: Foundation block front and back view of the Oscar style
- Figure 26: Nina Dobrev in a blood red gown resembling similarities to the Oscar foundation block
- Figure 27: Singer Rita Ora in a navy blue red carpet gown
- Figure 28: A rough work-in-process technical drawing in pen of the Vogue block.
- Figure 29: Front and back view of the Vogue foundation block development stitched up in black
- Figure 30: Jean Harlow, who was often pictured in Vogue Magazine, is featured here in an iconic bias-cut silk gown from 1933's *Dinner At Eight*
- Figure 31: Anne Hathaway pictured wearing a modern day, deep-blue, bias-cut, silk gown at the premier of the movie *Interstellar*
- Figure 32: A rough technical drawing of the Gala foundation block.
- Figure 33: Front and back view of the Gala foundation block development stitched up in black
- Figure 34: Hofit Golan wearing a gown similar to the Gala foundation block with layers of lightly-beaded tulle to the AMFAR Gala event
- Figure 35: Taylor Swift at the Winter Whites Gala at Kensington Palace in a gown similar to the Gala foundation block using a heavier silk georgette fabric
- Figure 36: A rough technical drawing for the Awards foundation block
- Figure 37: The 'toile' of the Awards foundation block stitched up in black
- Figure 38: TV personality Giuliana Rancic on the red carpet at the Academy Awards wearing a gown with no waistline

- Figure 39: Singer Taylor Swift in a gown constructed with no waistline
- Figure 40: Diagram depicting the differences between knowledge and experience and how they both fuel creative thinking by cartoonist Hugh MacLeod
- Figure 41: Sketch of Hollywood foundation block
- Figure 42: Sketch of Bride Five's bridal gown based on the Hollywood foundation block
- Figure 43: Bride One pictured in her bespoke vintage light stone and cream bridal gown based on the Hollywood foundation block
- Figure 44: Bride One pictured in her bespoke vintage light stone and cream bridal gown based on the Hollywood foundation block
- Figure 45: Detailed shot of Bride One's bridal gown captured by The Tank Shank at my 'Final Fitting' exhibition
- Figure 46: A detailed photograph of the beadwork from Bride One's bridal gown
- Figure 47: Sketch of Oscar foundation block
- Figure 48: Sketch of Bride Two's bridal gown based on the Oscar foundation block
- Figure 49: Sketch of Bride Three's bridal gown based on the Oscar foundation block
- Figure 50: Bride Two pictured in her bespoke bridal gown based on the Oscar foundation block
- Figure 51: Bride Two pictured in her bespoke bridal gown based on the Oscar foundation block
- Figure 52: Detailed pictures of the gown
- Figure 53: A picture of the gown in process
- Figure 54: Bride Three wears her hand-dyed, icy-pink bridal gown based on the Oscar foundation block
- Figure 55: Bride Three wears her hand-dyed, icy-pink bridal gown based on the Oscar foundation block
- Figure 56: Bride Three wears her hand-dyed, icy-pink bridal gown based on the Oscar foundation block
- Figure 57: Bride Three wears her hand-dyed, icy-pink bridal gown based on the Oscar foundation block

- Figure 58: Bride Three wears her hand-dyed, icy-pink bridal gown based on the Oscar foundation block
- Figure 59: Sketch of Gala foundation block
- Figure 60: Sketch of Bride Four's bridal gown based on the Gala foundation block
- Figure 61: Sketch of Bride Five's bridal gown based on the Gala foundation block
- Figure 62: Bride Four wears a bespoke princess bridal gown based on the Gala foundation block
- Figure 63: Bride Four wears a bespoke princess bridal gown based on the Gala foundation block
- Figure 64: Detailed picture of Bride Four's gown in process
- Figure 65: Detailed picture of Bride Four's gown in process
- Figure 66: Bride Five wears a bespoke bohemian bridal gown based on the Gala foundation block
- Figure 67: Bride Five wears a bespoke bohemian bridal gown based on the Gala foundation block
- Figure 68: Bride Five wears a bespoke bohemian bridal gown based on the Gala foundation block
- Figure 69: Detailed picture of Bride Five's gown in process
- Figure 70: Detailed picture of Bride Five's gown in process
- Figure 71: Screenshots of feedback from social media platform, Facebook, for Bride One
- Figure 72: Screenshots of feedback from social media platform, Facebook, for Bride One
- Figure 73: Screenshots of feedback from social media platform, Facebook, for Bride One
- Figure 74: Screenshots of feedback from social media platform, Facebook, for Bride Two
- Figure 75: A screenshot of feedback from social media platform, Facebook, for Bride Three

- Figure 76: A screenshot of feedback from social media platform, Facebook, for Bride Three
- Figure 77: A screenshot of the Fairlady Bride Magazine feature on the social media platform, Facebook, for Bride Three
- Figure 78: A screenshot of feedback from the review tab social media platform, Facebook, from Bride Four
- Figure 79: Screenshots of feedback from the social media platform, Facebook, from Bride Five
- Figure 80: Screenshots of feedback from the social media platform, Facebook, from Bride Five
- Figure 81: Screenshots of feedback from the social media platform, Facebook, from Bride Five
- Figure 82: Screenshots of feedback from the social media platform, Facebook, from Bride Five
- Figure 83: Photograph by The Shank Tank displaying my exhibition title and a blown up photograph of Bride Three
- Figure 84: Various sketches of the Foundation Blocks and bridal gowns
- Figure 85: Various sketches of the Foundation Blocks and bridal gowns
- Figure 86: Various photographic image groupings on display at the my MTech exhibition
- Figure 87: A photograph of the Jeannelle la Amour installation
- Figure 88: The first installation called the Foundation Block installation
- Figure 89: The second installation called the Jeannelle la Amour installation
- Figure 90: The third and last installation called the Real Brides' installation
- Figure 91: A photograph of the 'Juliette' gown from the Jeannelle la Amour collection, taken by Alexis Diack Photography, that is stocked at Calegra Bridal House

# CHAPTER ONE: MY STUDY UNVEILED

*“After all there is something about a wedding gown prettier than in any other gown in the world.” - Douglas William Jerrold<sup>1</sup>*

## 1.1 Inspiration: Stage one

Being a bespoke bridal gown designer, I am passionate about creating beautiful, exclusive bridal gowns and bringing a bride’s childhood bridal fantasies and dreams to life. The name of my brand and label is ‘Casey Jeanne’. I have been researching ways to improve my practice since its inception during the completion of my BTech in 2012. My business has relied predominately on creating once-off designer bridal gowns for individual brides.

The bespoke bridal-gown process is a pricey and delicate one and it takes a great deal of time and enormous expense using exclusive fabrics as the design, pattern and fit are made specifically for a particular bride. This led me to research ways on saving time and money for this bespoke service that I offer in order to provide more competitively-priced bridal gowns. The main question that fuelled my practice and my research was: *“How do I improve my practice as a bridal gown designer in a highly-competitive market?”* I found over the years that there was an underlying thread in the silhouettes of bridal gowns that brides were requiring. Together, that has formed the basis for my MTech practice-based action research self-study.

## 1.2 Rationale

Relative to the current status of the clothing<sup>2</sup> and textile import market, it is significant that the bridal gown market in South Africa is currently supplied from countries where labour costs are lower than those in South Africa (Wolmarans, 2011). As a bridal gown designer earnestly intent on building my practice, I

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<sup>1</sup> Accessed 4 March 2015: [http://www.inspiringquotes.us/quotes/iIPg\\_kcg65jzA](http://www.inspiringquotes.us/quotes/iIPg_kcg65jzA)

<sup>2</sup> Clothes collectively: an item of clothing | [as adj.] the clothing trade (Oxford Dictionary of English (2010).

found it extremely difficult to produce cost-effective<sup>3</sup> and competitively-priced<sup>4</sup>, bespoke<sup>5</sup> bridal gowns in South Africa.

These problems led me to further investigate the bridal<sup>6</sup>-gown<sup>7</sup> market through action research (McNiff, 2002; Stringer, 2007; Schmuck, 1997; Dick, 2003; Whitehead, 2009) and self-study (Schön, 1983; Whitehead, 2009; Samaras & Freese, 2006; LaBoskey, 2004), whilst simultaneously developing a solution through critical reflection (Schön, 1983; Dick, 2003; Fitzgerald, 1994; Boyd and Fales, 1983; Chirema, 2003; Aspelund, 2006) and practice-based approaches (Candy, 2011; Whitehead, 2009).

Through my own research in my practice, paired with theoretical research and interning with three bridal gown designers, I have been able to examine the individual design needs of brides for bridal gowns. I have analysed factors and developed measures that minimise costs in bridal-gown production without compromising the creative design process. By compromise, I speak on behalf of the designer rather than the consumer, as the perception of knowledge in the creative design process is varied and deeper.

### **1.3 The context of the study and its significance: What are my values and why are my values relevant to my topic?**

At BTech level I studied the effects of Hollywood red carpet events and glamour theory as a trend that influenced how a bride chooses her bridal gown (Bruzzi & Gibson, 2000). I then translated my findings into how I designed bridal gowns for my personal clients. These were the first tentative steps towards starting my business. The successes and the problems encountered in my BTech study motivated me to conduct further research on bridal gown design and construction at MTech level in the field of fashion, however, I realised that the context of my study was much bigger than improving my practice as a bridal

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<sup>3</sup> Effective or productive in relation to its cost: the most cost-effective way to invest in the stock market.

<sup>4</sup> A price lower than that offered by the competitors, or a price made more attractive because of added incentives, such as longer payment terms.

<sup>5</sup> Clothing made to order to client's measurements: a bespoke suit. (Of a trader) making such goods: bespoke tailors (Oxford Dictionary of English (2010)).

<sup>6</sup> Of or concerning a bride or a wedding.

<sup>7</sup> A long dress, typically having a close-fitting bodice and a flared or flowing skirt, worn on formal occasions: a silk ball gown (Oxford Dictionary of English (2010)).

gown designer. The bigger context, or picture, here was the sustainability of my business as a bridal gown designer and entrepreneur, in an economy where the textile industry faces tough international competition and where other countries can produce goods at a fraction of the cost of a South African product (Wolmarans, 2011; Vlok, 2006; Natrass & Seekings, 2013).

Africa has become a target market country for imports (Jacques, 2012) and whilst South Africa has admirable employee rights legislation, the South African clothing industry has been on a “downward growth trend with a significant increase in factory closures” since 1994 (Wolmarans, 2011: 87). In addition, the consequences of restructuring the South African clothing and textile industry, in line with post-1994 legislation, has rendered South Africa unable to compete with the prices of imported goods (Wolmarans, 2011; Vlok, 2006).

Taking into account the observations of Wolmarans (2011), Jacques (2012), Vlok (2006), Natrass and Seekings (2013), I realised that there was a need for sustainable<sup>8</sup> entrepreneurial thinking. While the question of ‘design’ was critical to my study, contributing to the economy and developing entrepreneurial ideas were equally important. In essence, the design issues are about individual choices and style, whilst economy and entrepreneurial issues are about cutting costs so that I can become more competitive without sacrificing elegance and individuality. In short, I believe my study is a ‘proudly South African’ initiative. Hughes (2003), who believes that improving one’s own practice, can in turn also help others. This sums up how action research compels a sense of value in the researcher:

I choose action research because I have a long-standing commitment to developing more effective strategies and methods to promote social justice.  
I choose action research because I believe in old-fashioned virtues like compassion and truth. I know this sounds corny, but it is real. (Hughes, 2003: 15)

Linked to my belief in contributing to our South African economy, I am aware that this pride is also linked to the values that I hold. Although my study is not based upon social justice (social justice rather being the positive repercussion

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<sup>8</sup> Able to be maintained at a certain rate or level (Oxford Dictionary of English (2010).

of my study) I still believe Hughes' underlying message in this quote is based on the core of action research being values. My core values are respect, skilfulness, integrity and commitment. Figure 1 on the next page demonstrates how these core values fan out into ethics, morals and outcomes in a small entrepreneurial business. The positive repercussions are linked to a long-term action plan for my small entrepreneurial business to employ more people over time. I believe that the basis of my action research study has even greater meaning: a respect for people and the skill, knowledge and experience they bring to the bridal industry; a belief in the ability of democratic approaches to achieve steps towards social justice; and an integrity and commitment to action (Miller, 2003:15). These values have shaped me as a person and an action researcher. Values are very much a part of the action research ethos and I quote "Action research begins with values. As a self-reflective practitioner you need to be aware of what drives your life and work, so you can be clear about what you are doing and why you are doing it" (McNiff 2002). The diagram (Figure 1) reflects how my values affect each aspiration of my business, ultimately demonstrating the link between my values and my practice.

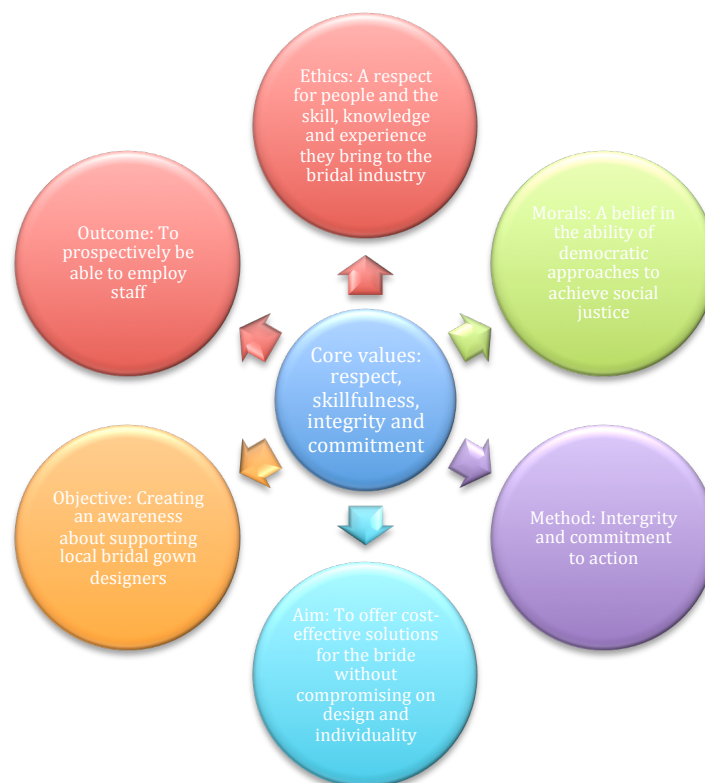


Figure 1: Link between my values and my practice

#### **1.4 My world view and it's relevance to the study (paradigm)**

One could say that my study is a coherent balance between the terms 'practice as theory' and 'theory as practice'. Practice is a form of theory and, likewise, theory is a form of practice (Dadds & Hart, 2001; Schon, 1995; Whitehead, 1993, 2004). My research integrates both the views in the literature and the practical aspects in an equally important light. My world view is a healthy marriage and balanced mix where I am equally informed by the practice which forms the theory and visa versa where the theory forms the practice. This forms a very holistic approach and view to my study.

#### **1.5 The research problem**

In my own business, I found it difficult to produce competitively<sup>9</sup>-priced, cost-effective bespoke bridal gowns in the current market, in competition with cheap, imported, mass-produced<sup>10</sup> bridal gowns. A number of these gowns are imported from countries where labour costs are lower than those in South Africa<sup>11</sup> as previously stated, but often in violation of international labour agreements and human rights (Nattrass & Seekings, 2013). Wolmarans (2011) and Vlok (2006) write that the South African Constitution (1997) ensures sound labour and human rights, which consequently lead to local designers being unable to compete with the prices of imported brands. This 'uncompetitive' quality is leading to increased unemployment and poverty in South Africa (Wolmarans, 2011; Vlok, 2006). Through bridging the gap between time and money, and theory and practice, I have been able to positively link the success of my study to the long-term action plan for my small entrepreneurial business to employ more people over time.

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<sup>9</sup> (Of a product) priced in a way that compares favourably with others of the same nature: our exports remained competitively priced (Oxford Dictionary of English (2010).

<sup>10</sup> Produce large quantities of (a standardized article) by an automated mechanical process: cheap mass-produced goods (Oxford Dictionary of English (2010).

<sup>11</sup> Along with Nattrass and Seekings' (2013) findings, I also found in my own experience visiting local bridal boutiques, that the retail selling price of these imported bridal gowns were much less than what I would be able to produce a bridal gown for; even more so that the wholesale prices the bridal boutiques were buying the bridal gowns for are on average 50% less than the retail price.

## **1.6 The aim of my study**

The aim of my study was to improve my practice as a bespoke bridal gown designer and, in doing so, develop measures to cut costs in bridal gown production without compromising the creative design process. I have explored what contributes to the individuality and creative process of successfully designed, competitively-priced, cost-effective bridal gowns, which can be seen in Chapters Four, Five and Six.

## **1.7 Purpose**

I intended to improve my practice using action research methods as an economically-sustainable designer of bespoke, cost-effective, competitively-priced bridal gowns.

## **1.8 Critical questions**

My research questions were fuelled by my own aspirations to improve my practice before I started my MTech research. I then recognised the research potential and practice gained that finding answers to these questions may have. These questions in my practice-based self-study were initially derived from my practice and not from the literature, which links to practice as a form of theory and theory as a form of practice (Dadds & Hart, 2001; Schon, 1995; Whitehead, 1993, 2004).

*My main research question:*

How can I improve my practice as a designer and manufacturer of bespoke, cost-effective, competitively-priced, bridal gowns?

*My subsidiary research questions:*

- a) How can I design and make bridal gowns, which meet the needs of individual brides?
- b) How can I design and make bridal gowns in a cost-effective way so that they are competitively-priced?
- c) How can I use what I learn from a) and b) to improve my practice as a designer and entrepreneur, with the intention of contributing to the future employability of others in the local bridal gown industry?

## **1.9 Limitations**

Due to the high expense of bridal gown fabrics and embellishments and the large amount of time spent on making each gown, I was limited to producing 15 bridal gowns for the practical component of this study. These 15 bridal gowns were broken down into three installations: five foundation bridal blocks, five gowns of my own interpretation on the blocks that I call 'Jeannelle la Amour' and five gowns for real brides based on the foundation blocks.

This study is not a comparative study, but rather a self-study based on improving my practice. Due to the size of this study, I excluded the breakdown of costs between a bridal gown produced in countries where labour costs are lower than those in South Africa compared to how much I could produce the same bridal gown for. The aim was not to replicate bridal gowns and compare costs, but rather to find ways to design and make bridal gowns in a cost effective way so that they are competitively-priced that meets the needs of individual brides.

## **1.10 Delimitations**

My research was dependant on the availability of the bridal gown designers for the three internships. These designers have strong entrepreneurial values and are successfully immersed in the bridal gown market, which was vital to my study. My research was also dependent on the willingness of the brides to have bridal gowns made for them derived from the five foundation blocks. This created a platform of both credibility (Trochim, 2000) and validity in my research, which can be seen in the methodology (Chapter Three) and my validation (Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven). I do not go into detail in my study about the fashion shows, bridal fairs and competitions I have been invited to as a result of my study, however, reflections are made in my creative journal. I also do not go into depth regarding the social media aspect of my study, which I briefly touch on in Chapter Two, as this is a whole study on its own.

## **1.11 Literature review**

The literature review explores the significance of various literary sources of information on the fashion industry and the relevance of producing cost-

effective, competitively-priced, bespoke bridal gowns in South Africa. My literature research draws parallels between practice as theory and theory as practice whilst focusing on different, relevant, yet equally-important aspects that affect the improvement of my practice as a bridal gown designer in a highly-competitive market. In my action research self-study, the literature substantiates my research in each relevant section. The philosophy behind action research is important because my research is creative, practical, dynamic, cyclical and collaborative by nature (Lewin, 1938). My literature review also serves to validate my research and methodological processes in designing bridal gowns. To help me answer my research questions, I have included a brief history of the clothing and textile industry and the consequences of labour legislation in South Africa since 1994; relevant entrepreneurial practices; bridal gowns and their social meaning; material culture and the use of visual aids in the selling of an idea to a bride and an examination of the influence of Hollywood's red carpet events on a bride's choice of bridal gown, all of which serve to create a clearer background to and for my research.

### **1.12 Conceptual framework**

I have chosen to draw up a conceptual framework rather than a theoretical framework because my action research, self-study is practiced-based as does not rely solely on theoretical approaches but rather a union of theory as practice and practice as theory. By drawing comparisons between the various theories such as social psychology (Howard, 1997), identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), glamour theory (Bruzzi & Gibson, 2000), social comparison theory (Bessenoff, 2006; Allport, 1985) and the effects of the Hollywood trends and red carpet events, I have ascertained their relevance to my practice and research. I have discussed creative practiced-based research methods (Candy, 2011; Schön, 1983) and self-study (Schön, 1983; Whitehead, 2009; Samaras & Freese, 2006; LaBoskey, 2004) in relation to social psychology. I believe that practiced-based research and self-study are grounded in the social psychology of a bride. These various theories weigh in favour of a practiced-based study, where I have been able to draw correlations between the theories and my practice. Through my lived experience and research for this study, I have developed my professional practice as a designer, entrepreneur and potential

employer. I have drawn parallels and bridged the gap between being an entrepreneur and a bridal gown designer. It is was my intention to do this by validating my research through continual critical reflection (Schön, 1983) in and on my practice using action research (McNiff, 2002) processes.

### **1.13 Research methodology**

The chapter on methodology explains the research methodology I have used and provides an outline of how my qualitative research has been designed. This includes a brief review of how I used qualitative research methodologies and methods.

I have adopted Maree's (2007: 33) "multi-method mode of enquiry". My practice-based self-study (Schön, 1983; Whitehead, 2009; Samaras & Freese, 2006; LaBoskey, 2004) includes action research (McNiff, 2002; Stringer, 2007; Schmuck, 1997; Dick, 2003; Whitehead, 2009); reflective-practice (Schön, 1983; Dick, 2003), and practiced-based research (Candy, 2011; Whitehead, 2009). It is important as a designer and researcher to employ a variety of methodological tools to validate (McNiff, 2010) the authenticity and influence of my study (Whitehead, 2009). My practiced-based study required a broader discussion of each methodology in order to include an array of multi-methods that were needed to carry out my self-study research on an MTech level; because of this I was able to make connections between the theory as practice and practice as theory. This also allowed me to reflect on both the theory and my practice in order to access my experiences and findings.

Creswell (2013: 21) notes that qualitative methods are time consuming and advises that the sample population, in this case the brides I have designed for, are usually in "smaller quantities to obtain accurate results on a personal level". This 'personal' factor is essential to the success of my study and I have used action-reflection cycles as a way to assess my "experiences, findings and observations" (Schön, 1983: 68). I believe that using an action-research and practice-based approach has helped develop my business as a South African designer, and as a prospective employer.

### 1.13.1 Self-study

To validate the perspective of the 'I' and the relevance of 'self-study' to my research, I have included the writings of Schön (1983), Whitehead (2009), Mitchell (2005), LaBoskey (2004) and Samaras (2002) who jointly believe that self-study allows practitioners a better understanding of the intersections of one's personal histories of learning (tacit knowledge), and one's professional practice amalgamated with the literature to form a holistic approach to action research. Whitehead (2009) demonstrates that when using self-study action research, 'I' as the researcher, explore and acknowledge the different facets of myself as a fashion designer, entrepreneur and social being. I am both the object and subject of this study because it is my own. 'I' as in 'How can I improve my practice?' make action research an appropriate methodology (Whitehead, 2009).

### 1.13.1 Action research

Through a series of action research reflection cycles, I have collected, categorised and reflected on the data that emerged. I correlated my practical findings with the literature and views of the designers where I was an intern. These action reflection cycles, along with my silhouette blocks and findings, form my evidence chapters.

### 1.13.2 Reflective-practice

Schön (1983) writes extensively on the validity of reflecting critically upon one's practice. Fitzgerald (1994: 67) like-mindedly writes about reflective-practice as, "the retrospective contemplation of a practice that is undertaken in order to uncover the knowledge used in practical situations, by analysing and interpreting the information recalled." Boyd and Fales (1983) have a slightly different approach and concentrate on the reflective process as a means of developing one's self 'before action', 'in action' and 'after action'. Dick (2003: 3) theorises that the solution to the "problem lies in the process of critical reflection as well as the action taken to solve the problem". Collectively, Schön (1983), Fitzgerald (1994), Boyd and Fales (1983) and Dick (2003) are significant in the reflective-practice methods I have used to conduct my research.

### 1.13.3 Practiced-based research

Practice-based research is relevant to my study because it is from my practice and my business that this research came about. Through working with brides on bespoke bridal gowns, I found that there were areas of my practice that I needed to improve on and this was the basis of and the beginning of my research. Whitehead (2009:1) says that practice-based research is an “original creative investigation undertaken in order to gain new findings and new knowledge by means of the practice, as well as the outcomes of the practice.” Practice-based research allows the process itself to lead to a “transformation of the ideas and designs, which in turn leads to new works” (Candy, 2011:1). This is relevant to my study because it is through the creative practical process that ideas are formed and problems are encountered and, as a result, are solved.

## **1.14 Data collection, analysis, validation and credibility**

### 1.14.1 Data collection

I have used a number of tools to collect my data. Gaimster (2011) believes that gathering visual information builds a better understanding of the person and subject, so I have used visual aids to learn what styles of bridal gown designs brides prefer, both as a practical application and as a way of expressing my findings. The visual information that I have used includes actual bridal gowns, and photographs and sketches of bridal gowns. I have reflected critically on my “lived experiences” (Whitehead, 2009: 173) and observations, and have recorded these reflections in my creative journal.

I have used McNiff and Whitehead’s (2010: 41) framework below to methodically gather my data and generate my evidence:

- Systematic monitoring of practice to generate data (reflection on past practice and experience; tacit knowledge; in action and on action; internships – Chapters Four and Five)
- Describing the action of data gathering (Chapters Four, Five and Six)
- Generating evidence to explain the data and make knowledge claims (Chapter Six)
- Testing the validity of knowledge claims (Chapters Five and Six)

- Communicating the significance of knowledge claims (Chapters Six and Seven)
  - Making action research public and disseminating findings (Chapter Seven).
- (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010: 41)

The diagram on the following page (Figure 2) indicates the crystallisation-based strategy for my research that I have adopted from Richardson (2000), who discusses how crystallisation validates the work of qualitative research. I have explored crystallisation as a reflective method in further depth in Chapter Three. I completed internships with two fashion designers in Johannesburg and one in Cape Town. I have learnt from these designers who have established bridal businesses. They are experts in marketing, pattern construction and embellishment techniques. I conducted open-ended interviews in the form of conversations with the “intention that the researcher explores with the participant his or her views, ideas, beliefs and attitudes about certain events” (Maree, 2007: 87) for both the internships and to gather the feedback from my brides from the gowns I created for them from the blocks. I compiled a list of guideline questions for these internships and feedback from my brides. See Appendix E.

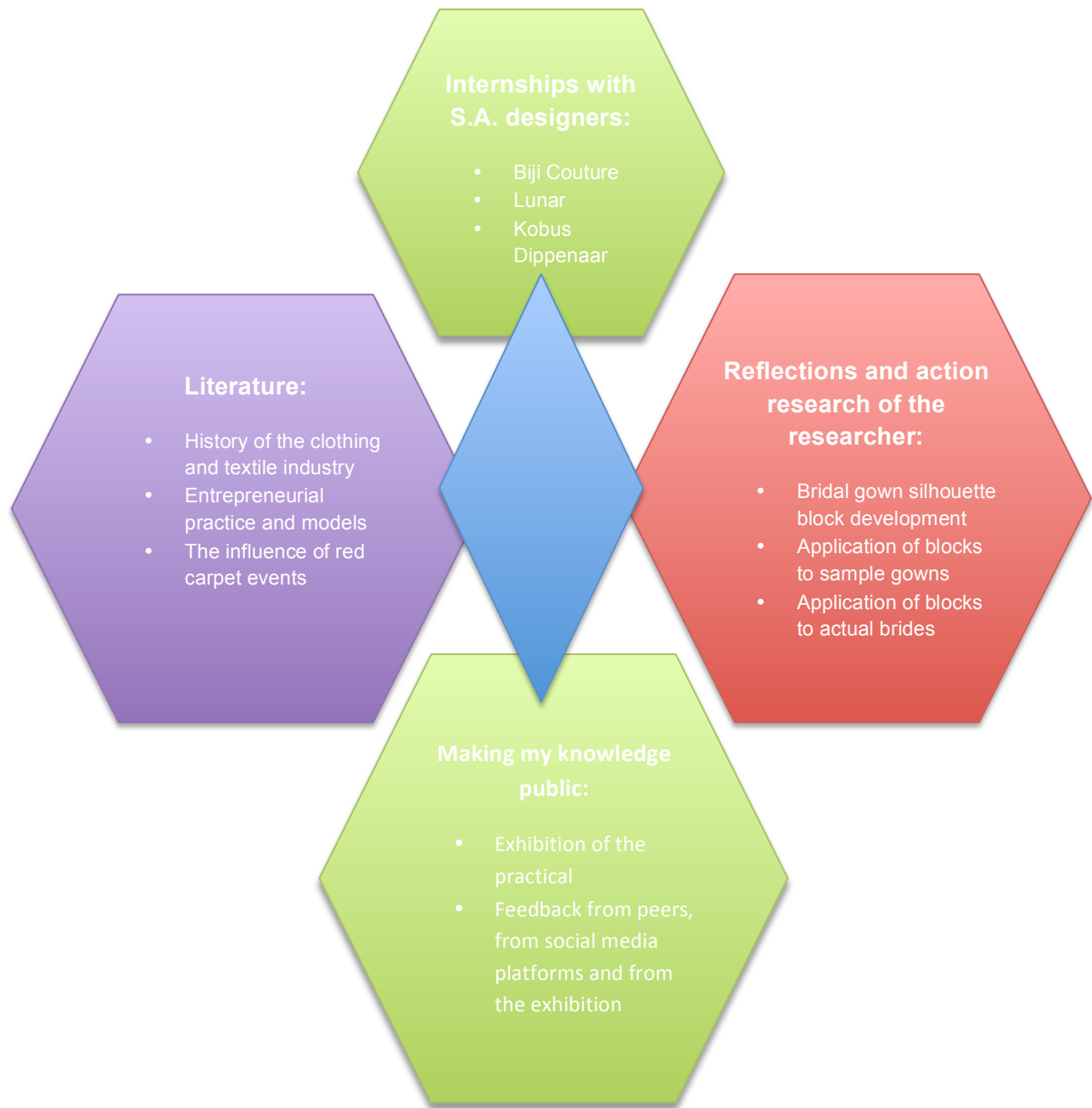


Figure 2: Strategy of research

1.14.2 Analysis: I have used reflective practice to analyse my data. My data is: 1. My experiences learning to be a bridal gown designer and entrepreneur. 2. My intern experiences with the three established bridal gown designers. 3. Designing and developing the blocks, which include modifications and changes to the designs. 4. Working with the brides – what worked and

why? 5. The feedback from the exhibition via the comments book and videoed comments from the audience.

I have used Brown's (1994: 96) seven questions to outline my writing in analysing my internships and the feedback from my brides.

- What did you do?
- Why did you do it?
- What happened?
- What do the results mean in theory?
- What do the results mean in practice?
- What is the key benefit for the readers?
- What remains unresolved?

(Brown, 1994: 96)

1.14.3 Validation and credibility: The validation and credibility of my research comes from six main components: a) Tacit<sup>12</sup> knowledge. b) Literature. c) Action-reflection. d) Peer review and feedback from designers, brides, industry professionals and peers. e) Social media. f) Competitions, events, features. Each of these components I explain further in my methodology (Chapter Three) and my validation (Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven) all of which made my research credible.

### **1.15 Ethical considerations**

My research is a self-study to develop my practice as a bridal gown designer. No brides' names will be included in the dissertation, however, the designers have agreed to the use of this information. See Appendices (A-E) for consent letters and open-ended questions.

### **1.16 Practical component - The story of my study**

In total, I have produced 15 bespoke, cost-effective and competitively-priced bridal gowns for my study that form a part of my exhibition. I have developed a creative process that is a healthy balance between 'couture' and 'ready-to-wear' (see Literature Review: 2.6). I am submitting a DVD of highlights from my

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<sup>12</sup> Understood or implied without being stated.

exhibition, which includes feedback and comments made by the public. I also submit a behind the scenes DVD from my own interpretation on the foundation blocks (Jeannelle la Amour), photographs, sketches and inserts from a creative journal with my reflections and notes, which is charted in Figure 3. I am a creative being, which means that my creative processes are unique; and because I am creative, my journaling notes have been recorded in many books and on many different pieces of paper over the duration of my MTech study. I have therefore included only inserts taken from different journal notes and reflections at the end of my study (see Appendix G).

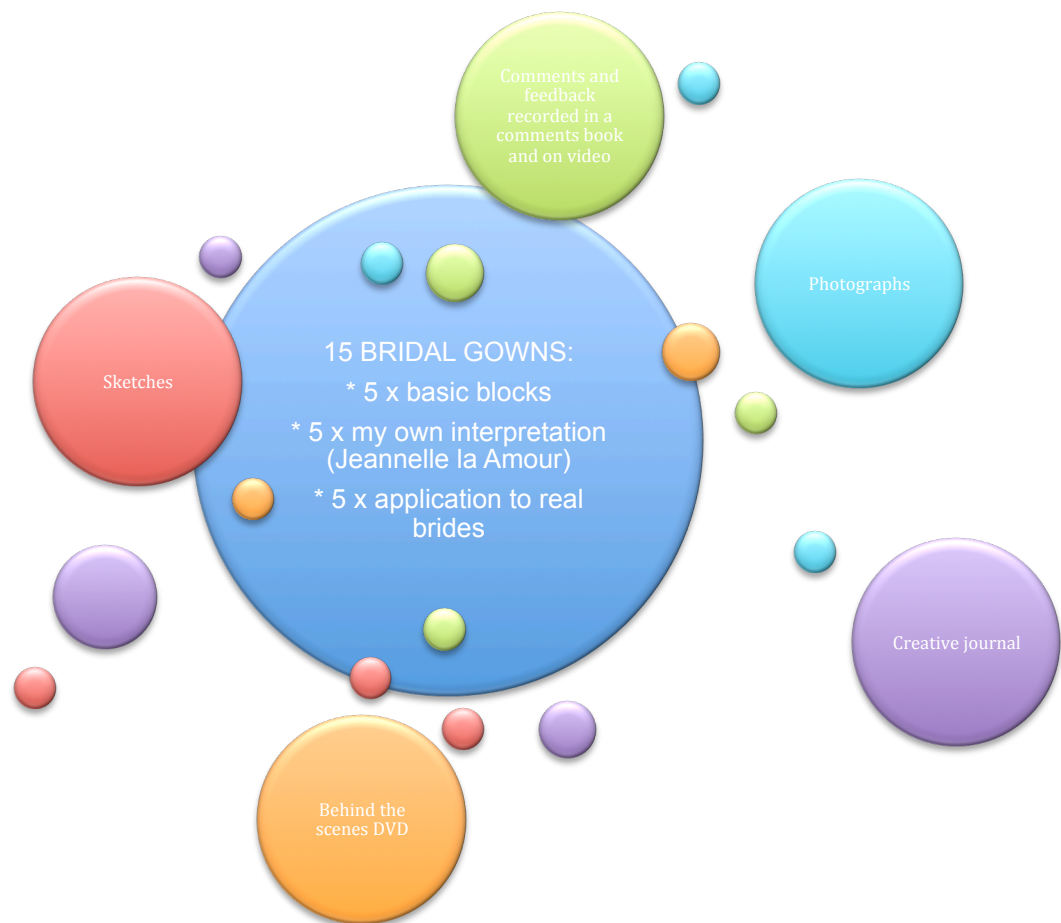


Figure 3: Practical exhibition strategy

I have developed five foundation bridal gown silhouette blocks. These blocks were developed as a way to both minimise the amount of time spent custom drafting designs and patterns for each bride as well as to clarify the selection process for the bride at the studio, where these blocks would be able to be

viewed on the rail. The blocks were a practical solution to save time, which in turn, saved costs. I developed the blocks from the combined evolution of the following three factors: 1. Critical reflection on past experiences from working with and factoring in the needs of brides; 2. The experience of my internships; 3. The years of experience, technical and practical skill and tacit knowledge gained.

These patterns form my distinctive signature design, which I further developed with five brides to create individual and custom-made bridal gowns. This concept has served to create a competitive price point because the foundation designs are the same, however, the gowns are unique because of the individual embellishments chosen by the bride. I have validated this concept through continual action reflection research processes, which form a part of my evidence chapters. I have covered the development of the blocks in Chapter Five.

### **1.17 The structure of my dissertation**

My action research self-study is organised and has been structured as follows:

**Chapter Two: Literature Review: Choosing the Fabric: Practice as Theory and Theory as Practice** In this chapter I discuss the history of the clothing and textile industry; entrepreneurial practice and models; bridal gowns and their social meaning; material culture and social comparison; design and individuality; Hollywood and the red carpet; and the importance of practice as theory and theory as practice.

**Chapter Three: A Bare Mannequin: Research Methodology:** This section records the theoretical underpinning of my research methodology. Using established resources of research methodology, this Chapter focuses on the research methods I used, and how my research was designed and implemented.

**Chapter Four: The Drafting (Internships): “What evidence do I have of my ability to design and make bridal gowns, which meet the needs of individual brides in a cost-effective way so that they are competitively priced?”** In this chapter I document, reflect on and analyse my internships with the three bridal gown designers and how these internships contributed to my study in respect of the design of the bridal gowns and the cost-effectiveness thereof.

**Chapter Five: The Toile (Foundation Blocks):** “What evidence do I have of my ability to design and make bridal gowns which meet the needs of individual brides?” In this chapter I document, reflect on and analyse the development of the silhouette blocks using tacit knowledge, my past experience of the needs of brides and knowledge gained during the internships.

**Chapter Six: Tailoring the Couture (Brides):** “How did I adapt the blocks to meet the needs of each individual bride using tacit knowledge, my experience regarding brides’ needs and knowledge gained during the internships?” In this chapter I document the custom bridal gown action research development process, and my interactions with the brides.

**Chapter Seven: The Final Fitting (Exhibition):** “What evidence do I have of the possibility that I can improve my practice as a designer and entrepreneur?” In this chapter I document, reflect on and analyse how I have improved my practice as an economically-sustainable designer of bespoke, cost-effective bridal gowns. This is a validation chapter where I also analyse the comments from my exhibition.

**Chapter Eight: The Big Day: Conclusion** In this chapter I reflect critically on the research process and outcomes to validate their usefulness and authenticity.

## **CHAPTER TWO: CHOOSING THE FABRIC**

### **Practice as Theory and Theory as Practice**

*"The dress must follow the body of a woman, not the body following the shape of the dress." - Hubert de Givenchy<sup>13</sup>*

#### **2.1 Identification: Stage two**

This literature review serves to create a clearer background to and for my research. As mentioned in Chapter One, my literature research focuses on different, relevant, yet equally-important aspects that affect the improvement of my practice as a bridal gown designer in a highly-competitive market<sup>14</sup>. Instead of focusing on one specific area of literature, I have also adopted a multifaceted approach to the literature in order to gain an unbiased and balanced perspective. In this chapter I discuss a brief history of the clothing and textile industry and the consequences of labour legislation in South Africa since 1994; relevant entrepreneurial practices and models; the historical significance of bridal gowns and its social meaning; material culture and social comparison theory; the examination of the influence of Hollywood's red carpet events on a bride's choice of bridal gown and the relevance of practice as theory and theory as practice.

#### **2.2 The history of the clothing and textile industry and the consequences of labour legislation in South Africa since 1994**

The world is moving into an era where globalization of production between countries and economies is providing both opportunities and threats to developing countries like South Africa (Wolmarans, 2011). In this case, the globalization of production refers to the sourcing of goods and services from locations around the globe to take advantage of "national differences in the cost and quality of factors of production" (Hill, 2007: 7). Some countries offer a lower price point for parts of production, which allows a more competitive price point to the economy (Wolmarans, 2011). Morris and Barnes (2008:6) believe that in what has become an increasingly global market place for the production of goods, many companies and manufacturers have moved the low, value-

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<sup>13</sup> Accessed 4 March: <http://highheelinahaystack.com/the-dress-must-follow-the-body-of-a-woman-not-the-body-following-the-shape-of-the-dress-hubert-de-givenchy>

<sup>14</sup> Where local designers need to compete with the prices of cheaper imported bridal gowns.

added<sup>15</sup>, labour-intensive parts of production ‘offshore’<sup>16</sup>, in an attempt to “maintain competitiveness”. For countries to be able to compete in price, their product price must be lower than that offered by the competitors. Salingier, Bhorat, Flaherty and Keswell (1999) state that ‘competitiveness’ is also defined by ‘profitability’<sup>17</sup> in a business and an economy.

Competitiveness is a term, which has assumed a broad number of definitions in both the economics and business literatures. Some use it in firm management sense to mean financial or economic “profitability,” others in a broad sense to compare economic conditions across national platforms (Salinger et al. 1999:4).

The term ‘competitiveness’, as stated by Salinger et al. (1999:4), is used to encompass both “quantitative (cost) and qualitative (strategic management) factors”. This means that the term competitiveness in my study refers to both the lower-value and higher-value production factors. My bridal gowns had to be both cost effective and competitively priced in order to offer a competitive edge. Whilst cost-effectiveness ensures that one’s business still runs at a profit and that the bridal gowns are a benefit to the business, being competitively priced is just as vitally important. The bridal gowns have to be competitively priced as both designer bridal gowns and locally-made gowns in order to be in fair competition with the cheaper produced imported bridal gowns.

Whilst globalization<sup>18</sup> offers a competitive price edge to the South African consumer, it has damaging effects on the South African economy as a developing country (Salinger et al. 1999). Integration into global markets offers the potential for rapid economic growth and poverty reduction, however, both McGuirk (2002) and Wolmarans (2011) note that in some aspects, the restructuring of the South African Constitution became a barrier<sup>19</sup> more than an opportunity for South Africa as a developing country. These barriers are linked

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<sup>15</sup> The addition of features to a basic line or model for which the buyer is prepared to pay extra.

<sup>16</sup> Made, situated, or registered abroad, especially in order to take advantage of lower taxes or costs or less stringent regulations.

<sup>17</sup> The primary goal of all business ventures. Without profitability the business will not survive in the long run, so measuring current and past profitability and projecting future profitability is very important. Profitability is measured with income and expenses (Oxford Dictionary of English (2010)).

<sup>18</sup> The processes by which businesses or other organizations develop international influence or start operating on an international scale (Oxford Dictionary of English (2010)).

<sup>19</sup> Something that prevents progress or success: the cultural barriers to economic growth.

to high labour costs and have resulted in substantial job losses and factory closures (Wolmarans, 2011). Van der Westhuizen (2006: 16) notes the spiral effect of workers not being able to find work: reduced food consumption in the household, withdrawal of children from education, and the increase in “social ills such as alcoholism and drug abuse”; these are a direct result of globalization.

Action research begins with values (McNiff, 2002). As an action researcher, the core values I hold, which are diagrammed in Chapter One, are linked to the betterment of the economy, in my small way through entrepreneurship. Although job creation is not a value in itself, it does stem and branch out from my core values which are respect, skilfulness, integrity and commitment. These fanned out into moral obligation in an entrepreneurial practice: A belief in the ability of democratic approaches to achieve social justice to rekindle skills and to create jobs for women in South Africa. Although job creation was a result of my research journey and an output rather than the aim of my study, it is an important value that I hold because I believe it has benefits to myself as an entrepreneur, to my business, to the prospective employee and to the economy as a whole. The downward spiral effects of the democratization of the economy that Van der Westhuizen (2006) comments on, are linked to my value system as an action researcher and the positive spiral effects my research may have in the long run in opposition to the negative effects of job losses in the South African Clothing and Textile industry.

Before democratization and South Africa’s “integration into the world trading system, the clothing and textile industry was focused on import substitution<sup>20</sup>” (Vlok, 2006: 227). South Africa sourced and produced locally and did not engage in the possibilities of importing to substitute what the country could already produce (Vlok, 2006). Import substitution, sourcing and producing locally, however, isolated local industries from outside competition, resulting in an inefficient and uncompetitive industry in the long run (Wolmarans, 2011; Van der Westhuizen, 2006). Although South Africa found ways to replace the import factor, which had a somewhat positive effect on the South African economy,

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<sup>20</sup> Import substitution Industrialization (ISI) is a trade and economic policy, which advocates replacing foreign imports with domestic production. ISI is based on the premise that a country should attempt to reduce its foreign dependency through the local production of industrialized products.

after democratization the country was almost forced into globalization to maintain some sort of competitive edge within the global economy (Wolmarans, 2011; Van der Westhuizen, 2006; Vlok, 2006).

The opportunity arose through globalization of production and democratization<sup>21</sup> of the South African economy for domestic producers to take advantage of outsourced, lower-value production, which essentially was cheap labour for the unskilled, labour-intensive part of the production cycle (Kaplinsky, 2005; Morris & Barnes, 2008). This meant that South Africa could now produce goods offshore at a cheaper rate as opposed to producing within the country. The consequences of lower-value production in the South African clothing and textile industry being transferred to other countries, that manufacture goods at a fraction of the cost, resulted in a negative effect on employment figures, and over time, a negative effect on the level of skill (Nattrass & Seekings, 2013; Wolmarans, 2011; Van der Westhuizen, 2006; Morris & Barnes, 2008). Many businesses in the clothing and textile industry were forced to close down and due to the workers not being able to work, the level of skill significantly decreased in the clothing sector; this almost forced South African manufacturers to continue outsourcing this production offshore (Wolmarans, 2011). These offshore countries, predominantly China, Japan, Pakistan, Vietnam and Mauritius, have in the interim developed skills for higher-value production, leaving South Africa's clothing and textile industry with an increased 'un-competitiveness' (Wolmarans, 2011).

### **2.3 Relevant entrepreneurial practices**

As a counter to the decline in manufacturing within the clothing and textile industry, Wolmarans (2011: 72) suggests that South African businesses should focus on "niche markets<sup>22</sup> and produce higher, value-added and high-quality products". This has resulted in entrepreneurship and lateral 'out-of-the-box'<sup>23</sup> thinking in niche markets, which has been a critical factor to my research. It is this type of thinking that I, as a researcher and designer, aspire to and explore.

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<sup>21</sup> The transition to a more democratic political regime (Oxford Dictionary of English (2010).

<sup>22</sup> The subset of the market on which a specific product is focused.

<sup>23</sup> By using the metaphor phrase 'out-of-the-box' thinking, I mean that one needs to think differently, unconventionally, or from a new perspective in a creative way; that is not the norm.

This innovative thinking in practice, I demonstrate in my validation (Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven).

I consider the investigation and inclusion of entrepreneurial innovation a key factor in my research. Authors such as Drucker (2012) and Audretsch (2009) write about entrepreneurship being good not only for individuals who start up businesses but because of the fact that starting up businesses is also linked to growth, jobs and competitiveness in a global economy. Through entrepreneurial thinking, I have not only come up with innovative ways to improve my practice, but also ways to positively impact the South African economy in my own small way. This is why I believe entrepreneurship is a value-based theory<sup>24</sup>. The core of entrepreneurship, I believe, is based on the following factors as a process to positive growth: an innovative idea, a belief for change, skills training, job creation, its positive effect on the economy and positive growth within the business.

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) 2010 Global Report states that:

Most policymakers and academics agree that entrepreneurship is critical to the development and well-being of society. Entrepreneurs create jobs. They drive and shape innovation, speeding up structural changes in the economy. They contribute indirectly to productivity by introducing new competition. Entrepreneurship is thus a catalyst of economic growth and national competitiveness.  
(Kelley, Bosma & Amorós, 2010: 12)

Kelley et al. (2010) believe that entrepreneurs are the drivers of change and innovation. Likewise, Drucker (2012:xiv) proposes the following: “the entrepreneur always searches for change, responds to it and exploits it as an opportunity”. Both Kelley et al. (2010) and Drucker (2012) see the process and the effects of entrepreneurship as structural change bringers in the economy. Drucker (2012:xiv) believes that if an entrepreneur exploits change, that they do it through the “process of systematic innovation” while Kelley et al. (2010:12) believe that entrepreneurs “drive and shape innovation”. Drucker’s (2012) concept of ‘systematic innovation’ is organized and purposefully searches for

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<sup>24</sup> The nature of entrepreneurship is based on values; helps others or the economy.

change and uses a process of systematic analysis of opportunities. Audretsch (1995), like-mindedly, theorizes that entrepreneurship is an application of old knowledge whereby new knowledge inputs generate innovative outputs. Through the journey of my study I have discovered that entrepreneurial thinking combined with continual reflection on my 'process' has helped generate innovative ways for improving my practice. This approach and process can be applied using entrepreneurial models as a framework to achieve innovative outputs. I show evidence of this entrepreneurial and innovative thinking in Chapter Five and Six.

By examining various entrepreneurial models<sup>25</sup>, for example, a model developed by Morris, Schindehutte and Allen (2003), I was able to include business values as one of a number of methods to find viable solutions to improve and validate my practice: business values being: 'Is my business valuable to the industry and economy?' This provides a different meaning to the term 'value' as discussed in Chapter One and it is equally important. One could say that the term 'value' offers two unique perspectives. From one viewpoint, value is based on societies' values, that being ethics and principals (Moore & Asay, 2013). Moore and Asay (2013) believe that these social and psychological principles are slowly developed over time. Examples of this are respect, integrity and commitment. From another viewpoint, which is what Morris's business model is developed from, is value as a form of "economics and consumer behavior; the term value is used as a measurement of exchange" (Moore & Asay, 2013:88). Moore and Asay (2013) go on to say that if you spend money on goods or services, you expect satisfaction from that exchange of resources. One could ask the question, 'Is this bridal gown as valuable as the amount of money I spent on it?' This question, in my opinion is subjective. A designer and locally made bridal gown may be priceless to one bride, but of little perceived value to another.

According to Morris et al. (2003), a well-formulated business model, which is based on values and business structure in a methodological framework, must address six key questions:

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<sup>25</sup> A system or procedure used as an example to follow.

Component 1 (factors related to the offering): How do we create value?

Component 2 (market factors): Who do we create value for?

Component 3 (internal capability factors): What is our source of competence?

Component 4 (competitive strategy factors): How do we competitively position ourselves?

Component 5 (economic factors): How do we make money?

Component 6 (personal/investor factors): What are our time, scope, and size ambitions? (Morris et al., 2003:730)

Morris et al. (2003) state that these six questions outline a strategy for an entrepreneurial venture. From these six questions and components of an entrepreneurial model, an evaluation can take place on three different levels: 'foundation', 'proprietary,' and 'rules' (Morris et al., 2003:730). I have linked and equated for myself these three different levels by making a link with the research design of my study.

Foundation level: defining basic components (Chapter Four: Internships)

Proprietary level: creating unique combinations (Chapter Five: Blocks)

Rules level: establishing guiding principles (Chapter Six: Brides)

I have employed this business model by answering these six questions and evaluating these three levels throughout my validation in Chapters Four, Five and Six as a way to both reflect on and validate my research. Morris's (2003) entrepreneurial model can almost be compared to Aspelund's (2006) design process model. They both draw similarities between having different stages both creatively and by principal in a business or design process. I have explained Aspelund's design process further in Chapter Three.

Entrepreneurial models explained by Morris et al. (2003) are much like entrepreneurial capital<sup>26</sup> as explained by Audretsch (2009). Entrepreneurial capital is the knowledge and strategy developed and collated from an

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<sup>26</sup> Wealth in the form of money or other assets owned by a person or organization or available for a purpose such as starting a company or investing (Oxford Dictionary of English (2010)).

entrepreneurial model (Audretsch, 2009). Audretsch (2009) goes on to say that along with entrepreneurial capital, traditional factors like physical capital, knowledge capital and labour directly contribute to economic growth. It is common knowledge that entrepreneurial capital and traditional capital work hand in hand to economic benefit. In Chapter Eight I have described and concluded how this entrepreneurial knowledge, as explained by Audretsch (2009), is linked to my tacit knowledge and past experience as a designer and entrepreneur. I have documented concluding notes in Chapter Eight where I collaboratively used these concepts to improve my practice.

#### **2.4 Bridal gowns and their social meaning**

A bridal gown is perhaps one of the most “highly symbolic objects” in the contemporary wedding ceremony (Walsh, 2005:239). I have noted that it is the most dreamt-of and most fantasized item of clothing a girl seeks throughout her life. In my own experience through my practice, the process that leads to the bride deciding on and receiving her bridal gown is one of the most stressful yet most rewarding parts of a bride’s wedding day. The bridal gown is an “emotional purchase” and it has become a symbol in the last few decades (Fenoli, 2011). Second only to the groom, the bridal gown is the most important item on the ‘list’<sup>27</sup>. The bridal gown is much more than just a ‘dress’: it signifies the ‘right of passage’ from a girl, to a woman and a wife (Walsh, 2005).

It is a rite of passage that signifies the break from the family and the formation of a new family. It is also a signifier of socially sanctioned sexual relations with the expectation that this will lead to children, who will eventually continue this cycle (Walsh, 2005: 239).

Walsh (2005) believes that bridal gowns have a great significance in social meaning for weddings today. The process of finding the ‘perfect’ bridal gown is a complex yet exciting journey for the bride, her family, friends and the designer or bridal consultant. I believe I am working with a bride at the pinnacle of her life, where not only is she exuding confidence but also all her insecurities, fears and emotions are a factor to consider. As I have just mentioned, the bridal gown is an emotional purchase and it is based on everything that the bride stands for;

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<sup>27</sup> The list being the order of priorities for a bride for her wedding day.

whether it is socially, economically or personally important; for example, a bride who believes in an ‘organic<sup>28</sup>’ way of life and by this, for example, I mean in the food that she eats as well as how it was prepared, will just as likely base the same values on the bridal gown she buys: the bridal gown itself being made of natural fibers as well as the process of how it was made. I have found that these kinds of brides are interested in, and insistent on the following question: ‘Was fair trade<sup>29</sup> implemented in the production of the bridal gown and was it ethically made<sup>30</sup>?’

Allport (2009), who is best known for his personality theory, believes that the psychology behind a bride’s choice of a bridal gown is socially driven: she is influenced by friends, family, television, magazines, celebrities and worldwide trends. Not only does the bride have to face the commitment of choosing a bridal gown, but also face the reality of the commitment of marriage (Mogilner, Kamvar & Aaker, 2011). All these aspects, I believe, are linked to social psychology.

With a view to a better understanding of the social psychology behind a bride’s choice of bridal gown (Allport, 1985), I briefly touch on the work of Moody, Kinderman and Sinha (2010) who jointly believe that emotion plays a part in consumer preference. Most brides have a vision of what they would like to look like and wear on their wedding day. Each bride has her own sense of style and personality that affect her choice of bridal gown. Moody et al. (2010:162) state that “Personality, mood and emotion” has proven to have implications in assisting the consumers’ clothing decisions. Walsh (2005:239) points out that colour, style and ceremonial importance of the gown can depend on the religion and culture of the wedding participants. Walsh (2005:240) goes further to say that the dress itself contains “both manifest and latent symbols that communicate to the wearer of the dress, as well as to those who observe the dress being worn”. The bridal gown is a statement, which represents who the bride is, what she is about, and it also communicates to those around her. Not

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<sup>28</sup> Food or farming methods produced or involving production without the use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, or other artificial chemicals (Oxford Dictionary of English (2010).

<sup>29</sup> Trade between companies in developed countries and producers in developing countries in which fair prices are paid to the producers (Oxford Dictionary of English (2010).

<sup>30</sup> Relating to moral principles (Oxford Dictionary of English (2010).

only does the bridal gown have to reflect a bride's personality and style, but also, in many cases, it is required to reflect sexuality (Walsh, 2005).

From that point, values and resources are weighed to determine what type of bridal gown is obtained and how it is secured (Walsh, 2005). Whether the bridal gown is borrowed, purchased, or created, each avenue tells a story of the bride's viewpoint on ethics and moral code (Walsh, 2005). This links back to values, which are a key factor in my research. As much as I base my business choices on my own values, a bride does the same when choosing her bridal gown. This is validated in Chapter Four in my writings about my internship with one of the bridal gown designers, Lunar.

## **2.5 Material culture and social comparison theory**

Material culture studies are an interdisciplinary field that examine the relationship between people and objects: the making, the history, and the interpretation (Carroll & Rothe, 2011). Carroll and Rothe (2011) believe people have many opinions and aspects to their identity, including wealth, profession, gender, ethnicity, age as well as religion. They are of the opinion that the way one dresses reflects the ability to express all of these multi-faceted aspects of identity simultaneously (2011). The ideal dress, or object in this case, is often described as "a form of non-verbal language" (Carroll & Rothe, 2011). This non-verbal language is linked to identity and the placing of oneself in society. Dress has the ability to do two things: it can include (in a group) the identity of those who dress in the same style and exclude those who dress differently, i.e. that do not fit in with the identity of the group (Carroll & Rothe, 2011).

*"Identity in what one wears; it is therefore not only an individually-influenced decision. Dress is both personal and public and is therefore impacted by not only individual choice but also by constraints within society"* (Carroll & Rothe, 2011: np). Carroll and Rothe write about how this leads to major diversity and separation in dress behaviour and identity within society, which leads to the formulation of relationship between group identities according to those aspects. I believe Carroll and Rothe are correct when they write about identity in one's clothing being not only a personal choice, but that it is also influenced by our comparisons socially. This therefore affects the role of embellishment of the

body in its own expression associated with gender behaviour and social values (Carroll & Rothe, 2011).

In a review written by Van Laren (2012:226), Van Laren cites Prown (1982:4) in describing a particular methodology that is based on the proposition that an object, such as a dress, is primary data for a study in the field of material culture. In studying material culture, using a bridal gown collection as evidence and the object at hand, the history and philosophy of the objects affects the purchasing choice as well as the “myriad relationship between people and things” (Drews, n.d.). This culture links to the social meaning of the bridal gown and the ‘emotional purchase’ decision on behalf of the consumer. This social meaning can be directly applied to a bride’s choice of bridal gown as it is said that a bridal gown is an “emotional purchase”, as mentioned in the introduction of this heading (Fenoli, 2011).

The bridal gown communicates and performs as a “significant material culture object within the custom of the wedding” (Walsh, 2005:3). Barnes and Eicher (1992:1) state that dress serves as one of the most important markers of cultural identity. Foster and Johnson (2003:1) concur with this thinking by affirming that the most visible and telling of dress modes<sup>31</sup> are bridal gowns, the choice of which makes a statement by showing “comparative prestige, wealth or perceived status”. Layered with images of sexuality and femininity, Walsh (2005:239) also believes the bride conveys multiple messages with her choice of dress colour, style and adornment. Moody et al. (2001) believe that garments can feature positive and negative moods and individual emotions, especially during the trying on stage and during the wearing stage because of the “multi-sensory aspects, social factors and symbolic associations” (Moody et al., 2010:162).

Moody et al. (2010:162) cite Entwistle (2000), Kaiser (1997) and Sproles (1979) when saying it is widely accepted that “clothing has the potential to reflect and convey the inner self”; but also that consumers prefer products that are consistent with their identity (Feinberg, Mataro & Burroughs, 1992). Carroll and

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<sup>31</sup> A way or manner in which something occurs or is experienced, expressed, or done (Oxford Dictionary of English (2010)).

Rothe (2011) believe people have many aspects to their identity, including wealth, profession, gender, ethnicity, age as well as religion; they are of the opinion that the way one dresses reflects the ability to express all of these multi-faceted aspects of identity simultaneously. From my lived experience (Whitehead, 2009), I have noticed how the theory has linked up with the practical work with brides. Each gown I design and create for each individual bride reflects her personality, style and nature. Each gown is different and unique and the feedback I have received has been that the bridal gowns are a true reflection of the bride in her entirety (see Appendix G). As designer Ralph Lauren so perfectly states, “I am not just making a dress, I am telling a story. While the dress is important, it’s just one part of the story.”

Both Moody et al. (2010) and Walsh (2005) have an underlying thread in their writing which links to one of the theories associated with the bridal gowns and the red carpet and that is the social comparison theory (Bessenoff, 2006). Bessenoff (2006: 239) contends that we determine our own “social and personal worth based on how we stack up against others”. Comparison theorists Allport (1985) and Bessenoff (2006) believe that the media has a significant effect on social comparison theory, impacting a woman’s moods, body image and self-esteem. Social comparison theory is relevant to my research, as it shows the natural human inclination to reflect on our lives in comparison to the lives and circumstances of those around us. I have investigated how social comparison theory influences the brides’ design expectations in Chapter Six.

## **2.6 The influence of Hollywood’s red carpet events on a bride’s choice of bridal gown**

The growing demand for the consumer’s individual preferences, also known as “consumer individualism”, has increased in the last decade (Kvidal, 2011:113). Brides want a gown that is exclusively their own and they expect an element of individuality. Mass production and the entry of leading global bridal brands such as Pronovias, Maggie Sottero, Lazaro and Prina Tornai, together with “legal and illegal duplication from Chinese factories often in poor quality, offer little individualism to the consumer” (Pasquinelli, 2012). Personal individualism is an

important factor to my research and my practice because I am aware, from my own experience, that brides, specifically in South Africa, want a bridal gown that no one else has.

Couture is said to be a fashion industry term that has “evolved to encompass expensive, customized garments such as wedding dresses and red-carpet evening gowns that are handmade from top-quality materials” (Strum, 2013:n.p.). In essence, couture is in the same category as consumer individualism, where people expect a gown to be completely custom designed and made specifically for them. In complete contradiction to what couture is, ready-to-wear is a mass-produced gown that is sold in standard sizes. It is not tailored to a client’s requirement or needs and there is a limited level of individuality.

The boundaries between couture and ready-to-wear wedding gowns are said to have blurred in the last decade (Strum, 2013:n.p.). Designs by bridal designers such as Vera Wang, Steven Khalil and Monique Lhuillier straddle both couture and ready-to-wear to give options to both types of consumers. Designers make their name by identifying and engaging with social trends and this provides an extraordinary opportunity for designer-branded fashion (Bruzzi & Gibson, 2000: 338). This is associated with the glamour fashion theory, which I believe has strong ties with design and individuality or ‘consumer individualism’. My research bridges the gap between couture and ready-to-wear by creating a creative process method that offers couture elements with little compromise.

According to Salinger et al. (1999), consumer preferences are changing and consumers in developed and newly industrializing countries no longer demand standardized products, but rather products that will distinguish their wearer from the masses. This is often an influence from the media, which flood newsfeeds in newspapers, on television and online with celebrities and red carpet events. Celebrity weddings flood the media and trends filtrate into mainstream bridal stores. I believe ‘good’ examples of this are the weddings of Kim Kardashian to Kanye West and the royal wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton, who are celebrities in their own right: both have become the ‘official’ red carpet trend

setters of today, setting trends for the common follower. Society has come a long way in recent decades from the significant and historical route that the red carpet symbolized; taken only by kings and queens, as well the heads of state, for formal and ceremonial occasions. It is because of this strong media presence that increasingly sophisticated consumers are demanding a greater variety of product choice (Salinger et al. 1999).

I also noted from viewing trends in bridal stores, online in wedding blogs and through the media, that Hollywood red-carpet events and bridal styles have major influences on each other. Elite red-carpet apparel is the highest form of fashion in society, the ultimate in chic and possibly the most influential item of clothing worn today (Bruzzi & Gibson, 2000). “With the erosion of traditional social hierarchies, fashion has become reliant on the mass media to perform its function of attracting attention, staging the famous and arousing wonder” (Bruzzi & Gibson, 2000: 332). Glamour theory is one of the many contributing factors to transforming a red-carpet dress into bridal gown, and these factors filter directly into mainstream media and affect the psychology of a bride when choosing her bridal gown (Bruzzi & Gibson, 2000; Howard, 1997).

## **2.7 Social media and its relevance in the bridal industry**

Although theorists and authors are of vital importance to my study, the role of social media is also relevant to my topic. Social media has become the “building block to create, modify, share and discuss on platforms such as websites, blogs and social networking” (Keitzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011:241). Traditionally, according to Keitzmann et. al. (2011), the Internet was used to simply disburse content. Over the last few years, however, what is now known as the social media phenomenon, the Internet has become a means of survival for businesses and a new system of information creation, sharing and debating (Keitzmann et. al., 2011).

Social media has also become an important tool in keeping trends relevant in the bridal industry to both the consumer and the designer. Brides now have direct access to trends and new ideas as and when they are published online and this affects both their choice of wedding gown and their desire for personal

individualism as discussed by Kvidal (2011). This is a clear example of the links I believe exist between social comparison theory (Bessenoff, 2006; Allport, 1985) and consumer individualism (Kvidal, 2011). Societies compare their bodies, their clothes and their lifestyles with what is portrayed by the media; this creates a want and desire for something unique and personalized (Bessenoff, 2006; Allport, 1985; Kvidal, 2011). This link between social comparison theory (Bessenoff, 2006; Allport, 1985) and consumer individualism (Kvidal, 2011) has fueled my research and my practice and the desire for a bespoke bridal gown that is unique and personalized; this is what my practice has been based upon.

Social media has become an entrepreneurial tool in both my study and my practice, which has been used as a research method and a way to make my work public as well as a validation method. According to Afuah (2004), social media has become a business model of innovation for businesses. By using various social media platforms to share one's work as a form of self-promotion, one builds social capital<sup>32</sup>, which leads to new clients and new business (Afuah, 2004).

I have been able to compare my ideas with bridal trends online and implement this knowledge with regard to my practice and my brides. I have also been able to share my work on various social media platforms; this has allowed brides to comment and give feedback on my work as well as allow for this content to be shared and recommended to new prospective brides. It has also allowed me to better my product and meet the needs of brides because I have a direct line to the consumer.

I have given a synopsis of these comments and feedback in Chapter Six and further feedback and validation in selected inserts from my creative journaling in Appendix G.

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<sup>32</sup> Refers to the collective value of all "social networks" [who people know] and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other (Oxford Dictionary of English (2010)).

## **2.8 Concluding reflections**

There are many factors that have influenced my research and my practice. In this chapter I documented the most important aspects that have affected my business from a literature perspective (practice as theory) and a business perspective (theory as practice), all of which are equally valuable. In Chapters Four, Five and Six I refer to different aspects of the literature review to substantiate the theory in practice in my business. The theories discussed in the literature review intertwine with the validation Chapters.

## CHAPTER THREE: A BARE MANNEQUIN

*“Fashion is not something that exists in dresses only. Fashion is in the sky, in the street, fashion has to do with ideas, the way we live, what is happening.” -*

*Coco Chanel*<sup>33</sup>

### 3.1 Conceptualisation: Stage three

This chapter on research methodology serves to give a clear outline on how my research was designed and includes a review of the research methods used. This was a qualitative study as it is an interpretation of my findings, my views, and my design aesthetic. As mentioned in Chapter One, this is not a comparative study. I looked at a physiological needs framework, which helped me understand the needs of brides to aid in my approach to design their bridal gowns. My study involved a cycle of continuously researching, analysing and reviewing data, which is exploratory by nature (Creswell, 2003). As mentioned in Chapter One, a ‘personal’ factor was essential to the success of my study. This was due to deliberately choosing to have smaller ‘sample’ sizes, i.e. fewer participants, and in my study this sample comprised of the brides I designed for, which was limited to five brides. Creswell (2007) notes that qualitative methods are “time consuming, therefore, sample sizes are usually in smaller quantities to obtain accurate results on a personal level” (Creswell, 2007:21). I used action reflection cycles as a way to assess my experiences, findings and observations during my study (Schön, 1983).

My study used two types of research, that being primary and secondary, or “desk-based research” (Gaimster, 2011:1). My primary research involved going out and engaging with people, namely the designers for whom I worked as an intern. The three bridal gown designers as well as the five brides for whom I designed gowns, based on the foundation blocks. My secondary research acknowledged literary sources of information; it was discussed in Chapter Two and later intertwined throughout Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six (Gaimster, 2011).

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<sup>33</sup> Accessed 4 March: <http://highheelinahaystack.com/the-dress-must-follow-the-body-of-a-woman-not-the-body-following-the-shape-of-the-dress-hubert-de-givenchy>

Figure 4 below demonstrates my research process, which can be viewed as chapters and visual indicators of what I cover in the various chapters in my research.

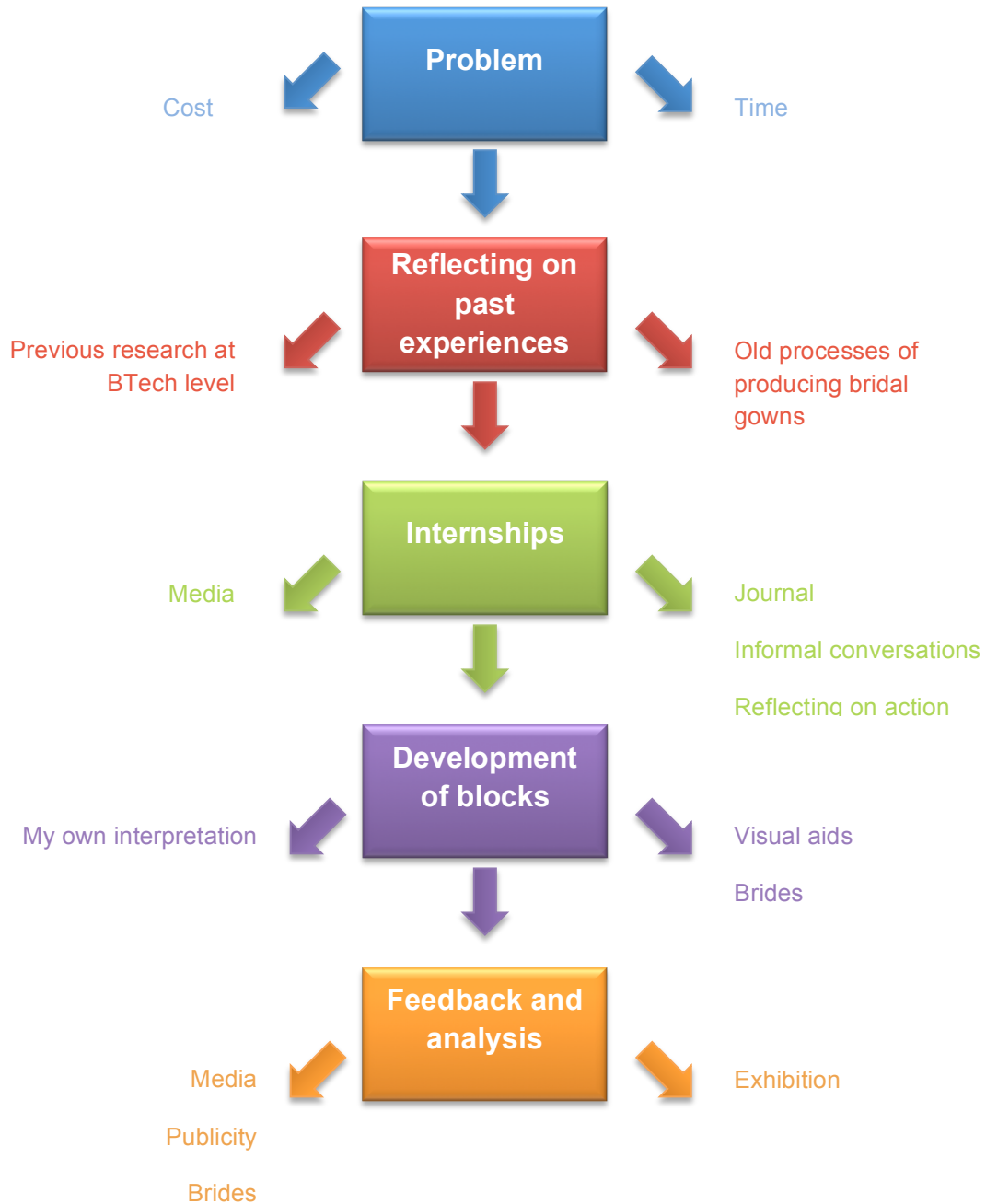


Figure 4: Diagram of the research process

As mentioned in Chapter One, Maree’s (2007: 33) “multi-method mode of enquiry” is the basis of my research and I have adopted a multifaceted approach to my qualitative study (Samaras & Freese, 2006). McNiff (2010) and

Whitehead (2009) believe that it is important as a researcher to employ a variety of methodological tools to validate the authenticity and influence of one's study. I have included the following methodologies in my practice-based self-study:

- Action research (McNiff, 2002; Schmuck, 1997; Stringer, 2007; Dick, 2003; Whitehead, 2009)
- Self-study (Schön, 1983; Whitehead, 2009; Samaras & Freese, 2006; LaBoskey, 2004)
- Reflective-practice (Schön, 1983; Dick, 2003; Fitzgerald, 1994; Boyd & Fales, 1983; Chirema, 2003; Aspelund, 2006)
- Practiced-based research (Candy, 2011; Whitehead, 2009)

### **3.2 What methodologies did I use and why did I use them?**

#### **3.2.1 Action Research**

Action research is an integral part of my methodology as a driving force behind my reasoning in conducting practice-based research (McNiff, 2002; Whitehead, 2009). Action research is self-directed professional development (Reece, 2013). It is derived from problem-based learning with a real-time and real-world application (Schmuck, 1997). By reflecting on my past experience and understanding that I employ my tacit knowledge (Polyani, 1966) in my business with brides, as well as having examined my experience with the three bridal gown designers, I was able to develop and improve my practice using action research as a basis. Although action research is one of the emergent methodologies (Dick, 2003), there are advantages and relevant theories behind using it as a method in practice-based research. Figure 5, as shown on the next page, developed by Shmuck (1997), demonstrates the basic differences between traditional research and action research which indicates why action research was the perfect methodology for my study.

Traditional vs. Action Research		
• Explanation	...	Improvement
• Knowledge	...	Development
• Experimentation	...	Perspectives
• Universal	...	Local

Figure 5: Traditional vs. action research (Schmuck, 1997)

The difference between traditional research and action research, according to Schmuck (1997) and Reece (2013), is in the objectives, means, and scope:

- Traditional research seeks explanations for what is; action research seeks progress toward what should be
- Traditional research broadens knowledge base; action research develops teachers and learners collaboratively
- Traditional research uses experimentation to gain perspective; action research uses various perspectives to solve problems and make changes
- Traditional research creates generalizations for universal application; action research creates solutions for local application

(Reece, 2013:3)

Traditional research in education is typically conducted by researchers who are somewhat removed from the environment they are studying whereas action research uses a hands-on approach where the researcher is completely involved with the process in action (Schmuck, 1997). This is why I believe action research is valid as both a method and a methodology. Although the processes of carrying out action research may vary, there is a common emphasis on critical and democratic social theory, which links back to value-driven research (Farren, 2008). Elliott (1991), like mindedly, writes that action research is implemented to improve one's practice rather than to produce knowledge, as one would do in traditional research.

The fundamental aim of action research is to improve practice rather than to produce knowledge. The production and utilization of knowledge is subordinate to, and conditioned by, this fundamental aim (Elliott, 1991: 49).

Stringer (2007:8) similarly describes action research as a “simple, yet powerful framework” consisting of a “look, think, and act” routine in his action research interacting spiral on the next page in Figure 6. Each stage consists of observing, reflecting, and then taking some sort of action. This action leads one into the next stage.

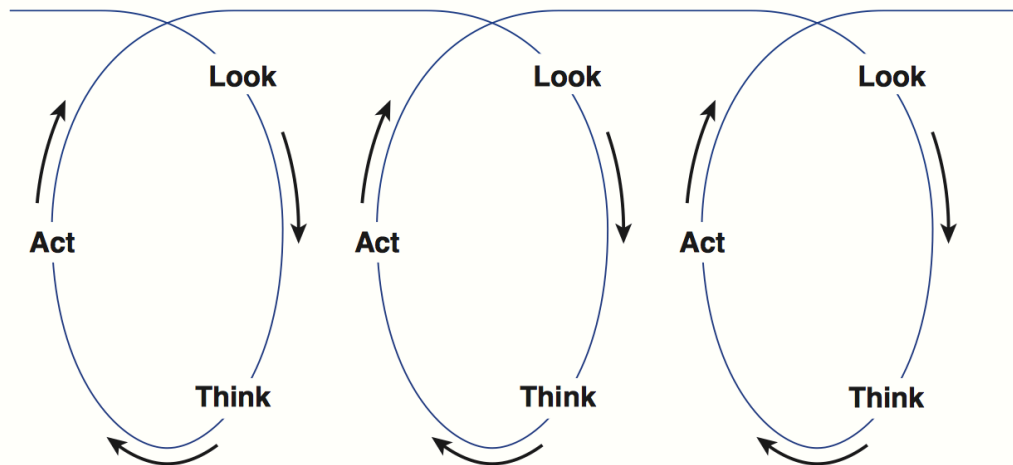


Figure 6: Stringer's action research interacting spiral (2007)

Miller (2003:13) believes that action research rejects the notion of an “objective, value-free approach to knowledge generation in favour of an explicitly political, socially-engaged, and democratic practice. His ethos is that action research should be used as a shared commitment to democratic social change (Miller, 2003:13). Miller (2003) highlights the fundamental values in action research and I believe this ethos links back to the values that entrepreneurship is based on as discussed in Chapter Two. Action research goes beyond helping one to develop one's practice. By using action research as a method, one automatically helps others, based on the values on which action research is built.

A respect for people and for the knowledge and experience they bring to the research process, a belief in the ability of democratic processes to achieve positive social change, and a commitment to action, these are the basic values which underlie our common practice as action researchers (Miller, 2003:15).

To address my research questions, I have used the action research framework of McNiff and Whitehead (2002:14) as an interrogative and critically-reflective tool to ask and answer the following questions:

- What is my concern?
- Why am I concerned?
- What evidence do I have for my concern?
- What matters to me?
- What can I do? What will I do?
- What happens as a result of my action?

By adapting McNiff and Whitehead's (2002:14) framework to create my own critical questions, as mentioned in Chapter One, I included the following, which also form the main subjects in my chapters:

- a) What evidence do I have of my ability to design and make bridal gowns, which meet the needs of individual brides in a cost-effective way so that they are competitively priced? **Chapter Five: The Toile (Foundation Blocks)**
- b) What evidence do I have of my ability to design and make bridal gowns, which meet the needs of individual brides? **Chapter Six: Tailoring the Couture (Brides)**
- c) What evidence do I have of the possibility that I can improve my practice as a designer and entrepreneur? **Chapter Seven: The Final Fitting (Exhibition)**
- d) What evidence do I have of the possible employability of others in the bridal gown industry? **Chapter Seven: The Big Day (Conclusion)**

These subsidiary questions were formulated into four evidence Chapters to ensure that I have correctly evaluated and validated my practice as a bridal gown designer and completed the action-research cycle. These three subsidiary questions helped in answering my main critical question, which was: *How can I improve my practice as a designer and manufacturer of bespoke, cost-effective, competitively-priced, bridal gowns?*

These evidence chapters are:

- **Chapter Four: The Drafting (Internships):** In Chapter Four I documented the internships I completed with the three bridal gown designers and analysed cost-effective measures to produce competitively-priced bridal gowns.
- **Chapter Five: The Toile (Foundation Blocks):** In Chapter Five I developed the five foundation blocks based on the most desired silhouettes for bridal gowns from my brides; my experience with the three bridal gown designers, my tacit knowledge in my business and from viewing online trends via social media.
- **Chapter Six: Tailoring the Couture (Brides):** In Chapter Six I presented my ability to adapt the foundation blocks I had developed to meet the needs of individual brides.
- **Chapter Seven: The Final Fitting (Exhibition):** In Chapter Seven I documented and analysed the comments and feedback from my final exhibition as evidence and validation that made my research credible.

### 3.2.2 Self-study

Although self-study and action research fall under the same banner within my study and although there are similarities between them, there are also clear differences between the two methodologies. Whilst action research focuses more on the action and 'what one does', self-study focuses on 'who one is' (Samaras & Freese, 2006). In my study, 'who one is' is vitally important in building a brand, building an identity and becoming well known; this became a validation process for my research. The 'who one is' is the 'I' in my self-study as mentioned in Chapter One. The 'I' also represents my values, my world view and my personal development in improving my practice which can be seen in the stages laid out in evidence chapters above. Self-study researchers use their experiences as a resource (Samaras & Freese, 2006), which links back to tacit knowledge as discussed by Polyani (1996) and reflective practice as discussed by Schön (1983).

Another important difference is that self-study focuses on “improvement on both the personal and professional levels” (Samaras & Freese, 2006: 5), with which LaBoskey (2004) concurs:

It is self-initiated and focused; it is improvement-aimed; it is interactive; it includes multiple, mainly qualitative, methods; and it defines validity as a validation process based in trustworthiness (LaBoskey, 2004: 817).

Self-study is built on personal reflection (Schön, 1983) which requires openness and vulnerability as the focus is on one’s self (Samaras & Freese, 2006). In self-study, one also makes the processes and work open to public critique which allows feedback and validation of the research (Samaras & Freese, 2006). This is why having an exhibition of my work is so important as it is a stepping stone in the self-study methodology. It is also important to be open to ideas from others, as explained by Barnes (1998), and to know how collaboration plays a critical role in self-study, which in my study involves the internships with the bridal gown designers, working with my brides and having constant feedback from clients, designers, peers and followers of social media platforms.

### 3.2.3 Reflective Practice and the importance of being reflexive

I have adopted Schön’s approach of reflective practice by means of reflection ‘in’ action and reflection ‘on’ action and I have used action reflection cycles as a way to access my experiences, findings and observations (Schön, 1983). Reflection ‘in’ action is looking at the events while they are happening; this allows the researcher to re-design and re-structure whilst one is doing it. Reflection ‘on’ action is turning information and findings into knowledge and looking back after the events (Schön, 1983).

Fitzgerald (1994:67) like-mindedly, writes about reflective-practice as, “The retrospective contemplation of a practice that is undertaken in order to uncover the knowledge used in practical situations, by analysing and interpreting the information recalled”.

Boyd and Fales (1983) have a slightly different approach and concentrate on the reflective process as a means of developing ones-self ‘before action’, ‘in

action' and 'after action'. Schön's (1983) approach abandons the 'before action' reflection, which is why, by using Boyd and Fales's approach, together with Schön's, I was able to obtain an objective and a more pertinent result in my research. I believe that this set the foundation for a thorough and rounded aid to my practice for my study.

By acknowledging what I learnt at BTech level, which is the 'before' action that Boyd and Fales (1983) refers to, I realised there were links between Schön's 'before action' theory and Polanyi's (1966) theory of tacit knowledge. Through this process I was able to develop old knowledge to substantiate my MTech research. This is valid because the knowledge and information recalled at BTech level was vital in the process of uncovering new knowledge and information at MTech level.

The process of journaling is also a "reflective tool" that is used in my research (Chirema, 2003). Chirema (2003) suggests that journaling promotes reflective thinking and learning. This journaling process that I have done documents thoughts, ideas, designs and informal conversations with designers and brides. A reflective journal is said to encourage open-mindedness, motivation, self-awareness, description, observation, critical analysis, problem solving, synthesis and evaluation (Atkins & Murphy, 1993). I have also used my social media forums as a form of reflection and recording of my ideas and thoughts, which are open to public comment and feedback. This reflective approach to my research has both aided my research and validated it. Aspelund's (2006) design process also leans in the favour of creative journaling. Aspelund (2006) states that since designing is a visual skill, one needs to use thoughts, ideas, photographs, sketches and sometimes impulsive and illogical designs to create visual statements that represent a process in a sketchbook or folder. Inserts from my visual journaling can be found in Appendix G.

As important and relevant as reflective practice is, being reflexive is equally important and relevant to my study and my practice. Reflexivity is finding ways to question our thought processes, values, and assumptions in an effort to better understand one's roles in relation to others (Bolton, 2009). Fook (2002),

in the quote below, explains the importance and the complexities of reflexivity in research.

Reflexivity is a stance of being able to locate oneself in the picture, to appreciate how one's own self influences [actions]. Reflexivity is potentially more complex than being reflective, in that the potential for understanding the myriad ways in which one's own presence and perspective influence the knowledge and actions, which are created, is potentially more problematic than the simple searching for implicit theory (Fook 2002: 43).

Fook (2002) goes on to explain how reflexivity is understanding how we relate to others within an environment or our surroundings, and becoming aware of the limits of our knowledge. To be reflexive involves thinking from within experiences and "reflecting upon the mind itself" (Bolton, 2009:14). By being reflexive, one is able to acknowledge that one is active in shaping one's surroundings, and I believe that one can choose how one would handle and further investigate a problem or situation. One can critically begin to take circumstances and relationships into consideration rather than simply reacting to them. One can then review and revise the situation or environment in an effort to improve one's practice or process.

#### 3.2.4 Practice-based research

Practice-based research methods have been used to carry out this study. According to Whitehead (2009), the main question in a practice-based study is 'How do I improve what I am doing?'. This main overarching question was the basis of my research, and again I recollect my main critical question: *How can I improve my practice as a designer and manufacturer of bespoke, cost-effective, competitively priced, bridal gowns?*

As mentioned in Chapter One, practice-based research is an "original creative investigation undertaken in order to gain new findings and new knowledge by means of the practice as well as the outcomes of the practice" (Whitehead, 2009; Schön, 1983; McNiff, 2002). This means that I have explored knowledge by means of my practice, resulting in an exploration of data by means of the outcomes of my practice. Practice-based research allows the process itself to lead to a "transformation of the ideas and designs, which in turn leads to new works" (Candy, 2011:1).

I have endeavoured to show the transformation of my ideas, designs and experience in my practice into new works and to generate new evidence as advocated by Candy (2011) and which can be seen in Chapters Five and Six. By recording and documenting this transformation in my visual journal, one can see the link between my practice and the theory and confirm the positive role authors like Candy (2011), Schön (1983), McNiff (2002) and Whitehead (2009) have had on my research process.

The outcomes of my practice-based study are 15 bridal gowns, various sketches, photographic images, digital media and a public exhibition (Candy, 2011). Candy believes that whilst the significance and context of the research is described in words, a full understanding can only be obtained with direct reference to the physical outcomes (Candy, 2011). She goes on to say that this kind of practiced-based research has “given rise to new concepts and methods in the generation of original knowledge” (Candy, 2011:3).

### **3.3 How did I collect my data?**

#### **3.3.1 Purpose of data collection**

Accurate data collection is important as it helps to ensure the integrity of my research. It gives me, the researcher, the ability to answer my research questions and makes it easier to validate my study. The main collection method in my study, as mentioned in Chapter One, is qualitative by nature. The data collection is broken up into tacit knowledge, existing literature and research, internships with the designer, my brides, my exhibition and reflective and reflexive journal notes.

#### **3.3.2 Tacit knowledge**

Years of subconscious knowledge that has become second nature in one's practice is known as tacit<sup>34</sup> knowledge (Polyani, 1966). According to Virtanen, tacit knowledge is usually characterized as “‘knowledge difficult to articulate’ and is therefore often used to refer to practical knowledge, such as skills, know-

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<sup>34</sup> Understood or implied without being stated.

how and professional intuition” (2013:1). Through reflection on my practice in past years, also known as ‘before’ action (Boyd & Fales, 1983), I have been able to use subconscious knowledge to both apply that expertise and gather data in my practice-based MTech research.

### 3.3.3 Existing literature and research

I have used secondary, research-acknowledged sources of information to gather data on existing literature for my research (Gaimster, 2011). By looking at authors such as Wolmarans (2011), Vlok (2006), Jacques (2012), Nattrass and Seekings (2013), I was able to support my research concerns and research problem. I was then able to gather ideas from Drucker (2012), Audretsch (2009), Kelley et al. (2010) and Morris et al. (2003) with regards to entrepreneurial models and entrepreneurial thinking that I could apply to my practice. Lastly, from researching authors such as Van Laren (2012), Walsh (2005), Carol and Rothe (2011), Salinger et al. (1999) and Bessenoff (2006), I was able to have a clearer understanding of the social psychology of a bride and how she would go about choosing her wedding gown.

### 3.3.4 Internships

The internships which I completed with three bridal gown designers were a form of primary research (Gaimster, 2011). Over the course of these three internships with Lunar, Biji Couture and Kobus Dippenaar, I was able to gather a better understanding on how they respectively run their businesses and work with brides. I chose these three bridal gown designers because they are leaders in the bridal gown industry in South Africa. They have respectively created their own methods to compete with imported bridal gowns that are manufactured at a lower cost. I chose them because I knew that there was something to be learned from each of them and that would be vital to my study. I conducted open-ended interviews in the form of casual conversations spread out over the course of each internship (Maree, 2007). I journaled and noted ideas, comments and casual conversations, which apart from my being able to reflect on and adapt to my own practice, also enabled me to critically analyse what areas of each business needed development. These guideline questions are in Appendix E. The most valuable learning experience for me was gathering tacit

knowledge (Polyani, 1966) from them from gleaned their own years of experience in the bridal industry.

### 3.3.5 The brides

I have taken the foundation blocks I developed and described in Chapter Five and applied them to five of my bridal clients with individual needs and requirements. I used a physiological needs framework based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs to help pinpoint what a brides needs are, which can be seen in Chapter Six. I was able to adapt the foundation blocks to meet the needs of each individual bride using tacit knowledge, my experience and knowledge gained during the internships. I documented my interactions with brides, the bridal gown sketches, the production process of the gowns, professional photographs on the actual wedding day as well as final feedback from the brides. A list of guideline questions for the brides can be seen in Appendix E.

### 3.3.6 Exhibition

I presented my practical component of this study at the DUT Art Gallery in the form of an exhibition, where I publically invited peers and exhibition viewers to comment and give feedback on my work. I arranged my exhibition into three installations that represented the stages of my design process, from the Foundation Block Installation, to the Jeannelle la Amour installation (my own interpretation of the foundation blocks) and, finally, the Real Brides Installation. I documented this exhibition and the feedback given by the public and peers in the form of a comments book and filmed documentation.

### 3.3.7 Reflective and reflexive journal notes

Journal keeping, apart from being an important tool and method for any action research and practice-based study, is also valuable for any entrepreneurial designer. By detailing my experiences, ideas and feedback, I was able to validate my research and my practice as well as find further ways to improve and refine my design process. My creative journaling also gives the reader a clearer view and understanding to my practice-based study in order to gain a holistic perspective between the theory and the practice.

### **3.4 Analysis and interpretation**

During the analysis stage, I examine relationships and make connections between the practice and the theory. As discussed in Chapter One, I have used reflective practice to analyse my data (Schön, 1983). My data is derived from the following five factors:

1. My experiences while learning to be a bridal gown designer and entrepreneur.
2. My intern experiences with the three established bridal gown designers.
3. Designing and developing the foundation blocks, which include modifications and changes to the designs.
4. Working with the brides.
5. The feedback from the exhibition via the comments book, comments made on social media and videoed comments from the audience.

From using Brown's (1994) seven questions to outline my writing in analysing my internships I was able to generate Chapter Four. I have systematically answered Brown's seven questions for each internship to both reflect on, and validate the data.

I used McNiff and Whitehead's action research framework (2002) to aid in the analysis to improve my practice through the development of the foundation blocks. I also used McNiff and Whitehead's action research framework (2002) to aid in recognising the shortfalls of selected foundation blocks after working with the brides. I further go on, as mentioned in Chapters One and Three, to analyse the final stage of my research, being the exhibition, through Aspelund's (2006) design process framework. I revisit my critical questions and synthesis comments made via my comments book, on social media and on the filmed documentation.

### **3.5 Validation**

McNiff (2010: 41) writes that validation can be broken up into two forms: "personal validation and social validation". I have made my action research public by having an exhibition and I have involved others in my validation

processes through various forms of peer review, that being through social media, my brides, the designers with whom I served internships, and the final exhibition; this assisted in disseminating my findings by establishing the acceptability of my gowns in the public sphere and the significance of what I have done. I have recorded viewers' comments and feedback from my exhibition as a form of validation for my research. This can be seen on the DVD as well as in my creative journal.

Social media as a form of validation is relevant because it has become a marketing tool which has led to entrepreneurial ideas. I have received valued feedback from future, present and past brides as well as general followers on various social media platforms that have validated the view that my practice reflects positive growth and success. Validation and evidence of my practice from social media can be seen in the inserts from my creative journal in Appendix G.

Habermas (1976) is the main proponent of a critical theory approach that I have taken in the steps to validating my study. Both Habermas (1976) and Maree's (2007) writings validate my approach to compiling guideline open-ended questions for the designers and my brides.

The speaker should:

- Utter something understandably;
- Give [the hearer] something to understand;
- Make himself thereby understandable; and
- Come to an understanding with the other person.

(Habermas, 1976: 2).

Habermas indicates the inherent importance of the following four validity claims in any communicative transaction and that I, the researcher, must be able to defend.

Habermas's (1976:195) criteria are as follows:

- Comprehensibility - does it make sense?
- Truthfulness - is there firm evidence to prove the validity of the claim?
- Authenticity - does the researcher show that they are living according to values they espouse?
- Appropriateness - does the researcher show an understanding of the context of the claim?

Habermas (1976) goes on to further emphasize the importance of the following factors of knowledge claims: comprehensibility in the sense that both parties understand the claims; truth in the sense of providing sufficient evidence to justify the claims being made; rightness in the sense of justifying the normative assumptions in the research and authenticity in the sense that the researcher shows, over time and in interaction, that they are genuinely committed to what they claim to believe in.

As discussed in Chapter One, I adopted a crystallisation approach to validate my qualitative research (Richardson, 2000). Richardson (2000) speaks of using crystallisation as a form of validity as apposed to triangulation, which is rigid, fixed and two-dimensional in form. She suggests rather using the central imagery as the crystal for multi-mode method of enquiry (Maree, 2007), which combines "symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionality, and angles of approach" (Richardson, 2000: 934). Richardson goes on to say that crystallisation provides researchers with a multi-sphere undertaking for practice based research.

Crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know. Ingeniously, we know there is always more to know. (Richardson, 2000:934)

Along with McNiff and Whitehead's framework (2010: 41), as mentioned in Chapter One, I have also adopted Aspelund's design process (2006:3) below to methodically gather my data, analyse my data and generate my evidence as a form of validation. Aspelund divides the design process into seven different

stages. These stages I realised were a part of a process that I had already implemented subconsciously during the years of working with brides. These stages are vital to the practical component of my study and my own design process to develop the foundation blocks and apply the method to the 'real' brides. He likens the design process to a "romantic relationship" and this process can be likened to each of my design chapters (2006:3).

- STAGE 1: **Inspiration** is the first stage of the design process where one experiences excitement and infatuation with one's new idea (Chapter One)
- STAGE 2: This excitement and energy is then carried through to the **identification** stage. The initial abstract inspiration becomes more recognisable and defined (Chapter Two)
- STAGE 3: In the **conceptualisation** stage the idea becomes specific and a set of loosely-understandable outlines are developed (Chapter Three)
- STAGE 4: In the **exploration/refinement** stage, boundaries and structures become fixed and the designer needs to commit to these structures and decisions (Chapter Four)
- STAGE 5: In the **definition/modelling** stage, the designer begins to build on experiences and discoveries and creates models or examples that allow the designer to test the validity of the design (Chapter Five)
- STAGE 6: In the **communication** stage the designer presents his/her designs with the intention of gaining feedback in order to make any last changes before the final stage (Chapter Six)
- STAGE 7: The **final** stage is the production stage, where all of the previous ideas and stages take a physical form (Chapter Seven)  
(Aspelund, 2006: 3-4)

As a fashion designer himself, Aspelund's (2006) approach was holistic and diverse. His description of the design process is similar to the process and stages I have followed over the years out of natural instinct and tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1966). Both Buchanan (1995) and Aspelund (2010) use the terminology 'models' to refer to the concept of definition in the fifth stage. Similarly, in my study equivalent terms to 'models' can be used and adapted as the 'foundation blocks' as discussed in Chapter Five.

### **3.6 Concluding reflections**

In conclusion, by adapting and applying these various multi-faceted methodologies (Samaras & Freese, 2006) and tools to suit my qualitative study (Creswell, 2007) in a multi-method mode of enquiry (Maree, 2007), I have been able to tailor an authentic, practice-based (Candy, 2011; Whitehead, 2009) self-study (Schön, 1983; Whitehead, 2009; Samaras & Freese, 2006; LaBoskey, 2004) through processes of action research (McNiff, 2002; Schmuck, 1997; Stringer, 2007; Dick, 2003; Whitehead, 2009) using reflective practice (Schön, 1983; Dick, 2003; Fitzgerald, 1994; Boyd and Fales, 1983; Chirema, 2003; Aspelund, 2006). This chapter also highlights the importance of approaches such as tacit knowledge (Polyani, 1966; Boyd and Fales, 1983) and validation, and draws parallels or links between the theory and the practice.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THE DRAFTING (INTERNSHIPS)

*“Good design begins with honesty, asks tough questions, comes from collaboration and from trusting your intuition.” - Freeman Thomas<sup>35</sup>*

### 4.1 Exploration and refinement: Stage four

In this chapter I document, reflect on and analyze my internships with the three bridal gown designers as a form of primary research (Gaimster, 2011). Along with Chapter Five, this Chapter is a systematic monitoring of practice and a description of the action aspect of data gathering based on McNiff and Whitehead’s framework (2010) as explained in Chapter One. I identify how these internships contributed to my study in respect of the design of the bridal gowns and the cost-effectiveness thereof. As mentioned in Chapter Three, I was able to gain a better understanding on how they respectively ran their businesses and work with brides. I noted that each designer relied on their own form of tacit knowledge from their years of experience in the bridal industry (Polyani, 1966) that have contributed to their own practice. This tacit knowledge also indirectly contributed to my practice as a result of carrying out these internships. Polyani (1962: 53) goes on to say: *“by watching the master and emulating his efforts in the presence of his example, the apprentice unconsciously picks up the rules of the art, including those which are not explicitly known to the master himself”*. This has been the most valuable learning experience for me: picking up on knowledge and methods that I wasn’t aware of until I critically reflected on the internships. The experience from my internships, my past experience and tacit knowledge has been married together to become the evidence in the improvement of my practice.

### 4.2 What is the importance of the methodology and methods used to gather my data?

#### 4.2.1 Brown’s seven questions

The writing in this Chapter is broken up into three sections based on the three internships. I do this because it is my aim to show the reader the importance each internship has had on my practice in both their different and similar ways. I

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<sup>35</sup> Accessed at: <http://quotesondesign.com/freeman-thomas-2/>

was able to learn different aspects from each designer as well as note some similar points they all made. As mentioned in Chapter One, I have used Brown's (1994) seven questions to outline my writing in each section as a form of action reflection:

- What did I do?
- Why did I do it?
- What happened?
- What do the results mean in theory?
- What do the results mean in practice?
- What is the key benefit for the readers?
- What remains unresolved?

Brown's seven questions that provide a framework for writing (1994:96)

#### 4.2.2 Informal, open-ended questions

Some of the answers to Brown's seven questions were gathered from the open-ended interviews in the form of casual conversation and some answers were gathered from observation over the course of the internships (Maree, 2007). Habermas' (1976) writings and view also validates my approach to compiling open-ended questions as the speaker can utter knowledge understandably and there can be an understanding between the researcher and the designers. These guidelines for informal, open-ended questions aided in answering an overarching question for this chapter: What evidence do I have of my ability to design and make bridal gowns which meet the needs of individual brides in a cost-effective way so that they are competitively priced? The guidelines for open-ended interview questions can be seen in Appendix E. The open-ended questions, together with general feedback from these internships and from what I had observed over each internship from my own perspective, gave me a well-rounded and balanced frame of reference.

#### 4.2.3 Journaling

As part of action-reflection cycles, I documented my experiences in the form of my creative journaling and selected experiences which were published on social media as a form of thanks to the designers. I found that being allowed to

photograph the dresses I worked on during the internships, along with my journal entries, allowed for both a reflective and reflexive approach.

### 4.3 Lunar



Lunar is a South African lifestyle and clothing brand founded by designer Karen Ter Morshuizen and her husband Paul Harris in 1998. Based at 44 Stanley Avenue in Johannesburg, Lunar offers unique, nature-inspired merchandise. Since its inception, Lunar has been sensitive to environmental concerns, making use, almost exclusively of natural fibers and pigment dyes. Each collection reflects their essential design philosophy: Lunar is about finding inspiration in the small things around us and emphasizing an appreciation for our environment. In Karen's own words, "I find beauty in the small things. Things that have existed around us forever and yet these same elements continue to overwhelm our senses, even today"<sup>36</sup>.

The principles of organic options, responsible business practices and the preservation of nature have always been high on their list of priorities. Lunar does not profess to be experts or purists in this regard but rather responsible designers leading the eco-conscious fashion movement in South Africa. Their business decisions and design principals are based on values and they attract brides who share the same values when choosing their bridal gowns. The demand for "alternative" options for bridal-wear, as opposed to mainstream, mass-produced bridal wear, is such that it comprises 50% of the Lunar business. Lunar offers a ready-to-wear bridal collection as well as top-of-the range, bespoke wedding gowns.

#### 4.3.1 What did I do?

I was an intern at Lunar over five working days, where I worked specifically in their bridal department. Lunar specializes in eco-conscious design based on

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<sup>36</sup> Accessed at <http://ethicalfashionforum.ning.com/profile/KarenTerMorshuizen>

natural fibres and fair trade. Over the five days we worked on bridal gowns for their store, which can be more accurately described as a boutique<sup>37</sup> where Lunar has a front-of-house and a back-of-house. The front-of-house is the shop itself, which is open to the public for viewing, fitting and sales. The back-of-house is the micro-factory<sup>38</sup> where all the production takes place for their flagship boutique as well as the other boutiques, stores and markets they supply.

We worked on stocking their rails by reproducing current designs, working on new designs as well as working on bespoke bridal gowns for private clients. I noted that the bespoke bridal gowns were strongly inspired by Hollywood's red-carpet events and the Lunar bridal designers added their own signature features to the bride's inspiration. Most brides brought pictures of celebrities wearing designer<sup>39</sup> gowns on the red carpet at the Oscars or Academy Awards as their inspiration and starting point. This is both evidence and validation of glamour theory (Bruzzi & Gibson, 2000) as mentioned in Chapter Two and how it affects a bride's choice of bridal gown (Howard, 1997). What I also noted was how the brides compared themselves to these celebrities and how they described the need to 'look like them' on their wedding day. This is evidence of social comparison theory and that it is really happening in the workplace; it validates my study and my practice (Bessenoff, 2006; Allport, 1985).

I was able to work on and gain experience from both sides of their bridal department: the bespoke service where they custom design a gown for a clients and the ready-to-wear<sup>40</sup> service where brides were able to buy already designed-and-made bridal gowns off the rail.

One of the bridal gowns I worked on during the internship was a new design for their boutique's bridal ready-to-wear rail as seen in Figure 7 on the following page. I had to develop this bridal gown from the knowledge I had gained over

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<sup>37</sup> A small shop selling fashionable clothes or accessories serving a sophisticated or specialized clientele.

<sup>38</sup> A small dimension factory able to produce small dimension products.

<sup>39</sup> Made by a famous or prestigious fashion designer.

<sup>40</sup> Clothes made for the general market and sold through shops rather than made to order for an individual customer (Oxford Dictionary of English (2010)).

the course of the internship, my own personal experience as well as from their signature style as a brand.



Figure 7: The new bridal gown I designed for Lunar's ready-to-wear bridal rail in the boutique with the Lunar signature style (Walters, 2014)<sup>41</sup>

One of the other bridal gowns I designed, alongside the Lunar bridal gown designers, was a bespoke<sup>42</sup> bridal gown for a private client, which can be seen in Figure 8. This was a great learning experience for me as I was able to see first-hand<sup>43</sup> how the Lunar bridal gown designers interacted with the brides and how they adapted the bride's vision and ideas to suit their brand and style. I gathered a better understanding of why this is important in the design process and why each bridal gown must reflect 'you' as a designer and 'you' as a brand. I have discussed how this factor impacted my practice in my conclusion regarding all three internships.

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<sup>41</sup> Photograph taken by author.

<sup>42</sup> Anything commissioned to a particular specification.

<sup>43</sup> (Of information or experience) from the original source or personal experience; direct.



Figure 8: One of the bridal gowns I worked on for a private client at Lunar (Walters, 2014)

#### 4.3.2 Why did I do it?

As a younger designer in the bridal industry, I had, and still have a great deal to learn. This internship along with the other two internships was a great experience and opportunity to observe how South African bridal gown designers operate their businesses, despite major competition from leading imported brands. Lunar in particular has a 'less is more' approach to their design aesthetic, taking great inspiration from using natural fibres and simple silhouettes. This restraint in design was important for me to observe as a bridal gown designer as it ultimately meant that fewer hours were spent on each dress. It was equally important to observe the customer relations side of the business, the design process side of the business as well as the production side of the business as this provides a holistic overview on how Lunar was structured as a business.

#### 4.3.3 What happened?

As a result, I learned how delegating tasks to specific staff members and being consistent in that delegation is vital to a successful business. The designer only designs and creates the pattern; the pattern cutter only cuts fabrics; each seamstress stitches the same dress or operation in production; and the finisher only does finishes on the garment. This ensures a higher level of productivity

within the business, which brings down the cost per garment thus ensuring a higher profit margin. I also learnt the value and validity of Hollywood's influence on a bride's choice of bridal gown, as discussed by Howard (1997). Lunar showed me that not only is glamour theory (Bruzzi & Gibson, 2000) and social comparison theory (Bessenoff, 2006; Allport, 1985) valid in the bridal industry, but also a key factor in keeping one's bridal gowns relevant and trend-current in the present bridal market.

#### 4.3.4 What do the results mean in theory?

- a) *Labour*: Upon reflecting on this internship I realized that having a strong and skilled labour force is vital to a successful bridal gown business. I established that labour costs at Lunar, as a South African business, are high. In theory, this effected the costing of the gowns, which resulted in a much higher price compared to those of competing imported gowns.
- b) *Entrepreneurship*: Secondly, Lunar is a prime example of how entrepreneurship links to growth, job opportunity and general competitiveness in the economy as stated by Wolmarans (2011), Vlok (2006), Natrass and Seekings (2013). As an eco-driven and value-based brand, Lunar has provided jobs for the underprivileged and has become a bridal brand of choice for value-driven brides. This links back to Chapter Two and validates the theory which Allport (1985) discusses regarding how a bride chooses her bridal gown based on her values.
- c) *Hollywood influence*: Lastly, Glamour theory (Bruzzi and Gibson, 2000) and the influence of the red carpet on a bride's choice of bridal gown (Bessenoff, 2006; Allport, 1985), as discussed in Chapter Two, is predominant in Lunar's business and through the internship this theory was validated in practice.

#### 4.3.5 What do the results mean in practice?

- a) *Labour*: Upon reflection on my experience with Lunar, I have come to the conclusion that one has to employ a workforce, starting with one person. In reality this is important in one's practice if one wishes to continue the

growing process to prevent stagnation<sup>44</sup>. From my internship with Lunar I learnt that delegation is a key factor to employing a successful workforce. Although labour in South Africa is higher than those of competing importing bridal market countries (Wolmarans, 2011), the lesson to be learnt is to simplify design and simplify work; this saves time and money on each bridal gown.

- b) *Entrepreneurship*: In terms of our economy in South Africa, the best current solution is entrepreneurship (Wolmarans, 2011) as discussed in Chapter Two, therefore, in my practice, the investigation and inclusion of entrepreneurial innovation was a key factor in my research. What I discovered at Lunar was that values are also a key factor in business, and that entrepreneurship is good not only for individuals who start up businesses but also for creating jobs and opportunity for others. This validates my research and the ‘theory as practice’.
- c) *Hollywood influence*: I learnt at Lunar that the aspect of the Hollywood red-carpet events influence a bride’s choice of bridal gown. This needs to be embraced in a bridal gown business. The strong influence of Hollywood’s red carpet events in a bride’s choice of bridal gown will keep a bridal designer current and on-trend all the time.

#### 4.3.6 What is the key benefit for the readers?

I believe that the most important part that can be taken from this internship is the common thread of every choice in the business being value based from the labour to the materials used. This is a great outlook for a business to have and this can have significant and positive effects on South Africa’s economy for small businesses should more than one adopt this approach.

#### 4.3.7 What remains unresolved?

Upon completing the internship at Lunar, I was left with no question unanswered or unresolved. This led me to answer “yes” to my overarching question for this chapter in order to help me improve my practice:

Did Lunar meet the needs of brides? Yes.

Were their gowns cost effective? Yes.

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<sup>44</sup> The state of being still, not moving, or not progressing (Oxford Dictionary of English (2010)).

Were they competitively priced within the bridal market? Yes.

#### 4.4 Biji Couture



Co-designers Biji and Laura are a professional couture fashion design team who create bespoke wedding and special-occasion gowns. Biji Couture was founded in 1990 and has become known for innovative design, exceptional attention to detail and service excellence. Collaboration with clients during the dress fittings ensures that making one's dream gown becomes a unique and memorable journey. Much of the work is done by hand, with painstaking care and precision.

Every couture garment is custom cut and fitted to the client. The garment is initially cut in the actual lining of the dress, instead of a muslin or calico toile, as is the traditional method. Biji cuts the toile a little looser and conservatively shapes the necklines, to allow room for adjustment to suit the client's figure and posture. All adjustments get marked after the fitting and the entire basic is unpicked, pressed out and re-assessed. Providing all the adjustments are minor and the shape is fluid, they then trim the alterations and re-join the garment ready for a follow-up fitting with only skeletonized boning in place, if necessary for a garment, which is promising to offer hidden support or corsetry. Once the follow-up fitting is done on the client, they predict the way forward, suggesting suitable necklines and the basic silhouette of the garment to suit the figure from every angle. Assuming, at this stage that the client is pleased with the general

result, they once again unpick the entire basic, tweak the shape and proceed to cut in the foundation fabrics.

The third fitting usually reveals to the client what she can expect the basic outcome to be. This is usually also the time vast progress can be noted. Every fitting that follows becomes more exciting and gives the client the opportunity to give her input and become more involved with the finer detailing. A perfect example of this is where Biji does hand-embroidery for a dress. It is a unique way of personalizing one's dress and gives one complete freedom to create amazing designs and effects.

The entire process from design to completion takes approximately 4 – 5 months. Weekly fittings take place, and start around 6 – 8 weeks prior to the function. Ultimately, Biji's aim is to create a masterpiece for every client, where their response on collection day is that their dress is the best they have ever made.

#### 4.4.1 What did I do?

I was an intern for Biji for five working days where we worked on bespoke hand-made bridal gowns for private clients at Biji's studio in her private residence in Johannesburg. Biji specializes in heavily embellished and intricate gowns where she often designs and embroiders her own lace and fabric. Like Lunar, Biji also had a showroom (font-of-house) where her private clients would come for consultations and fittings. The workroom was upstairs (back-of-house) where her staff would work on the bridal gowns and client orders. I worked tirelessly for five days on one bespoke bridal gown as seen in Figure 9. Together with the staff, we made a petticoat<sup>45</sup> for the bridal gown, draped the bridal gown in silk<sup>46</sup> and did lace hand applique and beading to accent the front of the bridal gown. Over and above that, there were Swarovski<sup>47</sup> crystals, flowers and feathers scattered on the dress. There was a large amount of handwork and detail

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<sup>45</sup> An undergarment stitched into the dress or worn under a skirt or dress separately to create volume at the base of the dress (Oxford Dictionary of English (2010)).

<sup>46</sup> A fine, strong, soft lustrous fiber produced by silkworms in making cocoons and collected to make thread and fabric (Oxford Dictionary of English (2010)).

<sup>47</sup> Crystal components that are regarded as the highest quality machine cut and polished crystal beads in the world (Oxford Dictionary of English (2010)).

involved in this dress. Unlike Lunar, who adopted a 'less is more' approach, Biji took the 'more is more' avenue to her bridal gown design.



Figure 9: The bespoke bridal gown I worked on for Biji's private client during the internship (Walters, 2014)

#### 4.4.2 Why did I do it?

It was of great importance to gain experience from a bridal gown designer who dealt solely with once-off, bespoke bridal gowns, unlike Lunar that produced both ready-to-wear bridal gowns for their boutique as well as bespoke bridal gowns for private clients. I sat in on a fitting with this specific private client whose gown I worked on and I got to see how Biji interacted with her as a client. Biji's perspective is to pamper the bride as much as possible and she gives about an hour of time per fitting whereas Lunar only set aside 15 – 20min per fitting. Biji is on the higher spectrum of the bespoke bridal gown price range and it was a great opportunity to see the difference in how she worked compared to Lunar, who is more commercialized and on the lower end of the bridal gown price range.

#### 4.4.3 What happened?

As a result, productivity was much lower due to the amount of hours and intense skill required for each gown, however, opportunity for higher profit margins was much greater: From working with both Biji and Lunar I discovered that it is key to find a balance between the two.

#### 4.4.4 What do the results mean in theory?

- a) *Labour*: Due to Biji's approach to bridal gown design, she was required to employ staff with a higher skill set to complete the skill-demanding and labour-intensive bridal gowns. In theory, because more time is spent on each bridal gown, her labour costs on each gown are very high.
- b) *Entrepreneurship*: From observation I was able to gather that Biji's values reflect the highest level of skill she can provide and the quality that comes with it. In theory, this gives her business the entrepreneurial edge because she offers a unique and bespoke service for a niche market.
- c) *Hollywood influence*: Glamour theory and the influence of the red carpet on a brides choice of bridal gown was once again validated through Biji's practice (Bruzzi & Gibson, 2000; Howard, 1997). Biji's pampering approach to her clients can be likened to the VIP treatment that is referred to on the red carpet for important guests. The red carpet goes hand in hand with the term 'Red-Carpet-Treatment', where lavish, special efforts are made in the interests of first-class hospitality and identity (Rogers, 1985).

#### 4.4.5 What do the results mean in practice?

- a) *Labour*: In practice, Biji is unable to employ a larger number of staff. Her staff is made up of three workers who are skilled in the fields they specialise in within the business. This does limit Biji in her capacity to grow as she can only take on the limited amount of work that her staff can produce.
- b) *Entrepreneurship*: In practice, although Biji offers a unique and bespoke service, her already-limited niche market is restricted even further due to her limited capacity to take on a larger amount of work. Even though her

prices are much higher, over time, her profit margin is not higher than that of Lunar's.

- c) *Hollywood influence*: The influence of Hollywood for Biji has gone beyond just the influence on a bride's choice of bridal gown, where as Biji has adopted a Hollywood approach to how she pampers the bride to make her feel very special, and likened to a celebrity. This is a great attitude to adopt in terms of public relations to make sure the bride is receiving the best service possible.

#### 4.4.6 What is the key benefit for the readers?

What I found most valuable from the internship with Biji Couture was the attitude she had on the internship in that she could learn just as much from me as I could learn from her. Biji has been in the industry for over 20 years and having a fresh young designer's approach and outlook to design and business offered Biji what she felt was the same benefit to her as it was for me. It was, in a way, symbiotic and also affirming.

#### 4.4.7 What remains unresolved?

Upon completing the internship at Biji, all questions were answered and resolved, however, in saying that, there were many aspects that I could learn from in order to make my business more productive, cost effective and competitively priced. This led me to answer "yes" for my overarching question for this chapter in order to help me improve my practice:

Did Biji meet the needs of brides? Yes.

Were their gowns cost effective? No.

Were they competitively priced within the bridal market? No.

## 4.5 Kobus Dippenaar

# KOBUS DIPPENAAR

Kobus Dippenaar is a South African-born fashion designer, most prominently known for his couture evening and bridal gowns that exhibit a strong play between masculinity and femininity, between structure and fluidity. While his style has evolved, Dippenaar is celebrated for his ability to enhance a client's best features and then accentuate those with his creations.

Born in 1968, in the Western Cape town of Paarl, Dippenaar launched himself into the world of fashion when he began designing high school dance dresses for classmates who could not afford to buy them off the rack. His mother, who had been a Home Economics teacher before she married, sewed the dresses he designed. After serving in the military, Dippenaar pursued a fashion diploma in Cape Town. After studying corsetry in London in the mid 1990s, Dippenaar returned to South Africa where he set up his studio in the heart of Cape Town's creative district.

### 4.5.1 What did I do?

I was an intern for Kobus Dippenaar over 10 working days at his studio in Cape Town. Kobus is known for his ready-to-wear bridal gown collection, called 'Anna Georgina', which is exported to bridal boutiques around the world, as well as his bespoke service he offers to private clients. Over the 10 days we worked on 42 gowns for his Mercedes Benz Cape Town Fashion Week collection that comprised both evening gowns and bridal gowns, one of which can be seen in Figure 10. This was by far the most valuable work experience gained from the three internships. His approach to bridal gown design I believe, was a healthy balance between Lunar and Biji Couture. He was able to incorporate the detailing and tailoring that Biji offered whilst producing the gowns at an even faster rate than Lunar. His aim was to finish five bridal gowns per day from

beginning to end with only three staff members and, on occasion, with help from students from surrounding fashion colleges.



Figure 10: One of the 42 gowns I worked on for Kobus Dippenaar's MBFW collection. This is the finale bridal gown (Walters, 2014)



Figure 11: The finale of the show for MBFW in Cape Town for Kobus Dippenaar photographed backstage (Walters, 2014)

#### 4.5.2 Why did I do it?

This internship was a rare opportunity and one where I could learn from a designer who understands bridal gown design and expectations on an international standard. This offered a unique perspective; where both Lunar and Biji Couture had both worked with international clients, they had not had the same experience producing bridal gowns on the level Dippenaar had from exporting. I got to work on many different gowns and learnt many tricks on how to make the production process quicker and easier. Some of the tricks of the trade that were most pertinent to me were creating one's own foundation blocks for one's brand, buying lace motifs already cut out to save time and learning that taking risks in design is what will make your brand stand out above the rest.

#### 4.5.3 What happened?

I noticed from working with Dippenaar that he had developed bridal blocks<sup>48</sup> on which he based most of his designs. He changed them according to each season but usually varied them using embellishments and different types of fabrics. This was what I had already discovered whilst working with my own clients: that was that some of the underlying patterns were the same. I elaborate on this in Chapter Five. Below is an example of one foundation block that he adapted into three different bridal gowns by changing the skirt and using different fabrics and embellishments.



Figure 12: Three adaptations from one foundation bridal block<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> The basic pattern from which patterns for many different styles can be developed.

<sup>49</sup> Accessed at: <https://www.facebook.com/Anna-Georgina>

#### 4.5.4 What do the results mean in theory?

*Labour:* Dippenaar works with a small team of workers. Dippenaar does all the design work, fabric sourcing, pattern making and pattern cutting. Similarly to Lunar, he has two hand finishers, a machinist; a bias cut gown specialist machinist and students who are interns for him throughout the year. Having extra sets of unpaid hands throughout the year helps with the workload in a small way and in theory it saves time and money in the long run.

*Entrepreneurship:* From observation over the work experience, I believe Dippenaar has the perfect balance between this bespoke bridal service and his bridal collection, Anna Georgina. He is still able to create once-off, designer pieces at a high price, but he also offers bridal gowns based on the foundation blocks he has created for his brand at a lower price point both for South Africa and for exporting.

*Hollywood influence:* Dippenaar's work is definitely influenced by Hollywood's red carpet events and it shows quite strongly in the end product. Glamour theory (Bruzzi & Gibson, 2000) and the influence of the red carpet on a bride's choice in bridal gown (Bessenoff, 2006; Allport, 1985), as discussed in Chapter Two is the strongest in Dippenaar's work as compared to Lunar and Biji's.

#### 4.5.5 What do the results mean in practice?

*Labour:* In practice, because Dippenaar is so hands on with his business, he still controls most of it, eliminating possible threats of someone taking his ideas, patterns and style to start up their own venture. Dippenaar handles the most important aspects that make his brand unique, and that has kept his business thriving over the years.

*Entrepreneurship:* In practice, Dippenaar has eliminated the client in his 'Anna Georgina' collection process, which takes the most time and costs the most money. He is now able to take orders through bridal boutiques, which deal directly with the bride so he can concentrate on manufacturing. In this way his production is higher and quicker.

*Hollywood influence:* Ironically, the international designers by whom we, as local designers are most influenced on social and online media platforms, are the designers Dippenaar's ready-to-wear collection, Anna Georgina, are

hanging next to in his international bridal boutiques. His gowns are required to be relevant and trend-current<sup>50</sup> in the present bridal market.

#### 4.5.6 What is the key benefit for the readers?

Looking back on this internship and reflecting on what I learnt over that time, the most valuable lesson Dippenaar taught me, unknowingly, was that sometimes in order to grow your business and take it to the next level, one has to take big risks and make big decisions. This is something I have carried with me since the internship and has helped me take my business to the next level.

#### 4.5.7 What remains unresolved?

Upon completing the internship with Dippenaar, I was left with no question unanswered or unresolved. This led me to answer yes for my overarching question for this chapter in order to help me improve my practice:

Did Dippenaar meet the needs of brides? Yes.

Were his gowns cost effective? Yes.

Were they competitively priced within the bridal market? Yes.

### **4.6 Meta-reflections and the value of reflexivity**

Reflecting on these three internships with the three bridal gown designers has made me realise that I have learnt and 're-remembered' things I had been subconsciously aware of. Going through the process of reflectively answering Brown's seven questions has also allowed me to be reflexive and apply reflexivity to the next chapter, with my own practice in mind and find a solution to the problem. Although each internship with each designer brought different individual lessons about the bridal industry, the main lesson is clear throughout: developing competitive and viable cost-saving measures for bespoke designer bridal gowns in a bridal gown business is vital to the longevity and success of a brand.

Looking back on my reflections in this chapter, one of the main aspects that has been re-grounded in my practice is the importance of being courteous with clients. In my own experience, word-of-mouth and social media have both been

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<sup>50</sup> Current and up-to-date with modern-day trends.

the highest form of recommendation in my business and it is therefore important to give one's clients the best possible service that is achievable. I also learnt the importance of entrepreneurial values in practice and how they positively effect and grow one's business. Lastly, Kobus Dippenaar reinforced the idea of the blocks for bridal gowns as a method of creating bridal gowns that are both cost effective for the business and competitively priced for the bride.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

As Thomas so perfectly echoes in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, "good design begins with honesty, asks tough questions, comes from collaboration and from trusting your intuition". This is what I have done in this chapter by being honest in my reflections, asking the tough questions of the designers and collaborating with them over the course of the internships, as well as trusting my intuition for the next step in my practice and research. Going forward, I developed five foundation bridal blocks based on my experience with brides and my experience with the designers. Chapter Five maps out the process of the bridal block development whilst Chapter Six covers implementation of these blocks and the 'theory in practice'.

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE TOILE (FOUNDATION BLOCKS)

*"The hardest thing in fashion is not to be known for a logo, but to be known for a silhouette." - Giambattista Valli<sup>51</sup>*

### 5.1 Definition and modelling: Stage five

In this Chapter I describe the action behind data gathering (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). I have built on my experiences over the years, through the internships and the discoveries I made through working with brides. This has enabled me to create a new model and process that improves my practice (Aspelund, 2006). I link these explanations to Aspelund's Stage Five of the design process where one builds on one's experiences and discoveries and I use McNiff and Whitehead's (2010: 41) framework to aid in the analysis of my passion for improving my practice. As mentioned in Chapter One, I have systematically monitored my practice to generate data, reflected on past practice, experience and tacit knowledge in action and on action.

I developed the five foundation bridal blocks based on the 'most desired'<sup>52</sup> silhouettes for bridal gowns for my brides based on my tacit knowledge, my past experience whilst doing my BTech and the knowledge I gained during the internships. This chapter aids in answering one of my sub-questions: *What evidence do I have of my ability to design and make bridal gowns which meet the needs of individual brides?*

As referred to in Chapter Three, this sub-question was adapted from McNiff and Whitehead's action research framework (2002: 14) as an interrogative and critically-reflective tool for my research to aid in the analysis of my passion for improvement. Furthermore, to aid in answering my sub-question above, I have adapted McNiff and Whitehead's framework (2002: 14) to support my action reflection cycles.

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<sup>51</sup> Accessed at: <http://www.marieclaire.co.uk/blogs/542820/the-40-best-style-quotes-of-all-time.html>

<sup>52</sup> 'Most desired' being the most popular or most wanted

- *What was my concern?*

My concern, from the perspective of entrepreneurial values as I have explained in the theory in Chapter Two and in my practice in Chapter Four, is the theory of 'time is money' and the efficiency of production in one's practice.

- *Why was I concerned?*

The evidence I have for my concern was that after the long hours put into designing individual bespoke bridal gowns was that my profit margins were very low: for example, I would work between 80-120 hours on one bespoke bridal gown using hand-embellished and high-quality fabrics. Once I had calculated the profit over time, per hour, I realised I was making less than the minimum wage. From my lived experience, this concern led me to further investigate how I would change this.

- *What matters to me as a young entrepreneur?*

What matters to me as a young entrepreneur is not only to be financially rewarded for my work and to be self-sustaining as an entrepreneurial business, but also to promote innovation and inspire 'creatives'<sup>53</sup> to value, and put a value on their time.

- *So what did I do?*

I developed particular silhouette blocks based on my observations of current bridal trends online, from working with my brides, as well as working on what I consider to be my own signature style and silhouette, which I have developed over the years.

Developing the blocks was a practical solution in order to save time during the design and production process of bespoke bridal gowns. Although my services are not limited to these five bridal gown foundation blocks, they do assist in the general process of making a bridal gown for the 'standard bride'; the 'standard bride' being the bride who follows trends and who would naturally choose one of the five foundation silhouette blocks as a starting point. Essentially, this process of using the foundation blocks as a starting point is finding the middle ground

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<sup>53</sup> People working within the creative industry

between what is known as 'couture' and 'ready-to-wear' as touched on in Chapter One. Saving time in this process allowed for saving money, which resulted in a competitively-priced and cost-effective bridal gown that still offered individuality to the bride within this middle ground.

Developing the bridal blocks also functioned as a visual aid in assisting brides choose a style of gown that was most suited to them. I go into further depth about the brides in Chapter Six.

## **5.2 The application of theory to practice**

Chapter Five, 'The Toile', is the application of the theory I have researched to my practice from a business perspective (theory as practice). I touched on the two perspectives in Chapter Two, which were from a literature perspective (practice as theory). Both these views, I believe, are equally valuable and both form a healthy balance in my practiced-based action research self-study.

In Chapter Two I explored the role social media plays on the bridal industry and in this chapter I give further details on how I link practice and theory. By sharing my ideas and findings with others using social media outlets throughout my study such as Facebook<sup>54</sup>, Twitter<sup>55</sup> and Instagram<sup>56</sup> as platforms, I was able to verify the validity of my accounts and keep my enquiry and research moving forward as a form of social validation. This form of validity is known as legitimation, where one "establishes the acceptability of a claim in the public sphere and measures the significance of what has been done" (McNiff, 2002: 52).

I also consider my website<sup>57</sup> to be a form of social validation, which has also been a public platform to share my ideas and my work that has been open for public review. My website is an important constituent to my social media accounts where the public may comment, 'like' and share images and ideas that have been posted. Social media has become a marketing tool for my practice

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<sup>54</sup> Can be accessed at <https://www.facebook.com/CaseyJeanneAtelier>

<sup>55</sup> Can be accessed at [https://twitter.com/\\_Casey\\_Jeanne\\_](https://twitter.com/_Casey_Jeanne_)

<sup>56</sup> Can be accessed at [https://instagram.com/casey\\_jeanne/](https://instagram.com/casey_jeanne/)

<sup>57</sup> Can be accessed at <http://www.caseyjeanne.com>

and because it is open for public review, it links up to my core values as a young entrepreneur and designer: respect, skilfulness, integrity and commitment. I value public opinion and consider this form of peer review to be an important part of my practice, along with news articles, exhibitions, features and publications.

### 5.3 Foundation blocks

#### 5.3.1 What is a block?

A block is a foundation pattern that forms a simple silhouette or outline that provides the fit of a garment with all the seams and darts required for a good fit as well as all the necessary tolerances of ease for comfort and movement (Defty, 2004). This foundation block is a two-dimensional or 'flat pattern' and at all times remains neutral and shows minimal or no illusion of design (Defty, 2004). One can adapt and draft styles from this foundation flat-block pattern with various cuts, shapes and fits in a number of different sizes. Each designer or factory adapts a foundation block that suits his or her requirements and specifications. Figure 13 illustrates a two-dimensional foundation female dress block.

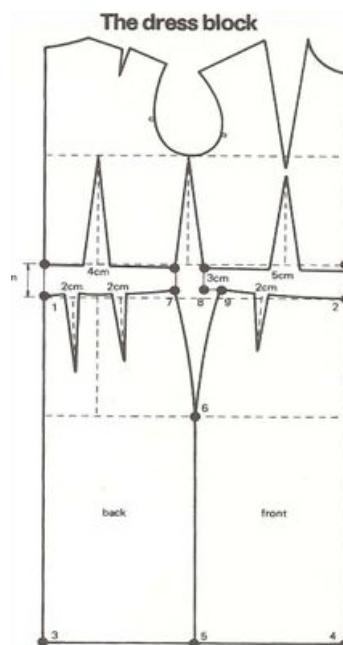


Figure 13: The Dress Block, Winifred Aldrich "Metric Pattern Cutting for Women"<sup>58</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Accessed 17 May 2015: <http://www.google.co.za/imgres?imgurl=https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/236x/f3/bf/8c/f3bf8c5a6484055d33733c23ae050d8d.jpg&imgrefurl=https://www.pinterest.com/explore/p>

### 5.3.2 What is a bridal block?

A bridal block is a block based on prevailing styles or silhouettes for bridal gowns, which I have developed over the years through experimenting and ‘trial and error’. A gown is a long dress as opposed to the foundation dress block, which is short. A bridal block comes in a variety of different silhouettes, which I have developed from my tacit knowledge, my brides’ preferences and the influence from the internships.

### 5.3.3 What silhouettes have become associated with my signature style as a bridal gown designer?

The prominent silhouettes that are associated with my brand comprise a ‘fit and flair’ shape, which I have named the ‘Hollywood’ silhouette, and the high-waisted princess shape, which I have named the ‘Gala’ silhouette (see Figures 20, 21, 32, 33). I describe these silhouettes in 5.5 of this Chapter and how these bridal blocks were applied to brides’ gowns in Chapter Six.

## 5.4 Tacit knowledge and reflective practice

In this section I demonstrate how I used action research cycles to uncover tacit knowledge gained over the years. In my practice, over time, I have unconsciously developed foundation two-dimensional patterns that suited my requirements as a bridal gown designer. By using the term ‘unconsciously’, I mean the thoughts and processes that I was not able to directly observe consciously. This tacit knowledge has its own processes and deeply affected my conscious thoughts. By means of continual practice and experience, my ‘know how’ has become second nature. Through persistent action research and applying reflection as explained by Schön’s (1983) reflection ‘in’ action and ‘on’ action, Fitzgerald’s (1994) retrospective contemplation to uncover knowledge and Boyd and Fales’s (1983) ‘before action’, ‘in action’ and ‘after action’, I was able to recognise the process I had developed and the knowledge transfer I was able to recall. Through this process of action research and reflection, along with my experiences as an intern, I developed the five foundation bridal blocks based on five silhouettes.

#### 5.4.1 Past experience

In my BTech collection, I designed a fitted, high-waisted skirt with the fit and length of a gown (see Figure 14). Upon completing the look for the collection, I discovered that I no longer needed the lining of this design and instead of discarding the lining I decided to keep it aside in the event that I may need it again. In saying this, at the time I had not intended or planned to use this 'throwaway' lining in a purposeful way with potential brides. At the time the lining was not considered to be useful. Somewhere in the consultation process, however, as a way to explain partial fit, I brought out this 'discarded lining' for the bride to try on as a way to better explain myself. I didn't think much of it at the time, however, looking back at my MTech research I do believe this was the first step in the development of the idea to create foundation blocks and wearable samples as a visual aid for the brides' initial consultations.



Figure 14: Fitted, high-waisted skirt from BTech collection<sup>59</sup>

After completion of my BTech, I developed a number of wedding gowns stemming from this idea of basing them on this discarded lining. Figure 15 is a selection of bridal gowns I actually developed for brides from trying on this discarded lining from my collection. The foundation silhouette is the same, using the pattern and shape of the lining; however, the details, fabrics, colours and embellishments differ. This image displays the early subconscious stages of my

<sup>59</sup> Accessed at: <https://www.facebook.com/CaseyJeanneAtelier/photos/pb.173085056043026.-2207520000.1453618337./539780936040101/?type=3&theater>

research and the variety of different finished bridal gowns that are a result of using the same underlying bridal silhouette.



Figure 15: A variation of bridal gowns developed from the idea of using the discarded lining (Walters, 2014)

#### 5.4.2 Internships

As reflected upon in the previous chapter, the internship with Kobus Dippenaar made me aware of what I had subconsciously been doing when using the bridal blocks as a foundational concept. The internship then cemented what I had already been doing and urged me to further develop the notion for my practice based on my own specifications and initiative in business. Through action reflection I was able to develop this idea into a working process to design and produce bespoke and cost effective bridal gowns.

### 5.4.3 Online and social media

Part of developing the five foundation bridal blocks has been through online and social media. As mentioned in Chapters Two and Three, social media has become the “building block to create, modify, share and discuss on platforms such as websites, blogs and social networking” (Keitzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, Silvestre, 2011:241). Since this form of social validation is public, it allows for open comment and feedback (McNiff, 1983). The social media platform has become a vital marketing tool in my business and has grown my business through public opinion and feedback. In my opinion, through my own experience, social media has taken the notion ‘word-of-mouth’ to an advanced technological level. I have been able to both identify through online and social media which bridal silhouettes are most popular as well as gather feedback from my own social media platforms as to which bridal silhouettes are preferred over others. I have narrowed down the foundation bridal blocks to five silhouettes: Oscar, Hollywood, Vogue, Gala and Awards. Figure 16 on the next page is a screenshot of my Facebook page.



Figure 16: A screenshot of my Facebook page 'Casey Jeanne'<sup>60</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Accessed 13 July 2015: <https://www.facebook.com/CaseyJeanneAtelier>

Public are able to view, comment, 'like' and share photos that have been posted on my Facebook page whether they are bridal gowns in process or a professional picture on the wedding day (see Appendix G). The public, as well as clients, are able to publically review my services as a designer. People are able to access my website from the Facebook page along with other social media platforms. There is also a private message option which allows for confidentiality and privacy where needed. One of the factors that are extremely beneficial in terms of marketing is the breakdown of insights on this social media platform where one can view the highest traffic groups through age, gender and country.

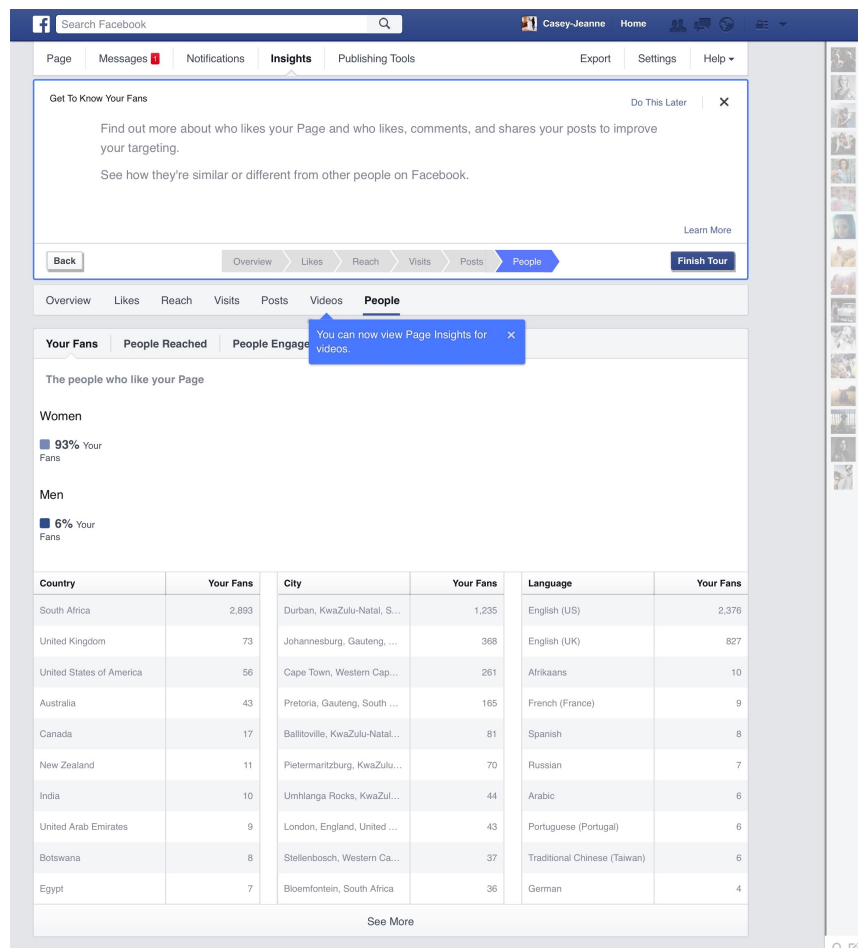


Figure 17: A screenshot of the insights tab for the 'Casey Jeanne' Facebook page

All of my business-related social media links are displayed on the website platform [www.caseyjeanne.com](http://www.caseyjeanne.com), which has become a building block in my brand. This website puts on display what my brand is about. The impression of the website is that of luxury, sophistication and exclusivity, which is the core of the brand. Each tab presents different aspects of the business, where the public can view images, read short descriptions, watch videos and make contact via the contact forms. Figure 18 exhibits a screenshot from the 'About the Designer' tab that takes a look at the story behind the name.

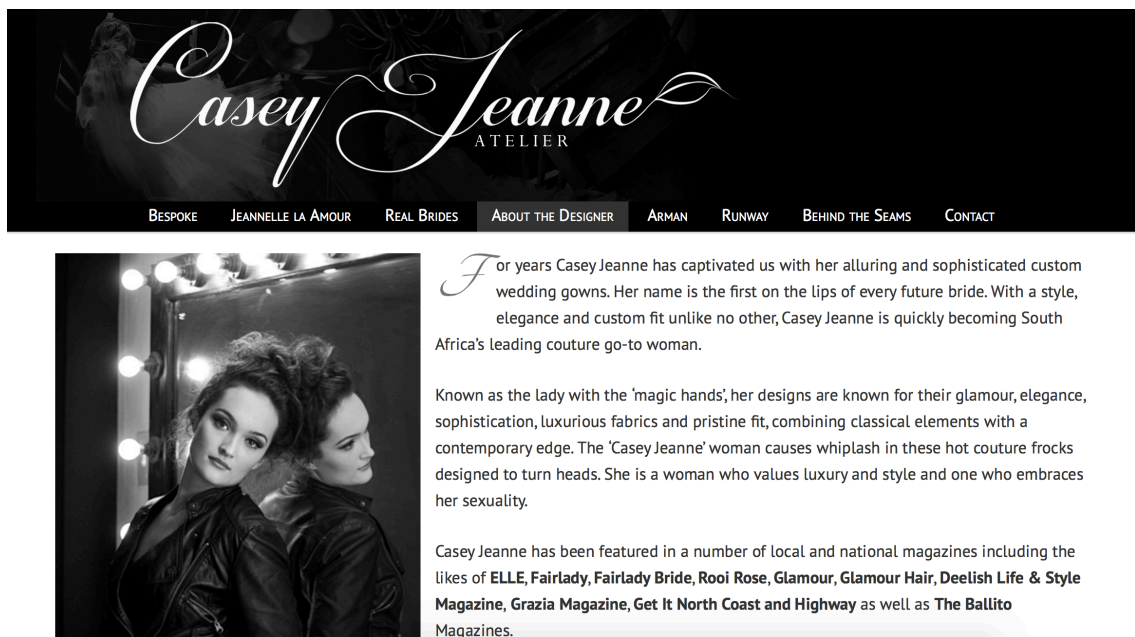


Figure 18: A screenshot of my website<sup>61</sup>

The methodology of action research means that you have to constantly evaluate what you are doing. You need to continually check that what you are doing really is working. By publically posting work on social media platforms, I am constantly putting myself 'in-check' and making sure I am on the right path. This awareness and the need for self-evaluation both show your willingness to accept responsibility for your own thinking and action. Accountability is part of good professional practice.

<sup>61</sup> Accessed 13 July 2015: [www.caseyjeanne.com](http://www.caseyjeanne.com)

## 5.5 The process

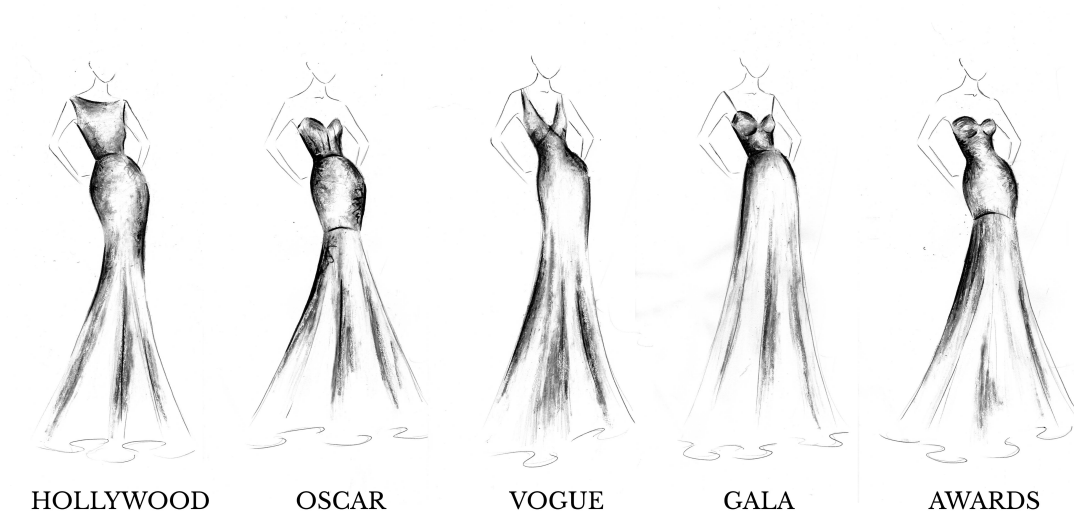


Figure 19: Sketches of the five foundation block developments<sup>62</sup>

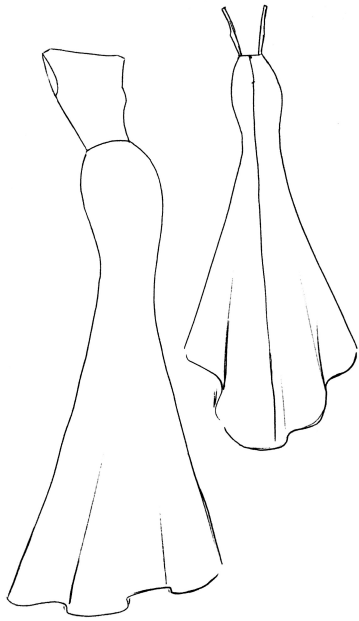
Pictured above are the five foundation blocks I have developed over the past two years through the application of tacit knowledge, my experience as an intern and my observations through social media and researching and noticing current trends. I have described each silhouette below accompanied with an example of the foundation block inspiration online as well as a front and back view of the actual sewn-up block. The creative process and journaling can be seen in the creative journal at the end of this study.

### 5.5.1 Hollywood

The 'Hollywood' foundation bridal block was the first block developed from the very first discarded lining and which brought this study into being. The reason I have named this block the 'Hollywood' style is primarily because of the relaxed 'mermaid' fit it portrays. Whilst this style is definitely not a true mermaid style, it is an offset between what is classified as a mermaid fit and what I term the 'Vogue' fit as often seen on the red carpet. This fit is very flattering to the female form as it does not break up the body beyond the waist and creates a smooth elongated look from the front and a curvy womanly fit from the back. This is a great silhouette for shorter brides and from experience is the most popular

<sup>62</sup> Sketched and developed by the researcher.

choice for brides. Figures 20 and 21 display a rough technical drawing of the Hollywood style alongside the front and back-view foundation block developed. I have stitched up these foundation blocks in a variety of cheaper black fabrics that are known as the 'toile' and 'mock-up'. Figures 22 and 23 display red-carpet gowns of a similar style to that of the Hollywood foundation block. This is as a form of online inspiration from what my brides have shown me.



Figures 20 and 21: Left - A rough work-in-process technical drawing in pen of the Hollywood block. Right - Foundation block front and back view of the Hollywood style (Walters, 2014)



Figures 22 and 23: Left - Blake Lively wears a relaxed Hollywood fit on the Red Carpet at the Cannes Film Festival<sup>63</sup>. Right - Daria Strokous pictured wearing an emerald green sequined gown, similar to the Hollywood foundation block development, to the Cannes Film Festival<sup>64</sup>

### 5.5.2 Oscar

The 'Oscar' foundation bridal block is a fitted silhouette with panel lines around the bust to create a desirable shape, along with a panel line 10cm above the knee to create a lighter and potentially fuller skirt. This is a shape often seen at the Oscar red-carpet events and it lends itself to a voluptuous profile. I have found that this specific block and method of construction takes more time compared to the other foundation blocks and requires the most work and expense. It does, however, create a beautiful fluid result by accentuating the curves of the female body.

<sup>63</sup> Accessed 28 June 2015: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/213639576048800315/>

<sup>64</sup> Accessed 28 June 2015: <http://www.elle.com/fashion/celebrity-style/news/g26315/cannes-amfar-gala/>

Figure 24 and 25 portray a rough work-in-process technical drawing in pen of the Oscar block as well as a back and front view of the block developed. Figures 26 and 27 portray red-carpet gowns of a similar style to that of the Oscar style as a form of online inspiration. In Chapter Six I compare and apply the Oscar block along with the other blocks to real brides.



Figures 24 and 25: Left - A rough work-in-process technical drawing in pen of the Oscar block. Right - Foundation block front and back view of the Oscar style (Walters, 2014)



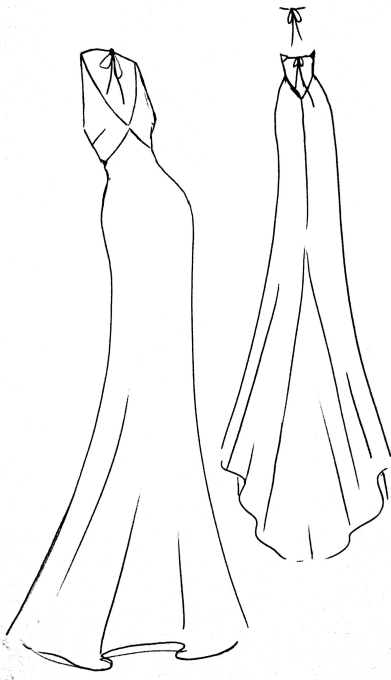
Figures 26 and 27: Left - Nina Dobrev in a blood red gown resembling similarities to the Oscar foundation block<sup>65</sup>. Right - Singer Rita Ora in a navy blue red carpet gown<sup>66</sup>

### 5.5.3 Vogue

The 'Vogue' fit is a bias-cut, relaxed-fit gown generally made from a bias-cut, silk satin or crepe fabric. This style has a low back built into the foundation bridal block, which is quite conventional. The reason I have named this style 'Vogue' is because it is reminiscent of the lingerie style and the appeal it has for the early Vogue Magazine readers. Celebrities like Jean Harlow and Marilyn Monroe were known for being pictured in bias-cut, silk gowns. Bias-cut, silk satin or crepe is generally associated with lingerie and this concept as a bridal gown is desirable for brides who want to depict that 'old style Hollywood' woman from another era. Below are Figures 28 and 29 which show the pen drawing of the Vogue foundation block and the 'toile' front and back views. Figures 30 and 31 display iconic women from the 1930s and today both wearing bias cut 'Vogue' style gowns.

<sup>65</sup> Accessed 28 June 2015: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/353814114451114998/>

<sup>66</sup> Accessed 28 June 2015: <http://www.eonline.com/photos/15284/worst-dressed-stars-at-the-2015-oscars/465837>



Figures 28 and 29: Left - A rough work-in-process technical drawing in pen of the Vogue block. Right - Front and back view of the Vogue foundation block development stitched up in black (Walters, 2014)



Figures 30 and 31: Left - Jean Harlow in an iconic bias cut silk gown from 1933s *Dinner At Eight* who was often pictured in Vogue Magazine<sup>67</sup>. Right - Anne

<sup>67</sup> Accessed 28 June 2015: <https://www.unique-vintage.com/blog/lifestyle/uv-icon-jean-harlow>

Hathaway pictured wearing a modern day, deep-blue, bias-cut, silk gown at the premier of the movie *Interstellar*<sup>68</sup>

#### 5.5.4 Gala

The Gala foundation block is fitted at the bust and features a relaxed evening gown skirt. Depending on what fabrics are chosen to create the skirt, it could either finish as a light evening gown or a full, princess wedding dress. The Gala silhouette is a versatile foundation block and can be transformed into both a relaxed, contemporary bridal gown and a formal and traditional bridal gown. The construction of this gown 'cinches'<sup>69</sup> in the waist to create a petite appearance, however, it is also a great silhouette for fuller brides providing the waist measurement is smaller than the bust measurement.



Figures 32 and 33: Left – A rough technical drawing of the Gala foundation block. Right - Front and back view of the Gala foundation block development stitched up in black (Walters, 2014)

<sup>68</sup> Accessed 28 June 2015: <http://www.whowhatwear.com/anne-hathaway-wins-us-over-again/slide6>

<sup>69</sup> 'Pulls-in' the desired area to give a desirable shape.



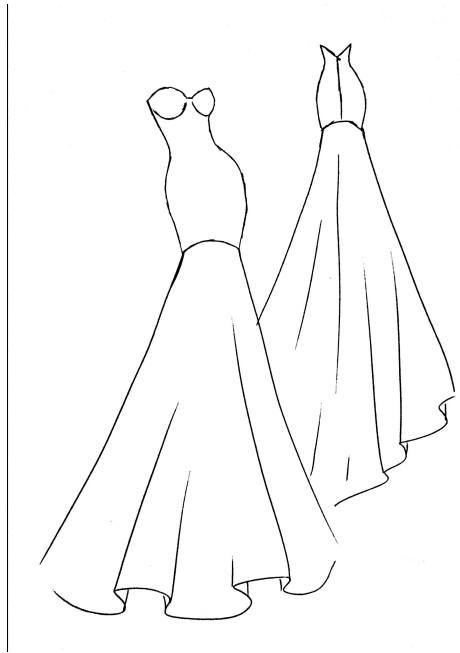
Figures 34 and 35: Left - Hofit Golan wearing a gown similar to the Gala foundation block with layers of lightly-beaded tulle to the AMFAR Gala event<sup>70</sup>. Right - Taylor Swift at the Winter Whites Gala at Kensington Palace in a gown similar to the Gala foundation block using a heavier silk georgette fabric<sup>71</sup>

### 5.5.5 Awards

The Awards foundation block is one of the two blocks without a waistline panel. Not all body shapes are the same and sometimes a waist panel makes the waist appear larger than it is. In order to avoid this, a block had to be developed where the midsection is reinforced to just above the hip to create a smooth, uninterrupted silhouette. As a foundation block, this shape is quite bare and does need fullness in the skirt to create a complimentary appearance, whether it is from a light tulle fabric or heavier georgette fabric. Figures 36 and 37 display the rough technical drawing for the Awards foundation block alongside the 'toile' stitched up in black. Figures 38 and 39 show celebrities on the red carpet wearing gowns similar to the Awards concept with no waistline.

<sup>70</sup> Accessed 28 June 2015: <http://www.elle.com/fashion/celebrity-style/news/g26315/cannes-amfar-gala/?slide=62>

<sup>71</sup> Accessed 28 June 2015: <http://fashionista.com/2013/11/taylor-swift-dresses-up-like-kate-middleton-to-meet-prince-william>



Figures 36 and 37: Left – A rough technical drawing for the Awards foundation block. Right - The ‘toile’ of the Awards foundation block stitched up in black (Walters, 2014)



Figures 38 and 39: Left - TV personality Giuliana Rancic on the red carpet at the Academy Awards wearing a gown with no waistline<sup>72</sup>. Right – Singer Taylor Swift in a gown constructed with no waistline<sup>73</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Accessed 28 June 2015: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/220394975484370676/>

<sup>73</sup> Accessed 28 June 2015: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/334955291011798928/>

## **5.6 Reflections and validation**

As mentioned in Chapters One and Two, a crystallisation approach to validate qualitative research provides researchers with a multi-sphere undertaking for practice-based research (Richardson, 2000). In my experience the creative process cannot be limited to one or two methods, but rather a collaboration of the best and most suitable aspects of a few methods and processes: no two are exactly alike. Going back to what Stringer (2007: 8) describes as a “look, think, and act” routine in his action research that results in an interacting spiral, is how this chapter, along with the rest of my research, has been conducted in conjunction with the methodologies described in Chapter Three. Each stage of Aspelund’s (2006) design-process framework consists of observing, reflecting, and then taking some sort of action. This action leads one into the next stage. I reflected on my experiences whilst doing my BTech, my experience as an intern and then demonstrated how these experiences influenced my bid to improve my practice. I observed what silhouettes brides were attracted to most, both online and through interactions and consultations with my brides. I reflected intuitively on what I believed was the best way forward and demonstrate this here by explaining design process where one builds on one’s experiences and discoveries to create a new way forward (Aspelund, 2006). After creating these bridal blocks, I demonstrate the next stage in my research process by stating how I applied the concept and new bridal gown process to my brides.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter highlights the importance of approaches such as applying one’s tacit knowledge (Polyani, 1966; Boyd & Fales, 1983), the value of reflective practice (Schön, 1983; Fitzgerald, 1994; Boyd & Fales, 1983; Chirema, 2003; Aspelund, 2006) and shows how validation, both online and via peers, are an important part of knowledge development. I have drawn parallels and links between the theory and the practice. Chapter Six exhibits the final stage of my research, which is the sixth stage in Aspelund’s (2006) design process, ‘The Final Fitting’.

## CHAPTER SIX: TAILORING THE COUTURE (BRIDES)

*“Design is the method of putting form and content together. Design, just as art, has multiple definitions; there is no single definition. Design can be art. Design can be aesthetics. Design is so simple, that’s why it is so complicated.” - Paul Rand<sup>74</sup>*

### 6.1 Communication: Stage six

In this chapter I apply the theory, knowledge and methods both researched and gained in experience to the application of the bridal blocks to real brides. In order to answer my main research question, I begin to make evident through Boyd and Fales’s (1983) reflection ‘on’ action and ‘after’ action my findings to answer the last sub-question and validation question: *What evidence do I have of the possibility that I can improve my practice as a designer and entrepreneur and the employability of others in the bridal gown industry?* This sub-question is also backed up in Chapter Seven by the analysis and synthesizing of comments gathered via social media and remarks made at the DUT Art Gallery about my exhibition called ‘The Final Fitting’ on the practical component of this study. I demonstrate practice as theory as touched on throughout my study.

Each chapter leads up to this important stage, and is likened to the sixth stage in Aspelund’s (2006) design process - the communication stage. In the communication stage, the designer presents his/her designs with the intention of gaining feedback to make any last changes before the final stage. Knowledge alone is not useful unless we can make connections between what we know (knowledge – Chapter Two) and what we have learnt (experience – Chapter Five): knowledge being facts, information, and skills acquired through experience or education and the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject<sup>75</sup>; experience being the practical contact and observation of facts or events<sup>76</sup>. Steve Jobs explains that experience is the secret to being able to make connections so readily:

That’s because they were able to connect experiences they’ve had and synthesize new things. And the reason they were able to do that was that

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<sup>74</sup> Accessed 17 April 2015: <http://www.creativethinkinghub.com/paul-rand-defining-design/>

<sup>75</sup> Accessed 3 June 2015: <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/knowledge>

<sup>76</sup> Accessed 3 June 2015: <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/experience>

they've had more experiences or they have thought more about their experiences than other people<sup>77</sup> (Wolf, 2003).

By marrying both knowledge and experience in the creation of my bridal gowns, I am able to produce a product that is both beneficial to me as the designer and my brand as well as desirable and valuable for the bride. Figure 40 shows the marriage between knowledge and experience with the links that tie them together. This knowledge and experience diagram expresses a concept that is often not easy to grasp: it shows the connection between the knowledge and experience that can fuel creative thinking and new ideas.

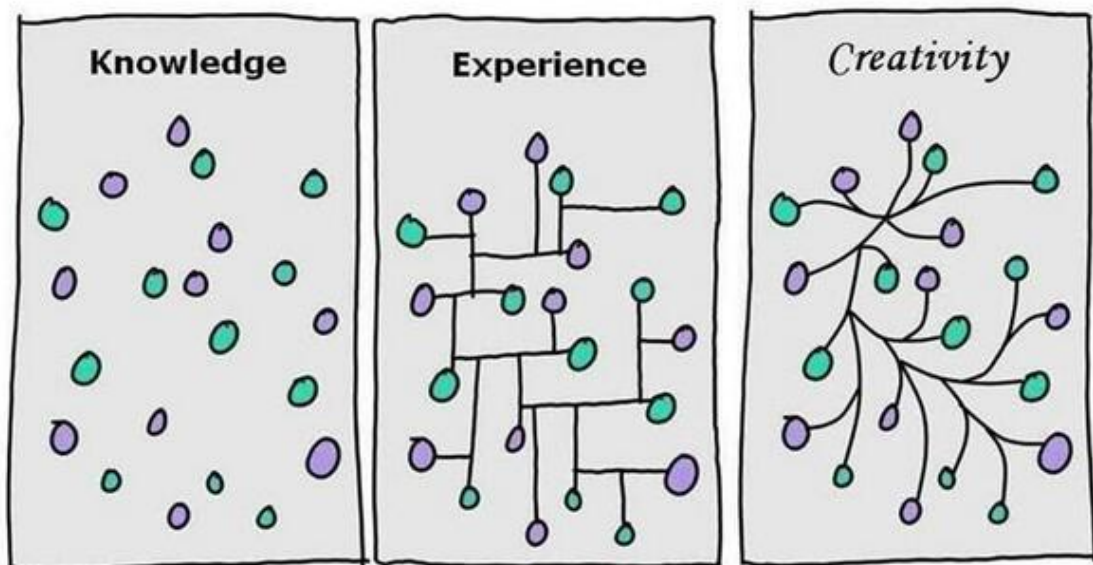


Figure 40: Diagram depicting the differences between knowledge and experience and how they both fuel creative thinking by cartoonist Hugh MacLeod<sup>78</sup>

This chapter I call 'Tailoring the Couture' and together in a consultation process with the bride, we, the bride and I, explore ideas and consider the possible designs that would suit her body shape. Fabrication, body shape, colour, detailing and structure with our in-house fabrics, embellishments and samples are the other factors that come into play and are discussed in greater detail in this chapter. I also look at the tone of the bride's skin and which tone of white or light stone, for example, may suit her olive skin tone. The bride then chooses an underlying silhouette from which I adapt the foundation bridal blocks and by

<sup>77</sup> Accessed 3 July 2015: [http://archive.wired.com/wired/archive/4.02/jobs\\_pr.html](http://archive.wired.com/wired/archive/4.02/jobs_pr.html)

<sup>78</sup> Accessed 3 June 2015: <http://t.co/kslJBhlfxb>

using different fabrics, embellishments and design details I create a bespoke bridal gown. I limit this chapter to five bridal gowns for 'real brides', the actual brides who wore bridal gowns based on the foundation blocks.

## **6.2 Values, professionalism and the needs of a bride**

The values in my action research study that come into play in the communication stage are both my core personal values and entrepreneurial values. The personal values, as mentioned in Chapter One are respect, skilfulness, integrity and commitment. I practice these values in the respect I have for the real brides by accommodating their wants and needs, both socially<sup>79</sup> and in the design process of their bridal gown; I do this with the awareness that I have to produce the best quality bridal gown with the highest skill and knowledge and with integrity and commitment to my action plan of my study and business. From my own realisation and experience, one can categorise these needs into personal needs and social needs.

Within the process of designing a bridal gown, a bride has certain needs as to how she would like to look and feel in her bridal gown. These personal needs differ from bride to bride, however, I have narrowed down these personal needs into one overarching fundamental concept: a bride wants to look and feel like the best version of herself in her bridal gown on her wedding day. To further narrow this concept down, I have selected key words that I hear most often when consulting with brides: they want to look thinner, taller, comfortable, sexy, glamorous, classic, sophisticated and different. Some of these ideas are conflicting, like for example, it is very difficult to achieve a 'classic' wedding gown that leans more towards a traditional bride whilst also achieving a 'different' wedding gown that leans more towards a trendy bride. The needs of a bride become complex; sometimes a bride does not know what her needs are. Through this personal process, working one-on-one with the bride, as a designer, I make connections between her needs and the design of her wedding gown.

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<sup>79</sup> I play a close role as both a designer and confidant. I have had to develop social skills that encompass my values. The scope of this study does not allow for in depth explanation of this role, yet it is a skill developed over time and as important as being a good designer. All these factors lead to client satisfaction and indirect marketing of my business via word of mouth and social media.

Finally, socially brides want to be accepted and self-assured with how they look on their wedding day. Brides want a sense of love and belonging. Brides want self-actualisation, where they feel as good on the inside as they do on the outside. In my experience, social needs come after the personal needs but they do still play a part in the bridal gown design process.

By working with my brides one-on-one, I have realised the importance and value of interpersonal skills as an entrepreneurial strength. The entrepreneurial values in my business are ethics, morals and positive outcomes for not only me as a young bridal gown designer, but also for my action plan to employ more people over time and positively shape the local industry in some small way. I practice these values by actively and ethically by producing these gowns locally, treating my business and practice with my moral code and driving positive outcomes and steady progression to a successful entrepreneurial small business. Together, these personal and entrepreneurial values create a platform for professional practice where services rendered are done to the highest standard. It is my experience and belief that professionalism in my business leads to happy clients, positive feedback and referral to new clients.

### **6.3 Visual aids and the consultation process**

For my research, consent was given by the brides to have their photographs used in this dissertation and to be included in this study (see Appendix D). For the reader I use the term 'we' in this section because often the bride and I develop a personal relationship and I have discovered how important it is to have the bride entirely involved in the bridal gown design process. I have found that I have become more than just a bridal gown designer but also their personal advisor on many levels, from hair and make-up styles to etiquette and how one should walk in a bridal gown. I am often invited to the wedding; I steam the bridal gown, prepare the bride and get her into the dress, add finishing touches and help calm her wedding jitters. Hence, communication on the interpersonal level is vital to a successfully produced, bespoke bridal gown and the cohesive aspect of Aspelund's (2006) design process for the communication stage.

In the bridal industry, visual stimulation is a channel in which to express ideas and experiences, to be inspired by ideas and experiences, as well as to communicate knowledge surrounding the wedding day (Pink, 2005). According to Pink (2005: np), using visual methods adds a new dimension to qualitative research by “introducing the possibility of knowledge and experience that cannot be communicated verbally or in written words”.

My experience working with brides has been that the majority of brides have difficulty expressing in words how they imagine their bridal gown should look. I have found that using images along with physical evidence and samples of bridal gowns, samples of fabrics and embellishments, and photographs of previous bridal gowns I have designed, as visual aids as referred to by Gaimster (2011), helps with the consultation process. Brides can express their ideas through selecting images and through the added visual aid of bridal gowns on a mannequin or hanging on a rail at my studio. By using textures and fabric samples in the consultation process, I am able to connect to how the bride envisions the bridal gown will feel and look like on her body.

Once a bride has chosen her silhouette, I then pair it with the best-suited foundation bridal block and she then tries on the sample foundation block from one of my samples. The bride then gets a clear idea of what the bridal gown would look and feel like on her body from trying on the foundation block sample. We then choose the final fabrics, embellishments and create a bespoke bridal gown from that point where we conclude design details.

The list below shows the steps in my action plan and process to designing a bride’s wedding gown.

1. Bride selects bridal gown images online that represent her style, with the overall silhouette, details and colours she likes
2. Bride selects bridal gown images that I have previously designed to help depict what her style is and what the overall silhouette and details are that she likes
3. Bride and designer compare bridal gown ideas with bridal gowns on the mannequin and what is hanging in the studio

4. Designer pairs ideas and silhouette with a foundation block for the bride to try on
5. Designer and bride select fabrics and embellishments
6. Designer and bride conclude design details and closures

#### 6.4 Foundation blocks in action

Here I present various bespoke bridal gowns designed from the foundation blocks that were chosen and how we ‘mixed and matched’ various design elements. These are categorised into three of the most popular foundation blocks and silhouettes chosen by my real brides. I also write about why the other two silhouettes were not as popular and how this can be improved upon.

##### 6.4.1 Hollywood



Figures 41 and 42: Left - Sketch of Hollywood foundation block. Right – Sketch of Bride Five’s bridal gown based on the Hollywood foundation block<sup>80</sup>

Bride One chose the Hollywood silhouette for her bespoke bridal gown. We created a Hollywood-like editorial vintage full lace bridal gown that featured a classic high neckline, an open squared-off back, sleeves and hand applique from a beaded lace that encrusted and accentuated her perfect curves. This light stone and cream wedding gown was finished with hand-covered buttons and loops as well as a horsehair hem.

<sup>80</sup> Sketched and developed by author



Figure 43, 44, 45 and 46: Above left and right - Bride One pictured in her bespoke vintage light stone and cream bridal gown based on the Hollywood foundation block<sup>81</sup> by (Maber, 2014)<sup>82</sup>. Below left – Detailed shot of Bride Ones bridal gown captured by The Tank Shank at my ‘Final Fitting’ exhibition. Below right – A detailed photograph of the beadwork from bride One’s bridal gown (Walters, 2014)

#### 6.4.2 Oscar

I developed two bridal gowns from the Oscar foundation block for my study. Although they are based on the same foundation block, again, the end products are different.

<sup>81</sup> More images of Bride One’s bespoke bridal gown can be seen here: [www.caseyjeanne.com/Lara](http://www.caseyjeanne.com/Lara)

<sup>82</sup> The photographs are not owned by the photographers for the weddings in my study. They are paid for by the bride. The bride has full rights to the images. I have permission from the brides to use these photographs in my study.

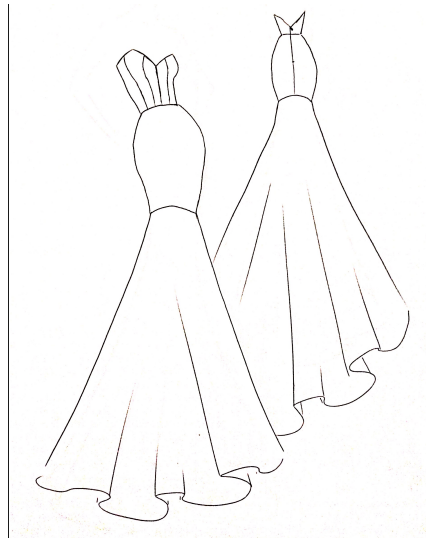
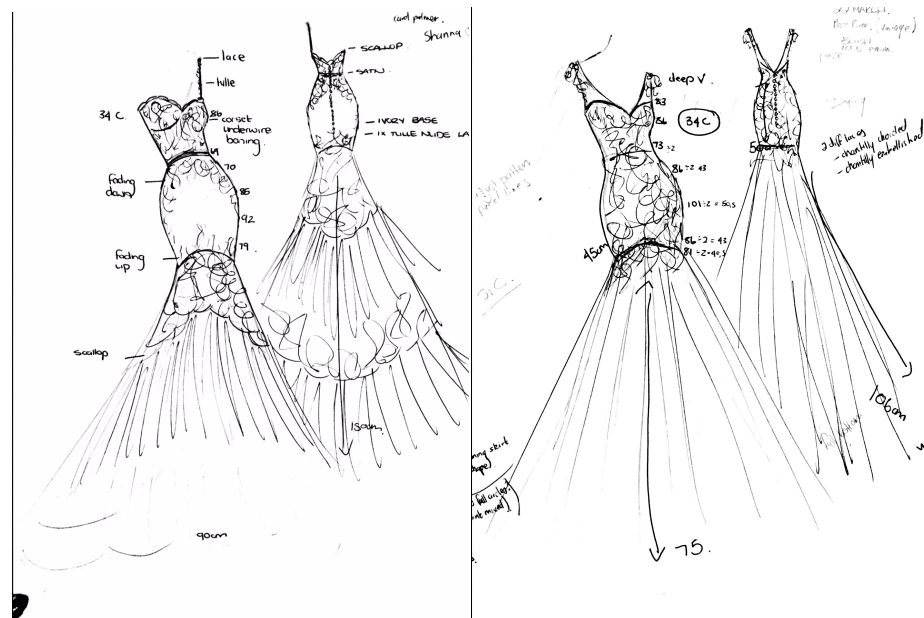


Figure 47: Sketch of Oscar foundation block



Figures 48 and 49: Left – Sketch of Bride Two’s bridal gown based on the Oscar foundation block. Right – Sketch of Bride Three’s bridal gown based on the Oscar foundation block

Bride Two’s bridal gown was a collaboration between traditional and modern bridal styles. This Oscar-based cream and milk-white bridal gown featured a structured bustier, similar to that of Bride Four, with a one-shoulder detail and a semi-low back. The bust is edged with the scallop of a chorded Chantilly lace, which fades down the dress into tiers and layers of light tulle and more scalloped chorded Chantilly lace. The dress was finished with hand-covered button and loop details.



Figures 50, 51, 52 and 53: Above left and right - Bride Two pictured in her bespoke bridal gown based on the Oscar foundation block (Jones, 2014)<sup>83</sup>. Below left - Detailed pictures of the gown (Jones, 2014). Below right – A picture of the gown in process (Walters, 2014).

Bride Three was a true ‘Barbie<sup>84</sup>’ at heart. She chose an icy-pink hand-dyed colour for her enchanting bridal gown. The entire bodice embellishment was created entirely by hand on an exquisite piece of hand-woven lace from France. The straps were created from illusion mesh with lace forming a delicate cap sleeve. Unlike Bride Two, the waistline was disguised with the embellished lace, which faded down into layers of light tulle finished with a horsehair hem.

<sup>83</sup> More images of Bride Two’s bespoke bridal gown can be seen here: [www.caseyjeanne.com/Ang](http://www.caseyjeanne.com/Ang)

<sup>84</sup> By using the term Barbie, I refer to what her family affectionately nicknamed the bride after playing with Barbies, dressing up and loving pink.



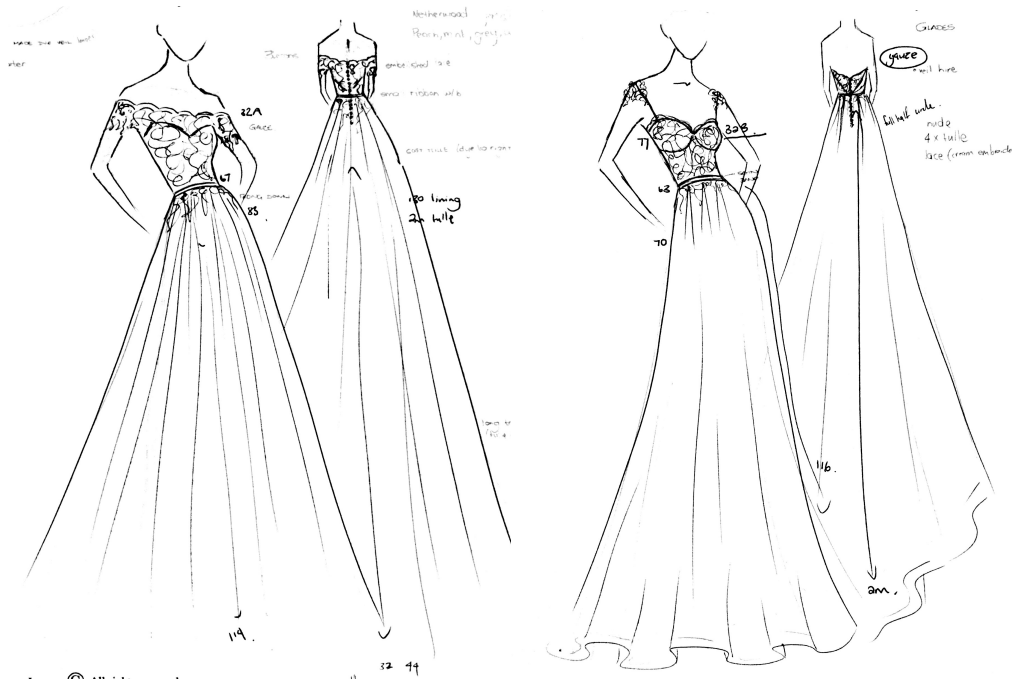
Figures 54, 55, 56, 57 and 58: Bride Three wears her hand-dyed, icy-pink bridal gown based on the Oscar foundation block<sup>85</sup> (Diack, 2014)

#### 6.4.3 Gala

I developed two bridal gowns from the Gala foundation block that I include in my study. They are unique in their own way. From the public eye, these two dresses are completely different, however, to the reader and to one who has been briefed on the foundation block concept, similarities can be seen.

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<sup>85</sup> More images of Bride Three's bespoke bridal gown can be seen here: [www.caseyjeanne.com/Lisa](http://www.caseyjeanne.com/Lisa)



Figures 59, 60 and 61: Above – Sketch of Gala foundation block. Left – Sketch of Bride Four’s bridal gown based on the Gala foundation block. Right – Sketch of Bride Five’s bridal gown based on the Gala foundation block

Bride Four was an ethereal Portuguese princess bride. We wanted to create something traditional, yet unique, so we decided on doing a high neckline in a heavily embellished lace with a sweetheart base and an unusual sleeve. The bust was adapted from the Oscar bust (see Figure 47), which offered more individualism to the bride. The base layer of the dress was in a light stone

colour whilst the lace and tulle were in a milk-white colour. We layered light tulle to create a long cathedral-inspired train, which gave it a whimsical 'royal' aura. This gown was finished off with hand-covered buttons with a loop detail and featured a hand-sewn heart inside the bridal gown cut from her late father's shirt. Below is Bride Four pictured in her bespoke bridal gown based on the foundation block, the Gala.



Figures 62, 63, 64 and 65: Above left and right - Bride Four wears a bespoke princess bridal gown based on the Gala foundation block (Cogill, 2014)<sup>86</sup>. Below left and right – Detailed pictures of Bride Four's gown in process (Walters, 2014).

Bride Five was an animal lover at heart and wanted a relaxed rustic-themed, autumn wedding so we chose something that would reflect her bohemian style. Adapted from two blocks - the Gala foundation block with the bustier bodice to 'cinch' her doll-like waist, and the cup shape, which we adapted from the

<sup>86</sup> More images of Bride Four's bespoke bridal gown can be seen here: [www.caseyjeanne.com/marissa](http://www.caseyjeanne.com/marissa)

Awards foundation block (see Figure 36; 66, 67, 68, 69, 70). The back of the bustier featured an illusion, scalloped-lace effect with a closure of hand-covered buttons and loops. We further individualised this cream-coloured bridal gown by creating a beaded cap-sleeve and embellishment detail created by hand that cascaded into layers of silk georgette. The silk georgette was finished with horsehair that created a waterfall effect at the hem.



Figures 66, 67 and 68: Left, middle and right - Bride Five wears a bespoke bohemian bridal gown based on the Gala foundation block<sup>87</sup> (Diack, 2014)



Figures 69 and 70: Below left and right - Detailed pictures of Bride Five's gown in process (Walters, 2014).

<sup>87</sup> More images of Bride Five's bespoke bridal gown can be seen here: [www.caseyjeanne.com/taryn](http://www.caseyjeanne.com/taryn)

## **6.5 Reflections: Recognising the shortfalls of the Vogue and Awards foundation blocks**

I noted that the Vogue and the Award foundation blocks were less well received. Looking back on why these blocks were not a final choice for these five brides I began to reflect and conclude that this was based on three factors: fabric, fit and feel. I critically reflected on why and how the brides found these foundation blocks less attractive by adapting the action research framework of McNiff and Whitehead (2002: 14) as discussed in Chapter Three.

*What was my concern?* My concern was that the Vogue and Awards foundation blocks were not a final choice for either one of these five brides even though these silhouettes were considered in the consultation process.

*Why was I concerned?* Reflecting on my time consulting with these brides, I realised that the main reason why the Vogue block was not a popular choice was because of the bias-cut, semi-relaxed fit. With the bias-cut fit using a satin fabric, brides felt they had to be very thin to feel appealing in the dress, which links back to the personal needs of the bride. The beauty of this style is that the fabric is allowed to drape over the body, however, this style also brought out insecurities in the brides about their bodies. The main reason why the Oscar block was not chosen as a whole silhouette was because the bustier cup at the front of the dress had no waistline and for brides Three and Five, this was a concern for fear the dress might make their waists look bigger than they actually were. By constructing a waistline and accentuating the waist with a band or sash, I accentuated the smallest part of the brides' bodies, which created a pleasing finished product both for the brides and myself as the designer.

*What evidence did I have for my concern?* For the Vogue style, the fabric did not have the same 'vacuum' effect as that of the Awards or Hollywood styles where the fabric would pull in all the right parts of the female body. The fit of the Vogue featuring a low, illusion back only allowed for a side seam closure, which caused difficulty getting in and out of and risking messing the hair and make-up. The Oscar style, not being a preferred block, was not too much of a concern for me as the brides' selection was based on personal preference according to taste, unlike the Vogue, which was due to actual design elements: for example,

with bride Four, although we used the Oscar block with a waistline constructed in the dress, we still applied lace over this panel to disguise the waistline. The end result was very close to that of what the Awards block would have been.

*What matters to me?* Correcting the design elements of the Vogue style was important because a bride wants to put on her wedding dress gracefully and easily and I have learnt that centre-back closures are best for this. By constructing a dress with a centre-back closure, the bride can step into the dress as opposed to fitting the dress over her head; this can spoil her hair and make-up. Jointly the fabric and fit of the Vogue style made the brides feel uncomfortable and feeling that they would not look the best they could look on their wedding day in this shape. Another factor I came to realise was what I term the 'fairy-tale factor'; brides want the fairy-tale wedding where they feel like a bride. My bridal gowns have to have the fairy-tale over-all appeal. The bias cut shape is too 'negligee' (nightie<sup>88</sup>) for their liking. Also, they may have felt that the style was too 'Betty Davis' or 'Greta Garbo' for them - ultimately in the roles they played in movies they were tragic figures - perhaps there is a sub-conscious association to these stories.

*What can I do?* I can create a bridal gown with the bias-cut fabric with a centre-back closure and possibly a higher back. The Hollywood shape gives the bride a fit and natural flair so I would like to adapt the Vogue block to a more suitable design for the bias-cut style.

## **6.6 Before action and after action**

Part of my action research study was to apply reflective practice, as discussed in Chapter One. Boyd and Fales (1983) concentrate on the reflective process as a means of developing one's self 'before action', 'in action' and 'after action'. Looking back on notes and reflections I had made during the making process of a bespoke bridal gown before my MTech study, I saw I was spending an average of 100 hours of labour on each bridal gown. I then divided the hours by the profit on a bridal gown and realised I was earning below a minimum wage. This is when it became apparent to me that I needed to change the way I had

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<sup>88</sup> A nightdress

structured my business, hence the importance of developing foundation blocks. I needed to develop ways to save time and, in turn, save money and make money.

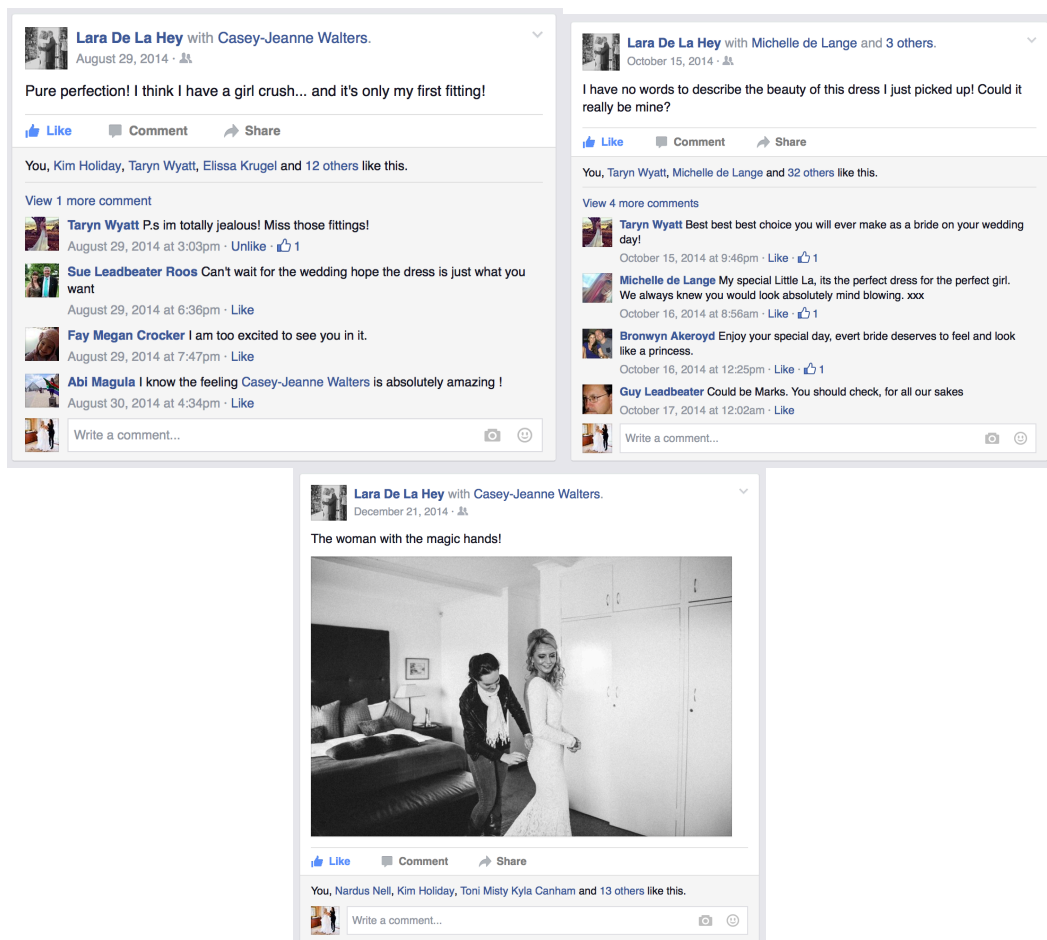
Once the process of reflecting 'in action' had begun, I became aware that the concept of the foundation blocks was working, using my own interpretation on the blocks. I had started to make a collection of bridal gowns that had been adapted from these foundation bridal blocks to distinguish whether the concept could in fact save time, and in the interim, save money. I then went on to apply these foundation blocks to my real brides and the results proved that this concept of foundation blocks was successful. Where I was spending an average of 100 hours on a bespoke bridal gown, I was now spending an average of 60 hours on a bridal gown. This means that an average of 40 hours had been saved in the making of each bespoke bridal gown that was based on a foundation block. By developing a way to roughly record the time I was spending on each bridal gown, I was able to pin point the fact that I needed to develop methods to save time. By developing the foundation block method I have now been able to save time in the bridal gown construction process that has directly contributed to the cost effectiveness of my bridal gowns and of my business.

By also using Fitzgerald's (1994) 'retrospective contemplation' and by a process of analysis and reflection, I have been able to uncover knowledge recalled. The 'after action' reflection process has shown me that I am now able to produce more bridal gowns in a shorter amount of time. The core principal here is that the time I save on a bespoke bridal gown can be simultaneously focused on another bespoke bridal gown; this has almost doubled my business. Where I could only produce two or three wedding dresses per month, I can now produce up to five bespoke bridal gowns per month. By uncovering this knowledge, I have also become very aware of how important both my personal and entrepreneurial values are in playing a large part in the longevity and sustainability of my business. It is one thing to have short-term success in one's business but it takes personal and entrepreneurial values to safeguard the potential for one's business in order to continue practicing in years to come.

## 6.7 Feedback

I have been in close contact with all five of the brides that were included in my research, not only to continuously check that they were happy with their bridal gowns, but also because by the end of the personal, 'one-on-one' design process, we all became friends. This personal factor I spoke of in Chapter One is evident with my brides and the results that it has.

Bride One's feedback was visible throughout the design process. She was extremely positive and both her personal and social needs were met. She looked and felt the best that she could be in her bridal gown and she herself had feedback from friends and family on her bridal gown and how beautiful she looked. By the end of the process, I was invited to spend the wedding day with her and her family. Figure 73 shows me helping Bride One get into her bridal gown.



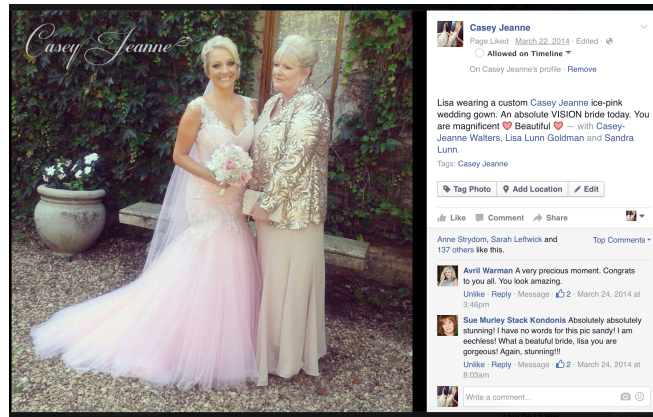
Figures 71, 72 and 73: Above left, right and bottom - Screenshots of feedback from social media platform, Facebook, for Bride One

Bride Two also invited me to her wedding; it was very something quite special and I was able to witness first-hand the end result of a long and detailed design process. She loved her dress and her personal feedback to me was that her bridal gown turned out better than she has imagined. Both her personal and social needs were also met and this is evident in the feedback we both received from social media. Figure 74 is an example of this feedback. Since then, I have designed and made her sister-in-laws bridal gown.



Figure 74: A screenshot of feedback from the social media platform, Facebook, for Bride Two

Over the course of the design process with Bride Three, she continually gave feedback on how the bridal gown was looking. In her second fitting, her mother stated that the lining was so beautifully fitted and sewn that her daughter could even get married in that. I was also invited to share their special day with them and help her get ready in her bridal gown. This was a great way to see her 'social' needs also being met first-hand. A few weeks later, her wedding was featured in the annual print of Fairlady Bride Magazine, where she said that her most extravagant and 'worth-every-penny' expense was her bridal gown.



Figures 75, 76 and 77: Above – A screenshot of feedback from social media platform, Facebook, for Bride Three. Below left – A screenshot of feedback on the social media platform, Facebook, from Bride Three. Below right – A screenshot of the Fairlady Bride Magazine feature on the social media platform, Facebook, for Bride Three

Bride Four’s feedback was given on the new review option I implemented on my Facebook page, Casey Jeanne, shortly after her wedding. She specifically made reference to how being organised helped her stress less about her bridal gown and the process. Like all the brides, Bride Four received a fitting schedule in advance, which helped the brides focus on other equally important aspects of the wedding. Figure 78 shows her public feedback that other brides can view when visiting the ‘Casey Jeanne’ page.

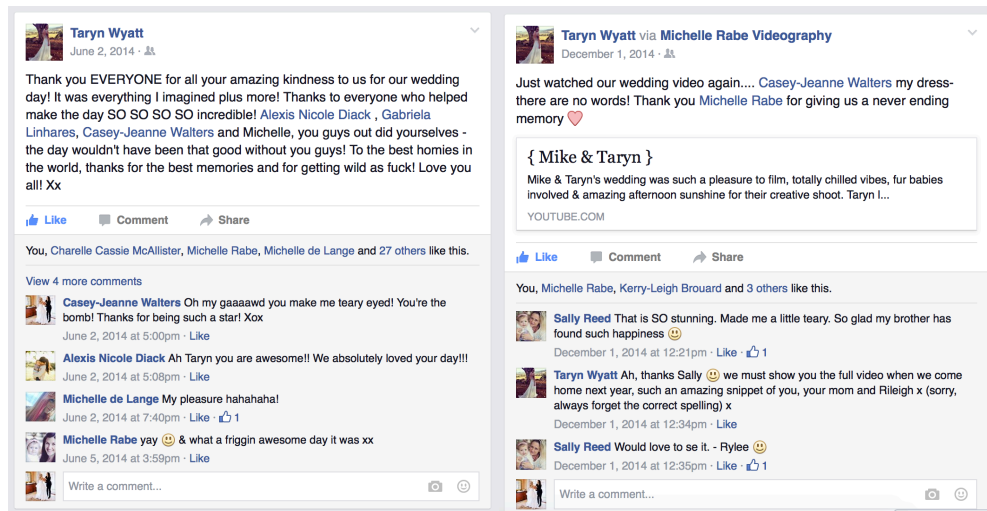


Figure 78: A screenshot of feedback from the review tab social media platform, Facebook, from Bride Four

Lastly, Bride Five also gave me feedback on more than one occasion. She was also extremely positive and thoroughly enjoyed the design process. Her personal needs were met and her social needs were met. We both had positive feedback on her bridal gown.



Figures 79 and 80: Screenshots of feedback from the social media platform, Facebook, from Bride Five



Figures 81 and 82: Screenshots of feedback from the social media platform, Facebook, from Bride Five

## 6.7 Conclusion

The concept of the foundation blocks is one that has to continually be improved upon through continual action reflection and communication with my clients as in Aspelund's (2006) design process framework. There will always be aspects to adapt like the Vogue foundation block and that is part of the creative action research process. By connecting the dots between my experience and knowledge, I have been able to fuel innovative thinking and the creation of the foundation blocks and apply this idea in practice with actual brides: this links back to the methodology of action research where I have to constantly be evaluating what I am doing and check whether or not what I am doing is actually working. This chapter provides evidence of the evaluation of my foundation-block method, self-evaluation and evidence of accountability to the bride, which is an important part of professional practice. It is also important to continually check with the bride at each fitting that the bridal gown in progress is on the path to what she had envisioned herself wearing on her wedding day. I found that continual feedback was more informative than a 'once-off' feedback session after the wedding, which I found to be a bit impersonal. The continually check-in on the bride shows that you care and it shows that the process is as personal to her. She is therefore made to feel special, she is affirmed, her self-esteem is lifted and she feels a sense of belonging. There is a greater chance

of the bride coming into self-actualization self-actualisation, if you are there to guide her and make her feel as good on the inside as she does on the outside.

In my next chapter, 'The Final Fitting', I present my findings and the work of my practical component to the public at the Durban University Art Gallery for public display. This shapes the final stage of the creative process as discussed by Aspelund (2006); however, in saying this, I believe there is no end to the creative process. There is always another stage and as a part of this creative process, the experiences, explorations, findings and, ultimately, new knowledge will always contribute to form my own creative cycle for my business.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: THE FINAL FITTING (EXHIBITION)

*“Design is about creating spaces for people to enjoy and of course, creating moments where you elevate the spirit, but 'design for good' is figuring out a program that not only creates better spaces, but creates jobs, creates new industry and really kind of raises the conversation about how we rebuild.” - Cameron Sinclair<sup>89</sup>*

### 7.1 Final fitting: Stage seven



Figure 83: Photograph displaying my exhibition title and a blown up photograph of Bride Three (Cruickshanks, 2015)<sup>90</sup>

On Wednesday the 3rd June 2015 I presented the opening of my MTech exhibition at the DUT Art Gallery, called ‘The Final Fitting’. Figure 83 shows a photograph displaying my exhibition title on the opening night of the event, to which I invited the public and my peers to view my work and give objective feedback on the 15 bridal gowns, various sketches (see Figure 84 and 85), photographic images (see Figure 86) and digital media displayed. Feedback was recorded in a comments book and in a filmed documentation: I present two supporting filmed documentation with this dissertation that will give the reader an in-depth visual and informative experience of the exhibition (see Appendix F). I arranged the exhibition into three installations, which were categorised into (1) the Foundation Block installation (see Figure 85, 87 and 88), (2) the

<sup>89</sup> Accessed at: <https://designsvg.wordpress.com/2015/05/25/design-is-about-creating-spaces-for-people-to-enjoy-and-of-course-creating-moments-where-you-elevate-the-spirit-but-design-for-good-is-figuring-out-a-program-that-not-only-creates-better-spaces/>

<sup>90</sup> All images watermarked at the bottom right-hand corner ‘The Shank Tank’ have been photographed by (Cruickshanks, 2015) on the opening night of my exhibition.

Jeannelle la Amour installation (see Figure 89) which was my own interpretation of the blocks, and finally, (3) the Real Brides' installation. These three installations can be viewed as the design process from the block development to the finished bridal gown for a real bride (see Figure 90).



Figures 84, 85, 86 and 87: Top left and right – Various sketches of the Foundation Blocks and bridal gowns. Bottom left – Various photographic image groupings on display at my MTech exhibition. Bottom right – A photograph of the Jeannelle la Amour installation

The exhibition was opened by Terrence Bray, a noted and multi award-winning South African designer who is highly recognised in the fashion industry<sup>91</sup>. His valued knowledge and experience working with brides, his ability to share his knowledge with students and his aptitude in honestly assessing my work and progress with absolute integrity, proved that Terrence Bray was the perfect speaker for opening my exhibition.

## **7.2 Methods and methodology**

My exhibition and the analysis thereof is the final stage in Aspelund's (2006) design process. This stage is known as the 'production stage' and for me this is where all of my previous ideas and stages in my study take a physical form (Aspelund, 2006). I have documented, reflected on and analysed how I improved my practice as an economically-sustainable designer of bespoke, cost-effective bridal gowns. This is a validation chapter where I give evidence of how I have evaluated and analysed the comments from my exhibition in order to make my research credible. 'The Final Fitting' provides me with the opportunity to demonstrate that I can analyse new data and synthesise it to show how it is relevant to my study and the research question I asked at the beginning of the study: *How can I improve my practice as a designer and manufacturer of bespoke, cost-effective, competitively priced, bridal gowns?* Certain words and phrases in this question I believe are validated in this chapter; they are: 'improve my practice', 'bridal-gown designer', 'highly-competitive market'. I have evaluated and synthesised comments from the comments book, the video clips of the evening and comments on social media about the exhibition and about my work. For a methodological tool, I refer to Whitehead and McNiff's (2002: 14) action research planner that I introduced in Chapter Three as a way to interrogate my practice. From these prompting cues and by breaking up my main research question, I asked myself: *what evidence do I have of my entrepreneurship in a highly-competitive market?*

The methodological lenses through which I evaluate and critically reflect on my exhibition are through a combination of Boyd and Fales's (1983) means of developing one's self 'after action' and Fitzgerald's (1994) evaluation required to

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<sup>91</sup> Accessed at: <http://www.safashionweek.co.za/?cat=229>

uncover knowledge used in my exhibition by analysing and interpreting the information collected. The analysis and evaluation of my data also takes the form of reflection 'on' action by turning information and findings into knowledge and looking back after the exhibition has taken place (Schön, 1983).

As mentioned in Chapter Three, Schön's (1983) self-study approach, which is built on personal reflection, requires openness and vulnerability to critique from peers and the public. The critique came from my exhibition and on social media (Samaras & Freese, 2006). By being open to ideas from others (Barnes, 1998), evaluating and reflecting on the comments made at my exhibition and on social media, I was able to prove the validity and credibility of my study. In turn, critical reflection of the event as a whole shows my influence in the bridal industry and justifies the claims I make about the values I attach to my practice.

### **7.3 How did I gather my data and select my evidence?**

I held this exhibition because I wanted a public forum where I could invite people to view my work and give feedback personally (McNiff, 2002; Whitehead, 2009), to show the authenticity of my study, along with the feedback I received on social media. I publicly invited the audience, both peers and public to the exhibition to be a part of the experience. They were informed that they, the exhibition viewers, were part of my data-gathering experiment.

I had five gowns on display in each installation, one of which (in each installation) was worn by a live model; this added to the experience of the evening. The Foundation Block installation (see Figure 88) was the first display where I stitched up the foundation blocks from the silhouettes reflected in Chapter Five of my research in a variety of cheaper black fabrics. My second installation, Jeannelle la Amour (see Figure 89), was a selection of five bridal gowns I had designed and created using the five foundation bridal blocks as a starting point. These are my own interpretation of the blocks or basic patterns that I use and these gowns show the diversity that can be created using a 'mix-and-match' formula with the various blocks. The 'mix-and-match' formula, along with individual embellishment aids in the creation of bespoke gowns. Some blocks had been further developed into new patterns; this is shown in the final bridal gown product, whilst others have only been changed by using different

fabrics and embellishments. Lastly, the Real Brides' installation (see Figure 90) exhibits five selected bridal gowns that I have made for five real brides based on the foundation block concept, which I described in Chapter Six. These five gowns validate how I adapted the blocks to meet the needs of each individual bride using my tacit knowledge gained from my experiences as a young bridal-gown designer, understanding brides' needs (psychological and social) and the practical knowledge gained during the three internships I completed. Some of the real bride's bridal gowns had also been developed through the 'mix-and-match' formula. Not all five basic block developments are shown here due to some silhouettes being more popular than others, as touched on in Chapter Six.



Figures 88, 89 and 90: Top – The first installation called the Foundation Block installation. Bottom left – The second installation called the Jeannelle la Amour installation. Bottom right – The third and last installation called the Real Brides' installation.

#### **7.4 What tools did I use to evaluate the truth and comprehensibility of the exhibition?**

Habermas (1976:195) speaks of the truth and comprehensibility being a “communicative transaction” between the speaker and the viewer. As written about in Chapter Three, in a spoken, open-ended manner, the exhibition viewers express something for the researcher to understand directly and first-hand (Maree, 2007; Habermas, 1976). The four main claims that make my work valid, according to Habermas, are comprehensibility, truthfulness, authenticity and appropriateness (1976). I validate the four claims by answering the four questions below:

*Was my exhibition comprehensible?* I organised the three installations clearly, (1) Foundation Block Installation; (2) Jeannelle la Amour Installation; (3) ‘Real Brides’ Installation, with descriptions and the number of the design process on each display. The exhibition was opened by Terrence Bray with opening comments by Francesca Verga, the gallery curator and my supervisor, Lee Scott, who gave the public and my peers a clearer view about my exhibition. I, the researcher, also briefly explained the practical display of my exhibition.

*Was my exhibition and the feedback given deemed truthful?* The practical work displayed was transparent and open to review. The exhibition was a view into the design process from the Block Installation through to the ‘Real Brides’ installation. Sufficient evidence and artist’s statements were given to explain to the audience what they were viewing.

*Was my exhibition and the feedback given authentic?* I filmed the exhibition so that I would have a visual record of the feedback given on the evening in order to show the authenticity of my research and my findings. The filmed recording of the exhibition was essential for critical reflection and analysis; it showed first-hand testimony and direct evidence of my bridal gowns. The public were also invited to give critical feedback about the exhibition and about my bridal gowns in the comments book. The public were asked to engage openly with the videographer and those who participated did so out of their own free will. Both the filmed documentation and page inserts from the comments book can be accessed from Appendix F. Both forms of data, the comments book and the

video recording were a comprehensible way to document the comments and feedback made at the exhibition.

*Was my exhibition and the feedback given appropriate?* The exhibition mirrors the evidence in Chapters Five (Foundation Blocks) and Six ('Real Brides') in my study. The second stage in the design process was my own interpretation of the blocks which was an essential part of my practical display, showing the ways in which the foundation blocks could be adapted. The exhibition was a necessary tool to validate my research and my findings.

### **7.5 What does this tell me about my practice? How does my practice generate my theory?**

The evening at the DUT Art Gallery validated the integration and importance of practice as theory and theory as practice. In my study, without the theory and the literature perspective, the practice and business perspective could not have been supported and visa versa. The balanced approach I have taken between the two have proven to be a successful tool in carrying out the methods for my action research self-study.

Due to the large number of comments and feedback I have received from both my peers and the public, I have highlighted a selection from the comments book and the filmed documentation on the exhibition and on my bridal gowns for the critically-reflective process of analysis. All comments from my peers and the public from all platforms remain anonymous with recognition of non-identity (Habermas, 1976), however, should you view the actual posts on public forums their names are openly listed. To further validate my research, I include comments made by my brides about their bridal gowns and the process of having it made by me. I also include feedback from social media on my exhibition and on my bridal gowns. I then synthesise this feedback into key phrases and words to further evaluate and validate my practice. I have categorised the comments using colour coding to further reflect and analyse the comments made and what they mean to me. Some comments are relevant in all the colour categories, however, I have had to limit each sentence to one category. **Blue** is professionalism; **green** is good craftsmanship, design and

appeal; magenta is an indication of professional influence on the industry whether it be for new, potential brides or inspiring young fashion students.

#### 7.5.1 Comments book:

There were many favourable comments, but far too many to record here. I have included those pertinent to my study to show evidence of the improvement of my practice. There were no negative comments. The comments are all very encouraging and motivating.

“Quite exquisite, wonderful fabrics! Loved the workmanship.”

“Well done. Endless hours of work. Beautiful.”

“Beautiful.”

“It all looked beautiful, well done and keep up the good work.”

“Absolutely stunning, next show New York Fashion Week! Well done!”

“Well done... great job. Indeed.”

“No criticism to give. Absolutely amazing and awe-inspiring. The detail and design of all the dresses is incredible. Any bride is lucky to have a dress by Casey.”

“Beautiful, amazing stuff.”

“Beautifully constructed, gorgeous and immaculate designs. Well done Casey!”

“It is beautiful and neat.”

“Absolutely gorgeous. You’re so talented!”

“Congratulations Casey. This exhibition is just amazing. There are truly great things in store for you. Good luck with all your future plans.”

“What an evening. Beautiful, outstanding, No words ‘really’ to bring to the art in these dresses. Carry on girl. This is just the beginning of many more events.”

“Wow! No words can say! You are doing an incredible job. I love all your designs. Thank you.”

“What an evening. Beautiful, outstanding dresses. I have no words, they are really nice.”

“So beautiful and wish you all of the best in creating gowns for special occasions.”

“Wow! This is amazing! Where did you get these pair of hands from? Unbelievable! Good work and keep it up!”

“Wow!!! Amazing work Casey... really fascinating creativity with a futuristic vibe in your work... quite a piece of art I must say.”

I specifically recorded comments that record the wish to wear one of my bridal gowns, as I believe that this is a strong indication of the real admiration of people and a validation of my social and professional influence.

“Exceptional work, totally amazing. Can’t wait to contact you tomorrow morning.”

“From your set-up to your designs, everything was spectacular. It was beyond every girls dream. We look forward to using one of your designs in the future.”

“Amazing work, probably the best I’ve seen in a long time. This looks like a long and promising future: all the very best to the designer. After seeing that all I want to do is get married. All the very best.”

“Your work is beautiful – anyone would be honoured to wear one of your creations. Well done.”

“No words can say how incredible this was! So amazing. Your garments feel perfect on. Wishing you all of the best.”

“Congratulations Casey, your work is phenomenal. Stunning designs. You will be contacted soon.”

I realized by the comments made by young ‘creatives’ that I was having an influence and being an inspiration to them, which in itself is encouraging because I have been inspired and wish to do the same for others. These comments are a validation of my core values as a designer, entrepreneur and action researcher.

“Wow, what an amazing talent. I would kill to have you as my mentor.”

“Very proud to see another South African designer #frombrickfield. Another step to world domination.”

“Congratulations Casey, your work is really amazing and breathtaking. I wish you all the best in life, and industry, obviously, #brickfieldcampus.”

“Your work is very extraordinary. You are gifted or let me say you have a calling for fashion. Well done... I am motivated myself by your work. Thank you.”

“Well done Casey, your work is absolutely exquisite. You are definitely an inspiration to us as young designers. Good luck with the rest of your future.”

I was particularly struck by the two comments below that indicated the vast range of influence and affect my work had on unassuming viewers.

“Suppose I ought to rethink my revolt against weddings – a white one at that to.”

“Even as a guy who typically wouldn’t notice things like wedding dresses, I am blown away! Particularly the pink one! Beautiful!”

#### 7.5.2 Filmed documentation:

There were limited comments made on film; however, I still found them valuable to my study and validating of my practice. I specifically record here two comments from the audience. The first comment is from the perspective of a peer in the bridal industry that I have worked with on many occasions. It was valuable to me to have her feedback as a peer and her willingness to collaborate time after time, I believe, speaks of the standard of my work, which is very encouraging.

“Collaborating with her and how amazing; her work is self-explanatory. So amazing, so feminine, soft, beautiful, stunning embellishments: always enhancing a ladies neckline, physic. She’s very clever and I love working with her. It’s awesome to collaborate with her. Who wouldn’t?”

The second comment I record from the filmed documentation, I record here for a specific reason: it validates one of the basic values of action research, the commitment to action and dedication to the craft, which is the fundamental underpinning of our practice as action researchers.

“Absolutely amazing. I have watched these gowns grow from small beginnings and it has been really interesting to see how absolutely incredibly hard she works and how devoted she is to her talent. I think tonight definitely shows that she is going to go very far.”

Lastly, I have recorded comments made by Terrence Bray both in a conversation recorded for the DVD and from his opening speech that I found valuable to my study. What I value most is his critical approach (‘mentoring’) and his honesty in this process. I have recorded specific sentences and phrases that I found valuable as a validation tool for my study.

“Very honoured to have been asked to open the exhibition with a few words, so that for me is quite exciting. I have mentored Casey, she is a past student and it’s always great to see people that you’ve had a hand in guiding doing somewhat extremely well. The work is incredible and speaks for itself. I think she’s a force to be reckoned with in this industry, which is not an easy industry. You will probably hear from my speech the same sentiment. It takes a great character to preserve and to have done it in such a short space of time that she has; this is a testament to her focus and her personality.”

“Having a hand in teaching and mentoring her you see a certain character develop. This in an industry where I think few realize how difficult and draining and complicated it is.”

Bray goes on to emphasize how it takes a very strong character, focus and determination and *“that character developed very quickly in Casey and she has achieved what takes most designers a lot longer in a very short space of time.”*

One simile Bray used can be linked appropriately to the methodology of self-study: that willingness to put your work and yourself as a designer up for criticism; it speaks a lot of the creative industry as a whole where you are as much as the work you produce.

“Bespoke wedding dresses is like building a house from foundation up, letting the person live in it for a week and then them telling you what’s wrong with it and you having to start all over again.”

### 7.5.3 Feedback from the brides:

I include feedback from my brides as an indicator and validation of the professional and entrepreneurial values I hold. I chose to include these comments because they had something specific to say about the personal and direct experience they had with me as the designer. These validating comments are much longer than the others and provide evidence of the importance of the 'personal factor', as mentioned in Chapter One; an aspect that is essential for the success of my study. By attaining results on a personal level, and offering a qualitative method of research, I have been able to give a valuable service to my brides:

"It is certainly NO secret that Casey is an insanely talented designer! To say I am obsessed with my wedding dress would be a major understatement. It is by far the most beautiful thing I have ever worn and I felt like a princess in it. Casey was divine to work with, she is SO organised which relieved a huge amount of stress from my wedding planning and she has the sweetest nature. I would highly recommend having her design your wedding dress - I can guarantee it will be a dream comes true! Thank you again Casey, you are amazing!"<sup>92</sup>

"I honestly don't have the words to describe, the feelings when you are in Casey's presence, so professional and her work is... yes; perfect!! My dreams have come true the day I met my dream man, but having my wedding dress made by Casey-Jeanne was a true blessing, I felt feminine, confident, lady like and like a true princess (the groom were speechless) it was all I wanted and more, I had a great day, from the moment walking down the aisle to dancing the night away (really dancing in my dress) I could not imagine a more perfect dress for my body type, and a perfect wedding day! Now I'm left with the best memories from planning to my wedding day! I recommend Casey Jeanne to any one she really knows how to deliver exquisite work! Thank you Casey!"<sup>93</sup>

"Casey is the best of the best. Hands down. Before I was recommended Casey, I looked for wedding dresses in New York and LA and nothing came close to the quality and details of any of Casey's creations. I worked with her in designing my dress from New York City and the experience was wonderful! She really knows her fabrics & laces and easily guides you with what works best for the dress you are wanting. My wedding dress turned out even better than I ever could have imagined. I was so proud to wear a custom Casey Jeanne dress on my wedding day! I actually think the dress received more compliments than I did! Thank you Casey!"<sup>94</sup>

"The best designer by far. Casey made my gorgeous wedding gown for my special day and it was exactly what I wanted. The attention to detail and the quality of work is amazing."<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Feedback given October 23, 2014

<sup>93</sup> Feedback given October 26, 2014

<sup>94</sup> Feedback given April 27, 2015

<sup>95</sup> Feedback given October 21, 2014

“Casey is one of the most special talented designers! I could not have asked for a more beautiful wedding dress and experience.”<sup>96</sup>

#### 7.5.4 Comments made on social media

On the next page are selected comments from my Facebook page<sup>97</sup>. The particular comments selected are chosen to demonstrate and give evidence of professionalism, good craftsmanship, design and the appeal of a professional influence which collectively validate my research and my practice:

“Elegantly perfect attention to detail with such Finesse!”  
“Day Dreamers reality”  
“Casey, so beautiful! Super woman!”  
“Just stunning!”  
“Well done Casey. I can't imagine how much work went into that.”  
“So excited!! Congratulations”  
“A lot if hard word, well done!!!”  
“All the best, congrats Casey-Jeanne you are amazingly talented”  
“Gorgeous!! I also want one!”  
“Beautiful!”  
“I think u have outdone yourself my friend beyond beautiful”  
“So beautiful Casey! You continue to amaze”  
“My word Case! That dress is magnificent!”  
“I'm speechless, you were born for this Casey, wow!”  
“Ah this is one of my favorites Case, well done! Love this style!”  
“Another gorgeous creation”  
“That dress!!! Incredible”  
“Oh my word Casey! This dress is just the most beautiful creation ever!!”  
“I want to get married again after seeing all your dresses.”  
“Soooo gorgeous!!”

#### 7.6 Synthesis of feedback

Below, I cohesively synthesise and present key words and phrases from the feedback I received from the comments book, filmed documentation, the brides and social media as validation of my practice, my study and my action research critical-reflection process. These key words give credence to Habermas's (1979) framework of truth, comprehensibility and authenticity in validating the data which characterises my professional values, entrepreneurial values and in the reflection process.

1. “quite exquisite”
2. “loved the workmanship”
3. “so beautiful”
4. “an inspiration to us as young designers”

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<sup>96</sup> Feedback given July 21, 2015

<sup>97</sup> Can be accessed at: <https://www.facebook.com/CaseyJeanneAtelier>

5. "absolutely amazing and awe-inspiring"
6. "detail and design of all the dresses is incredible."
7. "any bride is lucky to have a dress by Casey"
8. "the best I've seen in a long time"
9. "I would kill to have you as my mentor"
10. "beautifully constructed"
11. "garments feel perfect on"
12. "piece of art "
13. "motivated myself by your work"
14. "fascinating creativity"
15. "most beautiful thing I have ever worn"
16. "Casey was divine to work with"
17. "knows her fabrics"
18. "attention to detail and the quality of work is amazing"
19. "I could not have asked for a more beautiful wedding dress and experience"
20. "so professional"
21. "dream come true"
22. "devoted she is to her talent"
23. "It's awesome to collaborate with her. Who wouldn't?"
24. "a force to be reckoned with in this industry"
25. "achieved what takes most designers a lot longer in a very short space of time"

## **7.7 Concluding reflections**

I believe this chapter aids one in answering the question: *what evidence do I have of my entrepreneurship in a highly-competitive market?* The comments and feedback I have received from the exhibition and social media are validation that my practice and methods are well received in this highly-competitive market. The evidence is validated by the comments that reflect professionalism, quality of workmanship and design aesthetic. Also described is professional influence in the fashion industry for both fashion students and potential brides. Terrence Bray further validates the evidence by stating, "Casey has rooted herself in an industry that is quite hard to get into. It is an industry that takes a very specific type of personality, focus and determination which she has and I wish her everything of the best"<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Taken from the opening speech at my exhibition on Wednesday the 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2015.

By analyzing evidence, validation questions and synthesizing the feedback I have received, I have learnt that not only am I improving my practice and providing brides with a quality service, but I am also motivating and inspiring other young designers and 'creatives' in the industry to improve their own practices. This links back to the values that I hold to achieve positive social change (Miller, 2003) and my commitment to my action research, which proves the authenticity of my study.

I have also learnt that the most valuable and in-depth feedback comes from the people who have personally had a direct experience with me as a designer. The 'personal' factor that I referred to in Chapter One and again in this Chapter was essential to the success, comprehensibility and authenticity of my study. It is the 'person' behind the brand with whom people make a connection and 'buy into'. The bridal industry is a very personal industry and as mentioned in Chapter Two, the process of buying a wedding dress is an emotional one. It is the 'personal' factor that bridges the gap between an anxious, stressed bride and the excited, happy bride.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: THE BIG DAY

### Conclusion

*“A respect for people and for the knowledge and experience they bring to the research process, a belief in the ability of democratic processes to achieve positive social change, and a commitment to action, these are the basic values, which underlie our common practice as action researchers.” Mary Miller<sup>99</sup>*

#### 8.1 Conclusion

In this final concluding chapter I reflect critically on my research processes and outcomes to validate their usefulness and authenticity in my study. By using action research to underpin my study, I could actively enquire into my own practice in a systematic way using practice-based methods. Self-study allowed me to hold myself accountable for what I was doing and reflective practice aided me in uncovering knowledge and analysing feedback. By using these methodologies, I have been able to build my entrepreneurial knowledge, as explained by Audretsch (1995), through tacit knowledge, past experiences and new experiences with the designers and my brides. My conclusion naturally facilitates the answer to the sub-question ‘d’ in my adaptation of McNiff and Whitehead’s (2002) framework in Chapter Three: *What evidence do I have of the possible employability of others in the bridal gown industry?*

In the early stages of my research, I realised that the context of my study was much bigger than only improving my practice as a bridal gown designer. In essence, this was my main research question, however, I also recognised the need to create a sustainable business as a bridal gown designer and entrepreneur in an economy where the textile industry faces tough international competition from cheaper produced imports from other countries. By improving my practice in a sustainable manner, based on the belief in my values as an action researcher, the positive repercussions have resulted in the beginning stages of my long-term action plan for my small entrepreneurial business: to employ people over time.

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<sup>99</sup> Accessed at: [www.civitas.edu.pl/pub/nasza\\_uczelnia/projekty.../Brydon-Miller.pdf](http://www.civitas.edu.pl/pub/nasza_uczelnia/projekty.../Brydon-Miller.pdf)

Through the process of designing bridal gowns using the foundation blocks as a starting point, I have been able to save time and money, which has resulted in a process and method that is relatively 'user friendly' to train up staff. The foundation-block method allows one to become familiar with how the silhouette is sewn together, with slight design changes differing from bride to bride. When creating a completely bespoke bridal gown without using the foundation block as a starting point, it is very difficult to deligate the sewing aspect of the process because you as the designer and creator are the only one who knows what unique and new method to undertake in order to complete the bridal gown; however, when using the foundation block as a starting point, the seamstress can have an already-calculated method to use to sew together the gown. In that sense, it puts me in the position where I am able to employ a seamstress.

Using the foundation blocks as a starting point allows for a calculated method to be implemented in sewing together bridal gowns. Once I had developed a system for the foundation blocks, I employed a seamstress part time, trained her in sewing together the foundation blocks and coached her on how to recognise a concurrent and underlying method. I was also approached by the 3<sup>rd</sup> year fashion students at DUT to be involved in their in-service program, where a student would do her internship working for me. Since I was now able to take on more work due to better running of operations, I could also take on interns where required. Being an intern myself, I felt it be the next step in being able to take on interns as a form of giving back. The internships as well as the training up of a seamstress is validation of social justice; social justice being a positive consequence of my study, and the values that I hold as an action researcher.

Looking back at Chapter One and the aims and purposes of my study, I explained that I intended to improve my practice as a bespoke, bridal-gown designer and in so doing developed measures to cut costs in bridal-gown production without compromising on the creative design process. As a result of sustainable entrepreneurial thinking and developing the five foundation blocks, I was able to cut costs by saving time in the design and production process. By applying this measure and method to real brides, I could evaluate what the successes and downfalls were from this concept. The concern then was

whether I could still design with individuality and integrity whilst becoming more competitive in the bridal industry. Creating the foundation blocks allowed me to create and produce cost effective and competitively-priced bridal gowns resulting in a sustainable business. I also created a costing sheet that would help me to accurately work out my expenses on a bridal gown.

Another improvement I made early on was to put together fitting schedules for my brides in advance. I also have improved my time management by only consulting and fitting brides on a Friday and one Saturday per month. In this way I could be focused purely on clients on those days and Monday to Thursday work on creating the bridal gowns without distractions. This all helped save time and streamline the production process.

I have realised the importance of positioning one's self in a niche market and how this can determine the success or downfall of one's business. Bridging the gap between what is known as couture and 'ready-to-wear' has allowed me the opportunity to provide a service to a niche market while still offering an exclusive service. For these reasons, my brand, 'Casey Jeanne' has improved and grown significantly. I have been able to build a brand with a 'signature aesthetic', to the point where the public can tell whether or not a gown is a 'Casey Jeanne' design before it has been made known to them.

I had hoped to inspire other 'creatives' through my MTech research to value their time and develop their craft. Although, as an action researcher, I am not responsible for another's learning. I can take responsibility for my own learning; however, it was a natural outcome to motivate young, creative people. By analysing the feedback and comments I received on social media and through the exhibition in the previous Chapter, I have evidence to validate and support my claim. In effect, this claim also links back to the values I hold as an action researcher. The opening quote of this chapter concludes and validates my claim.

In conclusion, I answered my main question that has fueled my research: *"How do I improve my practice as a bridal gown designer in a highly-competitive*

market?” I came up with a foundation block method as a starting point in the design process of a bridal gown to save time. Saving time in the design and production process resulted in saving money, which in turn allowed me to offer cost-effective and competitively-priced bridal gowns. There are still aspects of the foundation block method that need to be improved upon and these will continually be improved and expanded on throughout the unfolding journey of my business. As an action researcher one needs to continually look, think, act and reflect. On this never-ending journey, one repeatedly encounters new problems and new improved solutions: that is the beauty of action research. As McNiff so eloquently puts it:

*You do not expect concrete answers or solutions: you are experimenting with life and creating something new. It is not about encouraging behavioral outcomes, you are exploring your capacity for learning and your new improved learning will inform new, improved actions.*  
(McNiff 2002:31)

## **8.2 Recommendations for further studies**

The research that has been undertaken for this thesis has highlighted a number of topics on which further research would be beneficial. Several areas where information is lacking due to the magnitude of this MTech research were highlighted in my study, and whilst some of these were addressed by the research in this thesis, others remain. In particular, there is an opportunity to expand upon the physiological needs framework of a bride.

Further research could include further investigation into creating a demi-bespoke bridal gown collection, manufactured in South Africa with the possibility to export; an in depth look at the dimensions of cost-effectiveness and competitiveness within the bridal industry in South Africa and abroad; and a more focused look at entrepreneurial theory relating to the dimensions of entrepreneurial values.

## AFTERTHOUGHTS

*“There are no real endings but continual new beginnings.” Jean McNiff<sup>100</sup>*

Since the writing up of my dissertation, I have been given the opportunity to expand upon and create a ready-to-wear bridal gown collection for retail to the public stemming from my interpretation of the foundation blocks, that I called ‘Jeannelle la Amour<sup>101</sup>’. I now supply Calegra Bridal House<sup>102</sup> in Cape Town and Pretoria with the Jeannelle la Amour bridal-gown collection. Calegra is a new concept and the first bridal boutique that houses only South African designed and produced bridal gowns. I am looking forward to seeing where this new ‘sub-division’ of the brand ‘Casey Jeanne’ will take me.



Figure 91: A photograph of the ‘Juliette’ gown from the Jeannelle la Amour collection, that is stocked at Calegra Bridal House (Diack, 2014)

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<sup>100</sup> McNiff, 2002

<sup>101</sup> The collection can be viewed at <http://www.caseyjeanne.com/jeannelle-la-amour/>

<sup>102</sup> Calegra Bridal House website: <http://www.calegra.co.za>

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## Appendix (A)



### LETTER OF INFORMATION FOR INTERNSHIPS

**Title of the Research Study:** How do I improve my practice as a bridal gown designer in a highly competitive market? A practice-based action research self-study.

**Principal Investigator/s/researcher:** Casey Jeanne Walters, B-Tech

**Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s:** Lee Scott, M-Tech

**Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study:** I, Casey Jeanne Walters from the Fashion and Textiles Department at the Durban University of Technology am conducting research to complete my Masters Degree in Technology; Fashion. The bridal gown market in South Africa is currently significantly supplied from countries where labour costs are lower than in South Africa, which impacts on the affordability of South African made bridal gowns. My research is based on improving my practice as an entrepreneurial young South African bridal gown designer, by making my bridal gowns more affordable without sacrificing the quality of design or manufacture. In short, my study is a 'proudly South African' initiative. I aim to develop competitive and viable cost-saving measures for bespoke designer bridal gowns. I believe that your expert knowledge will help me in this study.

**Outline of the Procedures:** I request permission to intern with you, and quote you as a participant in my research.

**Benefits:** You will receive free labour; researcher to improve her practice and complete her M-Tech.

**Reason/s why the Participant May Be Withdrawn from the Study:** Should you choose to withdraw, there will be no adverse consequences for the participant.

**Confidentiality:** In no way will this material be used for anything else but in this study.

**Persons to Contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries:**

Please contact the researcher (082 768 6250 or [casey@caseyjeanne.com](mailto:casey@caseyjeanne.com)) or the supervisor (072 246 6085 or [lees@dut.ac.za](mailto:lees@dut.ac.za)) or the Institutional Research Ethics administrator on 031 373 2900. Complaints can be reported to the DVC: TIP, Prof F. Otieno on 031 373 2382 or [dvctip@dut.ac.za](mailto:dvctip@dut.ac.za).

**General:**

Participation is voluntary and the approximate number of designers to be included in the study is three established designers. A copy of the information letter will be issued to you. All travel, accommodation and food expenses required to complete the internship will be covered by the researcher.



## Appendix (C)



### LETTER OF INFORMATION FOR BRIDES

**Title of the Research Study:** How do I improve my practice as a bridal gown designer in a highly competitive market? A practice-based action research self-study.

**Principal Investigator/s/researcher:** Casey Jeanne Walters, MTech

**Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s:** Lee Scott, M-Tech

**Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study:** I, Casey Jeanne Walters from the Fashion and Textiles Department at the Durban University of Technology am conducting research to complete my Masters Degree in Technology; Fashion. The bridal gown market in South Africa is currently significantly supplied from countries where labour costs are lower than in South Africa, which impacts on the affordability of South African made bridal gowns. My research is based on improving my practice as an entrepreneurial young South African bridal gown designer, by making my bridal gowns more affordable without sacrificing the quality of design or manufacture. In short, my study is a 'proudly South African' initiative. I aim to develop competitive and viable cost-saving measures for bespoke designer bridal gowns.

**Outline of the Procedures:** I am asking for permission to use photographs taken at fittings sessions and professional images from the wedding day for the assessment of my research. These photographs will

1. be exhibited publicly at a time and venue to be announced;
2. appear in my masters dissertation.

**Reason/s why the Participant May Be Withdrawn from the Study:** Should the participant choose to withdraw, there will be no adverse consequences for the participant.

**Confidentiality:** In no way will this material be used for anything else but in this study.

**Persons to Contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries:**

Please contact the researcher (082 768 6250 or [casey@caseyjeanne.com](mailto:casey@caseyjeanne.com)) or the supervisor (072 246 6085 or [lees@dut.ac.za](mailto:lees@dut.ac.za)) or the Institutional Research Ethics administrator on 031 373 2900. Complaints can be reported to the DVC: TIP, Prof F. Otieno on 031 373 2382 or [dvctip@dut.ac.za](mailto:dvctip@dut.ac.za).

**General:**

Participation is voluntary and the approximate number of brides to be included in the study is five brides. A copy of the information letter will be issued to you.

Appendix (D)



**CONSENT FOR BRIDES**

**Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:**

- I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, \_\_\_\_\_ (name of researcher), about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study - Research Ethics Clearance Number: \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_,
- I have also received, read and understood the above written information (Participant Letter of Information) regarding the study.
- I am aware that in no way will this material be used for anything else but in this study.
- In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be used by the researcher.
- I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.
- I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study. I understand that significant new findings developed during the course of this research, which may relate to my participation will be made available to me.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Full Name of Participant      Date                      Time                      Signature**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (name of researcher) herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Full Name of Researcher      Date                      Time                      Signature**

## Appendix (E)



### **PROPOSED OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS TO DESIGNERS DURING INTERNSHIPS:**

#### **General Questions:**

1. How did you start out as a bridal fashion designer?
2. What type of customer do you generally work with?
3. Do you charge for consultations? If so, how much?
4. Do you have a monthly budget for advertising? Please explain.
5. In your practice as a bridal gown designer, what do you think are important entrepreneurial values?
6. What advice would you have for me as a young designer to improve my practice as a bridal gown designer, in respect of originality, individuality (bespoke gowns) and cost-effectiveness?

#### **Aspects of bridal gowns:**

1. How do you differentiate your bridal gowns from mainstream bridal gowns in the bridal boutiques?
2. What are your perceptions of locally produced bridal gowns in comparison to imported gowns?
3. Does the bridal gown import industry have an effect on your business as a South African designer? If so, in what ways?
4. Do you think that the bridal gown import industry has an effect on bride's expectations in terms of your pricing strategies? If so, in what ways?
5. Do you simplify your designs for small-scale mass production? If so, please elaborate by saying why?
6. From your experience, what are the leading trends in the bridal gown industry?
7. Do you translate these trends into your designs? If so, in what ways?
8. Does the Hollywood red carpet affect a bride's choice of bridal gown? If so, in what ways?
9. Do you produce your own detailing on your fabric used in bridal gowns?

10. How many hours or days, approximately, do you need to make a bridal gown? This question is relevant in terms of costing and pricing. Do you feel it is better to charge per hour?

**Feedback of performance as an intern:**

It is my intention as an entrepreneurial bridal gown designer to develop my practice. As a part of my professional development I would appreciate your feedback on the service I have provided during the internship and what I can improve on. Please could you respond to the following feedback categories:

1. Was the manner in which I conducted myself during the internship to your satisfaction? Please explain.
2. Do you have any advice going forward for the development of my practice?
3. What can I improve on as a bridal gown designer?
4. Please provide general feedback of my overall performance as an intern.



### **PROPOSED OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS TO BRIDES:**

It is my intention as an entrepreneurial bridal gown designer to be as professional as possible in the development of my practice. As a part of my professional development I would appreciate your feedback on the service I have provided. Please could you respond to the following aspects:

1. Professional interaction and consultations
  - Was the manner in which we consulted professional, clear and easy to understand?
  - Did the use of photographs help you in deciding on the style and fabrication of the wedding gown? Please explain your answer.
  - Did the use of sample gowns in the studio and fabric samples help you in deciding on the style and fabrication of the wedding gown? Please explain your answer.
2. Costing and time management
  - Was the quality and value of work produced for your bespoke bridal gown to your satisfaction in terms of costing? Please explain your answer.
  - Do you feel that the time allocated for the design process and making of your wedding gown was enough? Please explain your answer.
3. The bridal gown
  - In terms of the final product, were you satisfied with the final look and fit?
  - Was the technical finish of your bespoke bridal gown to your satisfaction?

Appendix (F)

COMMENTS BOOK PAGE INSERTS WITH FILMED DOCUMENTATION OF EXHIBITION:

COMMENTS BOOK

Exceptional work, Totally Amazing. Can't wait to contact you towards Wearing ...  
Quite exquisite - wonderful fabrics! loved the workmanship - lig X.  
Love-one. (NEM)

Well done. Endless hours of work. Missed it xxx Beautiful.

Beautiful

It all look beautiful, well done and keep up the good work.

Well done Casey your work is absolutely exquisite you definitely are an inspiration to us all as young designers. good luck with the rest of your future.

Absolutely stunning, next show New York Fashion Week! Well done! (Wahudi Peters)

Well done ... Great Job. Indeed.

No criticism to give. Absolutely amazing & awe-inspiring. The detail & design of all the dresses is incredible. Any bride is lucky to have a dress by Casey.

Amazing work probably the best i've seen in a long time this looks like to be a long & promising future all the very best to the designer. After seeing that all I wanna do is get married. All the very best.

Congratulations - you are so talented, Glad some of your genius happened at NO 15! She.

Congratulations! Beautiful - Well Done

Beautiful, Amazing Stuff.

Wow, what an amazing TALENT I would kill to have U as My Mentor

• Very Proud to see another Amazing South African designer # FROMERICKFIELD Another Step to world Domination.

• Congratulations Casey your work is really Amazing and breath taking I wish you all the best in life and Industry Obviously # Brickfield Campus.

Beautifully constructed, gorgeous and immaculate designs well done Casey!! XXX

• It is beautiful and neat Wel gedaan, Casey!! Pragtig!

STUNNING VEEBY, BIE GEWIK CASEY

Absolutely gorgeous. You're so talented!!!

Your work is beautiful - anyone would be honored to wear one of your creations WELL DONE

No words can say how incredible this was! So amazing your garments feel PERFECT on. Wishing you all the best in life.  
Tone.

Wow Casey jy is in absolute ster klededaan. Jaa toekomst is ryk soos in ster voor jou uit. Anell.

Dit was in ongelooflike aand! Jy is so talentvol en elke rok is uniek! Dit is so mooi! Kan nie wag om te sien wat jy volgende doen nie. N.NELL

Congratulations Casey. This exhibition is just amazing. There are only great things in store for you. Good luck with all your future plans. Sindiwa

What an evening  
Beautiful outstanding  
no words "Really" to bring  
to the art in these dresses.  
Carry on Girl. This is just  
the beginning of many more  
events.. Dad.

Your work is very extraordinary,  
you are gifted or ~~let~~ let me say  
you have a calling for fashion.  
Well done..... I am motivated  
myself by your work. Thank you.

Your guys are doing a very good  
extraordinary work. I love all your dresses.  
Wow! No words, can't say you are doing an incredible  
job. I love all your design. Thank you!

What an evening beautiful outstanding dresses but no words  
they are really nice 😊 😊

Mooi werkkeidenhad - nie net nie jorde maar ook  
nie ouer persone. Dae kreatief stylvol en pragtig die  
veg. Gy loos met materiaal! Deur so voort  
Yash

Congratulations Casey  
Your work is phenomenal  
Stunning Designs  
You will be contacted soon ♥  
So beautiful and wish all the best  
in creating gowns for a special  
occasion.

Absolutely Stunning!  
The entire setup-backdrop cftail  
tables + chairs - Very Very impressive  
Wish you great success  
Will watch this space  
Ingnd Lloyd

Even as a guy who typically wouldn't notice  
things like wedding dresses - I am blown away!  
Particularly love the pink one! Beautiful!

From Your Set up to Your designs everything  
was spectacular. It was beyond every girls  
Dream ♥ We look forward to be using one  
of your designs in the future...es  
Kime, Theri & Vihz ♥

Wow! This is Amazing! Where did you get  
these pair of hands from? Unbelievable!  
Good work & keep it up!  
Hilly 😊 Greathne

Suppose I ought to rethink my revolt against  
weddings ~~and~~ - a white one at that - too.  
♥ly work Casey.  
Jia

Wow!!! Amazing work Casey... Really fascinating  
creativity with futuristic vibe in your work...  
quite a piece of art (must say)

Shaka Neza  
Siyanda Mankete



## Appendix (G)

### **INSERTS FROM MY CREATIVE JOURNALING:**

Creative journaling has been a way to informally record ideas, images, reflections, experiments and different forms of feedback. I am a creative being, which means that my creative processes are unique; and because I am creative, my journaling notes have been recorded in many books, on many different pieces of paper and even online over my MTech study. I have included inserts taken from different journal notes and reflections to form this appendix. To further organize my thoughts and notes, I have categorized them into the following headings:

- Consultation fabrics and trims (to give the reader a look into the different types of laces and trims used in the consultation process)
- Reflecting notes and sketches (of processes, ideas, techniques, thoughts and reflections)
- Process pictures (of fittings with brides one-five)
- Online validation (of my practice)

## Samples of a variety of different types of laces from the consultation process (small-scale pieces)



A - Bold vine/leaf lace with silver threading and 3D flower details

B - 3D beaded and lightly sequined flower lace

C - Embellished pearl lace with silver threading (used for Bride One and Bride Three's bridal gowns - later hand-dyed to an icy-pink colour for Bride Three)

D - Cotton floral delicate lace motif with no beading

E - Bold chorded vine lace motif

F - Traditional delicate chorded Chantilly lace



P - Beaded scallop trim with silk flower detailing

Q - Organic silk flower trim with sequins and beads

R - Silk flower trim with sequins and beads



- G - Lightly-beaded, chorded delicate Chantilly lace
- H - Heavier-chorded, beaded pearl lace motif
- I - Lightly-beaded, medium chorded Chantilly lace
- J - Cotton lace scallop
- K - Silk vine 3D lace
- L - Embellished Chantilly lace
- M - Hand embroidered motif
- N - Silk flower 3D lace with silver threading
- O - Power mesh



S - Embellished pearl and beaded scallop (used for Bride Four)

T - Delicate chorded lace scalloped trim with silk flowers

U - Art deco beaded vintage lace with scallop (used for Bride Five)

V - Embellished genuine Chantilly lace handmade in France (left - original colour; right - hand-dyed to icy-pink colour for Bride Three)

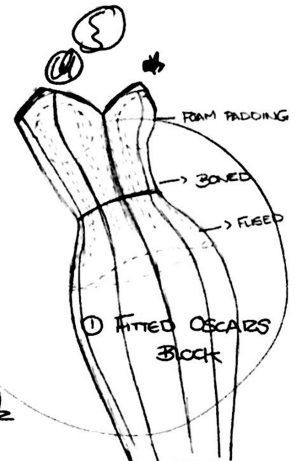


M-TECH  
Blocks

- ① CLASSIC HOLLYWOOD BLOCK
- ② FAIRYTALE GOLDEN GLOBES BLOCK 32 34 36 BLOCKS
- ③ SLINKY GRAMMY'S BLOCK
- ④ PRINCESS ACADEMY'S BLOCK (TOILE MOCK-UP FOR PATTERN)
- ⑤ FITTED OSCAR'S BLOCK



GRAMMY



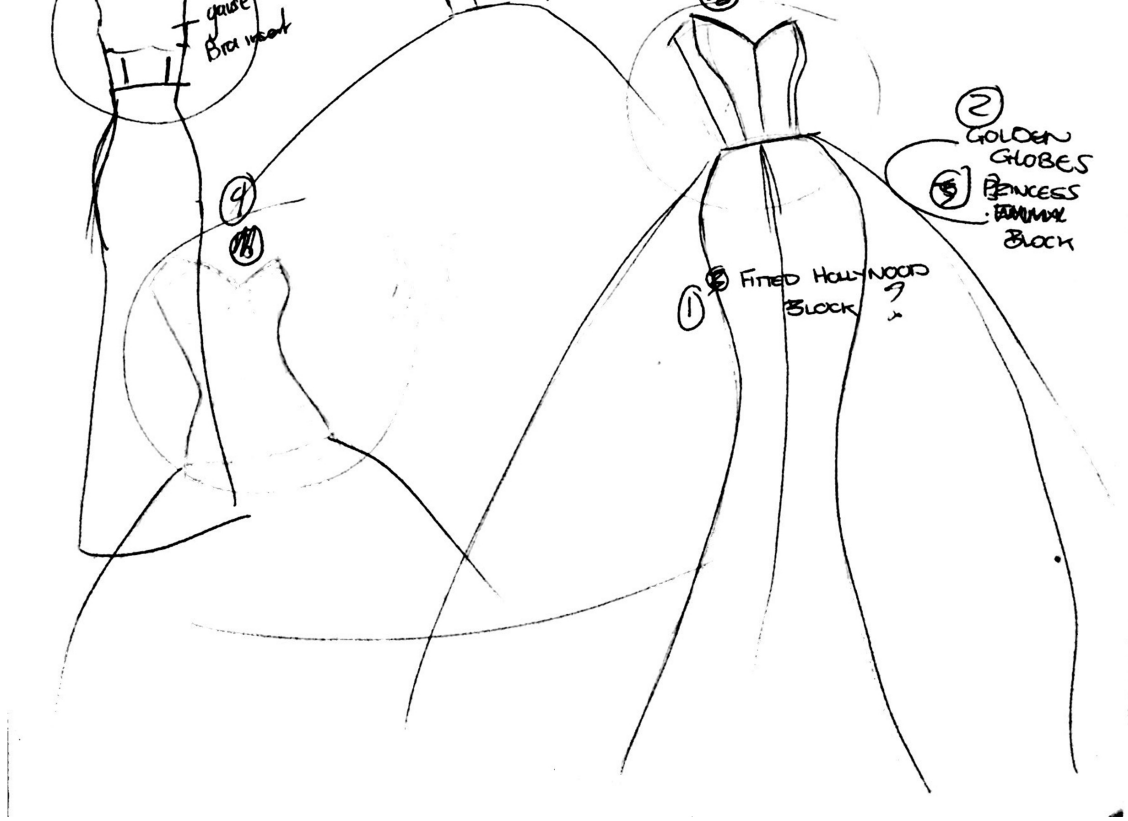
(named after Holly wood film awards)



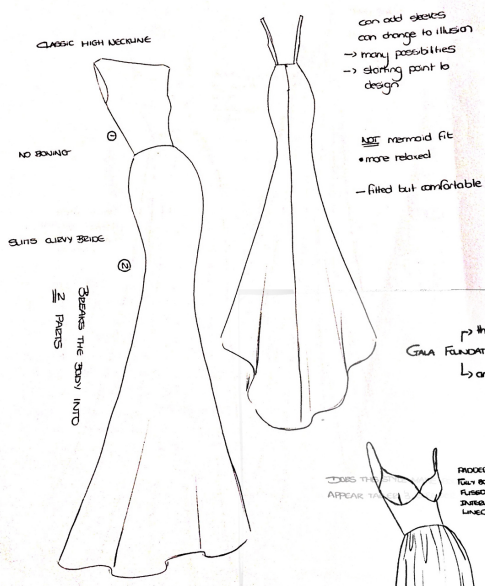
(grammy block)



② GOLDEN GLOBES  
⑤ PRINCESS ACADEMY BLOCK



social psychology behind brides choice in trichl gown  
 HOLLYWOOD FOUNDATION BACK  
 ↳ RED CARPET



CLASSIC HIGH NECKLINE

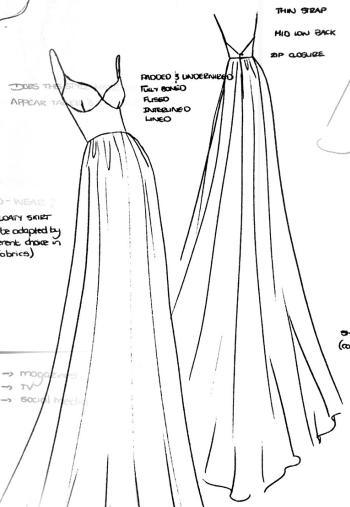
NO BODICUT

SUITS CURVY BRIDE

②  
 SHOWS THE SKIN INTO  
 3 PAGES

can add sleeves  
 can change to illusion  
 → many possibilities  
 → starting point to design  
 NOT mermaid fit  
 • more relaxed  
 - fitted but comfortable

↳ the starting point  
 GALA FOUNDATION BACK  
 ↳ on underlying basis or principle of something



DOES THE  
 APPEAR TO

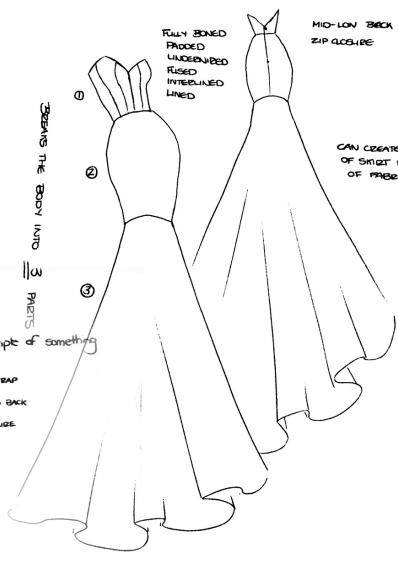
PROXIED & UNDERLINED  
 FULLY BONED  
 FULLY LINED  
 INTERLINED

THIN STRAP  
 MID-LOW BACK  
 ZIP CLOSURE

SHORT TRAIN  
 (can be extended)

Culture? READY TO WEAR?  
 FLOWY SKIRT  
 (can be adapted by  
 different drapes or  
 fabrics)

OSCAR FOUNDATION BACK  
 ↳ social comparison theory  
 ↳ who wore it better?



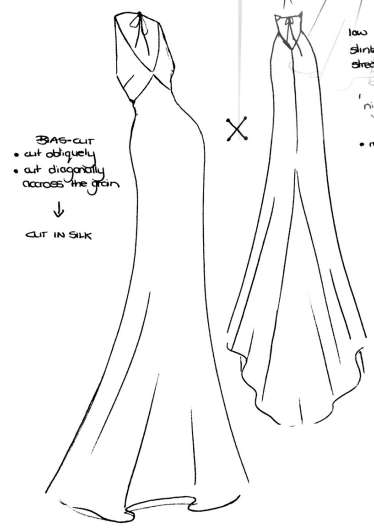
FULLY BONED  
 PADDED  
 UNDERLINED  
 FULLY LINED  
 INTERLINED

MID-LOW BACK  
 ZIP CLOSURE

CAN CREATE FULLNESS  
 OF SKIRT BY CHOICE  
 OF FABRICS

①  
 ②  
 ③  
 SHOWS THE BODY INTO  
 3 PAGES

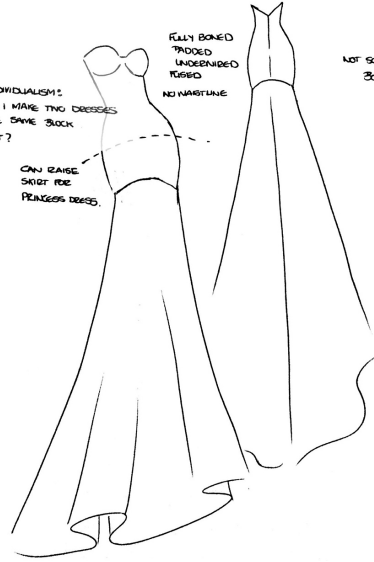
↳ celebrity & media influence  
 Vogue FOUNDATION BACK  
 ↳ the prevailing fashion or style  
 of a particular time



BIAS-CUT  
 • cut obliquely  
 • cut diagonally  
 across the grain  
 ↓  
 CUT IN SILK

low open back  
 slightly  
 draped  
 'nightgown'  
 • relaxed thru strap

CONSUMER INDIVIDUALISM:  
 → HOW CAN I MAKE TWO DRESSES  
 FROM THE SAME BACK  
 DIFFERENT?



FULLY BONED  
 PADDED  
 UNDERLINED  
 FULLY LINED

NO WAISTLINE

NOT SO POPULAR?  
 SOUNDING TOO MUCH

CAN RAISE  
 SKIRT FOR  
 PRINCESS DRESS

ANAKOS FOUNDATION BACK



Process pictures: a 'behind the seams' look at fittings with brides





# Screenshots of feedback from my Facebook Page 'Casey Jeanne' - Online validation

**Talitha de Charmoy** · Casey Jeanne · July 11, 2013 · 🌐

A dream turned into a beautiful day!

I first met Casey-Jeanne on the 6th of October 2012 at the Rain Farm (Ballito) when i was asked to model one of Casey-Jeanne's dresses. I caught a liking in Casey and I thought: "one day when it's my BIG day i would love for her to design my dress"

I did not even suspect what was about to happen on that day; my husband asked me to marry him!!!

January 2013 i started to plan my wedding and i knew that i wanted no one else to design my dress, so i phoned Casey to set up a meeting. So the process started!

I went for 5 fittings and every time i saw my dress i loved it more and more, wow what a designer!!!

Casey has the most beautiful, warm and sincere personality and she knew exactly what i wanted.

Casey offered to assist me on my wedding day so i agreed and let me tell you, thank the Lord for that, she was a angel sent from Heaven that day, "Casey thank you for being there, assisting me in getting dressed and helping with the photo shoot, you are a true LEGEND!

WOW!

**Jenelle Joanne Ramsami** · Casey Jeanne · June 9, 2013 · 🌐

U amazing! Awesome designs

Unlike · Comment · Share · 🍌 1 🗨️ 1

---

**Nataly F Da Costa** · Casey Jeanne · June 5, 2013 · 🌐

Wow Casey, love your work, incredible, you really have a talent and using it to its perfection. I will definitely be keeping an eye on this page for your new exciting designs.

Unlike · Comment · Share · 🍌 1 🗨️ 1

**Corné Zeelie** — 🌐 I honestly don't have the words to describe, the feeling when you are in Casey's presence, so professional and her work is... yes; perfect!! My dreams have come true the day I met my dream man, but having my wedding dress made by Casey-Jeanne was a true blessing, I felt feminine, confident, lady like and like a true princess (the groom were speechless) it was all I wanted and more, I had a great day, from the moment walking down the aisle to dancing the night away (really dancing in my dress) I could not imagine a more perfect dress for my body type, and a perfect wedding day! Now I'm left with the best memories from planning to my wedding day! I recommend Casey Jeanne to any one she really knows how to deliver exquisite work! Thank you Casey!!

Unlike · Comment · about 3 months ago

🍌 Casey Jeanne, Ronell Mikeoloni Sunday, October 26, 2014 at 8:36pm this.

🍌 Casey-Jeanne Walters October 26, 2014 at 10:20pm · Like

🍌 Ronell Mikeoloni Ben A very special lady with stunning stunning talent, bless you Casey 🍌 November 7, 2014 at 7:19pm · Unlike · 🍌 1

Write a comment...

**Marisa Baglione** — 🌐 It is certainly NO secret that Casey is an insanely talented designer! To say I am obsessed with my wedding dress, would be a major understatement. It is by far the most beautiful thing I have ever worn and I felt like a princess in it. Casey was divine to work with, she is SO organised which relieved a huge amount of stress from my wedding planning and she has the sweetest nature. I would highly recommend having her design your wedding dress - I can guarantee it will be a dream come true! Thank you again Casey, you are amazing!

Unlike · Comment · about 3 months ago · 4 Reviews

🍌 Casey Jeanne, Angela Hsu, Nicole Abbott and Casey-Jeanne Walters like this.

Write a comment...

**Ashley Lloyd** — 🌐 The best designer by far. Casey made my gorgeous wedding gown for my special day and it was exactly what I wanted. The attention to detail and the quality of work is amazing.

Unlike · Comment · about 3 months ago · 1 Review

🍌 Casey Jeanne, Angela Hsu and Casey-Jeanne Walters like this.

Write a comment...

**Corné Zeelie** Casey-Jeanne

Thank you so so much for making my dream wedding gown, it's even more beautiful then what I could've ever imagined, I had such a wonderful and special time, walking down the aisle, taking photos in it and my husband holding me in it! Words could not say how thankful I am to have my dress designed by you, acceptional talent, class, elegant, sexy meets fairytale, only a few words to describe my gorgeous dress so so special! Corné

Unlike · Reply · 🍌 2 · July 20, 2014 at 5:22pm

---

**Cara-lee Gevers** Just saw the front of the dress as well, geeppers Casey-Jeanne Walters, SO BEAUTIFUL & a massive congratulations lovely Junior En Corné Zeelie 😊 YAY!

**Nosipho Gasa Ngxulelo** — 🌐 Day Dreamers reality

Like · Comment · about 8 months ago · 6 Reviews · 🌐

🍌 Casey Jeanne likes this.

Write a comment...

**Zuanite Ploos Van Amstel** — 🌐 Casey is one of the most special talented designers! I could not have asked for a more beautiful wedding dress and experience.

Like · Comment · about 3 weeks ago · 23 Reviews · 🌐

🍌 Casey Jeanne likes this.

Write a comment...

**Marisa Baglione** ▸ Casey Jeanne  
June 9, 2014 · La Mercy · 🌐

Casey-Jeanne Walters is the most talented dress designer I could have ever wished for. I am besotted with my beautiful lace wedding gown and I am still in awe at how she went out of her way to make me feel like a princess. She accompanied us on our creative photo shoot (in freeeezing cold weather) and helped with every single shot. Casey, you were just wonderful! Thank you again!! XO

Unlike · Comment · Share · 👍 2 🗨️ 1

**SouthBound Bride** ▸ Casey Jeanne  
April 29, 2014 · 🌐

Featured on SouthBound Bride today!  
<http://www.southboundbride.com/black-tie-winter-wedding-fi.../>

<http://www.southboundbride.com/black-tie-winter-wedding-fiona-clair-tamara-paul/>

SOUTHBOUNDBRIDE.COM

Unlike · Comment · Share · 👍 1

**Cara-lee Gevers**  
April 11, 2014 · 🌐

Oh you know, just an average morning, having my morning coffee watching Casey-Jeanne Walters ( Casey Jeanne ) getting interviewed about her Spring/Summer range on Espresso Morning Show - SABC 3 🙄 WHOOT!

Unlike · Comment · Share

👍 You, Ashleigh Storm Behrens, Corné Zeelie and 15 others like this.

**Cheron Booth** ▸ Casey Jeanne  
April 1, 2014 · 🌐

I am just in love with your work.....it's gorgeous! Makes me want to get married again just so I can wear one of your dresses. Love looking at your page x

Unlike · Comment · Share · 👍 1 🗨️ 1

**Natasha Geldenhuys** ▸ Casey Jeanne  
October 31, 2013 · 🌐

I am aaaaaah'ing and oooooo'ing over your page, your talent, your drive and just plain everything!!!!!!!!!!!! SO PROUD OF YOU LADY!!!!

Unlike · Comment · Share · 👍 3 🗨️ 1

**Hanli van der Spuy** ▸ Casey Jeanne  
October 5, 2013 · Potchefstroom · 🌐

Oh my goodness Casey! Wow wow WOW! Your collection is gorgeous & your Betty Long Dress stole my heart (as well as those bags and glasses!) Congratulations on all your success - you deserve every bit of it! Keep on chasing those dreams\*

Unlike · Comment · Share · 👍 1 🗨️ 1

**Carine Greveling Danville** ▸ Casey Jeanne  
September 5, 2013 · 🌐

Hi Casey, Thank you for opening Danville's annual Grade 12 Art Exhibition. All of us at Danville are so proud of your achievements, commitment and hard work. We look forward to seeing your name highlighted in many newspapers publications and fashion magazines. Wishing you continued success.

Unlike · Comment · Share · 👍 1

**Green Goddess flower studio** ▸ Casey Jeanne  
May 17, 2014 · Cape Town · 🌐

Casey-Jeanne - I have just come across your work and wanted to say how beautiful your dresses were - was getting all excited thinking about a styled shoot with a red dress, then saw you are in Durban - nonetheless, wanted to just say how much I love your dresses, Coral

Unlike · Comment · Share · 👍 1 🗨️ 1

**Sandra Lunn** ▸ Casey Jeanne  
March 24, 2014 · 🌐

Casey how can I express my gratitude for making the most beautiful gown for my daughter..

As a function coordinator myself I have seen hundreds of dresses but none meant more to me than hers...you were a pleasure to work with.. A true professional...and the passion shows in your clothes...Lisa's gown was so beautifully crafted a real masterpiece...you are a true artist... To all the brides out there that are looking for someone to make their Wedding dress all I can say is don't hesitate for a minute ... Casey is amazing...thank you for also taking the time to come to Hartford and fit the gown yourself... That shows dedication and for that and everything you did for Lisa... THANK YOU...#

Unlike · Comment · Share · 👍 1 🗨️ 1

**Tercia Flashman** ▸ Casey Jeanne  
December 19, 2013 · 🌐

So absolutely thrilled to have found your page, a true gem! Your work is spectacular! Now I know who can make my wedding dress ❤️

Unlike · Comment · Share · 👍 1 🗨️ 1

**Skye Van Wyk** ▸ Casey Jeanne  
November 14, 2013 · 🌐

looking so beautiful Casey. So proud. xx

Unlike · Comment · Share · 👍 1 🗨️ 1

**Hannah Momogos** ▸ Casey Jeanne  
November 9, 2013 · BlackBerry Smartphones App · 🌐

As a friend and a sister , I don't think I could be more proud! ❤️

Unlike · Comment · Share · 👍 1 🗨️ 2

**Sammi Bouwer** ▸ Casey Jeanne  
September 11, 2013 · 🌐

I absolutely LOVE this page!! hope to have my wedding dress designed by you,after I get engaged;) haha one day #excitedforthefuture

Unlike · Comment · Share · 👍 1

**Kerry-Ann Van Der Merwe** ▸ Casey Jeanne  
August 23, 2013 · BlackBerry Smartphones App · 🌐

Hi Casey, Its been a long time. I just wanted to congratulate you on doing so extremely WELL with your fashion design and company. I have loved reading about you in the media and am super happy for you. Your designs are absolutely breathe-taking and I love looking at them. When I do get married.... I will definitely be contacting you! Stay blessed, stay awesome. Have a fabulous time in JHB!

Unlike · Comment · Share · 👍 1 🗨️ 1

**Savannah Donaldson** ▸ Casey Jeanne  
June 26, 2013 · 🌐

I just have to say, your wedding gowns are absolutely gorgeous! So well fitted to each individual bride's body shape and such attention to every little detail! Keep it up 😊 you're going places!

Unlike · Comment · Share · 👍 1 🗨️ 1

**Casey Jeanne**  
Liked · March 29, 2014 · Edited ·  
Allowed on Timeline

On Casey Jeanne's profile · Remove

Lisa wearing a custom Casey Jeanne ice-pink wedding gown. An absolute VISION bride today. You are magnificent! Beautiful! 🌟 with Casey-Jeanne Walters, Lisa Lunn Goldman and Sandra Lunn.  
Tag: Casey Jeanne

Like · Comment · Share

Anne Shrydom, Sarah Anne Collier, Carmen Nicole Watson and 137 others like this.

Avril Warman A very precious moment. Congrats to you all. You look amazing.  
Unlike · Reply · April 2, 2014 at 3:46pm

Cara-lee Gavers Oh my word Casey! This dress is just the most beautiful creation ever!!  
Unlike · Reply · April 2, 2014 at 8:24am

Sue Stack Kondonia Absolutely absolutely stunning!! I have no words for this pic lady!! an excited! What a beautiful bride. And you are gorgeous! Again, stunning!!  
Unlike · Reply · April 2, 2014 at 8:03am

Linda-Toni Steinschneider Stunning bride!!  
Write a comment...

**Casey Jeanne**  
Liked · May 17, 2014 ·  
Allowed on Timeline

A huge congratulations to Alexandra who got married today in Swaziland wearing a classic custom Casey Jeanne wedding gown! Such a gorgeous girl! — with Alexandra Carlson, Courtney and Casey Jeanne Walters.

Like · Comment · Share

Sarah Scoppale Numbata, Daniels Stephanie, Phoebe Carlson, Neelise Nosi and 238 others like this.

Kelvia Dippenaar Gorgeous as usual!  
Unlike · Reply · May 17, 2014 at 4:07pm

2 Replies

Lisa-Jo Synman Flawless x  
Unlike · Reply · May 18, 2014 at 10:43am

Simon Richard Congratulations Alex!!!  
Unlike · Reply · May 18, 2014 at 10:22am

Joy King Soo beautiful... congratulations to parents and to a blessed future to you and your beloved. Love...  
Unlike · Reply · May 18, 2014 at 4:21pm

Write a comment...

**Casey Jeanne**  
Liked · March 29, 2014 · Edited ·  
Allowed on Timeline

So lucky to have two brides getting married today! 🌟 Waiting for the most AMAZING wedding day today Kirsty! Been so special working with you!! Kirsty wearing Casey Jeanne looking so fabulous and gorgeous! #caseyjeanne #brides #bridehustlers — with Casey-Jeanne Walters and Kirsty Shrydom.

Like · Comment · Share

Lauren Elizabeth Buckle, Natasha Nadia Marlier, Kyra-moon Halperny and 63 others like this.

Carmen Gaynor Offiant Stunning!!  
Unlike · Reply · March 30, 2014 at 11:55am

Kirsty Shrydom Thank you for making my dream day come true, for allowing me the privilege of wearing one of your gorgeous gowns! You're truly talented!  
Like · Reply · April 8, 2014 at 4:15pm

Write a comment...

**Casey Jeanne**  
Liked · May 20, 2014 · Edited ·  
Allowed on Timeline

Work in progress... LOVING this freedom to create! Style: Petal — with Casey-Jeanne Walters and Caralee Gavers.  
Tag: Casey Jeanne

Like · Comment · Share

Sarah Leigh Mochousas, Priscilla Ramon, Carla Cloete and 118 others like this.

Jill Collings Wow! That is beautiful! Need to come and see you please!  
Unlike · Reply · May 20, 2014 at 9:49pm

2 Replies

Carmen Gaynor Offiant Stunning!!  
Unlike · Reply · May 20, 2014 at 8:02pm

Casey Jeanne Thank you! Really love this one!  
Like · Reply · May 20, 2014 at 8:06pm

Write a reply...

Kathie Lee Andrew!! I'll have to say Jill Collins.

Write a comment...

**Casey Jeanne**  
Liked · April 13, 2014 ·  
Allowed on Timeline

One more photo for the evening... can't resist! Getting ready behind the scenes. Angela really radiating today! Any wearing a custom Casey Jeanne wedding gown featuring a beautiful one-shoulder, low back and tiers of tulle! Life and scalloped choker! Thank you! 🌟 — with Casey-Jeanne Walters and Ang Otto.

Like · Comment · Share

Bianca Coppola, Carla Cloete, Corine Louise Mouton and 68 others like this.

2 shares

Carmen Gaynor Offiant Gorgeous!! also want one!!!!  
Unlike · Reply · April 12, 2014 at 9:40pm

Linda King Absolutely gorgeous dress!  
Unlike · Reply · April 12, 2014 at 9:30pm

Natalie Day Any you look like absolutely stunning! 🌟 congrats xoxo  
Unlike · Reply · April 12, 2014 at 9:31pm

Cathryn Roward Any you look beautiful!  
Unlike · Reply · April 12, 2014 at 9:19pm

Write a comment...

**Casey Jeanne**  
Liked · May 31, 2014 · Edited ·  
Allowed on Timeline

Finally wedding day has arrived for this goooooorgeous bride! Taryn wearing a custom bespoke Casey Jeanne silk-georgette wedding gown. Bustier bodice embellishment detail created by hand! 🌟 This is one of our fav fitting pics during the process she looks like a doll... gorgeous girl! — with Casey-Jeanne Walters and Taryn Wyatt.

Like · Comment · Share

Carmen McNeil, Anna Shrydom, Hannah Monogos and 120 others like this.

Antoinette Nell, y meg maari! See Translation  
Unlike · Reply · June 1, 2014 at 8:06pm

Amy Smit Oh MY GOODNESS... you look amazing! Need more pictures!! xox  
Unlike · Reply · June 1, 2014 at 1:10pm

Claire Starbuck Haha I see a twinkle toes! love the pose!  
Unlike · Reply · May 31, 2014 at 6:43pm

Danielle Bee Woot!  
Unlike · Reply · May 31, 2014 at 6:03pm

Write a comment...

**Casey Jeanne**  
Liked · April 13, 2014 ·  
Allowed on Timeline

Okay seriously... WOWERS!! Speechless! Angela looking INCREDIBLY beautiful and wearing a custom Casey Jeanne wedding gown. A picture perfect bride in every possible way! Thank you Shanna for this. Xox — with Casey-Jeanne Walters and Ang Otto.  
Tag: Casey Jeanne

Like · Comment · Share

Charisla Cassio McAllister, Angela Hsu, Lungile Nhlantla and 80 others like this.

4 shares

Casey Jeanne Thanks so much guys... she is incredibly gorgeous... SO wonderful to work with!  
Like · Reply · April 13, 2014 at 9:15pm

Bo Bisselot jesus ang lucky guy  
Unlike · Reply · April 14, 2014 at 12:50pm

Sandra Lunn Stunning bride stunning dress...  
Unlike · Reply · April 13, 2014 at 10:06pm

Alex Norris-Jones You are so incredibly talented Casey! 🌟  
Write a comment...

**Casey Jeanne**  
Liked · June 17, 2014 ·  
Allowed on Timeline

Breathtaking photo by Tik Photography of Marisa in her custom Casey Jeanne wedding gown! Train for days! (") — with Marisa Baglione.

Like · Comment · Share

Anton Muller, Marisa Baglione, Lungile Nhlantla and 71 others like this.

Justin James U little beauties. Xx  
Like · Reply · June 17, 2014 at 5:54pm

Thea Cogill Magnificent Dress Casey Jeanne!  
Like · Reply · June 17, 2014 at 2:44pm

Marisa Baglione I had the absolute best dress designer and photographer! Thank you both!!  
Like · Reply · June 18, 2014 at 8:06pm

Anna Monogos Beautiful x x x  
Like · Reply · June 18, 2014 at 9:39am

Antoinette Nell Bale moo!!!  
Like · Reply · June 17, 2014 at 5:11pm

Danielle Nivison Beautiful!  
Like · Reply · June 17, 2014 at 2:22pm

Write a comment...



**The official Vodacom Durban July**  
 Wed · June 18, 2014 · 46  
 Allowed on Timeline

The racy duo of designer Casey Jeanne (2nd from right) modeled by (from left) Annet, Beth and Hughique at the Vodacom Durban July Inited Designer Showcase, presented by LPSY LONDON — with Annet Muller, Casey-Jeanne Walters and Hughique Caswood.

Unlike · Comment · Share

You, Nardus Neil, Charlene Cassie McAllister, Carolee Gevers and 85 others like this.

1 share

Nicole Meyer Well done Casey! Exquisite!  
 June 18, 2014 at 10:03am · Like · 0/1

Casey-Jeanne Walters Thanks Nicole!  
 June 19, 2014 at 10:47am · Like

Write a comment...

People You May Know See All

Late Great Fourie  
 18 mutual friends · Add Friend



**Lucilla Boozen**  
 April 4, 2014 · 44  
 Allowed on Timeline

On Casey Jeanne's profile · Remove · View on Instagram

The talented @casey\_jeanne, being interviewed after her exceptional #SS14 Collection #SAFW #SS14 #1stBest — with Casey-Jeanne Walters.  
 Tags: Casey Jeanne

Tag Photo · Add Location

Like · Comment · Stop Notifications · Share

Nardus Neil, Antonette Neil, Kim Holiday and 24 others like this.

Write a comment...

People You May Know See All

Pauline Timms  
 3 mutual friends · Add Friend



**Casey-Jeanne Walters**  
 July 26, 2013 · 44  
 Allowed on Timeline

On Casey Jeanne's profile · Remove

Horreeeeeeeeeeeeeey I won I won I won! @ All the late nights and hard work paying off. Young Achiever Awards 2013

Tags: Casey Jeanne

Tag Photo · Add Location · Edit

Like · Comment · Stop Notifications · Share

Cheseli Radini, Nardus Neil, Laniela Tshelane and 84 others like this.

1 share

View 16 more comments

Dale McCarthy Outstanding!! So deserved, and I'm beyond proud of you Casey! @ @ @  
 And there's an actual trophy! Did you have to say a little speech?  
 July 27, 2013 at 8:28pm · Unlike · 0/1

Casey-Jeanne Walters Wowzers thank you for all the support! Damn I have amazing friends!  
 July 27, 2013 at 11:15am · Like

Leah Morgan Well done Casey! You deserve this so much!!!  
 July 27, 2013 at 11:51am · Unlike · 0/1

Write a comment...



**Casey Jeanne**  
 April 1, 2014 · Edited · 48  
 On Casey Jeanne's profile · Remove

SO Excited to be selected as one of the '10 best at SA Fashion Week'!! Wow what an honour!! Tickets to our show are sold out, blessed beyond! #fadsams — with Casey-Jeanne Walters.  
 Tags: Casey Jeanne

Tag Photo · Add Location · Edit

Like · Comment · Share

Angeli Hsu, Zama Zhabathi, Top Comments · Mathe, Sue Katharine Walters and 68 others like this.

1 share

Casey Jeanne Thank you all for your incredible love and support, y'all are amazing! @ won't let you down. xox  
 Like · Reply · April 1, 2014 at 10:57pm

Les Scott Fabouzz X  
 Unlike · Reply · 0/1 · April 2, 2014 at 6:07am

Anne Momoops Fantastic Casey x x x  
 Unlike · Reply · 0/1 · April 2, 2014 at 11:46pm

Antonette Neil I like I like very much!! Congratulations!!!! Great things still to come!  
 Unlike · Reply · 0/1 · April 1, 2014 at 7:22pm

Lisa Traas Wow coo!!! @ @ @  
 Write a comment...



**Casey Jeanne**  
 June 5, 2013 · 47  
 On Casey Jeanne's profile · Remove

The beautiful bride Jamie wearing a custom Casey Jeanne wedding gown @ More close up detailed shots to come. LOVE the tattoo!!! Ah @ @ @ — with Casey-Jeanne Walters, Calvin Howell and Jamie Howell.  
 Tags: Casey Jeanne

Tag Photo · Add Location · Edit

Like · Comment · Share

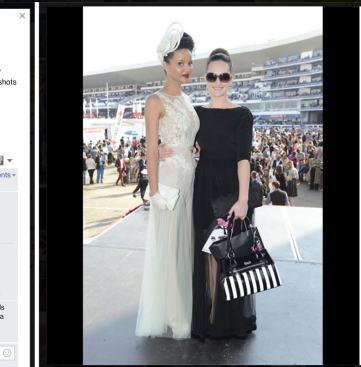
Anja Fraenkel, Alex Norris-Jones, Top Comments · Rhissa Grasse and 29 others like this.

Annalee Howell-Williamson Casey you did a STUNNING job on Jamie's Dress. Like Calvin said in his speech you did have the Perfect Canvas to work with.  
 Unlike · Reply · 0/2 · June 9, 2013 at 7:01pm

Casey Jeanne Absolutely, thank you so much Annalee Howell-Williamson!  
 Like · 0/1 · June 9, 2013 at 7:51pm

Annalee Howell-Williamson One of my friends asked who designed the dress. So I am doing a bit of advertising for you on my wall @  
 Unlike · Reply · 0/1 · June 9, 2013 at 7:50pm

Write a comment...



**The official Vodacom Durban July**  
 Wed · July 9, 2013 · 48  
 Allowed on Timeline

Casey Jean wins the Vodacom Durban July Fashion Challenge, brought to you by Canon — with Jeanne Boukes, Charne Leslie, Sue Katharine Walters and Casey-Jeanne Walters.

Like · Comment · Get Notifications · Share

Sue Katharine Walters, Kim Holiday, Nadia Nel and 126 others like this.

14 shares

View 25 more comments

Jamie Plus Linda Pretorius Wow!!!! This is awesome Congrats Casey, Stunning Outfit, Well done!  
 July 9, 2013 at 11:28am · Unlike · 0/1

Casey-Jeanne Walters Thank you all so so so much! You Debbie Jean Watson I did make my own dress as well @ Will be putting pictures up on my page a little later @  
 http://www.facebook.com/CaseyJeanneDesigns #trehah!  
 Casey Jeanne

Write a comment...



**Casey-Jeanne Walters**  
 August 15, 2014 · 44  
 View on Instagram

Trying to catch a semi decent picture while Top Billing was playing was near impossible! My shattered nerves @ well done Akshar on your inspirational success and insane talent. Diamonds surely are a woman's best friend (\*) xox

Tag Photo · Add Location · Edit

Like · Comment · Stop Notifications · Share

Cara-lee Gevers, Gregory Sandile Dladla, Twane Twinx Humphreys and 54 others like this.

Kobus Dippenaar nice!!!!  
 August 15, 2014 at 1:38pm · Unlike · 0/2

Akshar Choudree Thank you so much-you spoke so well.  
 August 15, 2014 at 2:57pm · Unlike · 0/1

Kyra-moon Halfpenny You look absolutely stunning!  
 August 15, 2014 at 10:09pm · Like

Write a comment...

