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**Dressing the Self:  
Young People, Dress and Identity**

**By  
Felicity Grace Perry**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Film, Television and  
Media Studies, The University of Auckland, 2011.**

## Abstract

Dress is one of the most taken for granted yet complex elements of everyday existence. Dressing is a practice that benefits from the invisibility associated with necessity, yet it is fraught with tension around dress codes, gender norms, appearance ideals, commodification, and status, for example. Examining how students at an urban, co-educational, non-uniformed secondary school in Aotearoa/New Zealand conceive of dress's relationship to identity, this study contributes to the process of rendering visible the practices of dressing and the complex grid of meanings and discourses that attach to dress. The research context is particularly salient given that there is no work that examines the experiences of young people in relation to dress and identity in contemporary Aotearoa/New Zealand. Based on focus groups held with clusters of friends at the school, my research examines the discourses of students who could be positioned as 'regular' or 'ordinary'. 'Ordinary' young people are a key site for analysis of the intricacies of the workings of identity and dress, as the 'ordinary' is where power is least visible and thus most productive.

The students consider identity to be based on experiences, relationships, and preferences rather than biological foundations, and use dress to help them embody desired identity positions. This thesis posits that the students' conceptions of dress draw on two discursive models of identity, familiar from contemporary media, that sit in tension with each other: a depth model which employs discourses of authenticity and a surface model which intersects with discourses of postmodernity as well as neoliberalism. This thesis examines how the students navigate the tension between these contrasting discursive models, which, on the one hand, position identity as given and dress as an authentic expression of identity (depth), and, on the other hand, imply that identity is constructed and position dress as part of the work that constitutes identity (surface). It considers how the students navigate the field of dress in a manner that maintains their commitment to authenticity alongside notions that identity is fluid, malleable and requires work.

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# Chapter One: An Introduction

## Introducing the research: Dress, identity models, and City High

The bodies that move us through our lives are almost always dressed. Dress is with us at key moments, and indeed marks many memories: the scratchy ‘special occasion’ clothes of childhood, the school uniform to be ‘grown into’, the graduation gown, and the items bought to wear to our first ‘professional’ job, for instance, are associated with key events in our past. Dress is there through the extraordinary and the quotidian. It wraps my body as I write this, and yours, most likely, as you read these words. Dress places us in the world, allowing us to be in the social realm. It plays a part in how we conceive ourselves and are conceived. Further, dress is often used to help us conceptualise changes in our selves – we buy new styles to fit with new views of ourselves and we use past dress styles to mark our life trajectories and measure how much we have changed. Dress journeys with us through our everyday, playing a salient role in how we map our lives, how we see ourselves and are seen.

Given the importance of dress to the everyday, this thesis examines how students at an urban, co-educational, non-uniformed secondary school in Aotearoa/New Zealand conceive of dress’s relationship to identity. It argues that the students consider identity to be based on experiences, relationships, and preferences rather than biological foundations, and use dress to help them embody desired identity positions. It posits that the students’ conceptions of dress draw on two discursive models of identity that sit in tension with each other: a depth model which employs discourses of authenticity and a surface model which intersects with discourses of postmodernity as well as neoliberalism. This thesis asks how the students navigate the tension between these contrasting discursive models, which, on the one hand, position identity as given and dress as an authentic expression of identity (depth), and, on the other hand, imply that identity is constructed and position dress as part of the work that constitutes identity (surface).

This tension is particularly prevalent in the students' belief that the occupation of an identity requires other people to view the subject as inhabiting that identity. Thus, although the students conceive of identity as based on the experiences and emotions of the subject, the situating of others' views as crucial to identity means that authentic identity does not rest solely within the subject's experiences but with others seeing her as she positions herself. In order for this to occur, the subject must work to competently perform that identity. That is, she must direct herself to look and behave as others that occupy that position do. This work may not be conscious. Identity can be seen, then, as confirmation of an adequate performance of self. This confirmation involves meeting others' expectations of the appearance, behaviour, beliefs, and emotional state(s) associated with that identity. Thus, while the students' emphasis on the emotions and experiences of the subject places identity in a depth model, the notion of confirmation places identity within a surface model supported by postmodern discourse of identity as work. Given their uneasy situating of identity within both surface and depth models, how do the students maintain their commitment to authenticity alongside notions that identity is fluid, malleable and requires work? How do they position the role of dress in this dual-conception of identity?

My thesis is based on the voices of students at a high school I have called 'City High'.<sup>1</sup> These voices came together in friendship-based focus groups which took place at the school. These focus groups were semi-structured conversations that explored how the students conceive of the relationship between dress and identity. Each focus group ranged from three to five students. The participants, 24 in total, were students from year 10 to year 13 (aged 14 to 17). I met with each group three times, except for Group Two, whom I met with four times as, due to their long enthusiastic responses and debates, they took longer to answer the questions than the other groups. As well as holding focus group discussions, I conducted one-on-one interviews with staff at the high school, analysed scrapbooks focus group participants made which featured photos and descriptions of the dress presented in the images, attended school assemblies, examined the school's official website as well as the school's student-created Facebook web-pages and the school magazine published twice-yearly by the journalism students, the *Flannel*. Further, I also

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<sup>1</sup> Please note, throughout this thesis single quotation marks are used to highlight the constructed and/or contentious status of the term within the single quotation marks, whereas double quotation marks are used to indicate a quotation, or a question.

examined some of the key texts, including television programmes, films, internet sites, and magazines, that the student participants engage with.

It was my desire that the research be driven by the students' views rather than limited by the framework of a hypothesis. Thus my research question – “how do the students conceive of the relationship between dress and identity?” – is intentionally broad, designed to follow the leads provided by the students rather than a line of questioning based on proving or disproving a fixed viewpoint. In accordance with this, the topics discussed following the initial set of focus group sessions were based on what the students had indicated were important to them in this first session. This enabled me to anchor my research in the students' views. Further, this made apparent the aspects of identity that were salient for the students, namely, difference from others, gender, sexuality, authenticity, and attractiveness. Although three of the five focus groups featured non-white participants, the discourse of race was not strongly present. Notions of class were also not strong. This was contrary to my expectations and suggests that these were not important identity-axes for these students. It is difficult to know, however, whether the students do not perceive themselves to be strongly affected by operations of class and race, or whether they are unreflexive about such operations. Given that discourses on the unequal status of women and men are found in a wide range of media texts, it is arguable that the students are just as affected by race and class, but have less access to discourses on race and class than gender and thus privilege discourses of gender. The identity-axes that the students were concerned with form the basis for the chapters of this thesis.

City High School was the most appropriate site for research because, as well as being co-educational and thus granting me access to both young men and women, it is an institution that I, as an ex-pupil, have insider knowledge of. Thus I have a fair understanding of its culture and how this might affect the identities produced onsite. Although I attended City High for my final year of secondary school only, rather than limiting my knowledge, this allows me to compare the school culture of City High with the more conservative provincial secondary school I attended previously. This experience of transferring to City High rather than undertaking my entire secondary school education there means that I can relate to the students in the focus groups (approximately one third of the participants) who also left more conservative schools for City High. Further, the majority of the students, both those who have attended other high schools and those who have not, frequently compare City High with other

secondary schools. My experience allows me greater understanding of these comparisons. As well as this, the school was an ideal choice for my research because it was easier to gain access to City High than other high schools due to my preexisting rapport with key contacts at the school: I have a good relationship with the head of Journalism and the same Principal that governed the school during my time there as a pupil still heads the institution.

Within the common life trajectory in the West, high school is a time of heightened awareness of identity as well as exploration and experimentation with different subject positions (Mac an Ghail 1994, McDonald 1999, Kehily 2002). Indeed, my time at secondary school was one of exploration. It was during this period that I found that there were other people besides myself who did not feel an affinity with the popular practices and ways of seeing the world of my peers, and learned the competencies to 'fit in' with this group of 'alternatives'. My leisure practices, the music I listened to, and the books, magazines, films and television shows I engaged with changed. It was the way I dressed, however, that marked the biggest divide between my awkward attempt to appear both as a 'prep' and a 'surfer/skater chick' (the popular subject positions in the provincial town I lived in at the time) to my embodiment of 'alternative' young woman. I collected clothes from charity shops and put them together in a flamboyant way to signal my dislike for the 'mainstream' – a practice that resulted in threats of violence and strangers yelling at me from across the street and their cars. Such contempt cemented my satisfaction that I had turned-away from the 'mainstream' and its attempts (as I framed it at the time) to make one and sundry homogenous. Although I do not dress in the same colourful way today, that time of immense change was influential in establishing my contemporary thoughts, practices, and approach to dress, which could still be considered outside of the 'mainstream'. I wanted to see if the students also found high school a time of exploration and experimentation with different subject positions, and if they utilized various dress practices in this exploration. As well as this, I wished to counter simplified discourses present in the popular news media that position youth as homogenous trend followers, slaves to consumption and to the views of their peers. I wished to demonstrate that being young involves more complex thought processes and practices than many popular discourses on youth suggest.

## ***Justification***

With few ethnographic studies dedicated to examining the relationship between identity, high school students, and dress, there is a lack of information about how young people experience dress in relation to themselves. This is not to imply that youth do not constitute a significant subject of research, for they have consistently captured the imaginations of academics and marketers since the establishment of the 'teenage' subject-position in the West after World War II. Indeed, many of the early studies of the Birmingham-based Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, influential in the development of the discipline of cultural studies, took youth as their focus (Hall and Jefferson 1976; Willis 1977, 1978; Hebdige 1979). Today young people continue to be an important group, primarily due to their purchasing ability and their high volume of media consumption. A considerable portion of consumer goods and media texts is aimed at their eyes and wallets. Young people are not just targets for marketers, however; they are often 'trend-setters'. Fashion theorist Diana Crane (2000) observes that fashion designers are frequently inspired by the ways (usually urban-based) young people dress and use such dress practices as the basis for designs, which they sell to affluent adults. This emulation of young people is indicative of the privileged position youthfulness currently enjoys in the culture and appearance industries: while young people are often maligned in popular news media, youthfulness is hailed as desirable in films, music videos, cosmetics advertising, magazines, television shows, and, of course, on the catwalk. Given the exalted position that the appearance and practices of youth have in the West, it is remarkable that the body of work on young people and dress is not more substantial.

One body of work that does foreground young people, dress and identity is that which examines youth-based subcultures. This includes the work conducted by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, which incorporates research by Dick Hebdige on Punk (1979) and Angela McRobbie on second-hand clothes shopping (1989), as well as work by Sarah Thornton on clubbing culture (1996), Nancy MacDonald on graffiti (2001), and Paul Hodkinson on the Goth scene (2002), to name a few. This work is based on young people who are outside of the ordinary, who have been singled out for study because of their visibility and outsider status. This reliance on visible outsiders has meant that there is a lack of research that examines youth who take up subject positions that could popularly be deemed 'ordinary'. I wish to counter this. Following my desire to render visible the often

invisible, I explore the practices and discourses of subjects who occupy the position of 'ordinary'. 'Ordinary' young people are a key site for analysis of the intricacies of the workings of identity and dress as the 'ordinary' is where power is least visible and thus most productive. As subcultural groups often have a consciously resistant relationship to dominant culture, I wanted to examine how students that do not belong to an established subculture utilise discourse in their identity production, and how this utilisation relates to dominant norms and values in the West, and in Aotearoa/New Zealand in particular. Thus the students that were approached to set up focus groups in my study were those students whose appearances did not stand out from the crowd, so-called 'ordinary' students at City High. This will be detailed further in the subsequent chapter (Methodology).

My study's basis on 'ordinary' students corresponds with my desire to examine the 'everyday'. I wish to explore the taken-for-granted and mundane, rendering problematic the practices that make up everyday life. I want to insist "on questioning the transparency of the daily" (Highmore 2002:1). Dress is one of the most taken for granted yet complex elements of everyday existence. It is a practice that benefits from the invisibility associated with necessity yet is fraught with tension around dress codes, gender norms, appearance ideals, commodification, and status, for example. This study contributes to the process of rendering visible the practices of dressing and the complex grid of meanings and tensions attached to dress. This contribution is anchored in the discipline of cultural studies, which explores the everyday workings of power, and takes seriously the materiality of culture, of which dress is a part.

The limited ethnographic work that has been conducted on the relationship between dress and identity has often focused its analysis on one sex (Nilan 1992; Miles, Cliff and Burr 1998; Swain 2004; Croghan *et al* 2006; Pomerantz 2008). This implies that this sex has a different experience of dress than the 'opposite' sex, and that the participants' experiences can be attributed primarily to the normative gender expectations for their sex. The majority of this work has been conducted on young women only, which contributes to the association of women with appearance and upholds the notion that dress is a 'feminine' concern. My work examines the experiences of both young men and women, demonstrating that young men are just as concerned with dress as young women, and avoiding the implied reduction of experiences to gender.

As well this, few studies on the relationship between dress and young people utilize friendship-based focus groups, choosing to work in classroom settings, one-on-one, or in vocation-based focus groups. I chose to use focus groups as my primary mode of study because groups are sites of identity production. Focus groups demonstrate what cultural theorists Deborah Epstein and Richard Johnson (1998:100-1) term the “situatedness” of identity production, that is, its constant production through practice and discourse, which is influenced by the spatial-temporal location of the subject and whom she is interacting with. Focus groups, then, allow the researcher an opportunity to engage with identity production at close range. Further, a large part of high school students’ identities are based on whom they spend their time with. These groups have distinct combinations of clothing-style, music taste, media consumption, behaviour, beliefs, out-of-school activities, and locations (both school and community-based) in which they spend their leisure time, which mark them out from other friendship groups at the school. Friendship-based focus groups allow an examination of this normative group-based identity production. The other pertinent motivation for the centering of the focus groups on preexisting groups of friends was to attempt to ensure that the students felt comfortable detailing their views. I reasoned that they would feel more at ease talking with friends than students they did not know or may intentionally not be friends with. Additionally, because I wished to avoid dominating the focus group sessions, I believed that the sessions were more likely to operate as flowing focused conversations if they were made up of groups of friends rather than groups of students who did not often communicate with each other.

Additionally, there is no work that examines the experiences of young people in relation to dress and identity in contemporary Aotearoa/New Zealand. The majority of ethnographic research that has been conducted has focused on young people in the United Kingdom or the United States of America. Place and space influence the identities and dress practices available to subjects. As a small country where local media content battles for attention with US or UK-based products, the participants in my research must balance local subject positions, such as what it is to be Māori or a young New Zealander, with Anglo-American subject positions proffered through the media texts they engage with. Thus this project draws information about an understudied region – the colonized small nation of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

As well as being methodologically different from much of the other research on young people, dress and identity, my claim that the students’ discourses draw on

both surface and depth models of identity is unique. There has been research that has examined a disjuncture between the discourses of postmodernity and the discourses of authenticity related to these models, but little, if any, in this field on how the discourses are utilized simultaneously by young people. In their research on young people and dress, for example, Diana Crane (2000) and Ruth Holliday (1999, 2001) ask if the views and practices of their participants are consistent with academic conceptions of postmodern identity. Both authors find that they are not, with Crane positioning her participants as having a “modernist” sense of identity as fixed, viewing dress as an expression of this stable identity, while Holliday argues that her participants subscribe to an essentialist notion of an authentic identity. Although Crane does not take a position on the disjuncture between theory and the respondents’ views, Holliday asserts that “the fixity” of essentialist positions, combined with “the unworkability of standard political discourses”, often “leave the subject disempowered, unable to explain or put into a cogent political context the ontological experiences which contradict these discourses” (2001:228). Unlike Holliday, I do not wish to position the participants in my research as “disempowered”. Rather than contending that the participants need to ‘catch up’ with the academy, this research shows that the students use the discourses available to them, which are discourses of neoliberalism, postmodernity, and authenticity. It demonstrates that young people’s conceptions cannot be easily distributed into academic classifications that divide discourse into separate categories and identity positions into models of surface or depth.

While this section has introduced my research, the rest of the chapter will provide a definition of dress, examine the relationship between dress and fashion, position identity in relation to a depth model related to authenticity and a surface model related to postmodernity and neoliberalism, and detail some of the ethnographic studies that have explored the relationship between young people, dress and identity. Finally, this chapter will provide a breakdown of the chapters in this thesis, mapping the major points for the reader.



## **The under-theorization of dress: Women, the body, and the trivialization of dress**

For something so central to the everyday engagement with others, dress has been under-theorized. In popular discourse dress, especially 'fashionable' dress, is denigrated as trivial, frivolous, and wasteful, and the field of fashion as harmful, particularly to women's self-perception. Such discourse has an influence in academia. As interdisciplinary dress theorist Efrat Tseëlon points out, to study fashion is to place oneself at the margin of academic respectability (2001:237). I have often had the 'worthiness' of my research questioned by friends and academics who have asked me how my research will "make the world better?" This question implies that an investigation of dress will not net any information that will contribute to the 'bettering' of society. Such questions are framed through the presumption that dress is 'unworthy' of sustained study. Clearly I do not see dress in this regard, positing it as a site of embodied interaction with others, as well as with mechanisms of power.

A large component of the denigrated status of the study of dress is its association with women. This arises, in part, from the affiliation of women with appearance, which was forged through the creation of the middle-class in the transition from feudalism to modern capitalism, which excluded women in this class from the labour market, forcing them to rely on their status in the marriage market to solidify their economic position (Wilson 1985:122-3). The women whose appearances were in line with what was deemed attractive were more likely to successfully attract a financially secure husband than those whose appearances were not. Women could thus primarily achieve financial success through marriage rather than through work, which placed increased emphasis on their looks rather than their skills and practices.

At the same time that women had to rely on their appearance to maintain and/or improve their economic position, men were required to downplay an interest in their own appearance. This has been termed the "Great Masculine Renunciation" by the psychoanalyst J. C. Flügel (1930). To be seen as sober, hardworking individuals who could therefore compete in the industrialized market, the men of the new middle

classes adopted a standardized dress in dark colours that allowed for ease of movement – the suit. Flügel, and the psychoanalytic feminist Kaja Silverman (1986), argue that to compensate for the loss of being able to exhibit themselves through dress, men channelled their desire for self-display into voyeurism, or displayed themselves through the dress of their wives or daughters.<sup>2</sup> Both of these techniques placed greater emphasis on middle-class women's appearance. As Tseëlon asserts, "the more men became repressed, the more women's visual quality increased" (1995:24). Although Western women today can enter the labour market freely and have the possibility to successfully provide for themselves without relying on a working husband, women are still associated with appearance more than men are. This is visible in a range of environments: from the disproportionate amount of clothing and 'beauty' products aimed at women, to the existence of services with the goal of improving the appearances of female cancer patients, such as Look Good Feel Better, which are not available to men,<sup>3</sup> to the disparity of media coverage in both news and entertainment contexts which deems the appearance of female public figures significantly more newsworthy than that of their male counterparts. This small sample indicates the continued association of women and appearance, which supports the notion that it is a woman's role to be concerned with her looks.

Further, the association of women with dress is entwined with the shopping center's place in the public/private divide created through the establishment of modern capitalism, which excluded women from public roles. The shopping arcades and department stores of the nineteenth century were one of the few locations where bourgeois women could go respectably without a male chaperone. These shops, filled with dress items, were places where women could meet others outside of the home (Wilson 1985:150). They were spaces where women could forge bonds with other women and take part in public life without the influence of male relatives. They were thus places where women congregated. Shopping became an activity that women did. The association of women with the act of shopping – which continues to be seen as trivial – remains strong today. If men display interest in shopping for dress items, this is deemed feminine (Tseëlon 1995:15). Indeed, the young men in my study position dress as a feminine concern and consequently downplay an interest in dress and shopping.

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<sup>2</sup> Early sociologist Thorstein Veblen also theorised on the woman's role at this time to showcase the financial status of her father or husband through her dress. This is detailed later in this chapter.

<sup>3</sup> Look Good Feel Better, "About Us", <http://www.lgfb.co.nz/>. Site accessed 17 May 2011.

The link between dress and/or appearance and women has thus been present from early modernity, cemented through the gendered division of the private and public spheres. Tseëlon asserts that due to the association of dress with women, “the marginality of fashion as an issue or a research domain cannot be divorced from the marginality of the woman who is regarded as its prime target and object” (2001:238). This goes some way to offer an explanation of dress studies’ fledgling place within academia.

This marginality of fashion as a research subject is supported by the Cartesian division between the mind and the body. While dress is not reducible to the body, it is made to be worn on the body, marking its shape. Dress, then, is not distinct from the body. The Cartesian division of the mind and body frames them as oppositional, with the mind occupying the positive pole of the opposition. Within this division, a focus on the cultivation of the body is seen as diverting energy from the – more important – cultivation of the mind. The focus group participants’ subscription to this position is apparent in their dismissal of subjects they view as placing great emphasis on their looks as lacking intelligence. This belief that bodily focus draws attention away from the pursuits of the mind has a long history in Western culture. Plato, writing in Athens in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, asserts, for example, that the body is a “source of countless distractions”, that it “fills us full of loves, and lusts, and fears, and fancies of all kinds... [it] takes away from us the power of thinking at all” (Bordo 1988:92). In line with this assertion, many philosophers have embraced what Friedrich Nietzsche calls the “ascetic ideal”, shunning physical pleasure and adornment and embracing poverty, humility, and chastity (1989:108). Because it is viewed as drawing attention away from the mind, the body is seen as something to ignore, to overcome. The body, then, can be positioned as a vessel that carries the mind (Bordo 1988), a vessel that needs nourishment solely so that it can continue to operate as a vessel for the mind. Dress, in this relation, is seen as necessary only to cover the body rather than decorate it.

Within this framework, the body-vessel can be positioned as something that must be de-emphasized or cast aside in order to access the mind inside. This vessel can be conceived as distracting from, or disguising, who the wearer ‘really’ is. This position can be seen in the familiar phrase that “it’s the inside that counts”; that is, it is the person’s mind rather than her appearance that is important and therefore one should not “judge a book by its cover”. Dress, in adorning this vessel, contributes to this

duplicious positioning. This view is evidenced in contemporary terms such as cover-up, disguise, and veil. Additionally, it is common to speak of “uncovering truth” and “removing layers” to find the true meaning of a phenomenon. Such language demonstrates that dress, as a covering device, is viewed as something that must be seen past or through, rather than taken seriously, in order to know the ‘real’ person ‘underneath’ the clothes.

While dress has often been denigrated in the West due to its association with femininity and the body, cultural studies renders it an important – yet small – area of study. Although Cartesian dualisms still maintain their place of privilege in the West, these dualisms, which form the basis for the denigration of dress, women, and the material, have been subject to a sustained critique within cultural studies. With its foundation in the notion that culture is “way of life” (Williams 1958) and a commitment to the investigation of the relationship between power and culture, cultural studies has positioned notions of good and bad, worthy and unworthy, and the hierarchal Cartesian divisions as socio-historical constructs which support dominant power inequalities. The study of popular texts has been one way that such dualisms have been shown to be constructed. Many studies of culture have followed Richard Hoggart’s (1957) example of examining popular forms such as pulp fiction, film, popular newspapers, music, advertising, comics, dancehalls, and other texts that under Cartesian-influenced notions of worthiness would be deemed ‘undeserving’ of academic attention. While fashion has been one of the last fields to undergo sustained analysis within cultural studies, since the 1980s there has been a notable amount of attention paid to dress, such as the work of Elizabeth Wilson (1985, 1992, 2001), Kaja Silverman (1986), Jennifer Craik (1994), Shari Benstock and Suzanne Ferriss (1994), Malcolm Barnard (1996, 2007), Joanna Entwistle (2000, 2001), Pamela Church Gibson and Stella Bruzzi (2000), and Valerie Steele (1996, 2010).<sup>4</sup> The first journal dedicated to dress and culture, *Fashion Theory*, which began publication in February 1997, heralded fashion’s stable status within the academy. Illustrating the continued challenge to Cartesian dualisms and the denigration of fashion, the field continues to grow steadily.

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<sup>4</sup> Barthes (1957), like Hoggart, also pioneered the study of everyday Western cultural phenomena, such as wrestling, cooking, and cars. Further, Barthes conducted a book-length semiotics-based study of what he termed “the fashion system” (1967). Barthes’ work, along with that of the sociologists Veblen (1899) and Simmel (1901, 1908), stands out as early examples of analysis of dress.

## What is dress?

I define as 'dress' any action that a subject undertakes to alter her appearance. This includes the placing of garments on the body; the insertion of feet into socks, shoes, or slippers; the wearing of jewellery and other accessories such as watches, bags, badges, patches, and belts; the washing, cutting, dyeing, and styling of hair; the application of makeup; receiving a tattoo or a piercing; cicatrisation of the skin; the removal or cultivation of body hair; the trimming, shaping and painting of nails; teeth whitening; and the use of appearance-altering crèmes such as moisturiser. This definition of dress is similar to that of cross-cultural dress theorist Joanne Eicher, who defines dress as "supplementing and modifying the body" (2001:233). Dress, then, is a practice. One 'gets dressed'. As this phrase implies, dress also refers to the appearance of the subject once she has modified her body. When people describe how they are dressed, they are describing the result of the practices of dressing.

This focus on dress as encompassing mundane practices such as the insertion of the body into garments and the washing and styling of hair positions dress as removed from the world of fashion, with its connotations of glamour, fantasy, and luxury. The everyday practices of dress and the catwalk are linked, however. The field of fashion shapes the way dress practices are seen, promoting certain dress practices as desirable at any one time. Further, it influences the dress items that are available on the market. Fashion theorist Joanne Entwistle (2000) asserts that the field of fashion is made up of reciprocal relationships involving designers, design houses, design schools and students, manufacturers, models, photographers, fashion editors, fashion distributors, collection buyers, retailers, shops, and consumers. Stock heads for fashion retailers, for instance, will attend catwalk shows and commission factories to produce designs that replicate catwalk styles to sell in the store, while fashion editors, magazines, and advertisers promote those styles as 'fashionable'. These relations provide what Entwistle terms the "raw materials" for dress (2000:2). While the field of fashion frequently touts new styles as 'fashionable', and thus the status of a dress item as 'fashionable' is temporary, the dress item's change in status does not remove it from the field of fashion. As Wilson, another prominent theorist on fashion, points out, fashion "sets the terms of all sartorial behaviour – even uniforms have been designed by Paris dressmakers; even nuns have shortened their skirts; even the poor seldom go in rags – they wear cheap

versions of the fashions that went out a few years ago..." (1985:3). This is a definition that is supported by other fashion theorists, such as Anne Hollander (1993), Craik (1994), Church Gibson (2000), and Crane (2000). As Church Gibson states, whether subjects follow trends or not, "by the simple act of getting dressed in the morning, [they] participate in the processes of fashion" (2000:353). Thus even the items one may associate least with the catwalk, such as old ill-fitting grey trackpants for wearing around the house, cannot escape the grasp of fashion; indeed, part of their designation for 'home-only' is their classification by the field of fashion as unfashionable.

While dress is inseparable from fashion, the word 'fashion' has common connotations of rapid change, seasonality, novelty, and triviality. Because such connotations may skew what the interview participants will discuss, dress is a more accessible and applicable term for my research. It is a term that participants can relate to their everyday lives, whereas they may not identify with fashion in this way. As a result of its broader meaning and reference to everyday life, throughout the focus groups and interviews I used the term 'dress', rather than 'fashion', explaining my definition of dress to the participants as it is given above.

Dress's relationship with the body is more complex than merely covering it. It highlights the shape of the body and affects the way the body feels. Dress is material: it can be itchy, silky, rough, smooth, loose or tight, for instance. As semiotician Umberto Eco famously points out in his essay "Lumbar Thought" (1986), dress items can make the wearer more aware of his body – in Eco's case, jeans that hurt his crotch. Garments shape the body and how it feels, squeezing it, lifting it, or letting it rest loosely. This influences how the body feels and how the wearer feels about her body. While the way dress affects how the body feels is significant, this thesis focuses primarily on the social, rather than the physical, effects of dress.

Dress renders the body visible to others. In contemporary Western culture, it is taboo for adults to be seen without clothes by those other than lovers. Sans clothes, subjects are limited in the interactions they can have with others. Dress allows the body to be in the public realm. Dress, as Silverman states, makes the human body "culturally visible" (1986:145). Silverman further asserts that dress "draws the body so that it can be culturally seen, and articulates it in a meaningful form" (*ibid.*). This articulation is influenced by the social meanings of dress. Each dress practice has a range of meanings. The undertaking of a dress practice places these meanings on

the subject's body. Dress, as Entwistle and Wilson state, "mark[s] out particular kinds of bodies, drawing distinctions in terms of class and status, gender, age, [and] sub-cultural affiliations that would otherwise not be so visible or significant" (2001:4). The dressed body is a body that situates the wearer in a specific time, place, and identity position.

Dress operates, then, as a technique of non-verbal communication. This point is emphasized by dress theorists who stress the social role of dress and its communicative operation. Crane asserts that clothes "are intended to be worn in public space; we dress for others not for ourselves" (2000:237). Roland Barthes argues that dress is "in the fullest sense, a 'social model', a more or less standardized picture of expected collective behaviour; and it is essentially at this level that it has meaning" ([1957] 2006:14). Joanne Eicher and Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins state that dress involves "communicating with other human beings" (1992:15), and Barnard, in his examination of the etymology of the word 'dress', finds that as a verb it has the notion of 'effect' at its foundation (2002:10). Dress is more than just material that allows the body to be public; it communicates information about such bodies and is used to influence others' interpretations of the self.

Getting dressed involves judgments about what is expected by others or deemed appropriate in relation to the dresser's class, gender, age, race, sexuality, location and the activities she wishes to undertake. These judgments affect the dress choices the dresser makes (even the choice to not take into account dress norms and the judgment of others is still based on the recognition that dress is part of a normative system of seeing), and these choices communicate meanings about the subject, which contribute to the construction of the dresser's identity. These meanings are culturally constructed and differ according to the age, class, ethnicity, background, and interests of the meaning-maker. While dressing entails choices, these choices are always made in relation to social meanings; they are anchored and made meaningful in the culture the dresser resides in. Thus there is tension between the agency that is implied by the notion of dress as communication and the social meanings that the dress items have beyond the dresser's own interpretation. Dress choices are not free-floating practices that the dresser undertakes in a vacuum, unaffected by the cultural meanings subscribed to them. The dresser's choices are limited by how others can be expected to read them, and the resources available to the dresser.

## Dress Literature: Veblen and Simmel

Writing about North America at the end of the nineteenth century, sociologist Thorstein Veblen stresses the communicative role of dress, observing that the bourgeoisie used dress to display their financial status. Veblen asserts that many members of the bourgeoisie spend unnecessary amounts of money on clothing items, terming this excess “conspicuous consumption”. Veblen states that the ability to consume is seen as a mark of wealth and thus honour, and the inability to pay as a mark of “inferiority and demerit” ([1899] 2004:265). Due to this moral association with pecuniary wealth it is important to wear one’s monetary status on one’s sleeve, or, as Veblen argues, on the sleeve of one’s wife. Veblen asserts that women are channels for the display of men’s wealth and status. This is in line with the so-called “Great Masculine Renunciation” outlined above, whereby the range of dress items middle-class men could respectably wear was more restricted than the range of items available to middle-class women.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, Veblen states that bourgeois women’s dress was designed to demonstrate the wealth of her father or husband by illustrating that she did not have to work. The women’s dress styles that were popular at the time of Veblen’s writing – large hats and headpieces, corsets, crinolines, bustles, and long trains, which restricted the movement of the body – support his assertion. Veblen’s notion of conspicuous consumption remains applicable to contemporary capitalist society more than a century after it was formulated. It is particularly pertinent in relation to the wearing of branded clothing, which is a considerable component of contemporary youth dress practice (Swain 2004).

Like Veblen, German sociologist Georg Simmel also conceives of dress as a tool for the communication of the status of the wearer. Simmel states that style “brings the contents of personal life and activity into a form shared by many” ([1908] 2004:82-3). Simmel views dress as a symptom of the heredity and variation that he designates the “fundamental duality” of modern Western society ([1901] 2004:290). For Simmel, this fundamental duality is the condition of fashion’s existence. Its role is to mark the wearer as both the same as a group and distinct from it. In his work “Fashion” (1901), Simmel asserts that fashion “represents nothing more than one of the many

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<sup>5</sup> This is not to suggest that bourgeois women of the era were not restricted by dress codes. Indeed, dress was heavily regimented, with different dress required for morning, for walking, for dinner, for leisure activities, and for visits to the country or the city, for instance.



forms of life by the aid of which we seek to combine in uniform spheres of activity the tendency towards social equalization with the desire for individual differentiation and change” (2004:291). For Simmel, dress items are uniform and distinct simultaneously. They allow the wearer to both signal membership of a group while continuing to be differentiated from the group. Fashion, then, marks group distinctions – Simmel was particularly interested in class differentiation – while also allowing individuals within each group to be distinct from one another. Thus, for Simmel, fashion makes possible “a social obedience, which at the same time is a form of individual differentiation” (2004:297). This posits fashion as inherently ambivalent, able to show both the group and individual identities of the wearer.

As Simmel outlines in his work “The Metropolis and Mental Life” (1903), the need to demonstrate difference and group membership increased as society fragmented and diversified (2004:16). Due to the rapid formation of cities and the increasing alienation of subjects from formerly small communities where status was fixed and people knew each other well, the subject was required to communicate with strangers, informing them of his social standing through his appearance. Simmel argues that the brevity and frequency of meetings placed emphasis on appearance as communication (2004:18). Because of this, as Wilson asserts, “an individual more and more *was what he wore*” (1985:137).<sup>6</sup> Simmel highlights the importance of distinction in such a busy and fragmented environment, asserting, “no longer was it the ‘general human quality’ in every individual but rather his qualitative uniqueness and irreplaceability that now became the criteria of his value” (2004:18). While Simmel’s analysis focuses on the men that dominated public life, Wilson asserts that women at this time, particularly those of the middle classes, were concerned to differentiate themselves from each other in order to attract suitors. Wilson states that women made their dress, as well as their houses, an extension of themselves in order to communicate themselves to potential husbands (1985:123). Like the period of urban growth that Wilson and Simmel theorise, with the increasing fragmentation of the West since World War Two, the need for men and women to use dress to communicate the self and mark distinction and belonging has arguably continued to rise.

Simmel also theorized the dissemination of fashion, viewing it as a top-down phenomenon whereby the lower classes emulate the dress of the upper classes.

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<sup>6</sup> Unless otherwise stated, throughout this thesis all italic use within citations is the original author’s.

Once this emulation is noticeable the upper classes adopt new dress styles in order to differentiate themselves from the lower classes, only for the cycle to begin again (Simmel 1905, in Sweetman 2001:61). The dissemination of fashion has been much debated, with the view that since at least the 1960s in the West fashion has been driven by youth culture rather than upper classes, resulting in an upward flow of fashion adoption (Polhemus 1994). Another view is that fashion neither trickles up or down, but rather that “trickle-across” would be a more apt description of dissemination, with trends being picked up within social groups, and taken on by other groups that occupy a similar place within society (Crane 1999, 2000). While Simmel’s theory of dissemination loses its power in the current climate of fashion, where copies based on catwalk outfits are found in high street chains well before the originals are available to be purchased, Simmel’s conception of dress as enabling the wearer to both belong to and be distinct from a group holds firm. There is broad consensus throughout fashion theory that this continues to be the major role of dress.

Barnard, for example, uses the etymology of the word ‘fashion’ to argue that fashion has long been used to differentiate social groups. Barnard states that one of the root words of fashion is the Latin ‘*facere*’, which refers to making and doing. Another primary trope in the development of the term fashion is ‘*factio*’, the Latin term for faction ([1996] 2002:8-9). Thus the development of the term fashion shows its historic associations with the creation of group differentiation. Ruth Barnes and Joanne Eicher’s statement that dress “serves as a sign that the individual belongs to a certain group, but simultaneously differentiates the same individual from all others: it includes and excludes” (1992:1) is another example of the Simmelian framework that runs through fashion theory. Barnes and Eicher position individual and social identity as “expressed in dress” (1992:2). Such statements are made throughout literature on fashion.<sup>7</sup>

Simmel’s work, then, has had a lasting impact on the theorization of dress. His positioning of clothing as simultaneously used to distinguish the self and indicate belonging continues to be a key theme in work on dress, emerging as a primary

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, the work of Jennifer Craik (1994), Patrizia Calefato (1997), Joanne Entwistle (2000, 2001), Diana Crane (2000), Steven Miles, Dallas Cliff, and Vivien Burns (1998), and Ana Marta González (2010), as well as theorists that I outline in the next section.

trope in work on subcultures (Hall and Jefferson 1976, Willis 1978, Hebdige 1979), dress and sexuality (Cole 2000, Rolley 1992), and dress and the body (Entwistle 2000, 2001, Warwick and Cavallaro 2001), for instance. Simmel's conception of clothing is particularly relevant to the high school context, as, at a large school with no uniform, dress is one of the main mechanisms for establishing group membership and distinction.

## **Literature on young people, dress and identity**

This section highlights the work of theorists that have conducted ethnographic work with young people, examining the relationship between dress and identity. Illustrating the importance of Simmel's argument that dress communicates membership to a group while differentiating the self from others, many theorists that have researched young people and dress reiterate this point.

In their article "'Fitting In and Sticking Out': Consumption, Consumer Meanings and the Construction of Young People's Identities" (1998) cultural theorists Steven Miles, Dallas Cliff and Vivien Burr argue, like Simmel a century prior, that dress and consumption are used by young people to mark affinity with and separation from a group. Rather than framing goods themselves as the primary reason students consume, Miles *et al* argue that the consumption of goods is principally about communicating with peers, who assess identity in relation to goods (1998:93). Thus consumption is used in "constructing valid peer relationships" (1998:94). Using a confidential questionnaire, Miles *et al* asked students to list a purchase they had recently made which was "pleasurable" (1998:86). Of these pleasurable purchases, over 72 percent were dress items. Music was the next highest item listed, with 12 percent of participants citing this as their last pleasurable purchase (1998:87). That the largest category by far was one featuring an item readily seen by others suggests that a large part of the pleasure of consumption is linked with display. For Miles *et al*, the visibility of an item is important in aiding the young person to develop a sense of identity (1998:86). Further, while the participants in this study asserted that individuality was important to them, over 70 percent of participants stated that a friend had an item similar to the one they used as their example (1998:88). Although this appears to counter the participants' claims regarding the importance of individuality, Miles *et al* state that "superficial" differences in goods, such as colour,

allow the subject to maintain a sense of individuality while simultaneously fitting in to a group (1998:90). Thus, although Miles *et al* do not refer to Simmel, they echo his argument that dress is used to simultaneously communicate membership to and mark difference from a group. While the authors overstate the importance of consumption, asserting that it is the “only viable source” for the construction of the participants’ conception of the self (1998:93), they usefully emphasize the importance of the gaze of peers in identity construction. This supports my argument that the conceptions of others play a critical role in the construction of identity.

Youth theorists Rosaleen Croghan, Christine Griffin, Janine Hunter and Ann Phoenix (2006) also examine how young people use dress to mark their identities as similar to and different from others. They held focus groups with students in years eight (ages 12-13) and twelve (ages 16-17) in England. For Croghan *et al*, dress is a “crucial” means of defining and sustaining group boundaries (2006:463). Like Miles *et al*, they assert that young people must manage style in relation to pressures on them to simultaneously fit in with peers and also to establish their distinctiveness as individuals (2006:464). The students in Croghan *et al*’s study highly valued designer goods, and used these goods to gain status and fit in with their peers. Croghan *et al* state that the students that could not afford to wear designer brands were more likely than those who could wear branded clothes to experience “style failure”, which occurs when a young person fails to embody a style that will facilitate her fitting in with other young people. Because of the value these students placed on designer clothes, style failure, for Croghan *et al*, is linked to class as it involves a lack of access to resources – most often the lack of money to buy branded clothes. Croghan *et al* also found that style success gave the wearer the opportunity to occupy another position marked ‘uncool’ by peers, such as being academically successful, without being ostracized. Style failures could not occupy these positions without being shunned (2006:472). In order to not be a style failure, then, students must dress in a way that will be accepted by peers. Croghan *et al* thus highlight the impact of peers’ opinions on identity, and the role that dress plays in forming these opinions. They conclude that young people use style as a way of establishing social rights within groups and conceive of style choices as marking the individual as “a particular sort of person” (2006:475). Like Croghan *et al* and Miles *et al*, my project positions dress as influencing how young people see themselves and are seen by others, illustrating the continuing relevance of Simmel’s theory of dress as an important part of group relation and differentiation.

The work by youth theorist Shauna Pomerantz (2008), based on a year she spent at a co-educational high school in Canada, also examines the way young people – in this case, young women – use dress to influence how they are seen by others. Pomerantz posits style as “social skin”, viewing it as enabling a transfer between the wearer and the social world whereby the wearer both acts upon and is acted on by the social world. For Pomerantz, style is “a point of convergence between girls and power in our society” (2008:38). Thus, for Pomerantz, students are not wholly determined by external forms of power but have some agency, agency which is played out on the site of the body. The degree of agency students have over the presentation of themselves is tempered by the subject positions available to them to occupy. Pomerantz asserts that the young women at the school had to understand “the limits of their performances of girlhood and work within those restrictions if they wanted others to take them seriously” (2008:154). They could not jump from identity category to identity category, for instance. In line with the other theorists I have outlined, Pomerantz found that style was the “most obvious way” to connote belonging to and distinction from a subject position at the high school (2008:120). While the students could not wholly control how others positioned them, they used dress to “represent who they thought they were, who they thought they wanted to be, and how they wanted others to see them within the school’s social world” (2008:149). Pomerantz’s work, then, like the other work I have detailed, stresses the role that peers and dress have in identity construction. Pomerantz’s concern with style, school, and identity parallels my research themes. In focusing her study on young women, however, Pomerantz supports the notion that style is only important to women, and cannot tell us about the way young men position themselves and each other through dress. Further, surprisingly for a book about style, Pomerantz does not engage with dress theory in any detailed way, instead focusing on work from the sociology of education. Simmel, for instance, is noticeably lacking from Pomerantz’s work.

Sociologist Murray Milner (2004), while avoiding a focus on dress, also examines group differentiation and the role of others’ evaluations in identity construction. Milner powerfully argues that young people are preoccupied with group differentiation and status because, lacking economic and political power, they form hierarchal groups based on the main source of power available to them, which is the ability to evaluate others. Milner’s finding that those students who adhered to hegemonic gender ideals had increased status at school compared to those pupils who failed to meet such ideals suggests that students use authorized discourses to

measure themselves and others. Drawing on his three-year ethnographic investigation of a North American high school, Milner also positions consumption items as being privileged tools in the conferment and evaluation of status, as well as group membership and individual differentiation. Milner argues that groups will routinely change the consumption items that they idealize to uphold their difference from other groups. Further, Milner found that the students who hold high status conform with dominant gender ideals and use consumption to aid this conformity. Thus, for Milner the dominant ways of performing gender are interlinked with the dominant values of capitalism, particularly with the ability to consume. My research also explores the relationship between authorized ideals and the students' judgments of others, as well as the link between consumerism and the embodiment of ideals.

Youth theorist Pamela Nilan (1992) highlights the influence of authorized ideals in the evaluation of others. Nilan, like Milner, is concerned with group differentiation and status, and examines how a friendship group at a Sydney girls' high school uses dress to categorize itself and other students. Nilan found that the group's classifications were influenced by dominant social categorizations; the young women placed those with low socio-economic status and non-Anglo ethnicity lowest on their style hierarchies. Nilan asserts that categorization is always value-laden and that each successive categorization affirms the categorizing group's values (1992:203). While the socio-economic status of the group affected the way the young women classified it, the notion of individuality was also influential. The young women admonished peers that look like others and privileged their own way of dressing, which they deemed "unique", placing it at the top of the style hierarchy they constructed.

The participants in youth theorists Kate Gleeson's and Hannah Frith's study, which was based on interviews with girls aged 12 to 16 in Bristol and Cardiff, also used dress to differentiate themselves from others. Gleeson and Frith argue that young women use dress to help them transition into adulthood, signalling adult femininities. Gleeson and Frith found that the young women in their study liked to wear clothes they described as tight-fitting, low-cut, revealing, and short, as well as high heels. As the authors point out, these are styles that are highly sexualised in British society and are thus associated with adult subject positions. For Gleeson and Frith, dress is used by the young women to navigate from girlhood to adulthood and back again, according to the situations they are dressing for (2004:110). As Gleeson and Frith

show, the young women are not passively adopting signals of adult femininity; rather they negotiate these signs, embodying them when it is beneficial for them. Pamela Abbott and Francesca Sapsford, in their interviews with young women in the UK at the end of year eleven (aged 16), also found that their participants used dress to help them undertake adult roles. They assert that shopping for dress items is not just about pleasure, but involves embodying an adult subject position through making 'wise' decisions about what to buy by looking for bargains and making the best use of the budget. Abbott and Sapsford state that this is an "important process of learning to become a woman" (2001:31). The students in my research also use dress to help them embody a more adult self, differentiating from the dress practices of those younger than them, as well as their younger selves. This gives impetus to the argument presented in the previous section, that dress is a tool that aids the transition to new – in this case more mature – subject positions.

Finally, sociologists Amy Wilkins (2008) and Paul Saucier (2011) examine the relationship between dress and the performativity of identity. Wilkins interviewed young women in the north-east United States from three subcultures: 'Goth', 'Christian', and "Puerto Rican Wannabes". Like the theorists outlined above, Wilkins argues that dress is "a particularly dynamic arena of identity production" (2008:245), enabling young people to demonstrate membership to a group while allowing for individual differentiation. Wilkins views identity as "performed", and positions these performances as "not a free-for-all". Subjects must draw on and remake existing ideas about class, gender, and race (2008:6). Wilkins conceives of dress, along with beliefs and emotional state, as a crucial part of the performance of identity (2008:246). Like Wilkins, Saucier also frames identity as performative. Saucier, influenced by Simmel, examines the way that young people of Cape Verdean descent living in the greater Boston area use dress to mark themselves as members of the Cape Verdean diaspora while also signalling their allegiance to a wider, pan-African black culture (2011:60). Saucier asserts that blackness "is maintained through the consumption of cultural goods associated with essential forms of blackness" (2011:57). Saucier thus transforms Simmel's work on group differentiation, changing its focus on class to race. Like Wilkins and Saucier, my work also examines the framing of identity as performative (Butler 1990, 1993), considering how the students' discourses both support and discount this position.

## Identity: Two discursive models

“Who am I?” is one of the most dominant questions in the contemporary West. Subjects go on quests to “find themselves”; they strive to be ‘true’ to themselves; and to show others who they ‘really’ are. This popular discourse implies that there is a fixed self to be found and conveyed, that there is a self hidden and weighed down by the goods, routines and pressures of the everyday, who can be accessed through contemplation and during extraordinary events. In contrast to discourses that advocate “finding oneself”, is another prevalent set of discourses that could be termed ‘neoliberal’. Neoliberal discourses imply that the self is improvable, and deemphasize the notion that there is a fixed self. These discourses promote the view that subjects “can be whoever they want to be”, and that “it does not matter where subjects have been, what’s important is where they’re headed”. Neoliberalism naturalises the quest for self-improvement, positioning subjection as a conscious teleological process of development which often results in material success. Yet another set of discourses, which are prominent in academic fields influenced by poststructuralism (associated with postmodernity) as well as found in popular culture, offer a contrasting view. Rather than positioning the self as fixed, awaiting revelation, or as something that can be mapped out through a path of ‘success’, the voices of contemporary theorists position identity as socially constructed. As sexuality theorist Jeffrey Weeks asserts, they deem identity as “made in history not in nature” (1998:140 in Kehily 2002:36). This posits identity as produced through practices, routines, and positions available for subjects to occupy within a given time and place. It suggests that identity is based on the discursive meanings attached to these practices, routines, and positions. These three sets of discourses, which the students engage with, can be attached to two identity models – a surface model which encompasses the discourses of postmodernity and neoliberalism, and a depth model which utilizes discourses of authenticity. This section examines these identity models.

The terms ‘surface’ and ‘depth’ have been used by, among others, Trinh Minh-Ha (1991), Zygmunt Bauman (1996), Alexandra Warwick and Dani Cavallaro (1998), and Simon Biggs (2004), as respective signifiers for constructionist (particularly poststructuralist) and essentialist framings of identity. I use these terms, like Bauman, to refer broadly to positionings of identity that fix it in time and biology (depth) and to framings of identity as malleable and not linear (surface). I use these



terms throughout my thesis as they signify the physical more emphatically than 'constructionist' and 'essentialist'. Dress is material. It is assembled on the body, shaping the way the body appears, and the way it moves. For a research project that explores dress, it is fitting that the signifiers of these identity models refer to physical demarcations of boundaries. Further, these terms find affinity with ways in which dress is often described in the West, as a (surface) 'disguise' that can cover-up, distort or hide the (deep) identity of the wearer. Surface is associated with the body, which is paired in Cartesian opposition to the mind, which is considered to be under the surface, in the sphere of depth. Finally, the terms surface and depth are less jargonistic than 'essentialist' and 'constructionist'. Using these terms throughout my thesis is an attempt to align my writing practice with my desire that the participants in this project may be able to understand this thesis should they ever choose to read it.

I subscribe to the poststructuralist surface position outlined above, conceiving identity as discursive. I view identity to be the result of the internalized attachment to subject positions produced through discourse. I thus utilised discourse analysis in my readings of the focus group transcripts and the media texts they engaged with, examining the discourses the students use in their framings of dress and identity. As the students demonstrate, there are multiple discourses on identity, and thus multiple subject positions to be taken up. Discourses produce many, often conflicting, meanings, which compete for dominance. They change across time and location. The discourses that achieve dominance are seen as more authoritative than others, and thus act as "effects of truth" (Foucault 1980:93). The most authoritative discourses are generated through professional fields such as medicine, education, law, psychology, and religion, and are attached to institutions such as the hospital, the school, the courthouse, the psychiatrist's office, the church, and mass media. These institutions classify subjects, and offer positions for subjects to take up.

Identity, then, as cultural theorist Stuart Hall states, is "the result of a successful articulation or 'chaining' of the subject into the flow of discourse" (2000:19). As subjects are hailed by multiple discourses daily, the subject is "in media res, constantly being formed, never coming wholly to fruition" (Mankekar 1999:17). Each subject has some choice regarding the subject positions she can inhabit, but this choice is restricted to the subject positions available to her and the ways that subject

positions can be occupied. Further, the range of identities within a socio-cultural period is limited by the discourses of the period. As social theorist Nikolas Rose asserts, these discourses structure “the connections between the truths by which human beings are rendered thinkable – the values attached to images, vocabularies, explanations, and so forth – and the techniques, instruments and apparatuses which pre-suppose human beings to be certain sorts of creatures, and act upon them in that light” (1996:296 in Budgeon 2003:41). Thus discourses structure who can exist and how. As Vivien Burr states, “our sense of who we are and what it is therefore possible and not possible for us to do, what it is right and appropriate for us to do, and what is wrong and inappropriate for us to do thus all derive from our occupation of subject positions within discourse” (1995:145-6). Identity, then, is based on negotiation of multiple discourses, conceptualised through the discourses we deem to be ‘true’. The students’ conceptions of identity are indicative of the differing discourses in circulation about identity, and illustrate that discourses do not work in a contained manner.

Conflicting discourses can be taken up simultaneously since subjects are formed in relation to the frameworks of seeing that circulate in a society. Thus as cultural theorist Purnima Mankekar asserts, “each person can be a contradictory subject ‘traversed’ by a variety of discursive practices” (1999:17). Because identity is discursive, multi-faceted identities produced by seemingly contradictory discourses may exist. Identities are not subject to the razor of reason, they are fragmented, complex, and inconsistent. Ruth Holliday asserts, “[o]nce identity is understood as performativity divorced from any notion of an essential self or individual truth, multiple identity positions or fictions become possible” (2001:224). Thus the discursive frameworks of surface and depth that form the participants’ conceptions of the relationship between dress and identity are not irresolvable contradictions when utilised by a subject, but illustrative that identity is produced through multiple discourses. This research project shows that subjects can position surface and depth models of identity simultaneously.

Subject positions gain their meanings in their difference from other subject positions. Hall argues that identities are always based on exclusion, establishing an oppositional hierarchy between inside and outside, or included and excluded (2000:18). Accordingly, both surface and depth identity positions establish themselves through the exclusion of others. Utilizations of the depth model of identity outlined above position other subjects as not ‘listening’ to their ‘true’ self, and

thus as inauthentic, while mobilizations of a neoliberal surface identity model situate other subjects as ‘wasting themselves’, failing to work on improving themselves. The surface model associated with poststructuralism constructs subjects – including other theorists – who believe in a depth model of identity as the misguided Other (Weedon 1987, Holliday 2001). In focus groups, the students, engaging in both depth and surface positions on identity, often compared themselves with subjects they conceived as occupying subject positions they do not occupy. These included ‘skanks’, ‘gangstas’, ‘tryhards’, homosexual men, ‘sheep’, ‘fakers’ and media ‘dupes’. By positioning themselves in contrast to these subject positions, they established themselves as occupying positions different from these. Further, through the repudiation of peers who occupy these subject positions, the students established their own subject positions as superior, denigrating – often with over the top displays of disgust – subjects who might be positioned as skanks, gangsta, tryhard, gay, sheep, ‘fake’ or ‘duped’.

In line with this model of exclusion, social theorists David Taylor (1998) and Shelley Budgeon (2003) position identity as operating through relations of similarity and difference. They term these relations “categorical” and “ontological”. Categorical identity is based on the recognition and classification of other subjects as being the same as one’s self in terms of social category – for instance, the same gender, sexuality, or race. Ontological identity is based on the notion that the self is unique, different from others within the same categorical identity, as well as those subjects that occupy different categories from the self (2003:110). Most subjects move through both categorical and ontological identifications at the same time. Identifying as a heterosexual young man, for instance, involves the recognition that the self is similar to other heterosexual young men, and also that the self experiences heterosexuality and age differently from others. Simmel’s positioning of fashion as both conducive to group membership and individuality outlined earlier aligns with this framework of identity. Dress allows subjects to both identify with a categorical group(s) while simultaneously maintaining an ontological identity, constituted through difference.

### ***Surface and depth models of identity***

As this thesis demonstrates, the students at City High subscribe, in part, to discourses of authenticity that are associated with a depth model of identity. This

model positions identity as based on an internal essence or spirit, which is within each person, waiting to be discovered. This essence or spirit defines the subject, and influences her behaviour, emotions, and experiences. This model of identity can be seen as operating in identity politics, based on sex or race, for instance. Discourses of radical feminism, for example, posit women as possessing a shared internal essence, different from men's essence due to their intensive role in reproduction. These discourses situate women as closer to nature than men because of this reproductive role (Griffin 1984, Collard 1988). They position women as naturally nurturing, cooperative and peaceful, framing men, in contrast, as naturally aggressive (Bryson 2003:185). As cultural theorist Chris Weedon points out, these discourses suggest that women must nurture their essential femaleness beyond the structures of patriarchy (1987:17). For radical feminist Mary Daly, this involves finding "our original integrity" and "remembering our Selves" (1978:39). This discourse of fixed essence is further seen in statements such as that pop star Lady Gaga makes in her song "Born This Way" (2011), in which she claims that she, and her audience, were born "superstars" and that to be gay, straight, bisexual, or transgendered is "no matter" because "you were born that way". This song taps into support for the narrative that people are born with an inherent sexuality, which has been used to justify same-sex desire by those subjects who do not identify as heterosexual. Depth discourses are also present in certain popular narratives of transsexual and/or transgendered subjects, who position themselves as having been born into the wrong body, as living in a body that does not belong to their (sexed) internal essence (Prosser 1998).

The discourse of each subject possessing individual and unchanging qualities from birth is powerful, and one picked up by the students, albeit in a manner that is unstable. One such example of this is Hannah's statement that "I don't think that your personality changes ever.... like you'll still always be the same like kind person even if there are more things on top of that kindness that may have changed you a little bit but I think deep down inside you're still the same sort of person as you were when you were born" (2, 4:22-3). Illustrating that the students are not committed wholly to this discourse, however, Hannah goes on to state that "cos you can, you can change yourself by saying everyday that I want to be a kinder, nicer person, and then deliberately doing things to make yourself a nicer person, like like donating and that stuff" (2, 4:27). When challenged on whether this contradicts her notion that personality is fixed at birth, Hannah asserts that this "means I'm indecisive and I don't know" (2, 4:27). I argue that, rather than indecision and lack of knowledge, this

indicates the influence of both depth and surface discourses on Hannah's conception of identity, enabling her to position it as both fixed and consciously malleable.

Depth models thus position identity as unitary, coherent and linear (Weedon 1987:112). Change is linked back to the internal self, and narrated as moving closer to this self. The students in the focus groups position the self as stable and unified. This is particularly apparent in their narratives that locate changes in their identities with experiences such as moving schools or becoming involved with a new friendship group. This positions the self as developing in a linear manner. Further, changes in subject positions which cannot easily be placed into this linear narrative are explained by many of the students as the display of "different sides" of the self. This accounts for inconsistencies in identity while continuing to position the self as unified and stable, and behaviour as authentic.

Surface models of identity, on the other hand, position it as fragmented and changeable because it is not based on a stable essence or spirit. The surface model of poststructuralism situates identity as produced through discourse, instead of lying within the individual waiting to be discovered. Weedon asserts, for instance, that in poststructuralist theory, "the structure and function of the position of the subject within discourse is the precondition for the individual to assume historically specific forms of subjectivity within particular discourses" (1987:31). Thus there is no identity outside of discourse, no prediscursive self that rests outside of history. Rather than possessing a constant 'inner' identity, the subject positions subjects occupy change as subjects encounter varying discursive positions of identity. This ongoing occupation of different positions means that identity is, as Hall states, "a process never completed – always 'in process'" (2000:16). Further, because meaning is contextual and temporary, the meanings of the subject positions the subject occupies are not fixed. The meanings each subject makes of subject positions change as different discourses become 'true' for the subject. Thus, as Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth St. Pierre point out, "because the individual is subject to multiple and competing discourses in many realms, one's subjectivity is shifting and contradictory – not stable, fixed, and rigid" (2005:962). Identity, in this surface model, is based, then, on the temporary embodiment of subject positions, positions that are discursive and consequently subject to socio-historical and personal changes in intelligibility.

Within a surface model approach to identity, the embodiment of subject positions is performative. Such embodiment involves the fulfilment of the appearance, behaviours, and emotions associated with that position. This embodiment constitutes the subject it purports to express. Philosopher Judith Butler, who formulated the notion of performativity in relation to gendered identity, states,

acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means” ([1990] 1999:185).

To suggest that identity is performative is not to propose that there is an actor outside of the deed. As the subject is required to perform identity in order to be a subject, there is no subject outside of the performance. Further, the subject does not have the privilege of choosing what she is expected to perform. This does not mean that the subject is without agency. There are a range of performative utterances available for subjects to enact and still be considered a ‘viable’ subject. Indeed, clothing is part of the repertoire of choices within which identity is performatively produced. One might use clothing to produce oneself as a ‘tomboy’ or a ‘girly girl’, for example. This, however, does not mean that gender or other identity categories can be randomly adopted, taken on and off with a change of clothes, as Butler’s notion of performativity has been (mis)interpreted. Feminist scholar Sheila Jeffreys, for example, asserts, “[w]hen a woman is being beaten by the brutal man she lives with is this because she has adopted the feminine gender in her appearance? Would it be a solution for her to adopt a masculine gender for the day and strut about in a work shirt or leather chaps?” (1994:461). As Butler states, however, gender performativity “is not a matter of choosing which gender one will be today” (1993b:22). Dress is a tool in the normative production and presentation of gender, but it does not wholly constitute gender production. Gender is a social production that is reliant on the construction of masculinity and femininity into opposites, which shapes practices and ways of seeing that reach far beyond the wardrobe. Thus Butler asserts that performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, which is “a regularized and constrained repetition of norms” (1993:95). As Butler states, this iterability “implies that ‘performance’ is not a singular ‘act’ or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even

death controlling and compelling the shape of the production...” (*ibid.*). Identity – raced, sexed, localised, as well as gendered – then, is made up of ‘regulative fictions’ (Weeks, [1986] 2010:66), and to misperform it is to risk being classified as ‘unwell’, or, much worse, subhuman. As culture changes, so too does the way identities can be successfully iterated; thus identity performances that are deemed subhuman may be repositioned and identity performances that are celebrated today may not exist in the future.

Butler argues that there is always a gap between the identity and its iteration (1993:2). Thus identity performance is only ever an approximation of the identity ideal. As Hall states, identification is “a process of articulation, a suturing, an overdetermination not a subsumption. There is always ‘too much’ or ‘too little’ – an overdetermination or a lack, but never a proper fit, a totality” (2000:17). Due to this absence of proper fit, subject positions can only ever be approximated, not totally embodied. This rendering of identity emphasizes its position as a construction. If identity merely shows what is already present within the subject, as the depth model proposes, then there would be no gap between the subject’s performance of identity and the ideal. The students’ concern with authentic identity can be framed in relation to this gap: if identity were based on what is preexisting, then authenticity would not be a relevant measure. That it is a relevant measure and an ongoing point of concern points to the consistent failure of subjects to perform identity according to identity ideals. Authenticity, however, is also performative – creating what it purports to demonstrate. As performance theorist Phillip Auslander argues, individuals achieve authenticity by citing the norms of authenticity (1999:72 in Vannini and Williams 2009:9). Such norms are socio-cultural; thus if culture changes, definitions of what constitutes the authentic change (*ibid.*, 2009:3).

For identity positions to be achieved in a manner deemed authentic, the subject must iterate the position without a noticeable gap. Being seen by significant others – usually peers that are viewed by the subject as embodying the same categorical identity – as authentically occupying the subject position marks the success of this occupation. Thus identity requires the confirmation by others of an adequate performance of self. This positioning of identity highlights identity as a process that involves work. Although this work may not be conscious, the subject has to work to embody the subject position she identifies with, as this identification is not merely the result of a preexisting essence. Thus subjects have to undertake techniques to

ensure that they appear in the manner that they identify with so that others will position them in this subject position.

### ***Depth and surface in dress literature***

Tension between surface and depth positionings of identity are present throughout literature on dress. This tension manifests itself in the situating of dress as expressing a preexisting identity (depth) and dress as constituting identity (surface). For instance, in her seminal dress theory text, *Adorned in Dreams*, Wilson asserts that dress often “successfully expresses the individual” (1985:12). In “These New Components of the Spectacle” (1990), Wilson uses different language, positioning dress as holding the body and ego together. Wilson asserts that because of this role, finished appearance “is the end result (yet itself alterable and altering) of an often elaborate construction, both bodily and mental, of identity itself” (1990:229). While this privileges dress’s role in the formation of identity, Wilson implies that this role involves linking what already exists – the body with the ego – and thus dress is the tie between the two rather than constituting the two. Silverman places more emphasis on the relationship between dress and identity formation, arguing that dress, in articulating the body, simultaneously articulates the psyche (1994:191). For Silverman, this means that “every transformation within a society’s vestimentary code implies some kind of shift within ways of articulating subjectivity”, and hence in that subjectivity (1994:193). Thus, while Wilson posits dress as expressing what preexists, then as having a role in the formation of identity, Silverman attributes dress with more power to shape the psyche than Wilson.

The argument that dress constitutes identity is associated with postmodernity. Church Gibson argues that in the contemporary West, which she positions as postmodern, dress determines the self’s “interior essence”, and this is “subsequently taken to determine the assemblage itself” (2000:356). Llewellyn Negrin (2008), as well as Tseëlon (1995) and Noel McLaughlin (2000), also put forward the notion that within postmodernity dress constitutes the wearer. Negrin asserts that this is not something to be welcomed, as, for her, when dress wholly produces the self rather than reflects a stable self, ‘morals’ are no longer important. Negrin states that when “aesthetic criteria come to substitute for ethical ones in the conduct of one’s life so that the basis of decision making is no longer ‘is this a good thing to do?’ but ‘does it look good?’” (2008:2). Craik offers a less moralistic view of the contemporary



relationship between dress and identity. Although asserting that “through clothes we wear our bodies and fabricate ourselves” (1994:16), Craik places more emphasis on other techniques of identity construction than Negrin and the other theorists mentioned above.

Rather than firmly arguing for or against one side of this dichotomy, many theorists position dress as both expressing and constructing identity. Feminist theorist Leslie Rabine states, for instance, that fashion “does not merely express this self, but, as a powerful symbolic system, [it] is a major force in producing it” (1994:59-60). At times this production is conscious, as when dress theorists Maura Banim and Alison Guy present participants as using dress to change themselves. The women Banim and Guy interviewed in their study of women’s wardrobes used clothes to present themselves according to their notions of “the woman I am most of the time”, but they also used dress to help them become “the woman I want to be” (2000:316). Thus dress is marked by these participants as having both an expressive and a productive role. Symbolic interactionist Susan Kaiser’s concept of “minding appearances” fits well with Guy and Banim’s work. Kaiser presents dress as “a process that can be used to articulate and even to produce reflexivity and subjectivity” (2001:92). Kaiser asserts that “minding appearances” involves “sorting through the possibilities [of dress] and weighing them according to what is attainable and applicable, what begins to tap emerging concepts of current and emerging identities” (2001:97). Thus for Kaiser, the imagining involved in the minding of appearances is limited to who the subject *could* be. Feminist theorist Iris Marion Young offers a similar position to Kaiser, as well as Guy and Banim, stating that clothes offer fantasies of “transport and transformation”, articulating who the wearer could be, where the wearer could go, as well as carrying the wearer through her current present (1994:206). Dress is thus used to help the wearer conceive of and approximate new subject positions.

The subject position ideal always remains a phantasmatic goal outside of the wearer’s full grasp; as, as I asserted earlier, identity ideals are never reached in practice, only approximated. The meaning of the ideal is constantly changing, thus the ideal is not a static goal. Further, because the embodiment of a subject position requires other subjects to situate the wearer in the subject position, this embodiment is destabilized by those who do not view the wearer as occupying the position. Additionally, the subject often embodies multiple, and at times conflicting, subject positions; thus her embodiment of one position is complicated by her intersectional identity. While ideals cannot be obtained, they can certainly be worked towards. As I

detail in the chapter on identity and dress, the young people in my focus groups also position dress as being able to help them become who they desire to be, as well as expressing who they are. Once again this suggests that they do not subscribe wholly to a depth or a surface model of identity but entwine discourses from both of these models.

## **Media and negotiation of hegemony**

Because dress is primarily about communicating with others, it involves an understanding of how to get meaning across and how others might interpret dress. Such an understanding is constructed through discourses. The media is a shared site for the production and dissemination of discourses. It conveys possible identities, attaching positive or negative connotations to them in line with socio-historical notions of good and bad. As youth theorists Elizabeth Birr Moje and Caspar van Helden state, popular culture “frames dominant discourses of our time”. These discourses are “important tools in people’s identity, learning, and self-expression kits” (2005:243). The media is certainly influential, but its influence cannot be measured in straightforward ways. As subjects encounter competing discourses within the media, and outside of it, it is difficult to pinpoint how much of a role media plays in identity construction. The studies below examine young people’s relationship with media texts, dress, and identity, looking at how young people negotiate the subject positions presented in the media.

Dress theorists Ingun Grimstad Klepp and Ardis Storm-Mathisen interviewed young women, aged 13, in Norway. They found that these young women viewed the female body idealised in the media positively, judging other bodies in accordance with this ideal. They saw large figures and baggy clothes as “boyish” and/or “old-fashioned” and believed that girls’ clothing should show off their figures (2005:327-8). They conceived thin bodies as modern and feminine (2005:328). The young women viewed fashionable dress as looking better on thin bodies than larger bodies, positioning thin bodies as the ‘right’ shape for the clothes (2005:328). The girls were negative about their peers who did not follow fashion trends and/or had large bodies. These peers had lower social status than those who followed fashion (2005:333). The participants stated that there was “no point” in women dressing fashionably if they were not thin as the clothes would not look good on them (2005:337). These

comments suggest that the young women in the study have taken on board unproblematically the ideals for young women's appearance offered within mainstream media in Norway, using these ideals to shape the way they dress and the way they interpret others. The young women in my research were more critical of representations of the idealized body, yet, like Klepp and Storm-Mathisen's participants, they judged other women in relation to this idealized body. This appears to affirm Milner's argument that young people judge each other in accordance with authorized discourses.

Crane's participants analysed images from the US edition of *Vogue* magazine that Crane chose on the basis of their relationship to hegemonic presentations of femininity: some of the images upheld hegemonic presentations of women; others featured women in a manner that was not consistent with normative presentations of femininity. Crane found that the young women in her study were critical of the models featured in both sets of images, viewing them as too thin, and not exemplars of beauty (2000:226). Although this demonstrates that the participants do not view media images in a passive manner, Crane states that their negative reactions to the photographs that presented women outside of hegemonic norms suggest that the members of the focus groups had "internalized traditional norms of feminine demeanour" (2000:231). Crane asserts, "taboos about appropriate gender behaviour for women led many of them to reject exaggerated expressions of sexuality, both heterosexual and androgynous, and images that implied gender ambiguity" (2000:231). Crane's study points to the complexities of interpretation; her participants were negative about both kinds of images, but in different ways – one because the models did not meet what they considered 'normal' weight targets, the other because the models were not normatively feminine. Although the participants were critical of both sets of images, their responses point to the salience of hegemonic femininity and the belief that women should 'look like' women. Such a belief was echoed by the participants in my study.

Unlike the young women in Crane's and Klepp and Storm-Mathisen's studies, the participants in the research conducted by youth theorists Dawn Currie, Deirdre Kelly and Pomerantz positioned dominant femininity, and the media texts that present it, negatively (2006:428). These young women embodied identities outside of dominant feminine norms, and rejected many of the subject positions offered by mainstream media. They did not identify with media presentations of how women are 'supposed' to act and measured themselves against women that embody hegemonic femininity.

Currie *et al* state that although the young women shared the view that “women can do anything”, they subscribed to what the authors conceive as essentialist conceptions of gender, making assertions that girls are “naturally” more sensitive than boys, for instance (2006:433). Such assertions rely on the gender oppositions created through and supported by the mainstream media that the young women critique. Thus while the young women measured themselves against performances of hegemonic femininity, they identified with the oppositions that are the basis for this femininity. Once again this suggests that the influence of the media cannot be traced in a straightforward manner, as resistance is multi-layered and not total.

Consumption theorists Craig Thompson and Diana Haytko (1997) also examined the negotiation of discourses by young people, analyzing how students in the U.S. make meaning of their dress practices. They argue that young people use fashion discourses in multiple ways, which do not simply reproduce hegemonic discourses (1997:16). Thompson and Haytko investigated how the young men and women in their research used fashion discourses to construct narratives of personal history, to create social distinctions, to interpret their social spheres, and to understand their relationship to consumer culture (1997:16). They argue that consumers do not simply accept or reject meanings from fashion media; rather, meanings within fashion discourses “present a contestable terrain that consumers rework in terms of their localized knowledge and value systems” (1997:38). The young people in Thompson and Haytko’s research used the relationship between fashion discourses and their own localized knowledge and value systems to help forge a sense of identity.

Finally, Birr Moje and van Helden also highlight the negotiated manner in which young people interpret and use the media. They argue that young people use media images in “complex and creative ways” (2005:229). Utilizing interviews that discussed the brand image of the US-based store Abercrombie and Fitch (A & F) with young men who identified as gay, the authors state that that the young men were aware of themselves as media consumers, and were reflexive about their negotiation of and their relationship with the A & F brand (*ibid.*). They rejected the associations of A & F with American jock culture, but embraced the erotic connotations of the brand, whose advertising regularly features men dressed in A & F clothes that highlight their toned physique (2005:228). The young men thus read the images against their intended reading, and co-opted the A & F images – which promote heterosexuality through their male-female couplings – into gay culture. The

authors also found that the young women they interviewed were reflexive about their relationship to media texts, using texts to mark out their identities differently in different contexts. Birr Moje and van Helden state that the young women foregrounded enjoyment of some texts and backgrounded enjoyment of others according to the group they were with and the situation they were in (2005:236). This underlines the way media consumption is strategically used to communicate commonalities with peers. It further highlights the students' status as savvy negotiators of media, a position that the students at City High also occupy.

These studies demonstrate that discourses within the media are not interpreted in straightforward ways; often they are neither rejected nor accepted completely. Rather, young people are constantly (re)negotiating their position in relation to the subject positions offered by the media. While they reject some subject positions outright, they more often take up some elements of a position while refusing to embody others, thus creating new subject positions. Further, the young people actively use their relationship with media as a tool to showcase their identities to themselves and others, referencing the media texts they enjoy (often through dress) and using discussions of media texts to illustrate their own points of view, for instance.

## **Chapter breakdown**

This thesis is divided into six chapters. The chapter that follows this introduction describes the methodologies that make up this project. It maps the setting of City High, detailing my time there as both a pupil and a researcher. It considers the factors underlying my decision to use focus groups and describes the successes and failures of my use of this method, including the focus group recruitment process in this evaluation. This chapter also examines the power relations between myself and the focus group participants and details ways I attempted to mitigate the uneven power relationship between us. It considers how I tried to continuously destabilize my position as 'knower', foregrounding the limits of my knowledge. Finally, the chapter asks, in an era where there are no absolute truths, how can research be considered valid? It suggests that the work of Jean-François Lyotard ([1979] 1984) on paralogy and of Donna Haraway (1988) on situated knowledges forms a useful framework within which to judge the validity of my research claims.

The third chapter examines how the discourses of surface and depth are threaded throughout the students' conceptions of identity and dress. It details the students' view that identity is the result of experiences and is constituted through behaviour and preferences. It argues that although this is a non-essentialist conception of identity, the students' view of identity cannot be said to be 'postmodern', or wholly surface, as rather than positioning dress solely as constituting the wearer (which is in line with the postmodern conception of masquerade), the students position dress as also expressing the wearer's preexisting identity. This chapter examines the tensions produced by this dual subscription to surface and depth models. It also considers the involvement of others in identity production, exploring the students' inability to separate how they view themselves from how they perceive others to view them. Further, this chapter examines the students' conflation of appearance with identity, which can be positioned within both surface and depth models. With this conflation, the students view dress as expressing the wearer's preexisting identity, yet, in accordance with the surface model, believe that what appears is what exists. The students are invested in this conflation, wanting what appears to show 'reality'. Thus they believe that subjects should dress to reflect themselves. This unsteady meeting of surface and depth is also present in the students' notion of comfort, which is based on the wearer matching her self with her expression, reflecting herself through dress. Yet being comfortable relies on others' viewing the wearer as she views herself, which thus positions identity as constituted through the views of others rather than innate. Thus this chapter demonstrates that the participants' conceptions of identity and dress cannot be contained within either a surface model or a depth model, suggesting that the students' views of identity oscillate uneasily between modernity and its 'post'.

The fourth chapter furthers the argument that the students do not conceive of identity in a wholly surface manner, examining their strong commitment to notions of authenticity and individuality, which are associated with a depth positioning of identity. The chapter situates the construction of the authentic individual in the disintegration of the close-knit community and the ability to be upwardly mobile precipitated by the formation of modern cities. It considers the students' equation of being authentic with being different from others. It examines the tension between the students' belief in the 'naturalness' of individuality and the work they must undertake to dress in a manner unlike their peers. This work positions difference as cultivated rather than 'natural', thus destabilising the students' depth model position. The

chapter also examines both the official and unofficial discourses of City High, asserting that the students' commitment to individuality corresponds with the culture of individuality fostered by the school. Further, the chapter describes how the students use the denigrated subject positions of the 'clone' (or 'sheep') and the 'tryhard' to establish themselves as authentic individuals. It details the importance of emotions in signalling authenticity for the participants and argues that the 'most authentic' positions are those the subject occupies seemingly 'instinctually', without analysis or noticeable work.

Following the chapter on individuality and authenticity, I dedicate a chapter to the students' relationship with sex and gender. I examine the way the students use dress to present a coherent sex and gender identity. The students associate non-normative presentations of the sex-gender relationship with homosexuality, thereby contributing to the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1993), which posits sex, gender and desire as oppositional. Like the previous chapter, I consider the work the students do to achieve subject positions they deem 'normal' and 'natural'. I look at the tension created through the students' depth model belief that gender characteristics 'naturally' follow from sex, and their surface model positioning of the coherence between sex and gender requiring work to achieve. I detail how, similar to their employment of the 'clone' and the 'tryhard' to establish themselves as unique and authentic subjects, the students use the figures who do not perform gender normatively to position themselves as performing gender according to gender ideals in comparison. The young men in the study consistently reference the homosexual male, monitoring themselves to ensure they do not embody appearance or behaviour that could result in others mistaking them as 'gay'. They position the 'gay' man as underperforming masculinity, as effeminate. On the other hand, the young women compare themselves positively with a subject who over-performs a sexualized femininity: the 'skank' or 'slut'. They view this subject as basing her self-esteem on the affections of men. The young women distance themselves from the over-performance of femininity, and position themselves as relying on themselves and their successes outside of the bedroom for their self-esteem. The Others the students produce, then, help the students to uphold normative notions of gender and to mitigate the work they undertake to occupy the gender positions they consider to be 'natural'.

The final chapter of the thesis considers the relationship between the focus group participants, dress, and power. It examines the students' negotiation of appearance

ideals, which structure dress practices. It conceives of power as productive of subjects and looks at the role of the embodiment of appearance ideals in this production. It examines how media texts act as instruction guides in the embodiment of ideal appearance and promote what I term the 'improvement imperative'. This chapter describes how the students situate many appearance ideals as media constructions, positioning themselves as able to successfully spot their status as constructs, unlike the 'sad' subjects they contrast themselves with who embody these ideals unquestioningly. The chapter argues that although the students shun some appearance ideals due to their position as constructions, they subscribe to the improvement imperative promoted throughout the media texts that construct these ideals. This supports neoliberal ideals associated with a surface model of identity which advocate for individuals to 'make the most' of themselves, using their self-discipline to reach goals within the improvement imperative, and live successfully without the state's help. The chapter also argues that the appearance ideals the students work to embody unquestioningly are those associated with health. This recontextualisation of appearance ideals in the authoritative field of health demonstrates the denigrated position of appearance ideals that are anchored solely in the field of fashion. This concern with optimal health further places the students (who do not claim an allegiance to any political ideology themselves) in line with neoliberal ideals. Finally, this chapter considers how the students legitimate their embodiment of ideals they position as constructed through positioning this embodiment as necessary to ensure their appearance matches their selves. In this way, ideals that are associated with a surface model of identity, with work and with construction, are sutured into the depth model realm of the authentic.

The conclusion to this thesis suggests that it is precisely because the students conceive of identity through both a surface model lens and a depth model lens that they are so concerned with authenticity. Since the dual subscription to these models positions identity in an unstable manner, the students are concerned with (re)stabilizing identity and thus with 'authentic' identity. Further, because the students conflate identity with appearance, they are invested in assessing whether the individual has dressed in a manner that is 'true' to himself. The conclusion returns to the students' production of Others, figures that help the students' negotiation of the tension produced by their view that subject positions are occupied 'naturally' and the work that they must do to occupy subject positions. The students position Others as working 'excessively' to be in a subject position, perceiving their own work in comparison as work conducted in order to authentically convey



themselves to peers. Finally, this thesis closes with questioning the positioning of the depth and surface models as oppositional, suggesting that the two models may be dialectical instead.

## Chapter Two: Methodology

"Conflict is the gadfly of thought... a sine qua non of reflection and ingenuity." (John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*).

"We're just fools with the lights on." (K-OS, "Black Ice (Hymn for Disco)").

There are many ways of seeing the worlds we encounter. Different modes of seeing are produced through different forms of measurement, and from the many places the seer can stand. The same elements can look different when examined from different angles. The methods I have chosen to undertake in the course of my research aim to facilitate the viewing of these different angles in order to form a multifaceted view of the relationship between young people, dress and identity. These involve holding three rounds of focus groups with young people, interviews with City High teachers and administrative staff, analysis of the scrapbooks made by the young people featuring images of themselves and descriptions of their dress, an exploration of the discourses present in the texts the students mention, and an analysis of the internal and external discourses of City High. I have chosen to engage with people and texts in order to encounter the unexpected, to destabilize myself as 'knower', and to demonstrate the limits of my viewpoint. I have analysed the themes and discourses present in the focus groups, staff interviews, and both school-based and popular cultural texts, with the assumption that 'reality' – what we take to be evident, or 'true' – is shaped by discourses which construct the way the everyday is made intelligible. Reality is positional, differing from person to person, based on one's relation to discourses that compete to make intelligible one's experience of the world. Interviewing people, then, offers glimpses into different experiences, which offer differing positions on reality. Together these positions, I believe, form a more complex view of a phenomenon than a solo viewpoint: for we can never wholly 'know' a phenomenon, but we can build a greater understanding of it through research which puts the discourses and experiences of the participants at the fore.

This chapter explores the benefits and drawbacks of basing my research on the views and practices of participants. It details why I am conducting friendship-based

focus groups and provides information about the recruitment and constitution of these groups. This chapter also considers the power imbalance between the researcher and the researched inherent in ethnographic projects. Further, it explores the status of the slippery concept of 'truth' within the postmodern era, examining how work could be conceived to be valid within this epoch of contested truth.

Because of the positioned nature of reality, my study makes no presumptions to be representative, to make statements about the experiences of young people throughout the West, throughout Aotearoa/New Zealand, or even throughout City High. Rather, my study illustrates how the relationship between dress and identity is conceptualized by some of the young people at City High School at the time of the study. The aim is to examine the link between young people, dress, identity, and the institution of City High, contribute to the growing field of fashion studies, and raise further questions about the relationship between dress and identity.

Before describing the research, I would like to offer a brief note on the terms I use to refer to the participants in my research. To a certain degree, all labels are limiting and based on exclusion, working to homogenize and contain subjects. I use four main labels for participants: 'staff', 'young people', 'students', and 'participants'. These each reduce the multifaceted identities of the participants to one subject position. For example, the notion of 'staff' situates the adult participants entirely in relation to their place of employment. Similarly, the use of the term 'students' throughout my work stresses the position of the young participants at the school and highlights that my research does not take into consideration young people of high school age that are in the workforce, unemployed, or in apprenticeship training. Labelling the participants in my research 'young people' places emphasis on their age, which downplays discrepancies that occur within age-groups as well as the position of the young people as classed, raced, gendered, and sexed. It also highlights the students' relational subject position – they are defined against adults and against children, occupying the liminal space between these two positions.

Throughout my research I have used the term 'participant' in accordance with the guidelines of the Ethics Committee for the University of Auckland (UAHPEC). The UAHPEC Applicants' Manual states that a participant is "a person with whom there is some intervention or interaction that would not be occurring or would be occurring

in some other fashion but for the research, or as a result of the research”.<sup>8</sup> The term participant has common connotations of contribution and collaboration. I want to draw attention to the unevenness of the collaboration between myself and the participants and the power differential this constructed. I formulated the research topic, composed the questions, and chose the methods. Although I tried to lessen this power differential by basing the second and third focus group rounds on topics and points raised by the students in the previous focus group round, I nonetheless chose which of the topics to further explore. Poststructuralist feminist Gayle Letherby suggests that the term ‘respondent’ is more appropriate than the term ‘participant’. For Letherby, ‘participant’ implies that the subject of research has a more active role in the research process than he or she has in practice, whereas ‘respondent’ alludes to the power discrepancy between researcher and researched (2003:7). While I have continued to adhere to the guidelines of the UAHPEC, following Letherby’s point, I want to make it clear that this does not mean that the power relationship between myself and the participants was equal, or that this relationship escapes my analysis. I address this later in the chapter.

## Locating the research

The school at which I chose to conduct my research acts as a strong reference point for the students and staff, who often compare City High to other schools in the region. Membership in the school’s community is a large part of their identities. In Chapter Four of this thesis, I will explore the internal and external discourses that construct the school. In this section, I briefly describe the institution in which my research took place. City High School has a roll of over 1000 students. Like other schools nearby, it is ranked as decile nine by the Ministry of Education. This places its students within the top 20% of socio-economic wealth in Aotearoa/New Zealand.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee Applicants’ Manual, 2010, p. 37. <http://www.auckland.ac.nz/webdav/site/central/shared/about/research/human-ethics/documents/Applicants%20Manual%20January%202010.pdf> The committee advises against using the term ‘subjects’ in favour of the label ‘participants’. While it does not advise against using other terms, such as ‘respondent’, it does not accept applications for ethics approval that do not use the term participant, and ensures that in the documents providing information for and the consent of potential research respondents are termed ‘participants’.

<sup>9</sup> Schools are awarded a decile rank according to the areas in which students that attend the school live. The income, occupations, qualifications, number of people in the household, and reliance on state benefits are measured from census data to produce information about the “meshblock” – an area made up of 50 houses. The decile rank refers to the percentage of

While this may be the average wealth of families of students at the school, there are many students who come from poor households. The school offers a broad range of subjects, with non-traditional subjects such as legal studies, drama, employment studies, film and television studies, and electronics offered alongside more traditional courses such as mathematics, English, history, and Māori. As aforementioned, City High has no uniform. The school's guide for caregivers asserts that the school expects students to be "clean and non-offensive in their presentation" and that clothes must be "appropriate for school".<sup>10</sup> What is considered 'appropriate' and non-offensive, however, is not clearly defined in the guide. Positive references to drugs and alcohol, as well as swastikas and gang insignias are not tolerated, with the student asked to remove the offending piece of clothing or turn it inside out so that the reference is not visible (personal correspondence with Principal, March 2009). For clothing which may be seen as offensive, but does not contain references to drugs, 'bad' language, or Nazi symbols, it is up to staff to decide whether the item is offensive or not. The staff members I interviewed asserted that they rarely encounter clothing at the school they would deem offensive. The school's lack of uniform, co-educational classes, and reputation for success in non-traditional subjects means that it is often seen as an 'alternative' to single-sex schools in the area. According to staff I interviewed, the school attracts students that come from liberal families; students that did not or may not function well at a single-sexed, uniformed school; and young people from council and state-subsidized housing near the school (including refugees). It is from this environment that my focus groups were constructed.

## **Focus groups: friendships and power**

I chose to conduct my research on young people using the focus group format rather than other ethnographic techniques, such as one-on-one interviews, for instance, for three main reasons: first, to witness the production of identity occurring through

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students that come from the lowest socio-economic "meshblocks": a rank of 1 means the school has the highest population of students from these areas, a rank of 10 means the school is one of the ten percent of schools with the lowest enrolments of students from "meshblocks" with low socio-economic status. A school's decile rating affects the amount of funding the school receives, with schools with lower-ranked deciles receiving a higher proportion of funds from the government. See the Ministry of Education's website for more details,

<http://www.minedu.govt.nz/NZEducation/EducationPolicies/Schools/SchoolOperations/Resourcing/OperationalFunding/Deciles/HowTheDecileIsCalculated.aspx>

<sup>10</sup> "Caregivers' Guide", City High School, 2009.

group discussion; second, to attempt to limit the unequal power relations between myself and the participants; and third, because focus groups are a good way to gather a sizable amount of information in a short period of time. This section further examines why I used focus groups, and some of the advantages and disadvantages of this method in relation to my project.

A subject's high school identity is heavily based on the friends she has at the school: the students with whom she spends her school-day breaks influence how the student sees herself, how she behaves, and how she is seen (Nilan 1992; Miles *et al* 1998; Milner 2004; Birr Moje and van Helden 2005; Croghan *et al* 2006; Wilkins 2008; Saucier 2011). Because high school students often spend more time with their school friends than with their family members or other adults, friends frequently have more influence on their behaviour than anyone else (Milner 2004:421). While my project is not intended to measure the scale of influence that friends have over each other, I examine influence at work through the operation of power and the function of norms within peer group interaction. Norms work through interactions with others, as norms are established and followed based on sanctions or rewards from the subjects one interacts with. In particular, it is one's friends that one desires approval and accolade from. Each group of friends has different discursive norms that friends are expected to adhere to. Youth researcher Mary Jane Kehily states that in peer group interactions students collectively negotiate "an accepted 'line'", defining "legitimate realms of thought, words and actions" (2002:6). This 'line' delineates the group's norms regarding gendered, classed, and racialised identity, among other identity-axes. Attitudes or opinions outside of these norms are deemed to be alien and even contrary to the group. Should a member contravene these norms, the group will have to collectively – though not necessarily consciously – decide how to deal with the transgression. Often transgressions are treated as a joke, warning the transgressor that the boundary is being crossed and that further traversal may have negative consequences.

Because the focus groups in my study are made up of pre-existing groups of friends, they provide a good insight into the construction and monitoring of this "accepted 'line'". As social science researchers Rosaline Barbour and Jenny Kitzinger point out, the 'naturally-occurring' group is "one of the most important contexts in which ideas are formed and decisions made" (1999:9). Basing the focus groups on this "important context" allows me to see the way that friends monitor and manage each other, and, significantly, how they position themselves in relation to outsiders. The

students use outsiders to establish who should be a member of their group and who should not, often implying that the member who crosses the 'line' might not belong in the group. Further, the structuring of my research around friendship groups supports an understanding of dress informed by Simmel (1901, outlined above); that is, dress as used to both mark individuals as part of a group while simultaneously asserting the individuality of group members.

While each group was 'natural' in that it existed prior to my research, the friendship group was taken outside of its regular context, placed into a room with a recording device and asked to have a facilitated conversation based on topics suggested by an outsider. Thus the research was far from a 'fly on the wall' observation of a group operating 'naturally'. As well as this, each focus group was not a self-contained friendship unit. There were members of the friendship group who were not taking part in my research; thus, the group's operations inside the interview room cannot be said to necessarily represent the way the group operates outside of the room. Further, the make-up of the friendship groups changed as the study progressed. In Focus Group Two, for instance, Aladdin, a strong member of the group, began to spend less and less time with the group, choosing instead to spend her school breaks with an older crowd. Had I recruited the focus groups later in the year, it is arguable that Aladdin would not have been included in the group. Group dynamics are not static, and relationships within each group changed through the year: although made up of the same students, the groups were not the same in the second focus group round in May as the third in September.

As well as being interested in the workings of pre-formed groups, I based the focus groups on groups of friends because it was important to me that the participants felt as comfortable as possible during the research. I reasoned that having discussions with friends, albeit focused and facilitated conversations, would not be alien to the participants, as conversing together is a practice they regularly engage in. Further, as stated above, friends are more likely to be comfortable discussing themselves with each other than with students they do not know or do not like. I also used friendship groups because I wished there to be some level of agreement within each group so that the discussion was not stalled in argument on every point.

Furthermore, I chose to work with friendship groups because I believed such groups would be more conducive to the revelation of ideas and/or views that participants might have that conflict with views that are dominant in wider society. Such views

may get lost in focus groups made up of students who do not know each other very well as participants may not feel comfortable challenging norms alone and therefore avoid voicing their views. Finally, the knowledge that friends have of each other's practices and opinions means that they are able to query each other's answers, elaborate on stories, and challenge one another, resulting in a more complex presentation of data than may be granted through interviews with singular participants or with participants who do not know each other. Indeed, this occurred several times within focus groups with members challenging other members whose statements contradicted their behaviour outside of the session.

Like Letherby (2003), Madriz (2000), and Wilkinson (1999), among others, I conceive of focus groups as limiting the influence of the researcher over the participants. By facilitating a conversation between the participants rather than between the researcher and the researched, the relations between participants may become more dominant than relations between the researcher and the participants. While one-on-one interviews can be intimidating and disempowering for the participant (Madriz 2000), talking to a researcher with a group of friends is likely to be much less daunting. Further, the focus group method limits the power of the researcher to impose her way of seeing as focus groups are based on open questions. I endeavoured to construct questions that were as open as possible, which avoided assumptions about the participants. The use of open questions allowed the participants in my research to shape the conversation and to give their views in detail, contrasting with, and elaborating on, the views presented by their friends.

There were three main disadvantages with basing focus groups on established groups of friends. First, this method excluded from participation those students who do not have a friendship group at the school. These are students who often sit alone at lunchtime, leave the school during breaks, or locate themselves somewhere where their lack of company is not noticeable, such as in the school library or in a classroom. These students may have much to contribute on the topic of dress and identity but were unable to be part of my study due to my use of friendship-based groups.

Second, I did not know each group's past experiences and the intricacies of statements that reference this past. Because of this I could not be party to some of the power dynamics operating within each group. This is one reason why some texts



on qualitative research advise against using pre-existing groups for research (Morgan 1988). It is not possible to see the full play of power dynamics in any type of group, however, regardless of how much knowledge one might have about the group's past. Where I was party to additional information, the influence of past events on the group was apparent, and made clear that my lack of intimate knowledge of each group meant that I could only ever have a partial understanding of it. For instance, having arrived early for our first focus group session, one of the participants came out to me as queer and stated that he had previously had a romantic relationship with one of the other participants in the group. I could then take into account the past history between the two, particularly when one made a hurtful remark about the other. As well as this, while the focus group members often challenged each other when they thought one of the participants was not being truthful or was contradicting herself, the group power dynamics may have inhibited individual participants from raising disagreements with certain individuals, particularly because disagreement may affect the participant's position within the group.

Related to this is the problem of over-disclosure. Students may say something, often related to their selves, during a focus group session that they later feel uncomfortable having said. This problem is exacerbated in friendship-based focus groups as the participant has an ongoing relationship with those present in the group, unlike a focus group made up of strangers. Over-disclosure can affect the participants' position in the friendship group. Social science researchers Michael Bloor, Jane Frankland, Michelle Thomas, and Kate Robson provide the example of a participant who, in a focus group based on sexual health, revealed that she had recently contracted a sexually transmitted disease from someone other than her committed partner. Bloor *et al* assert that this type of disclosure can change the way the participants' friends respond to her (2001:25). Further, as confidentiality cannot be guaranteed outside of the focus group sessions, what a participant may say may impact how people outside of the focus group view her as well. Thus, as Bloor *et al* remind researchers, "the content of the focus group discussion can have consequences beyond the temporal and social confines of the focus group itself" (2001:25). Following a suggestion from Barbour and Kitzinger (1999:9), to help address the issues of group power dynamics and of over-disclosure, I stressed that participants should think about what they feel comfortable saying and that they did not have to talk about anything they did not feel comfortable addressing. Further, I provided forums for participants to communicate their views outside of the group if

they desired: through the questionnaire, through the scrapbook, and through encouraging the participants to email me or to make a time to speak with me if they had any thoughts they wanted to contribute outside of the focus group sessions.

Another drawback of using friendship groups is that at times the group participants were highly agreeable with each other: focus groups work better when there is some level of disagreement between the participants as this reveals the operation of norms and the production of identity more readily. To facilitate exploration of topics, at times I presented different views from the ones offered by participants and asked them to discuss these views. Agreement did not preclude me from tracking identity production and norms at work. There are ways of exploring the operation of norms and identity that are not based on disagreement, such as analyzing the assumptions made by focus group members, what they view as self-evidently true, and how they position themselves in relation to subjects outside of the group, for instance. Even with the shortcomings described, I believe that peer focus groups are the best method for the examination of the attitudes towards dress and identity among different sets of friends due to their ability to counteract some of the power imbalance between the researcher and the researched (see below), and to demonstrate both group and individual identity in production.

This friendship-based approach tacitly affirms something that, in fact, warrants further investigation. That is, do – as much of the literature outlined above argues – friendship groups influence the dress practices of members of the group (and if so, how much)? Certainly many of the students asserted that they take into consideration what their friends may think of a certain outfit or style when they are dressing. Melo, from Group Two, for example, will not wear a certain top that she knows that the rest of Group Two find “weird” (2, 1:4). In another example, Saffron imagines what Eva might think about different hair colours she tries out, avoiding colours that Eva and other friends may not like (5, 2:10). Although the students agreed that they take into account friends’ points of view, they downplayed trying to dress alike. This was connected to not wanting to be categorized as ‘clones’ or ‘sheep’. Some of the groups could, however, suggest ways that they might visually be seen as ‘a group’ differentiated from other friendship groups. Group One pointed out that they all wear skinny jeans, Group Four emphasized their wearing of clothes they can play sports in, and Group Two stressed that they stand out because other friendship groups in their form are made up of members who dress alike, whereas they dress differently from each another. While recognising that more research is

necessary on the workings of friendship groups, this thesis takes as given that friends influence each other and friendship groups operate as a productive site for the operation of discursive norms, including codes of dress.

As well as conduct focus groups with students, I interviewed staff at City High. The purpose of these interviews was to ask staff about their conceptions of the relationship between the students' dress and identity,<sup>11</sup> to find out about the way they police student dress, and to be party to the construction of internal discourses at City High, that is, how staff talk about the school. I conducted seven one-on-one interviews with staff, made up of two English teachers, the year-twelve dean, the year-eleven dean, a science teacher, the head of fashion design, and the school's primary receptionist. While I was committed to using the focus group format with the students, I chose to use one-on-one interviews with the staff of City High as I reasoned that staff were likely to be more honest with me one-on-one regarding their views on students and the school culture than in a group of colleagues, particularly if this group were made up of both senior and junior staff, as my staff participants were. Because of the uneven status of the staff participants within the institution, it was likely that the staff may feel more uncomfortable talking in front of other staff members than with me, a young researcher who is not invested in the hierarchal structure of the school. As well as this, I was not looking for instances of group and individual identity production in these interviews, which are better provided by focus groups. Thus one-on-one interviews were my chosen format to gather information from staff at City High.

In addition to conducting focus groups and interviews, as mentioned above, I analysed some of the texts that the students engaged with. These were texts that were referred to in at least two focus groups, and include the student-produced school magazine *The Flannel*, the films *Mean Girls* and *House Bunny*, the television shows *What Not to Wear* and *America's Next Top Model*, magazines such as *Vogue* and *OK*, the social networking sites Bebo and Facebook, and the analysis of popular songs.

While it is widely recognized that texts influence people's lives, it is difficult to accurately measure this influence. Even if this influence could be precisely

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<sup>11</sup> As this study is based on the way the young people at the school position the relationship between dress and identity, I was not specifically interested in the staff members' own dress practices.

calculated, such a measurement could not be generalized as the impact texts have varies from person to person and changes over the course of an individual's life. At times an action can be traced directly back to a text, such as the purchase of an item of clothing because it was similar to one worn by a character in a film. More often than not, however, subjects are influenced by several texts simultaneously and this influence intermingles with other influences in an individual's life such as her family, workplace, and friends. While the texts that people engage with can be measured (by asking a person to write down every text she encounters during a day for instance), it is much more difficult to measure a person's understanding of the text's content, how she has interpreted the text's messages, how much of the text she can recall, and how that text will then influence future decisions, behaviour and relationships.

Rather than seeking to measure the influence of the texts the students refer to, I have analysed the texts in relation to the discourses they present. Following cultural theorist Angela McRobbie, I conceptualise the link between texts and the social as "loose sets of relations, capillary actions and movements, spilling out among and between different fields: work and leisure, fact and fiction, fantasy and reality, individual and social experience" (1984:142). Because identity is discursive, I conceive of the participants' engagement with such texts as a significant part of their identity construction (see also Hudson 1984; Hall 1997; Kehily 2002; Gray 2003; Birr Moje and van Helden 2005; Wilkins 2008, for instance). My analysis serves to demonstrate some of the discourses that students come into contact with, and acts as a reminder that the split between text and subjects is an uneasy one.

## **The research: Concrete, backpacks, and conversations**

It felt strange to return to the school after seven years. The strong smell of the toilets, the dark concrete stairwells, the familiar faces of the teachers, and the congregation of students in friendship clumps in the main foyer brought memories of my year at the school rushing back. I felt excited, but shy and alone all over again. I was nervous that I would not be able to be recruit groups, and unsure that my research would go according to plan. Standing by myself in the main foyer, I tried to avoid the stares of the students as they met their friends. Because I still look young, I was often mistaken for a seventh-form (year thirteen) student, and I took these

stares to be of pity at the new girl with no friends, propelling me back to the time when I was indeed new and friendless at the school. This feeling of heightened isolation was exacerbated by my decision, due to a back injury, to wear a backpack instead of carry a satchel – almost no student at City High wears a backpack; they are highly unfashionable. This contributed to the stain of unpopularity that my soloness signalled, particularly because the backpack, weighed down with my laptop, lunch, and several books, dominated my figure. I was surprised at how insecure I felt. Taking in students' stares, I often had to remind myself that I was a university graduate with a large circle of friends, and that my role at the school was researcher rather than student-looking-for-friends. One reason for my insecurity was my reliance on students being willing to talk to me: with my research assuming that appearance is a significant influence in how others view a subject, I believed my appearance was an important factor in the recruitment process, particularly as students would have little else on which to base their perceptions of me.

After a few days of observing students during breaks and becoming re-familiarised with the school, I approached students, explaining my research and asking them about the possibility of being in a focus group. These were students that were in small groups who appeared to be friends, that is, they were talking excitedly, hugging, high-fiving, laughing together, or showing each other things on their mobile phones or computers. Further, following my wish to explore the 'ordinary', the students that I approached did not particularly stand out. That is, they were students who embodied the dominant 'look' of City High – a mixture of high street and second-hand or 'vintage' clothes.<sup>12</sup> These were students who did not visibly appear to belong to a subculture. When I approached each group, after introducing myself and explaining that I was a researcher from the University of Auckland interested in dress and identity, I asked if they were friends outside of school as well as at school. I defined this as voluntarily spending time together outside of school hours. If students were interested in participating, and were friends outside of school, I gave them Participant Information Sheets that provided details of my project, and Consent Forms for them (and their caregivers if they were under 16 years of age) to sign and return to the school's reception if they wished to partake in my research. These forms were numbered, and I made a record of which numbers I gave out to which

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<sup>12</sup> I was surprised at the lack of obvious cliques during my observation. Many of the groups seemed to visually blend into each other with the majority of students dressing in a mix of contemporary high street dress-items and vintage or vintage-looking stand-out pieces to ensure their look was not identical to anyone else's. While this ensured 'individuality', en-mass the students looked similar in style.

group of friends so that I could position consent forms from friends together and contact these friends collectively to arrange our first focus group session.

I talked to more students that I recruited. There was no incentive for students to commit to the research, which required them to give up three lunchtimes and three periods of classes, as well as construct a scrapbook based on images of themselves. While many of the students were excited about getting class time off, some students felt that they could not afford to miss three classes, and many others did not wish to give up three lunchtimes. In hindsight, I think if I had offered some form of small payment for students' time, recruitment would have been easier. Payment was not offered, however, as it has the potential to change the relationship between the researcher and the participants into one more akin to employer and employees. This can influence the contributions from participants, who may shape their responses around what they think the researcher-employer desires to hear, rather than what is on their minds (Bloor *et al*/2001:34). While non-paid research participants may also give answers they think are desirable to the researcher, the offering of payment has the potential to increase this possibility and thus, although I believe small payment would have encouraged students to participate, it was preferable to undertake the research without this offer of payment.

I wished to recruit friendship-based groups from years ten through to thirteen. I decided to exclude year-nine students as, at the time of recruitment, the school year was in its infancy thus they were less likely to have established a relationship with the school culture than older students. I found that senior students (years eleven to thirteen) were particularly hard to reach, as City High has a policy where senior students are free to leave on breaks. Taking advantage of this policy, the majority of senior students leave the grounds at lunchtime, choosing to spend their break in the city. When I attended the school, seniors could be reached during the morning break, which was too short for most students to leave school and return in time for the next class. Since my departure, the timetable at City High has been adjusted so that senior students forfeit their morning break and free periods in order to start the school day later. Due to this difficulty in finding senior students, Mr S, my primary contact at City High, offered to assist me in recruiting senior students to participate in my research. I gratefully accepted Mr S's assistance, particularly because in his roles as the year-eleven dean and teacher of journalism (a subject which is only offered to students in years twelve and thirteen), he has regular contact with a wide range of senior students. Mr S was a highly popular teacher when I attended the

school, and evidently continues to be, with students regularly approaching him with news and for advice when we strolled the school grounds together. Before Mr S began to recruit participants, we had a long discussion about my research, and I provided him with further information through email. I asked Mr S to recruit “friendship-based focus groups that cover a spectrum of ages, ethnicities, sexualities, class, intelligence-levels, interests and popularity” (personal correspondence, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2009). Mr S was an enthusiastic recruiter, and in return for his help I taught a period with each of his two year-thirteen journalism classes where I outlined basic textual analysis and audience reception theories, and talked to the students about studying media at university.

Mr S and I recruited one of the focus groups together, following one of the journalism classes. We then recruited another two focus groups each. I was aware that using a teacher to help me recruit students meant that a further power discrepancy entered into the recruitment process. Although I believe Mr S to be generally well-liked, some of the students he approached may have felt unable to say no to his request for fear of being seen negatively by him. The benefits, however, of Mr S’s knowledge of and contact with the students outweighed this concern.

Following my desire to include both young men and women in the research, I recruited two mixed-sexed friendship groups (Group One and Group Five), and, with Mr S, one all-female friendship group (Group Three). Mr S recruited a group of young men (Group Four) and a group of young women (Group Two). Visually, groups at City High seemed to be roughly half single-sex and half mixed-sex. I wished to incorporate both single-sex and mixed-sex friendship groups in my study as this emulated the make-up of friendship groups at City High. Further, this inclusion would allow me to see what differences may be apparent within the single-sexed groups that are not apparent in the mixed-sex groups. While I do not wish to present these differences as ‘natural’ rather than social, reflecting the cultural division of sex in the West, differences nonetheless occur, as I detail in chapter Five.

During the recruitment process I, as a white woman, did not feel comfortable approaching groups of students that were made up primarily of non-white subjects. I questioned this unease, but I could not escape it. I found myself talking with groups that were predominantly Pākehā (New Zealanders of European descent). I wondered if Mr S would recruit a group of students of colour and how I might

mitigate the uneven power relations between myself and this group. Given the colonizing relationship between Pākehā and Māori, and Pākehā and Pacific Islanders in Aotearoa/New Zealand, this power differential would be substantially higher between myself and a group of participants from these colonized ethnic groups than between myself and participants who were also white. Although I am of Māori descent, I am also Pākehā. I look Pākehā, I have been raised in Pākehā culture, and benefit from white privilege. Because of this, I found it hard to ask for groups made up of people of colour to give up their time for me. While I recognize that all of my research is exploitative in the sense that I receive more from the students' participation in my project than they do, given the increased power discrepancy between white and non-white subjects, and the history of exploitation between white and non-white subjects in Aotearoa, I did not want to further contribute to this history. Thus, I did not wish to use the knowledge and opinions of a Māori or Pacific Islander group without a research mandate from that group, and without my research benefitting the group in a manner they, rather than I, determined. As well as this, I did not wish to contribute to the construction of racial differences through having a target 'non-white' group which readers could then compare with white groups, contributing to the construction of non-white subjects as Other.<sup>13</sup> Further, as I am highly limited in my knowledge of Māoritanga (Māori culture) and other non-Pākehā cultures, my analysis would not do justice to the complexities of the relationship between the participants' views, their cultural norms, and the dominant Pākehā culture. This ignorance of non-Pākehā culture means that I would have been asking participants to fit into my cultural framework rather than engage with theirs. As education theorist Linda Tuhiwai Smith asserts, Western research "brings to bear, on any study of indigenous peoples, a cultural orientation, a set of values, a different conceptualization of such things as time, space and subjectivity, different and competing theories of knowledge, highly specialized forms of language, and structures of power" (1999:42). Because my research is not taking into account these different conceptions of time, space, knowledge, and subjectivity, for example, I did not wish to implicitly perpetuate the colonial technique of insisting on the dominant culture as the framework that participants must work within. Thus, for these reasons, I did not recruit a friendship group made up primarily of non-white students, and I felt a sense of relief that Mr S did not either.

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<sup>13</sup> I am aware that this statement itself illustrates a contradiction, as by expressly avoiding using a non-white friendship group, I am othering non-whites and thus contributing to the construction of race.



The participants were not all white, however. Three of the focus groups featured students of colour. Below is a table describing the constitution of the focus groups. The categories I have used in this table serve to construct the participants' identities, highlighting some aspects of their lives and downplaying others. For instance, I could have featured class as a category in the table, among other identity-axes. All descriptions are partial, and cannot describe the complexities and multiplicities of the subject positions each participant moves through regularly. Accordingly, to place the participants within such categories is to give them descriptions that never wholly fit, and reduce similarities between participants to 'sameness' (Fine 1994; Scheurich 1996). No one individual corresponds neatly with these constructed categories, and members within each category are not the same. Further, although each focus group is often referred to as a cohesive whole, each group was not necessarily coherent with regards to the class and sexuality of its members. There were noticeable class differences in particular within Focus Group One and Focus Group Two. Two student participants were 'out' as queer. This does not mean that all other students identified as heterosexual, however. Further regarding self-identifiers, the students had the opportunity to choose their own alias. Where a name is used that does not commonly refer to the sex of the participant, such as 'Kandy', this was the choice of the participant rather than my own construction. None of the participants described themselves as identifying with a subculture. All had an appearance that was 'ordinary', with the exception of Scarlet, who was recruited by one of her peers, and dresses in extremely colourful clothes. Scarlet is known for her dress sense, and students and teachers often use her as a reference point when describing dress at the school.

**Table 1: Formulation of the Focus Groups**

Focus group	Name	Sex <sup>14</sup>	Year & Age	Ethnicity	Attended another high school?	Focus groups attended	Notes
One	Kandy	m	10 & 14 <sup>15</sup>	Chinese New Zealander	Yes, single-sex	All	Had a past romantic relationship with Bach
One	Bach	m	11 & 15	Pākehā	Yes, single-sex school	All	Had a past romantic relationship with Kandy
One	Henrietta	f	10 & 14	Pākehā	Yes, single-	All	

<sup>14</sup> This is the sex that the student identified as being.

<sup>15</sup> This is the age of each student when the first focus group session took place.

					sex		
One	Josh	m	11 & 15	Pākehā	Unknown	No show	
One	Hayley	f	11 & 15	Pākehā	Unknown	No show	
Two	Aladdin	f	10 & 14	Pākehā	No	All	
Two	Melo	f	10 & 14	Pākehā	No	All	
Two	Josef	f	10 & 13	Pākehā	No	All	
Two	Hannah	f	10 & 14	Pākehā	Yes, single-sex	All	
Two	Charlotte	f	10 & 13	Pākehā	No	All	
Three	Françoise	f	13 & 16	Pākehā	Yes, single-sex	All	
Three	Kat	f	12 & 16	Pākehā	No	First session	
Three	Penny	f	13 & 16	Australian	Yes, in Australia	All	
Three	Neve	f	13 & 16	American	Yes, in Japan	All	Went on school exchange to Japan for year 12
Four	Lance	m	12 & 16	Pākehā	No	All	Rugby player
Four	Nagesh	m	12 & 16	Indian New Zealander	No	First session	Cited school commitments for withdrawal
Four	Stephen	m	12 & 16	Pākehā	Unknown	No show	
Four	Allen	m	12 & 16	Māori	No	First session	
Four	Luke	m	12 & 16	Pākehā	No	All	Football/ Soccer player
Five	Scarlet	f	10 & 14	Pākehā	No	All	
Five	Saffron	f	13 & 17	Pākehā	Yes, single-sex	All	
Five	Marc	m	13 & 17	Pākehā	No	First two sessions	Had tonsillitis for last session
Five	Eva	f	13 & 17	Samoan New Zealander	No	First two sessions	
Five	Esme	f	13 & 16	Pākehā	No	All	

## The focus group sessions: Practice and power

The focus group sessions took place in the meeting room in the library, and, when this room was unavailable, in a small office in the administration wing of the school. To help focus the group I gave each participant a questionnaire about his/her dress style and the media texts s/he engages with. After a brief discussion about myself, and the importance of confidentiality, I began the discussion, using prompt-images in the second half of the session (see appendix no. three). These images were chosen from advertisements and fashion editorials in print magazines (and one book). They feature subjects who represent a range of gendered positions, from culturally exalted (such as the muscular man and the thin, busty woman) to culturally denigrated (such as men wearing 'women's' clothing and masculine-looking

women). I asked the participants, 'what do you think of this image?', or 'what thoughts come to your mind when you see this image?' rather than specific questions about each image. The prompt-images aided lively conversation about norms of gender and sexuality and about dress and identity. They usefully facilitated the discussion of gender and sexuality centred on the students' views of the images rather than my own discursive framing of sex and gender.

I used several techniques to attempt to limit the power differential between myself and the participants during focus groups. I tried to remove myself from a 'teacher' role by asserting that I was not assessing the participants, or reporting back to teachers and caregivers, and that there were no right or wrong answers. I encouraged participants to voice their thoughts, and stressed that because there were no 'right' answers to the questions, all ideas were welcome, and disagreement encouraged. I used language that mirrored the participants'. I ensured that I did not use jargon or terms that it was likely participants would not understand. I urged students to let me know if they were unsure of anything I had said. Additionally, I tried to walk the line between facilitating and engaging in the conversation, using my participation to tease out the conversation and to insert counter-views or ask about a different way of seeing that topic. I placed myself always as not-knowing, as wondering, rather than presenting my opinion as 'right'. This active facilitation helped to establish rapport with the students and to decrease the formality of the situation, which meant that the session was an active conversation rather than a rigid back-and-forth process with me asking questions and the students answering them. I ensured that the questions I asked were as open and assumption-free as possible in order not to close off any possible answers. Further, instead of leading the discussion in the order of the questions on my interview schedule, I chopped and changed the order of the discussion topics to suit the flow of the conversation. I grasped hold of topics raised in the conversation that were not on my question guide, and further explored these. Each time I left my question guide my position as conversation arbitrator was decentred and the power imbalance between myself and the participants lessened. Additionally, I based the questions for the second and third meeting of each focus group on what participants had said in the first focus group round, so the research was shaped largely by their ideas. Finally, I stressed my availability outside of the focus group setting, asserting that students could email me any time if they had questions, additional information or ideas, concerns, or wanted to make a time to talk.

While the influence of a researcher on participants cannot be removed, I further attempted to limit my influence on the students through dressing in what I considered a nondescript manner. The researcher's identity, that is, her class, gender, sexuality, race, education, and age, will affect the information that participants impart (Gray 2003, Madriz 2000, Hermes 1995). Because dress is a primary communicator of identity I attempted to limit the production of my identity through choosing to wear items that did not highlight my preferences at the time.<sup>16</sup> I wore clothes that did not emphasize the media I engage with (particularly my musical taste), my political beliefs, my sexuality, or my class status. My clothes were not obviously branded, and did not feature writing or images. I ensured that my dress did not look too professional or business-like, often wearing the style of jeans popular with high school and university students at the time and a plain jersey (sweater). Although every dress item can be read in multiple ways and send multiple messages about the wearer, I attempted to ensure that these messages were as broad as possible. I wished to limit the disclosure of my interests through my dress in case any of the students felt alienated by these interests, or as though they could not present their opinion for fear of offending my personal taste. For instance, I often wear t-shirts that feature references to hip-hop culture. Many of the students stated in the focus groups that they did not like hip-hop style dress, othering subjects who dress in such a style. While my wearing of hip-hop inspired t-shirts does not entirely constitute the 'gangsta' style that the students disliked, it does nonetheless reference the music associated with this gangsta style. If I had dressed in a manner that produced me to be a hip-hop fan, the students may not have been as vocal about their dislike for the gangsta hip-hop dress style.

In addition, I attempted to limit my influence over the participants' contributions by leaving the instructions for the creation of the scrapbooks as open as possible, asserting that the participants could write what they wanted about their dress, as long as they included some images of themselves with descriptions of the clothes they were wearing. In hindsight, my instructions were too broad. It would have been

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<sup>16</sup> I do not wish here to imply that I believe that dress merely illustrates a preexisting identity. Indeed, identity is produced through interaction with people and text and thus is never already determined, it is always in flux. In the focus groups sessions my identity production was restricted due to my wish to limit the influence I may have on the participants. Further, I understand that the use of my personal 'voice' in this thesis implies that my identity is stable, that my voice reveals the 'truth' of my identity. This voice is the temporary made permanent only by its form in print, not because it is unchanging. Writing at a different time, this voice would have been different. Like the students, my identity is produced through discourses available to myself and to others at the time of production.

better to give more detailed instructions, with some suggestions of what the students could write about. I avoided this however, as I wanted to see what the students would write about of their own accord. I had hoped that they would write about what was important to them. Further, I wished to give the students agency to set their own agenda for the scrapbook. As well as this, I was attempting to make the task least like assessed schoolwork as possible by limiting the compulsory criteria. Because students already have work to do after school however, and because the instructions were so broad, students did the minimum work required to complete the task, with most scrapbooks containing just photographs with descriptions of the clothes in the images. Over half the participants did not hand in a scrapbook at all. There was no incentive for the students to submit a scrapbook as the students were not gaining any material or academic reward for their participation. Perhaps if I had had some form of remuneration for each student who handed in a scrapbook, more participants would have submitted one and the books themselves may have been more detailed. As described earlier, however, I decided against providing remuneration due to its possible impact on the power relations between myself and the participants and what the students may state or produce. Because much of the information provided in the scrapbooks simply described where the dress-items the student was wearing in each picture came from, rather than why they were wearing them, they were not as beneficial for my analysis as I had hoped they would be. I already had information about where participants got their clothes from the focus group transcripts. Due to this lack of additional information, I did not utilise the scrapbooks in my analysis.

The power differential between myself and the participants could only be *limited*, not erased. Reading the transcripts, it is clear that I am the one in the room with the most power. I had a research agenda to get through, and even though I ensured that this agenda was not met through a rigid question order, and that there was room to explore related topics in the focus groups, I had to ensure that the agenda was covered in the allotted time. Because of this, at times I had to stop discussions that may have illustrated some useful points in order to get through my interview schedule. It was hard to balance how much time was sufficient to allow a topic to be explored before moving on to the next. For some focus groups this balance was fairly easy to achieve, by moving on when the discussion tailed. For other groups, particularly Group Two, each topic could have been discussed for longer, so once every group member had had an opportunity to speak to that discussion point, I needed to choose whether to further develop that discussion, or to move on.

Moving on was at times difficult, and I found myself frequently wishing for that constantly scarce resource – more time. Determining the topics to discuss in the second and third focus group sessions also involved the exercise of power, for although most of the discussion points were participant-led, I still chose which of the many points from the previous session to focus on, thereby relegating some discussion topics participants raised as less relevant and less ‘important’ than others.

While it was clear that the balance of power lay with me, the researcher-facilitator, the participants at times swung this balance of power towards themselves. As a Foucauldian (1976) perspective on power suggests, power is not top-down, but productive, creating multiple points of resistance. Having students not show up reminded me of this multi-directional power relationship. There was no attendance achievement to be met, no assessment credits, no binding pull for the students to attend the sessions. As well as this, once the students were present they could refuse to answer questions. I found that at times, some of the participants were unwilling to engage with my questions, particularly those that required them to think critically about their everyday practices. “I don’t know” was a stock answer, which impelled me to ask the question in another manner, exploring the topic from different angles to prompt conversation. Withholding contributions was another means the participants used to exercise power. One student, for instance, hardly participated in a session until I allowed him to go smoke a cigarette (the one act he wished to do in his lunch break). The young men of Group Four also resisted my position as dominant by commenting on my appearance (asserting I should continue to ensure I remove my facial hair, and also pointing out that they considered my footwear choice to be odd), and by talking over me on several occasions. As Valerie Walkerdine asserts, relations of power are “constantly shifting” (1990:3), ensuring that the experience of power is not stable. These instances were occurrences where the power relationship underpinning researcher and researched was destabilized.

The assumption of heterosexuality was another way that the power balance shifted to the side of the focus group participants. Focus Group One notwithstanding, heterosexual desire was assumed to be the norm, and the notion that the participants shaped their desire and their practices around the opposite sex was taken to be unproblematic. When I queried, for example, whether a participant of Focus Group Five, who “prizes” herself on not dressing for boys, was making this statement based on her desire to attract boys, she, and the other participants

present, were shocked at this question, and jumped to assert their heterosexuality as though being queer was something to be avoided. I used this opportunity to produce myself as queer to this group and explained that I asked such a question because I had not wished to make assumptions about the students' sexuality. Focus Group Four were particularly homophobic, positioning homosexuality and appearances associated with homosexuals negatively. While these participants were mirroring the assumptions made throughout Aotearoa/New Zealand, as a queer-identified woman it was hard nonetheless to be confronted with these assumptions as I facilitated the focus groups.

The discomfort that I felt with these assumptions illustrates that there is no neutral way of observing. My sexuality, race, class, gender, education, and past experiences colour what I see. Further, the interpretation of what I perceive is influenced by my experiences, and the discourses available to me to make sense of these experiences. While the students may have exerted power over me in the focus group sessions, power was firmly in my hands in the interpretation of the data formulated through the focus groups. Interpretation involves using collected information to form or to illustrate theories. By positioning information in relation to one theory, or a body of theories, and not others, I present a partial view of that information and close off other possible explanations of the data. Poststructuralist education theorist James Scheurich argues that research and interpretation is a colonizing process. For Scheurich, research takes the unknown, or in his terms, "the Other", and organizes this unknown, re-forming it and categorizing it. In doing so research turns the unknown into the 'known' or what Scheurich terms "the Same" (1996:54). This act of turning Other into the Same is an act of imperialism, of transforming a form into 'knowledge' for the academy. I am translating young people's language and views into language and structure appropriate for the Western academy, presenting their views through my eyes, at my benefit rather than theirs. Research necessitates the act of translation and interpretation, however. What must be emphasized is the partial and imperializing nature of interpretation, and the many possibilities for other interpretations.

This emphasis involves being reflexive about interpretation and willing to question interpretations. I structured the focus groups around this need to question, using the final round of focus group sessions to explore my interpretations with the students. During these focus groups I explained my interpretations of the statements the students had made and the positions they held, asking for feedback. While there

were a few instances where my interpretation was not quite right, or where I required more information, on the whole the students found my interpretations to be accurate readings of their positions. This affirms that that my process of checking for understanding as each focus group session unfolded worked well, resulting in a good grasp of the students' views.

The necessity of reflexivity was particularly apparent to me when I realized that my original readings of the transcripts were heavily influenced by my academic training. Used to certain phrases being shorthand for specific ways of seeing, I pounced at the participants' references to identity-traits as residing "deep down" and "inside" the subject, interpreting the students as positioning identity as biological. In the final focus group round, however, I asked students to expand on what they believe to make up identity, and found that – contrary to my original reading – most of them positioned identity as based on practice and experience rather than founded in genes and blood. The students' notions of identity, then, are much more complex than I first interpreted them to be. Such differences between my initial analysis of the students' views on identity and my analysis after the final round of focus groups demonstrate the usefulness of questioning interpretations and of exploring them with participants. Without this exploration, I would not have been party to additional information that produced a more complex view of the students' understanding of identity, which utilises both surface and depth identity models.

This raises the question of what a researcher is to do if she interprets a phenomenon differently to the way participants conceive it. How can she examine these differences without positing her way of seeing as superior to the participants' and the participants as misguided or dupes? If the students had seen biology as the basis for identity, how would I have described this in such a way that did not mark this seeing as unfounded or as outdated? The poststructural foregrounding of discourse is one way that multiple viewpoints can be put forward as valid, as discourses create multiple, conflicting, positions.

## **Transcript Analysis**

After each focus group round I transcribed, in full, each focus group session. During the transcription process I paid careful attention to pauses, laughter, nervous



sounds, and 'joining words' such as 'like' and 'you know'. It was important to me that my transcription was as accurate as possible. This meant listening to conversations repeatedly, checking several times to ensure my transcripts matched what was said. This repeated listening enabled me to get 'close' to each focus group session, becoming familiar with the content of each group interview.

Following the transcription of all of the interviews conducted during the first round of research, I carefully re-read each transcription, looking for key themes, concerns, and repetitions. These primarily revolved around authenticity, individuality, sex differentiation, attractiveness, and style change. These themes became the basis of the questions for the second round of focus groups.

After I had transcribed the second round of focus groups, I repeatedly combed through the transcripts from both the first and second sets of focus group sessions, undertaking a thematic discourse analysis. To aid my exploration of each theme, I made a list of key themes and created a document that contained these themes as section headings. These headings included 'authenticity', 'individuality', 'sluts/skanks', 'clones/sheep', 'tryhards', 'comfort', 'media', 'nature/nurture debate', 'buying clothes', 'masculinity', 'femininity', 'homosexuality', 'reasons given for dress choices', 'pressure to look a certain way', 'dress at home', 'school culture', 'friendship groups', and 'Wellington'. I copied relevant parts of each transcript into the related theme-section of this document. Frequently a relevant section would be copied into several thematic sections. Each section was analysed alone and then analysed with regard to links with other sections. Individuality, for example, was flagged under the sections 'clones/sheep', 'school culture', 'Wellington', 'authenticity', 'comfort' and 'friendship groups'.

Following Barbara Hudson's conceptualisation of discourse as "not just a unity of themes, or a grouping of objects of knowledge, a professional terminology, or a set of concepts; but an interrelationship of themes, statements, forms of knowledge, and (very importantly) positions held by individuals in relation to these" (1984:33), I analysed the transcripts in relation to the themes present, the meanings being made, the ways of seeing that were taken for granted, what was contested, the positions each participant took in relation to the meanings being produced, how these positions related to the other participants within and across each focus group, and how these positions related to dominant social discourses. In my analysis, following the advice of Richard Johnson *et al*, I aimed to understand "the author's

situated production of meaning, [and] the cultural forms (such as forms of narrative) that are used in such self-production” (2004:265). I wished to examine not just what was said and how this was framed, but also what was not said. I asked who is speaking? Who is not speaking? Who is being talked over? What are the students in each group agreeing on? What are their points of contention? What do they say about others? How do they register agreement, if at all? What are the patterns of meaning they use? What discursive structures do they draw on, such as codes of gender, ethnicity, class, *et cetera*? What texts are the participants referring to? What meanings are they making? How do these connect with discourses that currently have cultural currency? I asked the same questions of the cultural texts students had referenced, looking at how topics are framed, the dominant meanings produced in the texts, what is naturalised, what is not said, and how meanings and themes relate within and across texts. The question underpinning my analysis was, as Jonathan Potter phrases it, ‘what is made to seem “solid and unproblematic”?’ (2000:131 in Gray 2002:166).

Underlying my analysis was not just a wish to examine the discursive frameworks the students were using in relation to identity and dress but the desire to avoid privileging one set of meanings over another. As Ann Gray asserts, discourse analysis does not highlight one voice as the sole arbitrator of truth (2002:165). I wished to undertake an analysis that would not find the ‘one’ key ‘truth’ of the students’ statements, but illustrate the multiplicity of the students’ views. As educational theorist Adreanne Ormond states, “voice and silence are products of society, and therefore are neither pure, authentic, nor uncontaminated” (2004:243), thus there is no neutral ‘truth’ available to be accessed in the transcripts, but I can present the themes and frameworks present.

After analysing the themes and discursive frameworks utilised by the students I formulated some assertions regarding the way the participants conceive of identity and dress. I explored these notions with the participants in the final round of focus groups. This allowed me to check my understandings with the students and to gather more data related to these ideas. This checking process proved highly useful as it drew attention to another discourse the students were drawing on, a discourse that I have categorised as belonging to a surface model conception of identity. The primary role that this surface discourse played for the students when their conceptions on dress and identity were explored prompted me to return again to the focus group transcripts with a new lens, finding statements that supported this way

of seeing and statements that problematised it. This presence of assertions throughout the transcripts that both supported and troubled a surface model of identity formed “meaningful structures” (Hermes, 1995:27) and became a way of tying together the students’ statements in my thesis.

## **‘Truth’ and ‘validity’: Tensions in research**

My analysis of the students’ statements and positions raises the question of the construction of ‘truth’ and highlights the tensions between academic and everyday knowledge. For knowledge to gain entry into the institution of academia, it must adhere to criteria of ‘validity’, which encompass the concepts of truth and measurement. Validity is a contested term that lies at the cusp of modernity, with Enlightenment ideals of ‘progress’ and ‘proof’ resting at its back, and the possibilities of postmodernity, with its withdrawal from metanarratives and celebration of plurality, extending in front. The conceptualization of the notion of truth in different disciplines reflects this position: in the physical sciences, which are firmly rooted in modernity, the idea that there is an objective reality that can be measured continues to compel, while within cultural studies, influenced by postmodern theorists, it has become axiomatic to state that there are no objective truths. This section problematizes the notion of validity and examines how research might be evaluated without reference to a neutral and measurable ‘truth’.

The age of ‘Enlightenment’ precipitated a turning away from the use of deities to explain phenomena and the adoption of explanations based instead on the multi-disciplinary discourses and practices of ‘science’ (Daston and Gailston 2007). The popularity of ‘science’ today illustrates its continued reign. This can be seen, for instance, in the regularity with which ‘genes’ are linked to identity categories such as gender and sexuality. Science’s popularity is based in large part on the assumption that reality exists independently from human culture and is something that can be measured objectively. Science, then, purporting to accurately measure reality, sits atop the hierarchy of evidence in the West. This hegemonic status is continually re-won through the discourses of science which work to do “everything possible” to render the search for alternative meanings and interpretations “redundant” (Bauman 1997:125-6). This occurs through the demotion of meanings that do not rest on science’s foundation of objectivity to mere belief and ‘ideology’, thus positioning

ideology as an “instrument of power” (Lyotard 1984:38) while implying that science is value-free. Science, however, is not neutral (Kincaid et al 2007; Harding 2008). The separation of ‘science’ and ‘ideology’ positions these fields as binary oppositions and promotes science as valid and valuable as opposed to ideology which is associated with the subjective, with fiction, and with the field of the humanities, which are hence devalued.

Postmodernism, aided by the feminist and postcolonial turn against the colonizing imposition of the Western eyes of predominantly white, male, heterosexual, able-bodied ‘scientists’ measuring those-who-are-not-them, has signalled a widespread shift in the way that science and its goal, ‘truth’, are viewed in the humanities and social sciences. Similar to how ‘ideology’ is positioned through discourses of science, ‘truth’, in this shift, is seen as a production rather than the result of the objective measurement of reality (Lather 1993). This rests on two foundations: first, that there is no reality ‘out there’, independent of human culture, and second, that measurements are always shaped by who is doing the measuring. What is measured, how, and what the measurements are taken to mean are influenced by cultural assumptions made by the measurer. This means that all truths are discursively circumscribed, and, as education theorists Joe Kincheloe and Peter McLaren point out, all ‘facts’ are ‘ideological’ (1994:139). All seeing, then, is shaped by the past experiences, race, age, gender, sexuality, and language of the seer, and no one vision can hold the claim of being the final truth (although many try).

If truth is simply a position on reality rather than its reflection, then truth and its arbitrator ‘validity’ can be seen as part of the operation of power rather than neutral categories that seek to reveal an objective reality. Validity has as its goal the construction of knowledge as ‘true’ and ‘legitimate’ and this construction works to imbue knowledge with power. Indeed, as Foucault has successfully illustrated, knowledge is inseparable from power. Foucault asserts that ‘truth’ is “linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it” (1984:133). Power requires its foundations and workings to be seen as ‘true’ for its efficient operation, and what is deemed ‘true’ often helps this operation. Validity, then, rather than being a handmaiden of objectivity, helps to construct some knowledges as ‘true’ and powerful, and relegate other knowledges to the weak positions of the ‘illegitimate’ and the ‘ideological’.

Each truth regime has its own formulation of legitimacy and its own ways of measuring validity, including some knowledge within its borders and excluding other viewpoints. Scheurich points out that even those regimes that question the notion of absolute truth are still based on positing some research as better than others, using measures such as 'trustworthiness' rather than 'truth' to define legitimate knowledge (1996:56). Scheurich's position does not seek to remove validity from the examination of the creation of knowledge altogether. Rather, Scheurich asserts that new ways of imagining validity must be constructed which unmask the dualism of accepted versus unaccepted knowledges and support polyphony, multiplicity, and difference (1996:56). I consider two models that are particularly suitable for measuring the validity of knowledge construction that are not exclusionary: Jean-François Lyotard's (1979) notion of paralogy, and Donna Haraway's (1988) conception of "situated knowledge".

Lyotard puts forward paralogy, the constant questioning of the rules of knowledge, as the goal of research. Rather than ordering ways of seeing along a hierarchy of validity, the notion of paralogy encourages a Foucauldian move to be undertaken, that of asking not "what is the truth?", but "what are the conditions that allow for that discourse to be seen as truthful?" For Lyotard, knowledge that wishes to avoid the totalizing metanarratives of modernity should emphasise dissension and contradiction rather than close off complexity for the sake of consensus. The emphasis on contradiction and dissent helps to position the knowledge as unstable, as one of many truth positions. This destabilizes borders that work to posit some knowledges as legitimate and others as not, and undermines the position of the research as the final 'truth'. As Lyotard asserts, the end point of conversation should be paralogy, rather than consensus ([1979] 1984:65-6). Such a conversation is one in which the rules that construct what is deemed 'knowledge' are questioned and new points of view are constantly introduced. Poststructuralist feminist theorist Patti Lather also posits Lyotardian paralogism as a frame for validation and argues that work can be seen to be 'valid' if it fosters heterogeneity and refuses closure (1993:679). Such refusal lets contradictions remain in tension and demonstrates that the position put forward by the work is one of many possible positions. My research works to create paralogy, drawing attention to the complexities and contradictions of the participants, foregrounding the multiplicity of truths and disrupting the notion that the arguments that are put forward are the only 'right' ones. Paralogic work embodies the turn against the modern positioning of 'truth' as absolute.

Like the conception of paralogy put forward by Lyotard, Haraway's (1988) model of "situated knowledge" highlights the constructed and multifaceted nature of truth. Haraway conceives of truth as differing according to the seer's position, with as many truths as seers. Within this model, partiality rather than universality is the condition of being heard to make "rational knowledge claims" (1988:589). Haraway critiques researchers who hide behind the "godtrick" of objectivity, denying their position as subjects whose way of seeing is affected by their embodied position in the world. Haraway suggests that instead of measuring phenomena from the all-seeing "view from nowhere" position of 'Enlightenment' science – an eye that purports to see the 'truth' – researchers should "insist on the embodied nature of all vision" (1988:581). Such insistence involves the researcher situating herself in the research context and examining her location in the social positions of class, gender, race, age, sexuality and so on. The use of Haraway's model involves the recognition that there are as many different truths as there are social positions. For Haraway the goal of research, then, is to produce knowledge that locates its situatedness and provides a positioned viewpoint on the phenomenon researched. Together the many positioned knowledges work to illustrate the complexity of the phenomenon while presenting different ways of seeing. As Haraway asserts, the "only way" to find a larger vision is to "be somewhere in particular" (1988:590). It is the construction of that somewhere – and the acknowledgement of multiple views from elsewhere – that works to validate the research.

Analysing how one's own life position affects one's research is a crucial part of self-reflexivity and thus of presenting work that is 'valid'. This, however, is not without its problems. Lather warns that to attempt to deconstruct one's own work is to "risk buying into the faith in the powers of critical reflection that places emancipatory efforts in such a contradictory position with the poststructuralist foregrounding of the limits of consciousness" (1993:685). That is, the notion of reflexivity, advocated by Haraway as an important tool in the undermining of the modern concept of objective truth, can imply that the conscious can be fully known, which is itself a modernist idea based on the existence of a stable 'truth' of a person. While self-reflexivity is useful, and, indeed, necessary for my work to be considered valid, I need to be aware of my own shortcomings, and, as Lather points out, realize that much remains opaque to me (1993:685).

One well-known example of research that is reflexive is Valerie Walkerdine's essay "Video Replay: Families, Film and Fantasy" (1985), which examines the act of a

family watching the film *Rocky* (Avildsen, 1976). In “Video Replay” Walkerdine uses her own thoughts and fantasies about the film-watching family to explore her analysis, working through how her position as a working-class girl who has become a middle-class woman has affected her interpretation. Walkerdine asserts that she is “no more, no different” from the subjects of her research and thus her own thoughts and practices are useful research tools (1997:73). Although Walkerdine has been accused of being narcissistic in her reflexivity (see Walkerdine 1997:57-8), she demonstrates the value of treating the self-as-researcher as a subject for analysis. I have followed Walkerdine’s example, drawing on my experiences as a student at City High, for instance, to inform my analysis. Indeed, as Haraway and Walkerdine would argue, I cannot separate my experiences from my analysis, which is why reflexivity is so important.

Thus, following Haraway and Walkerdine, I now attempt to situate myself. Such an attempt raises the question: how much do I tell you about myself? I will try to paint a picture that is relevant. I currently identify as a ‘young’ ‘white’ ‘queer’ ‘Māori’ ‘vegan’ ‘anarcha-feminist’ ‘woman’ from a ‘working-class’ background. Like Walkerdine, I have moved into the middle-class through my university education (from an early age I learned that education was the key to such movement). I am often reminded of this mobility, unable to share many childhood commonalities with my current friends and unable to share adult commonalities with my childhood friends and some of my family. I am from Aotearoa/New Zealand, a country colonised by the British in the nineteenth century, leaving a disenfranchised indigenous population. I spent a significant portion of my childhood living in Australia, a country that also has a horrific history of colonialism. I witnessed racism from a young age and was acutely aware of my white privilege. Appearance has been a prominent theme in my life. As well as being aware of the privilege granted by my white skin, I had a sense early on of the power of appearance, specifically the advantage of having an appearance that others find favourable. I am an identical twin, used to being examined closely by others who comment on the likeness between myself and my twin sister. As children we were often given treats from shop-owners and stopped in the street by strangers wanting to look more closely at us. Cycling through five primary schools, we did not have trouble making friends, with our identicalness granting us the attention of curious peers. This awareness of appearance was heightened at Intermediate (a school which most students in Aotearoa/New Zealand attend for years seven and eight, usually aged 11 to 13) when my twin and I were no longer ‘cute’, and our family could not afford to buy the labelled clothes that were necessary to be popular.

My twin and I worked hard delivering newspapers to save money to buy fashionable clothes. I have a salient memory of only being able to afford to buy one labelled t-shirt between us and rushing to swap the t-shirt in our school breaks so that we could each wear it in our physical education classes, which were a chance to wear status-granting non-uniformed items. The entwinement of dress with status impacted me profoundly at this time, and I find myself today shuddering at the brands I coveted, and at how desperately I wanted to have the 'right' clothes and to fit in.

An introduction to the world of the 'alternative' was a liberation from the pressure of meeting the ideals and expectations of my 'mainstream' peers, and the legacy of this introduction to subcultures continues, with my political beliefs and sexuality positioning me outside of hegemonic culture today. I am committed to exploring different ways of seeing the world and my experiences with class, race, sexuality, and appearance (which have always been gendered) have cultivated an interest in power, in the construction of identity, and in the workings of capitalism. I am aware that this attempt at situating myself is an act of identity production, and that it is a partial representation of myself, a self that is always in flux. I hope, nonetheless, that it provides the reader with some understanding of how my background affects my position as a researcher. Throughout my thesis, where I think it will aid my own analysis, and the reader's analysis of my analysis, I have included information about myself, and my relation to the participants and/or the phenomenon being described.

Another means of validating research in a manner that highlights heterogeneity and does not construct work as exclusively true is through the practice of what education theorist Michelle Fine (1994) terms "working the hyphen". This usefully combines reflexivity with the principles of paralogy. Fine argues that the researcher and the participants are defined in relation to each other, and that researchers must 'work' the hyphen at the meeting of the Self and the Other (Self-Other). This involves the researcher making explicit the relationship between herself and the participants and how this affects the way she sees herself and the participants. Othering relies on the positioning of a group as homogenous (1994:74). For Fine, research should act to reduce othering by highlighting the heterogeneity of the participants and considering the overlaps, contradictions and conflicts within and between the self and the Other (1994:79). Such considerations use reflexivity to produce paralogy. I believe that being reflexive can open insights into identity production, and point to notions that need to be further troubled. For instance, upon analysing the transcripts, I was pleased that my knowledge of identity as a discursive production meant that I could



'see through' the participants' belief in the inviolability of the individual, and acknowledge its place of privilege as a modern construct. Yet I was also nostalgic for a time when I believed that individuals were inherently 'good' or 'bad'. This wistfulness for a simpler time, when I 'knew less', patronised the participants and positioned me in a favourable manner, as seeing 'beyond' the discourse of individualism which the participants are embroiled in. Such positioning simplified the way the participants view identity and worked to uphold the binary between myself and them, Self and Other. Questioning my viewpoint, it is clear, however, that I am just as influenced by discourse as the participants. Thus the participants are not less 'knowledgeable' than me; rather, we have access to different discourses. Further, I do not have access to one set of discourses, and the young people another; we have access to many shared discourses that subject each of us in fragmented, contradictory, and heterogeneous ways. This reflexivity reduced the gap between the participants and myself, positioning us as similarly affected by discourses. Additionally, it helped to facilitate my realisation that the students do not view identity solely within a modernist framework of individual authenticity, but also conceive it as something malleable. This realisation further reduced the space between Self and Other through no longer positioning the students as being at odds with the poststructuralist viewpoint I subscribe to.

In my proposal to the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, I also homogenised and othered the participants, asserting that a benefit the students would receive from my research was that of being taken seriously by an adult researcher. This implies that all young people are equally not taken seriously, and that the young people involved in my study would all benefit from being heard. This is not the case. The majority of young people are read in a serious manner: their moves are measured and surveyed by teachers, caregivers, doctors, and other professionals. These surveyors place young people into normative categories that construct some young people as deviant and as requiring help to 'correct' this deviance. Other major surveyors of young people are marketers, who employ knowledge of the practices of young people to both sell products to them, and to idealise youthfulness, using this idealisation to sell products to those nostalgic for their youth. I am conscious that my work, while not attempting to idealise, sell to, or pathologise young people, is contributing to the body of work that measures young people with adult eyes. Within this body of work – conducted by academics as well

as corporate researchers – adults other young people, positioning them as ‘not-like’ adults, and constructing adults as effective measurers of young people.<sup>17</sup>

In conceiving the production of my work as positive for young people through taking them seriously, I contributed to the binary positioning of adults as superior to young people: as though my (as superior) taking the time to listen to young people (as inferior) is doing young people a service. Thinking through this notion of ‘benefit’, it seems absurd that I originally positioned myself as benefitting young people merely through listening to them with respect. While many participants verbalized how much they enjoyed the focus group sessions, it is the participants that benefit me, as I am using the voices of the young people as the basis for this doctoral thesis, which will recompense me far beyond the rewards the students may have enjoyed from attending focus groups.

Further, positioning myself as benefitting young people through listening to them buys into the notion that young people need to be listened to by adults, as though somehow their words do not have much affect or influence unless they are translated into adult forms for adult audiences. With this position, I contributed to what feminist ethnographer Kamala Visweswaran terms the “university rescue mission of the voiceless” (1994:69). Young people, however, do not need to be ‘rescued’ and are not ‘voiceless’ – they have their own systems of communication, utilizing networking sites such as Bebo and Facebook, text messaging services, email, chat rooms, video-calling, and letters, among other forms, to communicate with each other. These communications are by young people, for young people, and the lack of translation of these voices for mass audiences does not mean that they are not meaningful. While these communications stand on their own (and should continue to), the more dialogue there is between adults and young people, the more complex the relationship will be and the less each will act as the other’s Other. Such a complex relationship cannot be achieved without a commitment to researching young people in a way that troubles rather than further constructs the Self-Other divide.

Throughout my doctorate I have worked to produce ‘good research’, which, as poststructural psychologist Jane Flax (1990:56-7) asserts, is that which makes

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<sup>17</sup> Young people rarely get to measure adults and have these measurements affect the lives of adults.

reality “appear even more unstable, complex and disorderly than it does now” (Hermes and Ang 1991:323). I have reflected critically on my work and my relationships with the participants and the texts I engage with. I have highlighted contradictions and instabilities, and stressed the situatedness and limits of my knowledge. I have tried to avoid constructing the participants as homogenous, and have foregrounded the differences between participants, as it is these differences that show the complexities of the everyday. I have attempted to view dress and identity from many angles, exploring the discourses that compete and overlap to produce this ever-changing pattern, while acknowledging that I can never see the pieces that make up my view outside of their angled formation.

## Chapter Three: Identity and Dress

“Things are entirely what they appear to be and *behind them*... there is nothing.” (Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*)

“Well there’s yeah obviously a distinct line between the way you look and the person you are. Except sometimes they merge.” (Henrietta, Focus Group One)

“What does my dress say about me?” is a common question that I receive when I tell people that I am researching the relationship between dress and identity. They turn their bodies expectantly towards me, adjusting their collars or their stockings, awaiting my appraisal. I try to explain that my research does not involve the decoding of individual outfits, but inevitably they push the question, wanting to know my thoughts on their dress choices. And why would they not ask, when dress is a medium of communication that lends itself to multiple and wide-ranging interpretations, at times vastly different from the wearer’s intention? Dress acts as a vestimentary envelope that wraps the self, making it culturally visible. Whether accurate or not, dress provides clues about the dresser. Do these clues reflect or constitute the dresser? The students at City High suggest that dress does both. This position, at times confusing, can be understood through the conception of two discursive models at work: a surface model of identity and a depth model of identity. Both these models are dominant in the contemporary West. This chapter examines the students’ utilizations of the surface and depth identity models, considering the contradictions produced through this dual use. This manner of characterizing the students’ conceptions of the relationship between dress and identity, weaving their views in and out of these contradictory discursive models, brings to mind Jean-Paul Sartre’s character Antoine Roquentin who, attempting to write a history of the Marquis Rollebon, asserts, “[t]hese are reasonable hypotheses which take the facts into account: but I am only too well aware that they come from me, that they are simply a way of unifying my own knowledge.... the facts adapt themselves at a pinch to the order I wish to give them...” ([1938] 2010:26). At times the students’ statements could be positioned within either the depth or surface model. I have attempted to make sense of the students’ positions as best as I can, revelling in –

and being frustrated by – the contradictory and fragmented nature of the students' views.

This chapter is divided into several sections. The first section explores the students' employment of discourses associated with a surface model of identity. It examines the students' notion that identity is based on experiences and choices rather than biological characteristics. It considers the requirement that others locate a person in a subject position she identifies with in order for her to securely occupy that position, exploring the contradiction inherent in the agency implied by surface models of malleable identity and the reliance of identity on the views of others. It also examines how the students use dress to help them embody new subject positions. It argues that the students conflate appearance with identity. The second section contends that this conflation is based not on the understanding of appearance as constituting identity, but on the depth model positioning of appearance as reflecting identity. It analyses the students' emphasis on dress as an expression of the self. It also explores their conception of comfort, which illustrates the importance the students place on dress reflecting the self. It notes the disjuncture, however, between this emphasis on reflection and the students' use of dress to help them occupy positions they do not yet inhabit. The penultimate section explores how the students reconcile some of the contradictions raised by their dual positioning of identity and dress. It discusses the role the construction of linear narratives plays in justifying the changes in subject positions the students occupy and the dress practices they undertake. Much of this reconciliation works to emphasize a depth position of identity. Finally, this chapter examines the tension between the students' statements and their descriptions of their practices. While the students assert that there is more to identity than surface appearance, they act as though there is not. Thus philosophically the students subscribe – for the most part – to a depth model of identity, but operationally they follow a surface model.

## **A note on language**

The students do not conceptualise identity explicitly in terms of class, gender, sexuality, able-bodiedness, race, or ethnicity, which are the identity categories commonly engaged by cultural theorists. Rather than indicating that these are not important elements of identity for the students, this suggests a disjuncture in the

discourses students and academics have access to. These identity-axes are commonly used in academic contexts, but are rarely used in New Zealand secondary schools, or in the popular media. The exception is age, which the students explicitly reference. Age is a common way of measuring people in the West, one the students have engaged with from early childhood. Clear references to age aside, I have translated the participants' statements in terms of the above identity-axes where relevant. I have taken the students' use of the terms 'background' and 'experiences', as well as their concern with taste, to encompass class, age and race, for example. This, however, is my academy-based categorization, and it is conceivable that the students were not referring to these identity-axes when they used these terms.

A further disjuncture between the theoretical concepts I draw on and the students' articulation of themselves regards the use of the terms 'identity' and 'personality'. When describing what I have termed 'identity', the students regularly used the term 'personality'. Because of this, throughout this thesis I use the terms 'identity' and 'personality' interchangeably. The language differences between myself and the students illustrate a problem in research conducted between academics and those that do not have the same theoretical background. Cultural theorist Cindy Patton argues that by corresponding vernacular terms with institutional ones, these terms undergo "enforced equivalency", which drains the complexity of meaning from the vernacular term, and robs it of its temporal specificity (1991:41). While theoretical terms are a useful way to insert examples from ethnographic research back into the field of academia and illustrate the links between theory and the lives of participants, in equating the vernacular with the theoretical I acknowledge that I change the meaning of the original term and how it is understood.

### **“You dress how you want to be.” Appearing as being: The students and the surface model**

Against the backdrop of the imposing concrete odes to neobrutalism that house City High, the students are a colourful calligraphy that dances across the grey walls. Their outfits pop with every shade imaginable. Stripes, spots, flowers, peace signs, zebra and leopard prints collide together in a frenzy of pattern. Tassels swing, hair flicks, caps snap, and jewellery clatters as the students greet each other with hugs,

high fives, and squeals. In this dramatic environment of expression, friendships, feuds, responsibilities, and pressure, how do the students conceive of identity?

The students understand identity to be constituted through thoughts, behaviour, the decisions the subject makes and the things that she enjoys, which are based on the way she sees the world. This seeing is influenced by the subject's background, her experiences, and the people around her. Françoise's assertion (3, 3:20) that identity is made up of "your own opinions and your own thoughts. Like what you think about the world – what you think about anything, will make up who you are" is echoed throughout the focus groups. Saffron also sums up the students' position on identity, stating that identity is "your memories and your life and where you've been and your education and like who you've been influenced by and who you've been around and what you've been exposed to" (5, 3:13).<sup>18</sup> These factors work together to produce the subject's identity: her views, her preferences, her decisions, which are illustrated through her behaviour and the choices she makes.

The students conceive of this self as the result of learned behaviour rather than the result of inherited biological characteristics. Utilizing discourses of depth and surface, the students position identity in the framework of 'nature' versus 'nurture', favouring the latter as an explanation for identity. This is particularly apparent when the participants reference gender identity. As Hannah asserts, "from a toddler age you see the people around you and like growing up and stuff you just grow up and you've learned that girls wear these type of clothes and males wear these type of clothes" (2, 1:16). Statements similar to Hannah's are repeated throughout the focus groups. The students' conception that the world around them affects who they are is further supported by their view that the media is a key influence in identity construction. Marc, for instance, states, "you just watch cartoon shows and shows like that and stuff and you see what they wear and it's kinda like that's right, that must be correct because they're doing it..." (5, 2:29). The students assert that if current social customs and norms were different then their personalities would be different. This positions their personalities as anchored to social norms rather than biological characteristics, which resonates with a surface model of identity.

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<sup>18</sup> NB The students' quotations are referenced in relation to the focus group session in which the statement occurred. The first number of the three-part reference refers to the focus group, the second number refers to the focus group session, and the third number illustrates the page number of the transcript for that particular focus group session. Thus (5, 3:13) refers to a statement made by a member of Group Five, in the third focus group session, found on page 13 of the transcript.

While biological positions are missing from the majority of the students' conceptions of identity, they are present in Group Four, who argue about whether identity is innate or not. Discussing differences between men and women, Luke asserts that ideas of how men and women should be come from the media. Other members of the group disagree, however. Nagesh asserts that these ideas come "from a million years ago... from our instincts" (4, 1:22). Allen agrees, stating that these ideas are "automatic". Supporting his argument, Luke reiterates that

even before we know about it like we watch TV, like before we can consciously think and so we're seeing these things and it's like first impressions and we're gonna like continue with that... what was shown of us, like the first thing we saw. If we constantly see women on TV with like plucked eyebrows, make-up and stuff, then we think that's the normal. And if we see men with like facial hair and stuff we think that's the normal, before we can consciously think about it like that (*ibid*).

Allen argues, however, "I just reckon we know, like it's built into our brains" and Nagesh adds, "it's like you know how to breathe when you're born, it's like the same sort of thing" (*ibid*). Allen and Nagesh's challenge to Luke's point of view demonstrates that the students do not have a uniform conception of identity, and is presented here in accordance with my commitment to fostering paralogy. Although the majority of the students can be positioned as conceiving identity in a manner that endorses a surface model point of view, as illustrated here, a small number present strong beliefs in a biological-dependent depth model of identity.

Emphasizing their position that identity is based on worldviews, most of the students assert that their selves change as they have new experiences, learn new things, and meet new people. Breaking with Nagesh and Allen's focus on instinct, this implies that identity is not fixed; it changes as the subject moves through her daily life. In a cultural studies' framing, this assertion positions subjectivity as a process that is never complete. There are multiple, conflicting subject positions for subjects to take up or reject as they are addressed by different discourses, move through different locales and engage with different people. Identity, then, involves ongoing and temporary attachments to subject positions (Hall 2000:19). These are not attachments that move the subject in a linear fashion closer to her 'true' identity. This is conceptualized by Charlotte, who asserts, "I think that there's not really like a 'you' that [you spend] like your entire life searching for and then one day you get it and then that's you for the rest of your life. Like it's not some kind of like lifetime achievement thing, it's more (another member of the focus group adds: "like 'yay I



found me!”) heh, yeah it’s like you’re- I was me when I was like a Jay Jays [clothing store] kind of girl, but then now I’m me as well...” (2, 4:24). Although the subject positions they occupy have changed, Charlotte, and the majority of the other students, do not consider their previous selves to be false and their newer selves to more accurately reflect their ‘true’ selves. As Charlotte’s assertion conveys, many of the students disagree with the depth model delineation of identity as something inherent within the subject, to be uncovered throughout her lifetime.

Supporting the students’ framing of identity as learned and changeable is the frequent positioning of identity in this manner in the mainstream media. One such example of this can be found in the popular magazine *Mindfood*. In an article entitled “Do you know the real you?” the author, Cynthia Hickman, asserts that “our identity is not something innate. We actually construct it. We build it up over the years” (2010:105). This self-invention narrative is found throughout the popular media, which proffers many versions of the rags-to-riches myth, including, for example, the story of Leighton Meester, star of *Gossip Girl* (a television programme popular with the students), who was born while her mother was imprisoned for drug smuggling and is now a successful actor. These narratives construct independence, wealth, career success, and committed romantic relationships as goals that can – and should – be achieved through such invention.

These goals correspond with discourses of neoliberalism, which contribute to the positioning of identity as the product of individual choice. A dominant ideology in Aotearoa/New Zealand (and in much of the West), neoliberalism reconstructs the modern emphasis on self-invention in a postmodern political-economic paradigm where the self is called upon to be individualist, reliant on herself rather than the state for support (Bourdieu 1998; McRobbie 2009; Shah 2010). Neoliberalism is the political climate that supports and facilitates the emergence of the postmodern consumer culture articulated by Jameson (1984) and Bauman (1997). Neoliberalism, Māori political theorist Maria Bargh asserts, is “those practices and policies which seek to extend the market mechanism into areas of the community previously organized and governed in other ways” (2007:1).<sup>19</sup> It is characterized by a ‘hands-

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<sup>19</sup> This definition is supported by McRobbie who asserts that the ‘hands off’ governance of neoliberalism is achieved through marketisation, whereby the potential of subjects “comes to be attached to a new form of consumer citizenship” (2011:181-2). McRobbie states that the governing strategy of marketisation is “designed to give a bigger place to consumer culture in the politics of everyday life, [and]... offload[s] the work of government onto a market that is given more leeway to shape the needs of the population” (*ibid.*).

off' approach to Government and the market place, which manifests in the privatization of health, education, and utility services; the reduction of the welfare state; less public expenditure; tax cuts; and the deregulation of the market (Martinez and Garcia 1998). The individual is favoured at the expense of collectives such as unions (Bourdieu 1998). The undermining of collective structures may occur in law, such as NZ's Employment Contracts Act 1991, which reduced the legislative backing of unions and introduced performance-based pay for individuals, and in trade agreements that undermine the nation-state, such as the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership signed by New Zealand in 2005. Collectivity is replaced by individual "competition, ambition, meritocracy, self-help" (McRobbie 2011:181).<sup>20</sup> This places emphasis on the "entrepreneurial self" (Lewis, Larner and Le Heron 2008:42), who shapes her identity through independence and competition.<sup>21</sup>

The students' conception of identity as not fixed, but constituted through experiences, preferences and decisions is aligned with the neoliberal promise of individual choice (Bauman 1997; McRobbie 2009), which promotes the notion that one can be whoever one chooses to be. For the students, identity is constituted through the choices the subject makes regarding where and with who she spends her time, what she wears, what she listens to, reads, and watches, who she chooses to pursue, and what she chooses to do. Within the neoliberal paradigm, both identity and success are based on selecting the 'right' choices from a seemingly endless parade. In this paradigm, racial, sexual, gendered, and class inequalities can be

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<sup>20</sup> Lisa Duggan, like many cultural theorists, points out that institutional structures such as Government and the economy impact subjection and identity positions. Duggan asserts, *The economy cannot be transparently abstracted from the state or the family, from practices of racial apartheid, gender segmentation, or sexual regulation.... in practice contemporary neoliberal policies have been implemented in and through culture and politics, reinforcing or contesting relations of class, race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, or nationality* (2003:xiv).

<sup>21</sup> This entrepreneurial self is facilitated by the emphasis on the individual and improvement within the education system. Traditional educational structures have been undermined by neoliberal policies which have resulted in government funding cuts to education, as well as the ever-present spectre of outcome-based funding which stresses individual achievement. Funding cuts in Aotearoa/New Zealand have meant an increase in commercial 'relationships' between schools and corporations, and that schools must attract families who can afford to pay the supposed 'donation' school fee that schools have come to rely on for their operations. This need to attract fee-paying families again means an emphasis on the results students can achieve at that school. Further, schools have increasingly poured resources into vocational subjects such as 'food technology', 'design', 'mechanics' and 'carpentry', and emphasize that from a young age students should have a career plan, preparing themselves for advancement and individual success. That is, schools have adopted what Mac an Gahill terms an "entrepreneurial curriculum" (1994:40. See also Robertson and Dale 2002; Codd 2005).

overcome through individual action, based on ambition and hard work (McRobbie 2009, 2011). What one is born with does not have to be permanent. This viewpoint is echoed by the students who agree that subjects can choose who they “want to be”. This positioning of identity as based on continual choices fits well with cultural theorist Stuart Sim’s definition of the postmodern subject as “a fragmented being who has no essential core of identity”, who “is to be regarded as a process in a continual state of dissolution rather than a fixed identity or self that endures unchanged over time” (2001:367). Given the prominence of neoliberal discourses within the contemporary West, it is no surprise that the students position themselves as malleable and aim for self-sufficiency.

### ***Watching myself being watched: Identity and others***

Discourses such as those that constitute the field of neoliberalism construct subject positions for the students to take up or reject. As Hall asserts, identities are the result of the subject being articulated or “chained” into the flow of discourse (2000:19). This ‘chaining’ involves both the subscription of the subject to the meanings produced by the discourses she is anchored to, and her identification with a subject position, or a series of subject positions, created through this discourse. Further, this identification entails the subject seeing herself in that position from another’s point of view. As Louis Althusser has theorized, subjectification is realized through interpellation ([1969] 1992:60-1). While Althusser formulated his theory of interpellation in relation to ideological positions, it can usefully be reworked in relation to subject positions, which are themselves ideological. Subjectification occurs through the hailing of a subject in a particular subject position by another subject. When the subject answers this hailing, she is interpellated into this subject position, cementing her occupation of the position. Others, then, are crucial to the construction of identity.

The significance of others in the construction of a subject’s identity is illustrated by the difficulty the students have in separating their visions of themselves from their perceptions of how others see them. When asked to describe themselves, many of the students describe how they believe they are seen by other subjects. The most prominent example of this is Neve, who quite literally describes herself through the lens of others, visualizing herself as a character in a film watched by an audience, of which she is also a member (3, 3:14). Utilizing psychoanalytic theory, Silverman

argues that this visioning of the self from the viewpoint of others is a requirement of subjectivity (1994:187). In other words, the gaze of others is necessary for the subject to exist. In the process of subjectification, the subject “comes to regard itself from a vantage point external to the self” (*ibid*). This begins when the child enters the mirror stage. The gaze of others, then, is one that permeates the students’ discourse, conveying the constant (and historical) positioning of the self through others’ eyes that subjectivity requires.

The important role others have in securing the occupation of a subject position is illustrated in the students’ assertions that they are “more themselves” in public than at home. Rather than viewing home as a site where the ‘real’ self can safely be revealed, the majority of the students posit their public self as more ‘true’ and as preferable to the self at home. When I query why there is a discrepancy between the way the students look at home and the way they look in public, the students assert that this is due to the effort dressing involves, rather than an ability to be ‘more’ themselves at home. Henrietta asserts, for instance, that “the look of [Henrietta] takes a while to achieve”, so when she does not have to leave the house she will not dress in the manner she would if she were to be seen in public. On these days, Henrietta will avoid looking in the mirror so she does not have to encounter a self that looks different from usual (1, 3:17). The members of Group Two echo Group One’s emphasis on effort.<sup>22</sup> Josef states, “when I’m at home and if I was wearing like fat-pants, that’s not me, that’s not me at all. But because it’s just comfortable and (Hannah: it’s the lazy me) it’s like ohh well nobody’s, nobody’s here really, like it doesn’t matter...” (2, 4:20). Without the gaze of peers, the students do not deem it necessary to represent themselves in their home sphere. Saffron in Group Five provides another angle, asserting that she is “more” herself outside of the house because she is “more confident” and can “talk more easily and stuff” (5, 3:20). Arguably, Saffron is ‘more confident’ and ‘more herself’ when others are around because they can provide affirmation of who she is. As political philosopher Ferrara states, “it is not self-knowledge that constitutes the self and enables it to relate to the world but, on the contrary, it is the self’s capacity to enter relations of recognition with others... that enables the self to achieve self-knowledge” (2009:30). In line with this assertion, the students rely on these relations of recognition to see, and thus be, themselves.

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<sup>22</sup> This is in contrast with the students’ equation of effort with inauthenticity, detailed in the next chapter.

The notion that the students feel “more themselves” in public rather than at home differs from the ‘common sense’ view that home is where the person can be his ‘true’ self. Inherent in the division of society into public and private spheres through capitalist modernization is the positioning of the home – the key site of the private sphere – as the place where subjects can find respite from the pressures of the world of work, where the subject may speak frankly without consequence, where he can relax and ‘be himself’ without having to filter himself to meet the expectations of superiors. This divide, however, was established when men dominated the public sphere; thus, the private sphere was defined in relation to male experiences. Many women and children did not have the privilege of being able to ‘let it all go’ in the ‘comfort of their own home’ as they were still required to fulfil the desires and expectations of the husband and father. While in the contemporary West this has changed somewhat, with women and young people taking on responsibilities in the public sphere, and the male-female power relationship in the home ostensibly having become more equal, most young people continue to have less autonomy at home as they have outside of the familial house. Thus students may feel restricted by the patterns of familial relations at home, and consequently the outside world may provide them with more freedom to explore and articulate their identities. Further, the students already know how they are positioned by those they live with (and arguably these positions are somewhat stable); therefore, their opinions are not as sought out as peers’ opinions in the students’ self-definitions.

The prominence of social networking internet sites, such as Facebook, My Space, and Bebo, may also account for the students’ prioritizing of the self that is lived in front of others. These sites are based on personalized profiles built by each account holder and shared with other account holders. These profiles include photos of the account holder, videos, the listing of music, films, television, and books that the person enjoys, as well as comments that others (‘friends’) leave on the page. The students frequently referred to these sites, commenting on their own and others’ profiles. The popularity of such social networking sites serves to further naturalise the role of others in identity construction, and contributes to the view that spaces where peers cannot see the subject are not as crucial to the construction of the self; hence, the subject can appear in these spaces – such as the home – in a manner that she would not desire others to see, that she deems ‘less’ herself rather than her ‘true’ self.

The students' emphasis on the social sphere can be framed in relation to their conception of identity as constituted through continuous choices that are based on the preferences, background, and world view of the subject. In order for the subject's identity to be validated, her choices must be witnessed by others, which is why the public realm is so important. When the students are their 'lazy' selves, not making an effort at home, they do not conceive of their appearance and behaviour in relation to choices; rather, they conceive of them in relation to convenience or ease. They reach for the dress items closest at hand when dressing, or the pants that allow for the greatest amount of physical comfort, for instance, rather than 'choosing' an outfit. That there is a disjuncture in the way the students speak of their dress in public and private illustrates that the students make decisions with the gaze of others in mind. Arguably they do not position their 'lazy' home-based dress as a choice because their dress choices are made for others to see, and there is no audience for their home-based decisions.

The link between the students' identities and the perceptions of others is further highlighted by the students' assertions that caring about what others think of the self is universal. The students argue that although people may purport to not be interested in the opinions of others, the person who does not care what other people think of them does not exist. Josef asserts that "nobody makes themselves ugly, nobody wants to be ugly, so people do, people actually, like you can ask them and they'll be like 'no I don't care what I look like', but they do. So many people care what they look like. And even if it's just a little bit, like you want to make good impressions on people but it's kind of subconsciously as well..." (2, 4:8). That people want to be seen positively yet be positioned as 'not caring' highlights a current tension within identity construction: identity is shaped by what others think, yet it is deemed weak to worry about what others think, so much so that people deny that they care. In part, this is because within neoliberal culture the subject should be self-sufficient, and the requirement for others to position her in a subject position reveals this self-sufficiency as an impossibility. For the students, not caring, however, is a myth. Saffron summarizes this view, stating, "like I know some people pretend they don't care just so people will be like 'ohh they don't care' but they secretly, you secretly know they took ages planning their outfit, getting ready this morning and stuff, you know. And they like try and have this 'I don't care' attitude, 'I'm really like in touch with myself, rah-di-rah-di-dah', and you're like 'no you're not. You're a faker'"

(5, 3:9).<sup>23</sup> Underlying the belief that “everyone cares” is the notion that how the subject sees herself is inseparable from how she believes others to see her.

Not all opinions are important to the student-participants however. It is the views of peers that matter, particularly those peers the wearer believes herself to be similar to, or desires to be like. These subjects are likely to share a worldview that is similar to the participant’s view; therefore, their opinions are more meaningful. They have knowledge of the subject position that the subject is attempting to occupy, and can thus judge the subject accordingly. Penny asserts, for instance, that she is not worried about the opinions of younger students at City High (who she does not consider herself to share a subject position with), but she is concerned to be seen positively by the young people that frequent a popular bar in the city with a reputation for being alternative and ‘cool’ (3, 3:12-3). The importance of the views of those that have similar interests, and/or belong to a similar social group (or a group one desires to belong to) over the opinions of those who do not share similar identities to the wearer is also highlighted by Eva’s assertion that she dresses ‘for’ women rather than men. Women’s opinions matter more to Eva because she sees herself as sharing an understanding of style with women but not men. Eva states, “cos I’m like [to young men] you dress completely different to how I dress, you know, like you’re a boy, you don’t really, you don’t know how to dress just like I do” (5, 2:7). The female members of Group Five agree with Eva’s assertions. Being seen positively by those the subject deems similar to herself validates the subject’s occupation of the subject position she believes herself to inhabit, securing her categorical identity. Group One’s delight at the negative reactions their dress elicits from “old ladies” further illustrates the importance of the age and status of the judge(s) (1, 3:2). For this group, the disapproval of these women is a positive sign, for such offence confirms their style as ‘alternative’ and ‘youthful’, which are positions the members of this group believe themselves to occupy.

The views of others are crucial because, the students assert, they become how others see them. In other words, they accept the interpellations of select others. Saffron states that “people perceive you a certain way and so you kinda generally change your personality to that way, if you get what I mean, cos people think you’re

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<sup>23</sup> The positioning in this quote of ‘being in touch’ with the self as oppositional to caring about how others judge the self’s appearance supports the notion that caring about appearance occurs at the expense of the cultivation of the mind. This contributes to the trivialization of dress I outlined in the introductory chapter.

like that you kind of mold to that” (5, 3:2). Saffron explains how she has been positioned as artistic by her family, and has consequently taken up that subject position (5, 3:12). Many of the students state that they have accepted the positions in which their friends and family place them. Josef further contributes to this view, asserting, “I think that when you accept something about yourself um that in a negative way like someone says you’re- calls you... bitchy, you’re like ‘ohh yeah I am bitchy’ and you convince yourself you’re bitchy, then you become it” (2, 4:27). The students’ identities, then, develop in relation to how others position them, becoming inseparable from these positions. The notion that the way others position them affects who they are further illustrates that, for the students, identity is not based on characteristics inherent within a subject but on how others see the subject and how she reacts (accepts, rejects or negotiates) to these views.

### ***Agency: Surface model limits***

The surface model implies that subjects can choose their identities, constructing their selves through the choices they make. The requirement for others to recognise the subject’s occupation of a particular subject position in order for her to securely occupy it produces tension between the wide range of choices available to the subject and the limited range of positions others will hail the subject into, that is, conceive the subject as occupying. This tension means that the students must work to influence how others view them in order to occupy the subject positions they desire.

The students know how they wish to be seen and make decisions about how to present themselves based on this desire. They are aware that the choices they make regarding what to wear in public affect how they are positioned by others, and thus attempt to control this positioning through their dress. This reflexivity regarding dress is demonstrated in Charlotte’s policy to not wear something if it could influence others to position her in a subject position that she does not identify as occupying. Charlotte states, “if I like something and it will look good on me but I thought if I like walked through the school in it other people might be going ‘ohh weirdo. She must be emo’ or ‘she must be scene’ or something, then I wouldn’t want that like stereotype put on me because that’s not what I think I am” (2, 4:7). In another example, Lance asserts that even if he desired to wear a “tall tee” (an oversized t-shirt), he would avoid wearing this style of shirt due to its association with street



gangstas (4, 2:4). This reflexivity requires an understanding of the connotations dress items may have. As Marion Young asserts, media texts imbue dress styles with narratives, so attached to clothes are associations with popular tropes such as success, romance, or countercultural subversion (1994:200). Charlotte, Lance, and the other students thus make decisions regarding what to wear based on dress items' popular associations. Esme describes this process, asserting, "I just think that when I look in the mirror you kind of, you're just kind of, like you see yourself one way and then you kind of have an idea of how you think other people might see you. And so that can kind of change what you wear and stuff I guess. And I think you kind of do it subconsciously" (5, 3:11). While Esme may posit this reflexivity as subconscious, that the participants describe it so readily implies otherwise. Consciously or not, it is clear that the students use dress as a tool to shape the views of others.

Returning to the split in appearance between home and public, the students' desire to influence how others position them can be seen in the distinctions between how they dress when there are significant others around and how they dress when they are alone, or with family. Melo states, "I wouldn't come to school in clothes that didn't bloody fit but if I'm walking round at home where I don't care like, I wear like the most ridiculous things, like I'm like sitting on the couch and I'm like just looking like this baggy shirt and like boxers are like over there and I'm just like 'ugh'" (2, 3:22). Group Five list dress items they would not wear to school. These include, trackpants, rain parkas, "fat man pants", the same outfit they wore the day before, and, for some of the young women in the group, no makeup (5, 1:5). The reliance of identity on interpellation means that managing others' impressions is of utmost importance to the subject positions a person can occupy. Dress, then, plays an important role in the construction and occupation of subject positions as it is through dress that the students can exercise agency regarding how they are positioned by others.

The students read others' reactions to their appearances and base (some of) their future dress choices on these interpretations. They assert that when they receive signals that others are seeing them in the manner they wish to be seen (which, in an Althusserian rendering of identity means that they fully occupy that position), they continue with the appearance and/or behaviour that has procured this signal. Penny states, for instance, "if someone's like 'oh I love that top' you wear the top more often". Neve agrees, asserting "yeah exactly, [if complimented] however you're

wearing your hair that day, so like you start wearing your hair that way” (3, 3:15). Thus others’ views have a lasting impact on the dress decisions of the students, reassuring the students that if they replicate their past appearances others will again position them in the subject position they occupied previously.

A portion of the work the students undertake to influence how others position them involves attempting to be seen in a position that they do not yet view themselves as occupying. Because the positions that subjects can occupy are those that others hail them into, the students can use their appearance to help them to embody new subject positions. This occurs through the students inviting others to see them in a certain manner, then consciously behaving in a manner fitting for this position until they confidently occupy it. This further illustrates the students’ understanding of identity as constituted through behaviour rather than an inalienable internal essence. Saffron, for example states that “if you dress all like punk and badass and stuff people will be like ‘oh my god they’re so badass!’ and then [you]’ll be like ‘yeah I am” (5, 3:2). Penny details how she has recently been through a “phase” of consciously dressing in more ‘mature’ manner. Penny states this involved wearing “high-waisted skirts and little heels and like blouses... because I felt like I was like I don’t know being more like ladylike, and becoming more mature... Something I wanted to be, I guess” (3, 3:10). Penny dressed more maturely in order to signal maturity to others and thus become more mature. Affirming that clothing items have narratives attached, the dress items that indicate maturity for Penny are those she associates with women who are in the workforce. Through emulating the dress of such women Penny showcases her readiness to finish school and enter the professional world. In another example, Lance asserts that if he wished to feel more powerful and intelligent, he would wear a suit because when he sees a man wearing a suit, he thinks that this subject is “really up there and intelligent”, so he himself would “feel pretty up there” if he dressed similarly (4, 3:18). These signals, then, are based on visions of what the wearer of these items is like, visions that the students then apply to themselves. By presenting themselves in a certain manner and then fulfilling the expectations others attach to these presentations, subjects come to occupy subject positions they do not yet occupy, internalizing the visions they have of those that already occupy the subject positions they desire – the ‘mature young woman’ and the ‘intelligent, successful young man’.

The desire to occupy new subject positions raises the questions “what are the positions the students desire to inhabit? What are the values they wish to uphold

and the goals they wish to fulfil?” While these were not questions that featured in my interview schedule, the students’ communicated their desires throughout the focus groups. These were to be liked, to be different from others, to be wealthy, to have a ‘good’ career, a committed romantic partner, and a family. As stated earlier, these values are aligned with the neoliberal project. The students’ measures of success correspond with these neoliberal values. They work to construct identities around the future fulfilment of these goals. This offers support for Budgeon’s assertion that “[r]egimes of subjectification work to give meaning to what we think we should be – we then become that kind of subject” (2003:75). Many of the students have set themselves academic goals, for instance, that will help them to attain ‘good’ careers and appearance goals that will aid them in attaining a romantic partner.

The students assert that they look to others for inspiration and information regarding who they could be. Many of the participants follow the example of subjects that inhabit the subject positions they desire to occupy. These subjects act as role models, illustrating how those that occupy the desirable position look and behave. Saffron states, “I think when you admire something or someone you kind of want to be, like if you admire their attributes and what they’ve done and stuff you kind of want to be like them as much as you can” (5, 3:14). Melo points out how she has taken on characteristics of those that she thought were “cool” (2, 4:14). A more specific and dress-related example is given by Scarlet, who describes how an older student influenced her current style, asserting, “I sort of like you know looked up to his you know same fashion sense cos he was even more insane than me. And I sort of took that on board and now I dress pretty insane, like more than I did before” (5, 3:14). Representations also offer examples of how to occupy certain subject positions. Some of the students make decisions based on being more like a figure in the media. Melo, for instance, asserts that she wishes to emulate a fictional character from a popular anime show (2, 2:9). The social realm, then, offers exemplars of numerous subjects, whether encountered ‘in person’ or in a mediated fashion, that portray the types of behaviour and style associated with differing subject positions, behaviour which the subject can then assume.

While the subject is seemingly able to make choices about the position she occupies, these choices are always reliant on the recognition of others. Thus the assumption of different subject positions – both those the subject wishes to embody and those the subject views herself as already occupying – is tempered by the subject positions that others will recognize the subject to occupy. As Budgeon

(2003:9) points out, “the authority of the self exercised autonomously in constructing a biography is always held in tension with external sources of authority that operate to limit or shape that autonomy”, through defining the limits of who that person can be. These limits exist because subject positions are associated with identity-axes such as race, ethnicity, sexuality, class, gender, and sex. If the subject does not fulfil the identity-axes associated with that position, she is unlikely to be consistently seen by others to occupy the desired position.

Further, the subject has no guarantee that others will interpret her choices in the manner she has intended. There is always the chance that her behaviour will be misread. There can be large disparities between the way a subject works to appear to others and the way others position her. The students often ridicule peers who believe themselves to or wish to occupy a subject position that the other students – the focus group participants included – do not locate them in. Such subjects are referred to as ‘fake’ or ‘tryhard’ (see Chapter Four). If the subject wishes to be positioned in a certain subject position, she must present herself to others according to the conventions of this subject position in a way that convinces them that she occupies this position. If she cannot do this, she will be frequently mispositioned by others.

Choices are also limited by what is available within the marketplace as a choice. The range of education institutions available to enrol in, the medical technology one has access to, the dress items one can buy, the ipod colours available for the consumer to advertise her preferences, for instance, are limited by the profit motive and the whims of the market. Further, market-based choices are restricted by access to money. The seemingly endless array of choices that the market proposes to deliver is limited to the choices the subject can afford. Additionally, the opportunities and choices a subject has increase according to the amount of dominant identity positions he fulfils. That is, the choices available to subjects are limited by the race, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, class, education, and location of the chooser. The neoliberal notion of free and unrestricted choice, and success as based merely on making the right decisions, then, is an illusion that masks structural inequalities that ensure that some people have access to far fewer choices than others. Thus while the students and neoliberal discourse imply that the self is malleable, who the self can be shaped into is limited.

Contemporary social norms also restrict the range of subject positions available for persons to take up. The students make their choices in relation to how these choices may be interpreted by others. This constant eye on others' interpretations involves a consideration of social norms as these shape the interpretations that others will make. Choices must be negotiated according to the relationship those others the subject is trying to win the approval of have with these social norms. The students of Group One, for instance, base many of their choices on flouting norms as the subject positions they wish to securely occupy are carved out through opposition to the 'mainstream'. The students delight in the protestations of their appearance by the elderly and by 'mainstream' heterosexual peers and their positioning as kindred by subjects who occupy the 'off-scene' subject position.<sup>24</sup> Thus the students' choices are limited to those that will allow them to be accepted by desirable others. The students of Group One must signal their 'alternative' identities by choosing to dress and behave in an 'alternative' manner. For subjects that wish to occupy subject positions that are more likely to be positioned positively by the majority of society, behaviour that is deemed extreme, 'weird', or unacceptable in mass culture is not a viable choice.

When a subject's choices are read as she intends them, confidence ensues. Confidence comes from being positioned in a subject position that one desires to be positioned in. It involves feeling in control of how others are positioning the self. Usually this position is one which construes the subject favourably. Aladdin states, for example, that "when you feel pretty you feel confident" and Hannah agrees that "well if I'm confident I feel pretty" (2, 1:14). In opposition to being confident, the students feel self-conscious when they believe others are not positioning them in a manner that they want to be seen (usually they believe they are being positioned in a negative manner). This destabilizes the subject position they believe themselves to be in. Neve, for instance, describes how she often feels confident in her outfit as she leaves the house, but once out she loses confidence and feels self-conscious if she believes that her dress is not soliciting the judgments she wishes to receive. For Neve this happens regularly as she often wants to defy conventions, yet she finds herself repeatedly questioning her choice to resist norms, wishing that she had been conventional. Neve states, "when I get there, in the back of my mind I'm like 'eeh

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<sup>24</sup> See the next chapter for an explanation of the 'scene' subculture. The students of Group One dress in items that are similar to those worn by 'scene' subjects and listen to music associated with 'scene', but distance themselves from what they consider to be a 'poseur' mentality within the subculture.

eeh', you know, 'aw I wish I'd worn this instead, I wish I hadn't gone with the casual look' or you know. Just like the little voice" (3, 3:12-3). This results in Neve feeling insecure about her subject position and experiencing a loss of agency as her earlier vision of the way her appearance will be interpreted by others has been unsuccessful and she is unable to influence the way others see her in the manner she desires.

Hannah further demonstrates the unease produced by being labelled in a manner that is incongruent with the way she wishes to be seen, asserting that at her previous high school, "I got called emo because I didn't listen to hip-hop. Basically all I listen to is basically like Nirvana and Jimi Hendrix and Led Zeppelin and stuff and they called me they called me emo for that! (laughs). It really pissed me off!... I just found that really unfair" (2, 1:8). This indignation illustrates the crudeness of the act of othering. Hannah's peers made her 'Other', placing her into the category that acts in opposition to hip-hop for them, 'emo'. This positioning, however, is inaccurate and shows a lack of understanding of the multiple sub-genres of rock. Hannah's indignation further demonstrates the importance of others' views. The lack of peers at her previous high school that viewed Hannah in a manner consistent with her own self-characterisation meant that Hannah felt isolated. This was a significant factor in her decision to change schools. Hannah is much happier at City High, having found a group of peers who view her in a similar manner to how she sees herself, which thus provides her with a secure subject position.

Neve's and Hannah's examples suggest that confidence is contextual. Many of the participants assert that they feel confident wearing some dress items in certain situations and not others. This suggests that the students are reflexive about the different expectations that are attached to different environments and activities, giving school, home, work, and nightclubs as examples of contexts that involve differing codes of dress. The students customise their dress choices in these contexts to facilitate them being positioned by others in the subject positions they wish to occupy in these contexts. When this does not take place, the feeling of self-consciousness occurs. Neve, once again, describes feeling underdressed to attend an art gallery opening, believing that the other attendees would not take her for the mature art-loving young woman that she sees herself, and wants to be seen as, but rather position her as a scruffy school girl (3, 3:16-7). This meant that Neve did not feel confident at this event, as she was not positioned as she wished to be seen,

and thus she did not stably occupy the subject position in which she desired to be located.

The students, however, have agency over how they react to the way others (mis)position them. As stated above, the students choose to ignore the views of certain others, or celebrate others' misreadings of them. Certainly Hannah did not accept her labelling as 'emo' by the young women at her former school and become 'emo'. Thus the occupation of a subject position is not a matter of simply slotting into the position others place a person in; it involves some negotiation. Josef asserts that out of the many possible interpellations, "you become what you want yourself to be really" (2, 4:27). Once again, though, this is limited by the subject positions available to be taken-up or rejected, which are the subject positions that others see as viable. Further, if a subject is interpellated a certain way from an early age, it may be hard to separate this from the way he sees himself and thus a choice cannot be said to have been made. Saffron, for instance, cannot conceive of herself outside of the subject position of 'artist'. She has been positioned this way, and accepted this position, for the majority of her life. If Saffron had been positioned in another manner by her family, perhaps she would occupy this other position today. While the students do have some agency over the subject positions they occupy, then, this agency is limited by the positions others will position the subject as occupying, the frequency and length of time others position a subject a certain way, and the value that the subject (and others) attaches to varying label(er)s.

### ***Conflation: Appearing as being***

Because the students use dress to shape how others think of them, the students believe that dress shows who the wearer wants to be. The students' positioning of the seen self as the 'real' self can be understood to support a surface model conception of identity which conceives of identity as constituted through appearance. They make judgments of the wearer based on this accord. Neve states, for example, that dress expresses how the wearer "want[s] to appear to someone... what kind of person they want to put out to the world" (3, 3:4). Illustrating this belief, the students make decisions about who they wish to pursue a friendship with based on the dress decisions the wearer has made. Melo asserts, for instance, that if young women are scantily-clad, she desires to "*not* get to know them" (2, 1:10). Just as the students make decisions regarding possible friends, they are aware that

others make similar decisions. They are conscious, then, of presenting their selves to others. Bach, for example, asserts that if he left the house without his hair straightened – an important signifier of his identity as a fan of ‘emo-core’ music – and met someone similar to him, it is likely that this person would not be as friendly towards him as he may be if Bach’s hair was straightened, as, Bach states, “they’d think that was normal for me” (1, 3:18). Additionally, Saffron attributes her friendship with Eva to the clothes that she was wearing when they met. Saffron asserts, “if I had dressed another weird way or if I was wearing like really odd clothes, I can’t remember what I was wearing- but she, they wouldn’t have been friends with me I’m pretty sure” (5, 2:17-8). Saffron further connects dress with the judgments of possible companions through an anecdote about losing the respect of an acquaintance due to the misrepresentation of herself. Saffron relays how this young woman saw her at a popular café wearing an oversized hooded sweatshirt, something which she would never usually wear as it does not fit with the way she sees herself and wants others to see her. Saffron asserts that prior to this sighting, this acquaintance “looked up” to her, whereas Saffron believes that because of her appearance at the café, the young woman no longer admires her or wishes to be her friend (5, 3:17-9).

These examples imply that the students (and others) take dress to stand in for the personality of the wearer. The students conceive of the wearer’s presentation as who the wearer is. This belief is encompassed in Kandy’s assertion – which stresses the role of others in identity – that “when you dress... you see yourself and you think about yourself, and that’s how you see yourself. You assume that’s how other people see you, cos you’ve dressed like that to like influence other people so that that’s how they’d see you as well” (1, 3:12). The students purport to know, then, the wearer’s identity based on his dress choices. They thus judge others, and position others as making judgments about themselves, based on what they are wearing.

At the heart of these judgments is the assumption that what appears, is. According to Goffman, this assumption is one of the foundations of stratified Western society, which is “organized on the principle that... an individual who implicitly or explicitly signifies that he has certain social characteristics ought in fact to be what he claims he is” (1969:24). These signals advise how this individual is to be treated by others (*ibid*). The students’ readiness to make friends (or not) with others based on appearance suggests that, for them, how someone looks is how they are and thus the basis for how they should be treated. Because the students cultivate their



appearances based on how they want others to see them, and thus to be, they assume that others do too. The students of Group Five, for example, agree with Scarlet that people “don’t have to ask you ‘ohh who are you?’ and everything” because they can “pick it up off your clothing” (5, 2:18). Thus ‘who you are’ is how you are dressed; appearing is conflated with being, the seen self with the self.

## **Dress “definitely reflects” who you are. Being as appearing: Challenging the surface model**

The students’ conflation of appearing with being can be framed through the concept of self as masquerade. This has a close connection with appearance, and thus with dress. Masquerade is often referred to in studies of fashion (see the work of Efrat Tseëlon (1992, 1995), Llewellyn Negrin (2008), Catherine Constable (2000), Joanne Finkelstein (1996), Pamela Church Gibson (2000), and Noel McLaughlin (2000), for instance). For these theorists, the self as masquerade is a self that has no interior represented by the exterior; rather, the exterior constitutes the interior. That is, there is nothing behind the appearance. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1997:88) asserts that in postmodernity, identities “can be adopted and discarded like a change of costume”. In relation to masquerade, this statement could be repositioned as “identities can be adopted and discarded *with* a change of costume”. Identity, then, is reduced to appearances in this formulation. Church Gibson asserts, for example, that fashion is “a storehouse of identity-kits, of surface parts which, assembled, determine the ‘interior essence’ which is subsequently taken to determine the assemblage itself” (2000:355). Thus the self changes with a change in the style. Such a self, as Negrin argues, is “constantly mutating in accordance with whatever guise one adopts” (2008:24). As this ‘guise’ constitutes rather than reflects identity, there is no ‘true’ identity as there is no performance that is more authentic or ‘sincere’ than others because there is no self prior to the performance (Tseëlon 1995:40-1, Negrin, 2008:24, Constable 2000:198). While the students do indeed conflate appearing with being, and do subscribe to many surface model positionings of identity, further exploration finds that the students equally conceive of dress as a reflection of a self that already exists. This section examines the ways in which the students’ framing of identity can be positioned within a depth model, illustrating that while one could align the students’ use of dress with masquerade, the students’ viewpoints are more complex than the surface model suggests.

The students' understanding of dress as reflecting rather than constituting identity is apparent in the way they position choice as a reflection of identity. Choice itself, then, is conditioned – the self determines the range of choices to choose from. This contradicts the students' framing of choice as constituting identity I detailed earlier. The contradiction illustrates the students' utilization of both surface and depth discourses of identity. In this depth model framing, the students position the choices individuals make as indicative of their worldview and opinions, and thus of their personality. In this formulation, there is a chooser or agent that preexists her choices rather than is formed through them. Dress is seen as highly demonstrative of personality, as the students view subjects as having access to a wide range of dress items to choose from. Indeed, the students at City High have more choice than many young people at secondary school regarding school-dress as they are not restricted by a uniform. Further, as inexpensive second-hand clothes are popular among much of the student population, lack of money is not deemed a significant factor in the amount of choice the students have. Penny summarises the connection between dress and identity made by the student participants when she asserts that dress "definitely reflects on what you are like" (3, 3:2).

The students thus provide support for Budgeon's statement that "[i]n the act of confronting choice, a relation to the self is made and remade, generating particular expressions of selfhood" (2003:186). The students believe that in choosing her dress, the wearer may indicate her music taste, where she is from, some of her beliefs, whether she is neat or messy, her mood or emotional state, the media texts she is interested in, and her social group, for instance. Hannah, for example, asserts "because you do choose things yourself, which means that you choose it with your opinion in mind so you kinda dress in your own opinion" (2, 4:3). Such statements echo the findings of dress theorist Sophie Woodward, who, in her study of the "wardrobe moment", the choices that women make as they dress, found that her participants, like those in my research, perceive the dresser as "plac[ing] herself around her body, bringing attributes of her personality and aspects of herself into the surface of her outfit" (2007:72). The students' principal conception of dress, then, is that it is a continuous series of decisions that place the preferences, influences, and background of the wearer on display.

The students' belief that appearance reflects rather than constitutes identity resonates with the understanding of participants in studies conducted on identity and

dress by Crane (2000) and Pomerantz (2008). Crane held focus groups with women at universities in the United States and France based on the discussion of images from fashion editorials and advertisements in *Vogue* magazine (US edition). Crane asserts that the women in her focus groups perceived clothing selection as an expression of their identities, evaluating the images from *Vogue* in relation to whether the dress items shown would 'suit', that is, accurately reflect, them (2000:222). Like Crane, Pomerantz conducted research with young women, spending over a year at a high school in Vancouver observing and interviewing female students regarding style and identity. Similar to the students at City High, the young women in Pomerantz's study positioned appearance as important in communicating the self to others, a self based on where the subject is from, where she lives, the classes she takes at school, her extra-curricular activities and who she is friends with, as well as – rather than solely on – her dress choices.

The strength of the students' belief that dress reflects personality is made clear in their strong condemnations of those subjects who do not dress in a manner that is synchronous with their views and preferences. This is seen, as Hannah points out, as "misguiding other people... if you're not dressing [like] yourself then you're sort of giving a different impression. Because people do get impressions from what you wear and if you wear like um [clothes that don't reflect the self], you just give a different impression" (2, 4:17). This disjuncture between appearance and personality is taken seriously by the students, who expect dress to portray the personality of the wearer. As I outline below, the students judge others as though dress reflects them, thus when dress does not, it upsets the system of judgment.

The students' condemnation is particularly apparent in their protestations at those subjects who 'misguide' others by associating themselves with a media text, sports team, or subculture that they are not personally invested in. These subjects are disparaged as "fake", "clones", or "tryhards". Such scorn is apparent when Hannah, for instance, details a young woman at the school who wears a Nirvana t-shirt, ostensibly without liking the band. Melo asserts that it is such acts of inauthenticity that "are the reason Kurt Cobain [the lead singer of Nirvana] killed himself" (2, 1:6). Luke and Lance offer another example, despairing of the legions of young people who wear the Manchester United jersey without following the team's line-up or watching their games. They view these subjects as "jumping on the bandwagon", riding the wave of the team's popularity, rather than 'true' supporters who are knowledgeable of the team's players and would be fans of the team even if it was

not popular (4, 2:12). Underlying these protestations is not only the notion that dress should reflect the pre-existing 'real' preferences of the wearer, but that the approval from others that is gained from displaying certain preferences must be earned (Bourdieu 1984). The 'true' fan puts hours into watching a television series, attending concerts, or supporting a team, for example. The 'false' fan benefits from the cultural capital that is acquired through presenting allegiance to a team, show, or band, without putting in the work to earn this capital. Further, because much of the value of cultural, and subcultural, capital lies in its scarcity, the larger the following a band, show, team et cetera receives, the less valuable the capital is that is generated from an investment in this cultural product (Thornton [1995] 2005). Subjects who are 'authentic' fans must find new ways to establish their fandom as 'true' to maintain the level of cultural capital that was previously generated from their investment. The students' concern with authenticity present in their judgments of others negates the positioning of appearance as the self outlined above. If the self were simply who she appears, then the notions of accuracy, authenticity, and earned cultural capital would be redundant. Rather than being redundant, however, as the next chapter details, authenticity is one of the main criteria through which the students judge the appearance of subjects.

The ongoing assessment of the authenticity of others' appearance illustrates that the students expect that their peers share similar systems of reference to them, and that they can make some accurate assumptions about subjects based on their appearance. This expectation shows the students' commitment to the anchoring of signifiers to their signifieds. The examples by Hannah and Melo of the young woman wearing a Nirvana t-shirt without being a fan of Nirvana, and by Lance and Luke of people donning Manchester United shirts without following the team, do indeed illustrate that meaning can be leached from signifiers so they are no longer anchored to a matching signified (a phenomenon associated with postmodernity). Yet it is their outrage at this that fuels the students' dislike for the subjects that wear these dress items without an investment in their referents. Such condemnation illustrates the students' belief that signifiers *should* match their signifieds. With these denunciations the students serve to re-strengthen the ties between signifier and signified so that a band t-shirt, for example, indicates an appreciation of the band rather than an appreciation of the image on the shirt. Further, these denunciations illustrate the students' view that dress should reflect the preferences of the wearer.

The students' commitment to the attribution of stable meanings to signs suggests that the students do not occupy a wholly surface, 'postmodern' subjectivity. As Fredric Jameson (1983, 1984), Negrin (2008), Tseëlon (1995), and Jean Baudrillard (1993, 1994) assert, among others, the postmodern subject fails to make stable links between signifiers and their signifieds, so that signifiers have become free-floating and signify "nothing beyond themselves" (Negrin 2008:10). If the students did occupy postmodern subject positions, then it could be postulated that the students would fail to come up with similar meanings for dress items, or attribute dress items to the wearer's personality, as dress items would be part of the "rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers" (Jameson 1984:72) and thus disconnected from their wearers. The participants, however, continually attach meaning to certain styles and colours. Further, the majority of these meanings are consistent throughout the focus groups. This works against Negrin's assertion that bodily adornments have been "stripped of their meanings" (2008:10), for if meanings were absent then it could be expected that connotations for the same items would differ widely throughout the focus groups. The shared interpretive framework demonstrated by the focus groups enables the students to judge one another, and to have some understanding of how they each may be judged by others.

The students' emphasis on the ability to make accurate judgments of others based on their dress is further demonstrated in their belief that dress should illustrate the emotional state of the wearer. Melo, for example, describes how a friend of hers mistakenly labelled Melo and her friends as 'emo'. This friend correlated fitting into the social category of 'emo' with appearance, when being 'emo' is popularly positioned as the occupation of a negative emotional state.<sup>25</sup> Melo states that the young woman,

was like 'oh I'm gonna dye my hair black'. And we're like 'why?' and she's like 'ohh because like I want to be emo like you guys' and we're like we we're not emo [girl's name] – no. And then she's like yeah but emo boys are hot and they only like emo girls. And we're like [girl's name] but you're not *depressed*, ok. And none of us are depressed, so don't say we're emos cos we're quite happy actually (2, 3:19).

This anecdote suggests that the student participants do not reduce identity to appearance. If, as Negrin posits, "[t]here is no 'real' self that exists independently of one's outer appearance..." (2008:24), then Melo and her friends would not have

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<sup>25</sup> Luv-Emo, "What is emo?", <http://www.luv-emo.com/>, and Emo-Corner, "More about emo", <http://www.emo-corner.com/what-is-emo/>, sites accessed 10 May 2010.

been so indignant at the girl's wish to appear 'emo' without embodying the emotional state required to belong to this social group.

The important connection that the students make between appearance and the display of emotions can further be seen in the differentiation they construct between the categories 'emo' and 'scene'. The label 'emo' refers to a person who embodies the emotional state of sadness or depression; listens to 'emo-core' music (a style that has its roots in the genre of 'hardcore'); often engages in a creative outlet such as poetry, drawing, or posting to online forums; and uses dress to signal his sadness and his membership in the subculture.<sup>26</sup> The label 'scene' is used to differentiate those subjects who dress in an 'emo' fashion (usually skinny black or brightly coloured jeans, a band t-shirt, converse or vans shoes, and an asymmetrical haircut with a side-swept fringe dyed dark with coloured highlights) and listen to 'emo-core' music from those who possess the 'depressed' emotional state required to be designated 'emo'. The term 'scene', then, is used to refer to someone who appears 'emo' but is not in an extended state of melancholy. This label implies that clothes do not 'make' the wearer – black jeans and dyed hair do not constitute depression. Acting as a popular exception to the notion that dress illustrates emotions, the 'scene kid' must be differentiated from the emo subject. The students frequently make these distinctions, stressing the importance of the emotional state of the student in these categorizations. That another label has developed solely to encompass emotional difference between the two groups demonstrates the centrality of emotions to identity, and the salience of the students' view that appearance should illustrate attitude rather than constitute it.

Further, the students' commitment to dress reflecting the self is apparent in the condemnations of the outfits they have worn in the past. The students view themselves as strongly invested in these previous styles when they wore them as they reflected who they were. Charlotte states, for example:

When I when I was year-five I probably thought you know like 'ohh I'm gonna wear Jay Jays forever, Jay Jays is cool. Jay Jays is gonna be cool til I'm like- til I die!... But and then I never would have, I never would have suspected that I would be like like I am now so- even though I like my style now, in a few years from now I might be looking back and going like 'loser!' (2, 4:13).

Such looking back is based on the notion that appearance is more than just an outfit; it illustrates the mind of the wearer and what influences her. Thus when Charlotte

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<sup>26</sup> Luv-Emo, "What is emo?" <http://www.luv-emo.com/>, site accessed 10 May 2010.

thinks “loser” she is referring to her personality rather than the dress items. Similarly when Henrietta (1, 2:15) asserts that she wishes to punch her year-eight self in the face because of the way she dressed, it is the conformist nature of her behaviour, her dress and preferences at that time that she is upset with rather than the style itself. Indeed, if it were just the style that the students were displeased by, they arguably would not have such strong reactions as the issue (conformity, misjudgment of a brand’s value) would disappear with the discarding of the outfit.

This condemnation of past selves reiterates that the students’ identities are not stable; they change. The students, however, frame the role of style in change as reflecting transformation rather than producing it. That is, they view personal style as emerging subsequently to the development of personality rather than prior to or simultaneously. In contrast to the positioning of identity as masquerade, style is conceived as advancing in order to match the personality of the wearer, changing as the personality of dresser changes, rather than changing the dresser. As Lance states, style change occurs because “our perception of everything around us... change[s], as you grow up. Cos you notice more as you get older”. Luke adds that “you enjoy different things when you’re older as well” (4, 3:13). These perceptions and new enjoyments are reflected by the students in their dress choices, which communicate these changes to others.

The students’ belief that dress reflects personality is encapsulated in their conception, and frequent use, of the term ‘comfort’. The students position being comfortable with a synchronicity between how they see themselves and how they present themselves. Comfort is a goal, a state the students aim to achieve and maintain. This is a similar understanding of the notion of comfort used by the participants in a study conducted by Holliday, whose research on dress choices in the English midlands found that the participants used being comfortable to refer to “the harmony of self-explanations and self-presentations – the degree of fit between one’s *explanation of/for* oneself and one’s *expression of that self*” and thus the congruence of the inside of oneself with one’s body (1999:487-8). Comfort, then, entails a match between appearance and selfhood.

Many of the students relay times when they have been uncomfortable due to the incongruence between their identities and the way they are dressed. Josef states, for instance,

I remember coming to school one day and like I didn't I didn't particularly look bad but I just remember feeling like the whole day I was like 'oh my god I don't feel myself at all', like you're so conscious – I was so conscious the whole day of not feeling myself, so I asked [friend] if I could use her checked shirt and then when I put it on then I felt more comfortable, I was like 'ok I feel better now' like, it's just, but the art- I just felt so um I don't know like the stereotype. So I didn't feel like myself, I was like 'this is not me'... 'I don't feel like myself' (2, 4:17).

Scarlet, also describes not 'feeling herself' in some clothes, particularly those dress items she wears to adhere to formal dress codes. Formal events for Scarlet mean that "I can't dress the way I do usually, so I'll have to dress in something like a dress or something, a black dress. And like I've already said, I don't suit dresses, I never wear dresses at all. So I just, I don't really feel like myself..." (5, 3:21). The negative effect the disjuncture between appearing and being has on the students suggests that they are committed to appearing corresponding with being. If the notion that behind appearance there is nothing were accurate for Scarlet, Josef, and other students, there would not be a mismatch between their selves and their appearance when they wear certain clothes, for their selves would be constituted by these items. Comfort, then, would not entail a coherence between self-presentation and self-view as the self would be made through presentation.

These anecdotes suggest that the students feel comfortable when they believe others position them in a similar way to how they position themselves. As Kandy suggested earlier, the assumption here is that others see you as you see yourself (1, 3:12). In order for this to occur, the students must present an image that is synchronous with their visions of themselves. As Saffron states, "You kind of want to show how you are on the inside by viewing you on the outside because nobody can judge you without- like nobody can like see into your soul or anything without knowing you, they have to judge you by what you look like" (5, 3:1). This involves the subject having a self-view, and possessing the cultural competencies to present this self in a manner that is consistent with her self-view. The students, then, are comfortable when they believe that others are interpreting them as they see themselves – in a manner that reflects who they 'are'. This synchronicity is key because, as I established in the previous section, the way the subject sees herself is entwined with the way others see her and thus she wants to present an image of herself to others that reflects herself.



Like choice, the students' conception of comfort straddles both depth and surface models of identity. The students' emphasize dress as a reflection of the self in their conception of comfort, and thus support a depth model position, which conceives of dress as illustrating rather than producing identity. Being comfortable, however, is based on the belief that others see the subject as she sees herself. Thus although the notion of comfort emphasizes reflection rather than constitution, its reliance on the views of others destabilizes the depth model viewpoint that it seems to promote, as it positions identity as determined through others rather than internally.

In a similar contradiction, feeling comfortable involves not worrying about others' opinions of the self. Scarlet asserts that being comfortable means "not even thinking about anybody thinking about anything else about you- so you're just sitting down in say you know a café and everything, you don't- you're not thinking at all about what other people are thinking", to which Saffron interrupts, bringing appearance to the fore, "or what you're wearing" (5, 3:18). Paradoxically, this comfort only occurs once the student has taken into consideration others' opinions and believes others will see her in the manner she sees herself. Neve also states that when she is comfortable she is "virtually mostly unaffected by other's opinions. I mean I'm always affected to some extent but what- but you know not hugely" (3, 3:19). When the students feel comfortable they can 'get on' with their lives, not worrying about their appearance. As Scarlet asserts, being comfortable means that "you just go along normally with like your everyday life" (5, 3:18). Being comfortable, then, is similar to being confident. In this rendition, however, rather than believing that others are positioning the self as one desires to be positioned, being comfortable involves the belief that others are positioning the self as one *is*. Thus comfortable subjects are at ease: secure within themselves, and secure within the subject positions they conceive themselves to occupy.

While the students' notion of comfort places emphasis on the importance of dress reflecting the wearer, they believe that dress cannot show all of a person, as it cannot display the entirety of the experiences of the wearer. Melo, for instance, states that her dress-style shows "ten percent of me" and is "a snippet of what you really are" (2, 4:9). Saffron asserts that dress is "not fully 'I'm this! This is me', you know, it's just a tiny bit of your personality..." (5, 3:25). The students' repeated assertions that behind appearances there are multiple unseen layers demonstrate that they conceive of personality as reflected through dress, but separate from it, greater than dress is able to convey. Due to this belief, the students find it

problematic when they are viewed by others solely in relation to their appearance. Neve, for example, asserts that she believes her dress defines her too much (3, 1:6); and Lance details how he believes he is unfairly seen as only interested in sports due to his penchant for wearing rugby shirts. Lance states that “there’s much more to me than just maybe a rugby game” (4, 2:27). The students position dress as continually running behind identity, always attempting to catch up with the self. The self-presentation being comfortable involves, then, can only ever approximate the self, not showcase the whole. Thus, although the students conflate appearance with identity, for them, identity cannot be reduced to appearances.

### **Reconciling change in identity: the depth model rolls in surface discourse**

If dress struggles to catch up with the self, how do the students negotiate dress’s role in constituting identity? The students must work to reconcile their view that identity is changeable with their commitment to authenticity and to coherent identity. This occurs through the conditions they place on changes in identity, conditions which stabilize change as a regular element of coherent identity.

The students view experimenting with different subject positions (in part through style) as key to finding those positions that most suit them. Penny asserts that “as you go through high school you like I guess hang out with different people and tend to like if you’re hanging with a certain group of people and they dress a certain way you kind of emulate them and then you’re like trying to find out if you’re part of their group or if you’re like you know a different kind...” (3, 3:14). Part of this exploration is “Finding your own style”, a goal which is achieved when, after experimentation, one discovers “what you’re comfortable in and what you like to wear and think is cool and are comfortable [in] at the same time, and that just develops into your own style” (Josef, 2, 4:4). The students deem experimentation to be necessary, conceiving it as an inherent part of the journey to figuring out both the subject positions that reflect them and their personal style, which is style that best mirrors their interests and desires. Thus this experimentation is conducted with a sense that there is a self to reflect through behaviour and style. This is a self that does not necessarily stay the same, but transforms with the changing experiences and mind of the subject. Such a sense of self to reflect further suggests that the students do

not position identity as masquerade. If, for instance, as Negrin asserts, the students believed that there is no self that exists independently of their outer appearances, and conceived the self as “an incessant changing series of masks behind which there is no fixed core or ‘essential’ identity” (2008:24), then the students would equate a change in appearance with a change in their identities rather than a desire to better reflect their identities.

The students judge change in relation to the ‘authentic’ self, the self the subject ‘should’ be working to reflect. Illustrating their commitment to the conception of identity as based on the background and experiences of the subject, this judgment is made with regard to how closely the change resonates with the subject’s background, experiences, and past behaviour. Hannah explains, for instance, how she used to be friends with a “normal” young woman at intermediate school (a separate school students attend in Aotearoa/New Zealand for years seven and eight) but that when the young woman started at City High she “changed completely”, making a decision to be “weird” and thus they are no longer friends (2, 3:18). Group Two’s assessment of this young woman as ‘fake’ shows the usefulness of the metaphor of identity as palimpsest, often engaged by poststructuralist scholars to describe identity (Davis 1997). The palimpsest is a parchment upon which previous markings are scraped off to allow new markings to be made.<sup>27</sup> This erasure is incomplete, however, since the presence of the old marks is always apparent. Although the young woman Group Two assess has boldly made new markings, subjects who have witnessed her prior markings continue to judge her in relation to them, thus these previous markings influence how the newer marks are read.

Hannah’s suggestion that this young woman “decided” who she would be illustrates her view that the young woman’s new subject position is inauthentic. This view constructs tension between the notion that subjects think about who they want to be and thus how they want to appear to others and the belief that an ‘authentic’ self is not based on a decision to be a certain way. Like the young woman Hannah describes, however, Françoise, Saffron, Neve, and Scarlet took beginning at City High as an opportunity to change their subject positions, each taking on a different style, friendship group, and a different course program than at their previous schools. One way that students reconcile changes in their subject positions is to

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<sup>27</sup> In engaging this metaphor, I do not wish to imply that the parchment was ever blank, as bodies and identities are always already placed into meaning structures.

position this change as the result of new experiences. Because the students conceive of personality as based in experience, background, and influences, the more the subject can link changes in his identity, and thus his self-presentation, with changes in these elements, the more likely the change will be deemed to be an authentic display of personality. With this emphasis on the past and the lack of conscious decisions regarding the trajectory of the self, the students' identity practices do not support cultural theorist Simon Malpas' conceptualization of the construction of postmodern identity as involving subjects "choos[ing] and purchas[ing] lifestyles" from wherever they please, "eclectically piecing together patchworks of images and signs to produce [their] identities" (2005:1). The students do not position identity as constructed from whatever the subject plucks from the realm of cultural representation; rather, the choices the subject makes are required to resonate with her background, experiences, influences, and preferences.

The use of experiences to legitimize change is underscored in the students' creation of linear narratives to explain transformations in the subject positions they occupy. These narratives are based on cause and effect, and serve to authenticate the students' movements between subject positions. The students often connect changes in their personalities and style to major events in their lives, such as moving to a new country or city, or, as mentioned above, enrolling at a different school or meeting new people. Through these narratives the different subject positions a person has occupied are linked together, acting to form a stable and consistent identity. These narratives play an important role in the achievement of a sense of a coherent and continuous 'I'. Life narratives, as Budgeon asserts, involve a "negotiation of inconsistencies, interruptions, and conflicts" in order for the linear 'I' to be accomplished, "thus preserving a particular understanding of one's self..." (2003:54). The attribution of change to experiences, then, acts to smooth out inconsistencies and changes in the occupation of subject positions by providing an origin for transformation. These narratives are not stable, however. The meanings within the narratives change according to the current subject position(s) of the teller, so that while Charlotte, for instance, may have viewed dressing in clothes from Jay Jays as desirable in year five, she filters her narrative through her current understanding of Jay Jays' clothing as unoriginal, and in time the meanings this narrative holds are likely to transform again.

Although the meanings the students attach to their narratives change with the subject positions they occupy, they continue to explain changes in subject positions

in a linear fashion, based on cause and effect. Experiences, then, are a crucial tool in the legitimization of change. The strong sense of linearity, of identity being the effect of a chain of experiences, means that the student participants do not embody postmodern subjectivity as conceptualized by Jameson (1983) and Bauman (1996). These theorists assert that the postmodern subject is 'schizophrenic'. The 'schizophrenic' in Jameson's formulation – a repositioning of Lacan's understanding of schizophrenia – fails to connect signifiers into a coherent sequence and thus experiences time, acts and events as disparate and disconnected. This conception of time and experience is echoed by Bauman, who asserts that, for the postmodern subject, time is fragmented into "self-enclosed and self-contained" episodes (1996:25). Due to this non-linear sense of time, for Jameson, the postmodern subject "does not know personal identity", as identity "depends on our sense of the persistence of the 'I' and the 'me' over time" (1983:119). As the students consistently link changes in subject positions to event chains, however, they have a stable sense of identity and do not display symptoms of Jameson's postmodern surface-based schizophrenia.

Indeed, the previous subject positions the students have occupied shape subsequent positions. Henrietta, for instance, violently disavows her self in year eight as "disgusting" as she dressed in a 'mainstream' manner, wearing similar clothes to most of her peers. Henrietta asserts that due to this she wishes to punch her year-eight self in the face (1, 2:15). Bach points out that he used to be "wemo" – one who attempts to be 'emo' yet does not achieve this – but realized, he states, "how much of a dick I looked like" (1, 2:14). While they now read those positions they used to enjoy occupying in a negative manner, like the young woman who "decided" to be "weird" that Group Two comment on, Bach's and Henrietta's previous subject positions are not erased from their current positions. Indeed, they have helped form their current subject positions – Henrietta as a non-conformist, and Bach as 'scene'. Like the marks on a palimpsest, previous subject positions have varying degrees of impact, with some obviously present and others seemingly having faded from the sphere of influence.

Due to the connection the students make between change and experience, the rapid movement through different styles is viewed as a sign of inauthenticity and that something is amiss with the dresser. Saffron asserts, to agreement from the others in the focus group session, that "you can't just one day be like wearing like gothic emo clothes and then like and then like the next day wearing like really pretty girly

clothes. And if you do do that people are like ‘what’s, what’s wrong with you?’” (5, 3:5). Luke further illustrates the view that experimentation and change should occur slowly, describing how after a standard weekend break a group of young men in his year-group returned to school having changed their style from what Luke describes as clean-cut to ragged, wearing shorn jeans, no shoes, and ripped t-shirts (4, 3:12). Because of the rapid and homogenous nature of this change, Luke questions its authenticity. Further, Bach states that when he changed his dress from “wemo” after his realization that he looked like a “dick”, it was a slow process. Although his realization hit him in a manner of instances, if Bach had changed his appearance too rapidly, he may have been positioned as inauthentic. Because dress is conceived as displaying identity, then, rapid changes in appearance are questionable. Rather than “incessantly changing” appearance being the norm for the students (Negrin 2008:24), a ‘legitimate’ new image is deemed something to be undertaken slowly, as preferences and worldviews change.<sup>28</sup>

While the students use depth model positions to reconcile change with a coherent sense of self, the use by some of the students of dress to change their mood presents a fracture in the notion that dress reflects what exists. Members of Group Three, for instance, assert that they use dress items to change their emotional state. By appearing in the emotional state they wish to inhabit, they become this state, particularly through the interpellations of others. Hannah and Neve state that when they are not feeling positive, they will construct an outfit that they believe looks good to help them feel more positive (3, 2:3-4). Marc, in Group Five, asserts that he will try to appear happy when he is not so he will be addressed by others as happy. Marc suggests that he will become happy through this address (5, 2:19). The students do not attempt to reconcile these moves to produce rather than reflect themselves. It could be postulated that the students do not view attempts to ‘fake’ their emotional state until that state becomes authentic as falsifying their identities. This practice, nevertheless, suggests that the students’ conceptualization of identity change cannot be wholly aligned with a depth model position.

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<sup>28</sup> The ‘make-over’ is an exception here – it involves rapid appearance change. Emphasis is placed, however, on the new look ‘revealing’ what has been there ‘all along’, and thus on the authenticity of this change in appearance. See Lewis 2009, Weber 2009, for example.

## **In practice: Operating as though dress and appearance are the same**

While the students present explanations of the relationship between identity and dress that utilize both surface and depth model discourses, they operate within a surface model. That is, although they do not view appearing and being as the same, they act as though they are. Since the students conceive of identity from both models, this practice is conducted with tension. As I have detailed above, the students move to ensure that their appearance adequately matches their identity. Lance offers a further example of this practice, illustrating the way that the students' practices often conform with the surface model. While lamenting that he is positioned in a one-dimensional manner by others, as having an identity that revolves around rugby, Lance supports appearance-based judgment through better enabling others to view his personality by ensuring that his appearance demonstrates his worldviews and preferences. Due to his recognition that dress is seen to display personality, Lance has decided to broaden his dress-choices beyond rugby shirts in order to represent himself more accurately. Lance's donning of dress items which communicate wider interests than rugby ensures that the way he appears more accurately matches who he is, which gives credence to the notion that it is possible to know a subject through his appearance. Ironically, while Lance is clear that identity is not reducible to appearance, by dressing in line with his identity, he supports the surface rendering of identity – that what appears, is.

The clash between the two models of identity is also apparent in the students' navigation of the judgments of others. Demonstrating their belief that appearance and identity are separable, but in their operations that they are not, the students describe instances where they have misjudged people according to their appearance. Neve, for instance, relays how she met a young woman at the train station, describing her as “the epitome of bleached blonde hair, she was orange, like makeup, like her butt was hanging out” (3, 1:8). This caused Neve to assume that the young woman would be unfriendly, but to Neve's surprise, this Other began a conversation with her and, as Neve states, “she was just the nicest person I've ever met, she was so sweet, and we just spent the entire time just on the train together” (*ibid*). Hannah and Josef also present an example of appearance seemingly not matching identity, describing a boy in their year-group who dresses in nondescript clothes but is charismatic. Josef states that “you would never expect him to be really

funny and have a really really big personality because he's wearing such boring clothes, because you don't expect to see someone in boring clothes (Hannah: "be so cool") be so, be so like interesting" (2, 4:12). Yet another example is provided by Group Four who assert that one of the school's caretakers looks "intimidating" because she is heavily tattooed. They state that they were shocked at how friendly she is, exclaiming, "she's really nice!" (4, 2:16). This recognition that assumptions can be 'wrong' serves to reiterate for the students that there is 'more' to subjects than the way they look. These instances of inconsistency between appearing and being illustrate that the students view personality as separable from dress rather than constituted by dress. Dress usually, but – as these examples suggest – not always, reflects this personality.

The surprise that the students exhibit at their misjudgements, however, signals their investment in the conflation of appearing with being. Although they continually misjudge people based on how they look, the fact that they judge in the first place, and frame these judgments as 'mistakes', illustrates that the participants believe that they can deduce who someone is from how they look. The students expect, as Luke asserts, that "you can tell a book by its cover... like if you're gonna read a book, if it's got an interesting cover you pick it up and generally it'll be an interesting book" (4, 2:27). This commitment to judging shows the students expect the signifier and signified to match. While the students recognize that appearance does not necessarily match being, they work to ensure that it does and expect others to work similarly. Thus the notion that appearances show reality becomes self-fulfilling. By expecting the surface to match the reality, the surface takes on the status of signifier and signified.

Yet the conflation of appearances with being cannot be resolved so easily. The students' contradictory relationship with judgment illustrates the tension that occurs between the equation of appearance with being and the notion that appearances can deceive. This tension is encompassed in the opposing beliefs presented by the students that judging others based on their dress is necessary and usually accurate and that judging is something that should be avoided because judgments are often incorrect. The latter is articulated by the popular expression – refuted by Luke above – "a book should not be judged by its cover". Group Four in particular embody this tension. They are anxious to convey that they do not make assumptions based on dress, particularly about sexuality. They disparagingly assert that if I wish to hear such assumptions – which they disapprove of – then I should conduct my interviews



at a single-sex school (1, 4:8). Later in the interview, however, this group formulated repeated assumptions about the sexuality, desires, and behaviour of people based on their dress choices. Despite the recognition of the tension between appearances and 'reality', the students continue to judge as though appearances show 'reality'. Indeed, Group One stipulates that judgment is 'natural'. Bach asserts that "everyone" judges, and that "You can't escape it". Kandy adds, "like, when I (Henrietta: happens naturally) see a fat person walking down the road I go 'uurghh!'. (Bach: yeah) I try not to, but it's like (Bach: it's so sad but it's so true) natural instinct..." (1, 3:22). The students' continuous judgments demonstrate that they operate within a shared reference system and, while recognizing that judgments can be inaccurate, do not view meanings as having floated away on the chaotic winds of postmodernity, becoming signifiers of nothing but themselves. Yet this shared reference system provides the students with a framework in which they can attach reality to appearances, equating the two.

Further, although there are instances where the students' judgments are 'wrong', they continue to frame the subjects in relation to their appearance, and these misjudgements. The students' continual reassessment of these subjects based on their original judgment of them means that the way these subjects appear(ed) continues to affect how they are positioned by the students. The caretaker will always be positioned by the students in relation to her unexpected niceness, and the orange woman at the train station will always be conceived as the bitch-that-wasn't. Thus the notion that what appears, is, cannot be shaken from the identity positions these subjects are hailed to occupy, even if this hailing is deemed to be a mistake. These (mis)judgments show that Françoise's notion that a subject can be "anyone [she] want[s] to be" (3, 3:13) with new people she meets is a myth based on the notion that identity can be assembled from unlimited choices, a myth that does not take into account the narrow appearance-based positions others frame subjects within.

The tension involved in assessing others based on appearance illustrates the push and pull of surface and depth models at work: the students conceive of the image in a surface manner, as showing reality, yet – consistent with a depth model position – they expect that this image presents the truth of an existence beyond the image, an existence that preexists the image. There is emphasis then, on the surface, on appearance, but this is an emphasis that is undergirded by a notion of truth. The students assert that they can become who they wish to be through appearance, yet

they also hold people accountable to their past, their preferences, their background, their experiences. The students' sense of self is slippery, a confusing criss-crossing through and between surface and depth models. They conceive of the self as changeable, not as a stable essence to be triumphantly found after years of searching. Yet they view the self as something that should be reflected through dress, which implies the self has substance. This substance is the culmination of the experiences and preferences of the self. The discourses of surface and depth identity models work together, and are reconciled through the work the students do to incorporate changes in their identities while continuing to positioning the self as coherent. Thus the two models sit side by side, blending into each other. That the depth model is the bolder of the two is illustrated in the students' commitment to the notion of authenticity, which I explore further in the next chapter.

## Chapter Four: Individuality and Authenticity

“The unbeaten path got my soul so sore.... Serving in the army of one, it’s on again. Walk alone, I walk alone, you know I walk all alone. I’ve always been on my own, ever since the day I was born. So I don’t mind walking alone.... I’m a loner in a world of clones. I’m the piece that don’t belong.” (The Roots, “Walk Alone”)

It is with serendipity and amazement – but not surprise – that I discovered that an opinion piece I had written for one of the major newspapers in my region when I was fourteen years old echoes the sentiments of the participants in my research. After all, part of my desire to embark on this project was to research my own culture. Written at the height of my rejection of what I perceived to be the conformist practices of the students that populated my high school and provincial town, I urged people to “be themselves”, stating,

Is it cool to be “cool”, or wait, are you too cool to care? Let’s face it, conforming to other people’s images of what’s cool is not only style cramping but it’s confusing and a complete waste of your time. So, the moral of the story is eat your Ricies, run around trees, wear the fluorescent green jumpsuit and say what you feel because “cool” is being yourself and having a good time (1998:15).

The students at City High also passionately advocate “being who you are”. Both my newspaper column and the students’ views produce conformity and “being yourself” as oppositional. This production equates being authentic with being different from others. Substantiating the popular phrase “you be you, because no one else can”, the students view difference as lying at the heart of identity. As they conceive of identity as based on the thoughts, behaviour, memories, experiences, influences, and preferences of the individual, they believe that no two individuals have the same combination of these, and thus no two individuals are the same.

The communication of identity, for the students, revolves around the communication of difference from others. Because the students view this difference as an inherent part of the self, this difference is ostensibly communicated when the subject is “being himself”. The students assess peers’ dress practices with regard to whether they authentically communicate the self. Authenticity is a rubric that guides the students’ behaviour and their judgments of others. Since they view identity as

entwined with difference, the students believe that those subjects who do not express themselves in a manner that is different from others – who do not mark out their individuality – are not expressing their authentic selves. This emphasis on the authentic expression of the self situates the self as preexisting the expression. Thus this emphasis suggests that the students believe that there is a ‘real’ self behind expression. Yet the students conflate appearance with identity, believing that what appears is the ‘truth’ of the expresser, and making judgments of authenticity based on appearance. Thus the students’ relationship with authenticity further demonstrates their dual positioning of identity within the discursive models of surface and depth. While their concern with authenticity shows their commitment to a depth model of identity based on expressing what exists, their judgments of authenticity illustrate a commitment to the conflation of appearance and identity associated with a surface model.

This chapter explores the students’ investment in individuality and authenticity through their constructions of inauthentic, often ‘sheep’-like, Others against which they define themselves. These figures are labelled ‘clones’ or ‘tryhard’. They are imagined subjects, based on encounters from afar. The clone illustrates the students’ commitment to a surface model of identity, as she is based on the notion that appearance and identity are one; the students posit that if the clone looks the same as others, she is the same as others. Yet the clone is also conceived within a depth model, as having a ‘true’ self which she chooses not to express. The tryhard also illustrates the students’ investment in a depth model of identity. The students condemn the tryhard based on their belief that to occupy an identity position a subject must do more than look the part; he must also embody the background, emotional state, and behaviour associated with that identity. These figures demonstrate much about the students’ conception of individuality and authenticity. Both the tryhard and the clone are denounced for ignoring their ‘real’ selves in order to win the approval of others. This chapter examines how the students use these Others to position themselves in comparison as authentic subjects. It considers the work the students must undertake to produce themselves as authentic subjects, arguing that authenticity is not produced without effort. This chapter also highlights the tension created through the requirement that others locate a person in a subject position she identifies with in order for her to occupy that position securely, and the students’ conception, illustrated through the clone and the tryhard, that subjects should not rely too much on the views of others. Because the line between an acceptable amount of concern with others’ opinions and an over-concern with

others' opinions is not stable, this line must continually be re-established and re-asserted through the condemnation of the inauthentic figure. As this chapter argues, feelings are central to whether this line is crossed or not; it is in listening to one's feelings that one remains authentic.

## **Everyone “is naturally so different”: The students, authenticity, and individuality**

Bach sits alone in a cold and dark room, the window pasted over with newspaper. He cannot see out. He has been stripped of his possessions – his bag, his phone, his school books. He has been in this room for hours with nothing to tell the time and nothing to pass the time. Bach has been placed in these prison-like conditions for “destroying” the school uniform through his acquisition of a facial piercing. The deputy principal of the school has punished Bach, because, as he paraphrases her, “if I wasn’t going to go by her rules then I wasn’t allowed to be part of the school” (1, 2:15). Following the deputy principal’s rules involved obeying the school’s dress code. The deputy’s ultimatum, and Bach’s time in the withdrawal room, demonstrates the often painful clash between individual style and institutional norms. Bach acquired the piercing to mark his fifteenth birthday. He considered it an expression of who he had become, and a way of celebrating his outsider status in the school and its surrounding suburbs. Mirroring the deputy principal, Bach presented his own conditions: if the school could not accept him for who he was, then he could not accept the school. His conditions ignored, Bach spent three long days in the withdrawal room before deciding not to return to school. For Bach, being able to express himself authentically was more important than adhering to the institution’s rules. After four months without formal education, Bach enrolled at City High, a school over an hour’s drive from his home. Since being at City High, Bach has added several facial piercings to the one that landed him in the cell-like room at his previous secondary school. Such piercings are common at City High and do not cause Bach any trouble with its authorities. Bach’s story is one of many that contribute to the discourse purveyed by students and teachers at City High that positions the school as a place where students can “be themselves”, expressing who they are through appearance, without the limitations a school uniform and dress code imposes. In this discourse City High is compared with other schools in the area

and marked as a rare institution that does not ask for self-expression to be curtailed in order that the institution flourish.

The positive status the students and teachers accord the notion of 'being yourself' is not particular to City High, of course. Authenticity is highly valued in modern social contexts, a valuation that can be traced back to the development of the notion of the individual in the West in the seventeenth century. This construction gradually entwined authenticity with individuality, positioning persons as individuals with unique qualities, which should and could be harnessed through the individual being 'true' to himself. As cultural theorist Lionel Trilling points out, this early form of individuality depended on the historical emergence of internal awareness (1972:24). This awareness, which continues to be characteristic of the construction of the self today, entailed the individual imagining himself reflexively in different social roles, "standing outside or above his own personality", assessing which roles would be suited to his characteristics and disposition (*ibid.*). Such imagining was facilitated by the emergence of the novel and the autobiography (1972:25), and, later, Romantic poetry. Subjects that had access to these texts could see the world through the eyes of the respective narrators, learning what it might be like to live as an explorer or sailor, or an artist, for instance. This imagining aided the social and physical mobility that was made possible with the spread of capitalism and the growth of urban areas in the West. These extended possibilities for mobility, combined with reflexivity and the production of texts that gave insights into different lives and locales, enabled the modern emphasis on self-realisation.

This increased emphasis on the individual can be seen in the 'Romantic' poetry that emerged towards the end of the eighteenth century in England and Europe (Lewin and Williams 2009:65). The Romantic poets constructed individuals as creative beings that could realize themselves through attending to their feelings rather than the desires of society. This construction positioned the authentic self as one who acts in accordance with one's emotions rather than the will of others and/or social structures. Literary critic Abigail Cheever argues that this conception of authenticity continues to hold weight in the twentieth century. Cheever points out that from the mid-twentieth century in particular, the individual who was seen to correspond too closely with social and institutional norms was deemed to be acting inauthentically (2010:2). Writing in the early 1970s, Trilling sums up this point of view with his assertion that the "prescriptions of society pervert human existence and destroy its authenticity" (1972:161). Indeed, the prominent counter-cultural 'Beat', 'Hippie', and

'Punk' movements of the late 1940s, 1960s, 1970s respectively can be read as responses to the notion that social conformity represses the authentic individual. Participants in these movements, like the Romantic poets, emphasized the importance of following one's own path over social norms. As encapsulated by Bach's story and the official values of City High more generally, this point of view continues to be influential in the contemporary West.

Authenticity emerged from the focus groups as one of the overriding concerns of the students. The students' interest in whether someone authentically occupies his claimed identity supports the definition of authenticity proffered by Ferrara, who terms authenticity "the property of identities" (2009:22). For a subject to authentically embody an identity he must realize the identity's "own guiding ideal" (2009:23). In other words, he must feel, think, behave, and act in the manner that corresponds with that identity. The students are concerned with whether someone is a 'real' 'hip-hopper', or a 'real' 'indie kid', or a 'real' 'gangsta', to name three youth identities common in Aotearoa at the time of research. They use a range of techniques to judge such authenticity, which I will detail in the course of this chapter. The subjects who are judged to be 'not themselves' are condemned. This judgment supports political theorist Charles Taylor's argument that in the contemporary West being 'true' to the self has taken on a "moral significance", whereby those people who do not meet this standard are seen as less worthy than those who do (1991:26). Indeed, the students assert that they wish to avoid engaging with peers whom they deem to be inauthentic. They term such people 'clones', 'fake', or 'tryhards', and distance themselves from these subject positions.

As the students' abiding concern with authenticity attests, the notion of realizing the authentic self has not diminished in postmodern capitalism. As stated in the previous chapter, this is contrary to the assertions of many theorists of postmodernity who argue that this period is marked by a declining interest in authenticity (Jameson 1984:60; Bauman 1997:125; Negrin 2008:28). Indeed, further contradicting these theorists' claims, many contemporary texts emphasize the value of individuals being authentic. For instance, the film *House Bunny* (Fred Wolf, 2008) espouses the importance of not changing the self for others. The film is aimed at young people and was referenced throughout the focus groups by participants who disagree with the film's initial message that the self should be transformed in order to win the approval of others (2, 3; 3, 1; 5, 1). *House Bunny* depicts female students in an unpopular American sorority who, with the help of a former *Playboy* 'Bunny', change

their appearance and their behaviour in order to become more attractive to the opposite sex and thus popular. At the same time, the 'Bunny' transforms herself to appear more intellectual. These makeovers do not bring about the desired results, however, and the film ends with the House Bunny and the students realizing they should be who they 'really' are rather than who they think others want them to be. To mark this realization, the young women change the motto of their sorority to "Be who you are", a move that attracts young women from rival sororities who are tired of being 'fake' in order to fit in to their current sororities. Another film frequently referenced by the students, *Mean Girls* (Mark Waters, 2004), is also based on the theme of authenticity. This film depicts a group of young women at high school known as "the Plastics" due to their propensity to be disingenuous in their interactions with others. The movie ends with the break-up of the Plastics and the protagonist asserting that by being 'true' to herself and to others she has become "human again", associating inauthenticity with being monstrous. The students in my study repeatedly state that they do not wish to be 'plastic', emphasizing their commitment to being authentic.

Further, two of the music genres the students in my research listen to, indie and hip-hop, also emphasize the importance of being authentic. The indie genre emphasizes the musicians' creativity and independence, attempting to differentiate music of this genre from commercial pop music's emphasis on selling singles and getting radio-play. Many of the songs produced within this genre are not commercially radio-friendly, with controversial lyrics, experimental sounds and song structures, lengths that do not conform to the three-minutes usually designated for a radio single, and musicians who are often reluctant to be in the limelight. Hip-hop similarly has authenticity as one of its philosophical foundations with 'fronting', or appearing to be what one is not, strongly criticized. A major tenet of hip-hop culture is to "keep it real". The popular UK-based hip-hop artist Estelle, for instance, asserts, "I don't know about all the bullshit that people talk about, trying to get up in this industry, you know. You're not really that person.... I do know about the shit I know about and that's exactly what I talk about. I'm not a thug, I'm not trying to be, but you know, um so I don't talk about that kind of crap" ("The Rocks", 2010). It is important to Estelle to make clear that she sings about the things that she experiences in everyday life and thus does not sing about the clichéd 'thug' milieu hip-hop artists are often expected to inhabit as this is not her world. Further, the line from one of the hip-hop artists most frequently mentioned by the students, US-based rapper Nas – "They want my blood. Why me? Why not the fake ones who deserve death?" – typifies the



negative attitude within hip-hop towards those who do not present themselves authentically (“Louis Farrakhan”, 2008). Although the students conceive of many mainstream texts as promoting inauthenticity, the prominent presence of the theme of authenticity in the contemporary cultural products they engage with is consistent with and supports the strong attachment the students have to notions of authenticity.

The authenticity emphasized within contemporary culture and by the students is associated with being ‘true’ to the self, that is, acting in a manner that is consistent with the self’s background, experiences, and preferences. The idea of the ‘true’ self supports the formulation of the individual as the primary unit in society, a unit that is differentiated from other individuals. This difference is naturalized by the institutions, bureaucratic processes, and technologies that construct subjects. Individuals are given a unique health code at birth, their own tax number, and their own national education code, for example. Most students have their own email address, their own cell phones, and their own profiles on social networking sites such as Facebook and Bebo. Such personalized technologies support the notion that the individual is the primary unit of measurement and suggest that each individual is worthy of differentiation. This is emphasized at primary school in New Zealand and Australia through the implementation of the health curriculum, which teaches students that they are each different from one another. The Life Education Trust, which is contracted to deliver health classes at primary and secondary level by many schools throughout Australia and New Zealand, teaches for instance that “there never was, is now, or ever will be again, another you. You are unique, you are special”.<sup>29</sup> The health curriculum stresses the value that every individual possesses by emphasizing the value of individuality. Such valuing is in line with the principles of capitalism that shape the daily understanding of life in the West. Capitalism places value on whatever is scarce. Thus the students are taught that they are valuable precisely because they are ‘unique’, as the ‘one-off’ is the scarcest of all.

In accordance with this naturalization, the students overwhelmingly view being unique as positive. For most of the students, the more different they can be from others, the better. The members of Group One, for example, describe how when they were younger very few of their peers dyed their hair, so when they dyed their hair, they “felt really cool!” (1, 2:14). This ‘coolness’ is based on being different from their peers. Group One laments how it is much harder to stand out today because

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<sup>29</sup> Life Education Trust, “About Us”, <http://www.lifeeducation.org.nz/about-us/>, site accessed 11 November 2010.

most of their friends use hair dye. In another example, Penny describes how when she attended a formal dance at her secondary school in Australia she felt good because she “looked so different to everyone else”, all of whom were dressed in “that year’s colour”, blue, whereas she wore a bright purple dress that her mother made for her (3, 2:12). Penny asserts that she wants to look different because “I don’t like blending in” (3, 1:3). Neve states that subjects want to be seen as individuals because “you want to be interesting and different than everyone else, you know?” (3, 3:23). To be different, then, is to be ‘interesting’ and ‘cool’, and thus to be a valuable subject. Or, in the words of Group One, to be different is to “win at life” (1, 2:14).

Further in line with individualizing technologies and discourses, the students view difference from others as an inherent part of identity. This interlacing of identity with difference is apparent in the term ‘individual’ itself, which refers to both a single human, and to a person who is different from others. Because the students view identity as based on the experiences, preferences, and influences of a subject (see Chapter Three), they believe that each individual is different since no one individual has the same experiences. As Group Four asserts, each subject “see[s] something slightly differently to someone else, and that’s what identifies you, it’s like a fingerprint” (Luke 4, 3:19). Since these different experiences are, as Esme asserts, what “sets you apart from other people” (5, 3:13), for the students subjects are “naturally” different. Saffron states, for instance, “I don’t think you can try to be an individual. I think you just are, you know...” (5, 3:16). The focus group participants agree with Hannah’s assertion that “*everyone* is completely different” (2, 4:28). Thus difference is celebrated because it is attached to the ‘natural’ self. As Lance states, “you want to be different!”, because, as Luke adds, people “want to have their own identity” (4, 3:9). To possess an identity, then, is to be different from others. For the students, this difference is at the heart of the self, constructing subjects as individuals.

## **In/authenticity and the clone**

Since being ‘individual’ is one of the most dominant of the students’ self-categorizations, the students frequently construct clone-like Others against whom they identify themselves. As Hall asserts, “it is only in relation to the Other, the

relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its constitutive outside that the 'positive' meaning of any term – and thus its 'identity' – can be constructed" (2000:17). The clone acts as an Other to the authentic individual. This figure is one who is deemed to be too similar to others, following others in a sheep-like manner. According to the students' views, this similarity means that the clone ignores her 'true' identity, which, if adhered to, would mark her as different from others. It is this supposed inauthenticity that the students condemn. Hannah's fierce words that she "hates conformists" (2, 4:12) are echoed throughout the focus groups. Since they view identity as based on difference, the students cannot fathom people willingly looking similar to others. Aladdin asserts that "I don't want people to think of me as a clone or anything and yeah I want to be recognized as being [*sic*] my own sense of style" (2, 2:9). Further, Esme states, "I hate it, I hate like walking down the street and seeing groups of friends who are" – Eva interrupts, stating, "clones"; Esme continues, "not exactly the same things but... just slightly different (5, 1:17). Drawing on the valuation that 'boring' is one of the worst adjectives that can be applied to a person or artefact in the contemporary West, Henrietta cuttingly asks, "can you get more boring?" (1, 1:9). The students' negative positioning of the clone acts to disassociate them from those who do not perform their identities differently enough from others. With this disassociation, the students imply that they are far removed from this position, that they are each unique and act in a manner that corresponds with their 'real' selves.

Highlighting their belief that identity is based on difference from others, the students associate the erasure of difference with the erasure of identity. Penny states that her "worst fear" is "becoming a businesswoman", as this will mean that she loses her individuality because 'businesswomen' "all kind of look the same in a way, cos they're all like doing the same [activities]" (3, 1:6). Françoise asserts that "you take away your identity when you walk into a workplace like that" (3, 2:10). This erasure of identity occurs through the assimilation of the subject into the culture of the institution, becoming the 'same' as everyone else. Penny and Neve (who are in their last year at secondary school) imagine a dystopian future in an office block-dominated world where their differences, and thus their selves, are not accepted. They posit City High as a safe haven for their freedom of expression before they have to change to fit into what they see as the conformist 'adult' world. Such a viewpoint once again exhibits the notion that the majority of social institutions repress self-expression. It is institutional culture in this example that encourages subjects to be the same and consequently to 'lose' their identities.

The students' judgments of clones, sheep, and businessmen and women illustrate their conflation of appearance with being. Thus when Aladdin asserts, as referenced earlier, that "I want to be recognized as being my own sense of style" (2, 2:9), this is not so much a grammatically erroneous sentence as a statement that illustrates the way the students fold identity and appearances into each another. They posit that if one looks like someone else, one *is* like someone else. This is based on their view, described in the previous chapter, that appearance displays the personality of the subject. Working on the logic that each person is unique, the students presume that the expression of difference is the expression of the 'true' self. In other words, as the students believe that everyone is different, and that dress displays personality, they assert that everyone should look different. Such belief is summed up in Hannah's statement that "if you're showing yourself through your clothing then everyone's clothing *will* be different, because everyone's personality is different" (2, 4:28). This statement deftly illustrates the importance of appearance for the students. Uniqueness, and thus authentic identity, is realized through dress. These judgments once again demonstrate that, although the students' subscribe to the depth model belief that each subject has a 'real' identity to represent, they simultaneously operate within a surface model of identity, as their judgments imply that what appears is. Thus if one appears different, one is different; if one looks the same, one is the same.

The clone acts as a powerful figure for the students to mark themselves against because she is seemingly everywhere. The students designate whole areas of the city as crowded with "sheep", and view other schools as filled with conformists. Literally distancing themselves from 'sheep', the students state that they try to steer clear of those areas where such people congregate. Many of the students assert, for instance, that they avoid the shops on Lambton Quay, in the business and government district, because they are uncomfortable with the Quay's inhabitants' supposed uniformity. This distancing of themselves from the places clones inhabit further acts to disassociate themselves from the subject position of clone. The students cannot claim an affinity with the same locales that clones enjoy as this jeopardizes their identities as being far removed from the clone. This representation of so many subjects as clones or sheep is at odds with the notion the students fervently present that everyone is "naturally" different. Clones, however, are positioned by the students as not being 'true' to themselves, that is, not following their 'real' identities, which, if followed, would ensure they were different to others.

Thus, while the clone seemingly disrupts the notion that everyone is different, the students' positioning of the clone as inauthentic affirms their view that people are 'naturally' different.

In comparison to the inauthentic subjects that supposedly surround them, the students position themselves as successfully behaving and appearing in a manner that is consistent with who they 'really' are. This situates themselves as the rare minority amongst the sea of clones. By categorizing the masses as clones, the students are positioning themselves outside of mass behavioural patterns and portraying themselves as rare expressers of authenticity. This rareness places emphasis on the 'realness' of the students' appearance and actions, as, for most of the students, the less like others subjects appear, the more authentic they are. Further, returning to the point that capitalism attaches value to what is scarce, the students praise themselves through their conceptions of themselves as rare illustrators of 'true' identity, benefitting both from the value they place on being 'real' and on being different from the 'masses'.

Because identity is entwined with difference, the students are upset when other subjects dress similarly to them. This threatens the authenticity of their own identities and self-expression as it diminishes the uniqueness of this expression. Neve states that when she realizes that someone has an item that she believed no one else at the school possessed, "my ego gets a little bruised cos you know I want to be the only one wearing that. I want people to think 'oh wow'. And then you know if other people start doing it and then I feel like ohh well you know once again I'm back with you know everyone else" (3, 3:23-4). Neve then has to find another way of expressing herself that differentiates her from others. Lance's relationship with sports jerseys can also be viewed in relation to the link between difference and authenticity. Lance often wears a rugby shirt for his favourite team, the Chiefs. This team is based in the Waikato, several hundred kilometres from Wellington. Lance asserts that in Wellington, "I'm relatively safe down here then, no one else will have [a] Chiefs jersey" (4, 2:2). Lance's use of the term "safe" is striking, particularly as the donning of a sports jersey involves the recognition that many other fans wear that same jersey. Unsurprisingly, there are few Chiefs' fans in Wellington, which leaves Lance's unique, and thus authentic, position intact. Further engaging the language of safety, the wish to be 'original' is so prevalent for some students that it can be "dangerous" to wear a dress item that someone else has. Group Two describe a situation where one of the students in their form was threatened with

violence by an older popular student because she was wearing the same pants as her (2, 1:17). This desire to be original and the difficulty of maintaining originality – requiring policing of the self and others – illustrates that being individual does not happen on its own, ‘naturally’, as it were.

Indeed, the students must work to look different from their peers. This work is in tension with the students’ assertions that subjects are “naturally” different from others. Part of this tension is the use of dress to construct and display identity. Using dress in this way means that what are often key expressions of an individual’s identity – and thus supposed to be different from others’ expressions – can be procured by others with a trip to the shops. To ensure this does not regularly occur, the students enact a range of techniques which result in their dress differentiating them from others. These techniques include the conscious embodiment of an unusual style – the wearing of as much colour as possible, or dressing more formally than other young adults, for instance; shopping at opportunity shops (thrift stores) or online auction sites where the clothes are second-hand; confronting friends who appear to “copy” their style; constructing their own clothes and altering bought items; lying to others about where clothing items were purchased to prevent inquisitors from buying those items; buying clothing online from overseas-based websites; pairing dress items that are currently popular with clothes that other students do not have; avoiding shops frequented by young adults; shopping at stores typically unpopular with other students such as designer boutiques, or, in contrast, shops with low price points such as the family-oriented department stores Farmers and the Warehouse; and buying from shops outside of New Zealand. These strategies evidence that the students actively work to appear unique. This is work that both naturalises the conflation of authenticity with difference and reveals this difference as something that does not occur ‘naturally’ but requires labour to achieve. This labour constructs the difference the students are supposed to be illustrating.

Further demonstrating that difference must be cultivated, some of the students refer to past periods when they did not express themselves in a unique manner. These anecdotes demonstrate that appearing ‘different’ is not the ‘natural’ occurrence that the students purport it to be. If it were, then the students could confidently label their past self-expression as different. Instead, they must work to ensure that their expression is unique and distinguishable from others. The students’ denouncements of past behaviour where they could be considered to have followed the crowd make clear that they are not currently clones and do not wish to be in the

future. For instance, Henrietta's assertion, outlined in the previous chapter, that her former way of dressing (which she labels as 'just like everyone else') was "disgusting" and "so lame" (1, 2:15) demonstrates her distaste for those who conform to the most dominant appearance norms. This distaste is increased because she is condemning herself. The 'disgust' that Henrietta feels for her former style is projected onto others that dress alike. When referring to the similarity exhibited by the students at her old school on mufti day (a day where students are not required to wear their school uniforms), she visibly shudders and emulates gagging (1, 2:2-3). Melo also associates her past style with conformity. Melo describes how she had a nightmare in year seven that she and her friends were "clones". Melo states that in her dream, "we all wore the same thing and it was like horrible and then like I kinda realized that me and my friends kinda did wear the same thing like we were all really similar..." (2, 2:8). After this dream-fuelled realization, Melo changed the way she dresses. Melo is now careful not to dress like others and is wary of those that might be copying her dress, policing these subjects when she deems it necessary. The students reconcile their past conformity with their current selves by understanding the period when they looked and acted similarly to their peers as a time before they had 'found' their 'own' style, a time of juvenility before they had matured into their (naturally) independent selves. This complicates the students' narrow view of the clone. Rather than following others at the expense of herself, she can be positioned as not having 'grown into' her self yet, and thus as acting in accordance with her still-forming identity.

Many of the strategies the students use to prevent themselves from appearing like others are based on avoiding the adoption of any appearance that is promoted by commercial culture, which most of the students view negatively. The students conceive of commercial culture as promoting homogeneity, and thus inauthenticity. Rather than critiquing mainstream, or commercial, culture on the basis of its promotion of the exploitative economic doctrine of capitalism, for instance, the participants' negative view of the mainstream is a result of the high value they place on uniqueness. This view is based not on political or ethical ideals, but on their distaste for homogeneity and its associated inauthenticity. The students assert that commercial media texts do not feature as broad a spectrum of appearances as desirable, presenting a homogenous ideal that most men and women will not achieve. They argue that in the process of trying to achieve this ideal, subjects become similar and thus their selves and their self-expression become less authentic. The participants position themselves as not being swayed by the ideals of

commercial culture, and view those that are as duped by the media. Indeed, some of the students joke about being influenced by such ideals, placing themselves in a position to laugh at those subjects they imagine are overly affected by them.

Referring to a blemish on her face, Françoise mocks a familiar acne-clearing product television advertisement, stating, to laughter from the rest of the group, “the day before the party, oh no!... oh I can’t go to the party because my skin’s not perfect today” (3, 1:11). In this way Group Three position themselves as being outside the influence of much of commercial culture, once again establishing themselves as unique in a world where the majority cannot ‘see through’ the messages peddled by advertising.

Escaping the clutches of the homogenous and homogenising media is not, however, as simple as the majority of the students suggest. All of the students assert that they feel pressure to appear a certain way. Such pressures are related to the very ideals that many of the students position as homogenising and ‘fake’. These include, for example, pressure to have clear skin and to be thin. Additionally, the female participants feel pressured to have relatively hair-free bodies, and the young men to be muscular. While the students present themselves as authentic individuals, they are still influenced by homogenising appearance ideals, which contradicts the association of commercial-oriented appearance ideals with inauthenticity. The students’ relationship to these ideals is detailed in the final chapter of this thesis.

The students position clones as following what the media and others construct as positive because they are scared to show who they really are. Unlike the clones who hide their ‘natural’ differences, the students argue that they present themselves authentically, even if this presentation results in persecution from others. Bach, for instance, relays stories of having “fag” shouted at him from cars as he walks down the street (1, 2:19). Rather than this preventing him from wearing what he wishes, he continues to wear clothes with a ‘feminine’ edge as for him they express his authentic self. Bach further comments that those that label him in this way are “right” (1, 2:19). Of one car-calling incident, Bach asserts, “that was great, I loved it”. It appears that Bach is glad to be labelled a ‘fag’ by strangers, even when they are being homophobic, as this means that his sexuality, which is an important part of his identity, is visible. Bach further states that many people “don’t like seeing people that aren’t the same” (1, 3:14). Bach asserts that he knows others who “want to be themselves” but “feel like they can’t because they’ll get shunned upon” (1, 3:21). By refusing to change his dress in the face of homophobia and the perceived fear of



difference, Bach distances himself from those who are 'not themselves', and positions his appearance as authentically portraying his identity.

In a more minor key, Scarlet also describes how she faces daily discrimination due to her colourful appearance. Scarlet asserts that peers talk about her behind her back, calling her a hippie and spreading rumours that she does drugs (5, 2:5). As well as this, Scarlet receives what she perceives as negative looks and attitude from adults (5, 3:8). Unlike Bach, Scarlet does not identify with the category that draws these negative looks, the subject position of drug-taking hippie. Being subject to social negativity does position her outside of the mainstream, however, which is a position Scarlet identifies with. Like Bach, Scarlet does not wish to change her appearance as a different style would not represent her 'true' self. Such anecdotes locate the authentic dresser as one who is 'brave'. In contrast, the dresser who does not offer an authentic expression of his self through his dress is seen to be too concerned with others' judgments to be himself, and thus unduly influenced by social norms and the desire of others.

Since the students view inauthentic expressions of identity to be a result of internalizing social norms and others' desires at the expense of their own, they view the authentic subject not only as unafraid to be herself, but also as one who does not care too much what others think. This positioning corresponds with that of the self-identified punks in the work of subculture researchers Philip Lewin and J. Patrick Williams. These American-based punks view authentic subjects as people with a nonchalant, self-assured attitude (2009:74). Similarly, Group Two comment that they "don't really care what others think" (2, 1:1) and have "respect" for those subjects who are also not overly invested in others' opinions (2, 4:9). Hannah states that the person who does not care is "strong-minded" and "dresses how they want to" (2, 4:29). Group Five also offer this view, asserting that it is "cool" not to care (5, 3:9). The students support Neve's statement that she feels most herself when she is "virtually mostly unaffected by other's opinions" (3, 3:19). Implied in their statements is that to care too much what others think is to follow others and thus not act in an authentic manner. There is a tension here, however: the students wish to appear as though they do not care what others think, yet identity itself, as I have argued in Chapter Three, is reliant on others hailing the subject into an identity position. Others must recognize the difference the subject possesses. Thus the views of others are important. Indeed, as the previous chapter described, the students take the views of significant others into account when they dress, using dress as a tool to

shape how others position them. While the students recognize that the person who does not care at all what others think does not exist, they believe that such caring should be minimal and should not occur at the expense of self-expression. The fact that people strive to appear nonchalant demonstrates the importance of the lack of caring about others' views in the demonstration of authenticity. The students downplay their investment in what others think of them so that the authenticity of their self-expression is not questioned. This allows them to position clones as caring more than they do and to secure their position as authentic in comparison.

The students are particularly condemnatory of those subjects they view as associating themselves with a cultural product because the mainstream has designated it 'cool' rather than because they have a personal attachment to the product. As outlined in the previous chapter, associating the self with a sports team or a media product that one does not genuinely 'like' is to present oneself in a 'false' manner. What becomes clear in the students' statements about the inauthentic subject is that an authentic relationship with a cultural product such as a sports team, a music group or television show, for instance, requires an emotional connection with that product. This is particularly important because identity, for the students, is in part constructed through the cultural products one enjoys. If one purports to like a cultural product that one does not, then one is constructing a 'false' identity. Interestingly, a product's popularity can prevent a subject from associating herself with it even if she believes herself to genuinely like the product. Esme, for instance, is reluctant to wear Doc Marten boots, even though she enjoys their aesthetic. Esme asserts that she does not wish other people to perceive her as a "trend follower" as Doc Marten boots are currently popular in Wellington (5, 3:5). Esme, and other students, position the following of trends negatively as this has associations with inauthenticity. Ironically, then, Esme ignores her preference for the boot – which, according to the students' linking of preferences with identity, is authentic – in order to not appear inauthentic. Other students also report that they do not engage in trends although they may like them. Thus while an emotional connection – particularly the 'liking' of a product – is linked to authentic identity, the students' decisions to not display some of their preferences in order to avoid being mispositioned as 'fake' further shows that the students must work to appear authentic. Additionally, Esme's choice to not wear Doc Martens' boots is based on her analysis of how others might position her; thus, these others are affecting her appearance and behaviour, preventing her from wearing boots that she likes. This is

the very behaviour that the students proclaim is indicative of the clone – a position that Esme would be extremely reticent to categorize herself within.

Whereas the inauthentic subject is viewed by the students as acting too much on the basis of the desires of others and the directives of mainstream culture, the subject who behaves on the basis of how she feels is usually viewed as authentic. The students' association of emotional connection with authenticity illustrates their conviction that feelings are 'real'. This is consistent with a broader social understanding of individualized authenticity, in which self-realization has its basis in feeling (Lewin and Williams 2009:65, Muggleton 2000:159-62). For example, Wilkins found in her study of a Goth youth subculture that Goths link authenticity with emotions. By choosing to live their lives based on the privileging of their emotions, the Goths in Wilkins' study view themselves as living more authentically than the subjects who ignore their emotions (2008:42). Sociologists Jaber Gubrium and James Holstein also emphasize the importance of feeling in their definition of authenticity. They describe the authentic person in the West as "one who is in touch with his or her phenomenological and emotional experience and who reveals his or her own true thoughts, feelings, and actions" (2009:124). In line with this definition, the students use feelings as a measure of authenticity, positioning an act as authentic for the actor if it is based on her feelings. In particular, they view dress as 'true' to the wearer if she enjoys wearing it. For Françoise, a dress choice is authentic if the wearer has "picked out" the item for herself, because she "genuinely like[s] it" and it "inspires [her] in some way" (3, 3:8). Lance, for example, asserts that he wears a checked shirt because he "likes it" rather than because it is fashionable. In another instance, Saffron uses her feelings to justify her use of makeup, which is associated with commercial culture. Saffron states that she wears makeup because "I actually enjoy doing it, like I find it fun. Cos I love art and painting and stuff and I like find it fun..." (5, 2:11). Further emphasizing the importance of enjoyment to authenticity, while the students argue over the morals of the scantily dressed main character of the film *House Bunny*, Aladdin uses her perception of the way this character feels to justify her outfit choice. Aladdin argues that it does not matter if the House Bunny is dressed in a revealing manner because the character is "happy" and dressing the way "she wants to" (2, 3:5). This emphasis on individual happiness and wearing what one wants also highlights the other tenet of authenticity for the students: dressing for the self rather than for others.

The speed with which feelings can be accessed contributes to emotion being taken as signs of authenticity. This is because feelings are contrasted with following the directives of others, which is conceived as taking more time and effort than the impromptu flash of feelings. As Ferrara states, authenticity can often be equated with what is “spontaneous, immediate, [and] unreflective” (2009:28). Trilling similarly asserts that authenticity “readily attaches itself to instinct” (1972:143). This ‘instinct’ can be seen as spontaneous judgment, judgment that takes place seemingly without analysis or reflexivity. Françoise, for instance, asserts that dress which is ‘true’ to the wearer is that which she has put on “naturally”, where she has “not over-thought” the process (3, 3:7). The way the students talk about style as a “sense” also posits authentic dress as based on spontaneous judgment. As Group Two asserts, style is “automatic”; it “entwines with who you are” (2, 4:13). This ‘entwinement’ is based on the relationship between preferences and identity. The students view dress choices as based on preferences, which are both founded in and experienced through feelings. These feelings produce spontaneous judgment. One ‘likes’ an item or not, and this knowledge is usually apparent at first glance, rather than requiring an involved or conscious thought process. “Automatic” style, then, is authentic style.

While the students do not specifically reference the relationship between emotion – which guides spontaneous judgment – and the body, the ‘automatic’ behaviour referred to by Trilling and the students is associated with the body, which is where feelings are believed to be situated. Often the ‘gut’, for instance, is evoked as a location of authenticity; the question “what does your gut tell you?” is frequently asked in the West to help subjects make ‘authentic’ decisions, that is, decisions which are aligned with their feelings. The body affects the way a situation or cultural text is experienced and realized. Although they are located in the body as responses to stimuli, emotions are socially guided (Lupton 1998, Lyon and Barbalet 1994). That is, we must learn what feelings mean and the appropriate responses to them. Further, we learn what it is we should feel when we encounter something, and assess our responses in terms of this guidance. Thus while feelings may be widely experienced as an indicator of individual ‘truth’, they are also a key way that the social acts on the body, aligning the body with the social. There is tension, then, in the use of feelings as a more ‘authentic’ justification for decisions than decisions made based on the consideration of others, as feelings are not located outside of the social, outside of the influence of others. In other words, if ‘true’ decisions are those that are not based on others, then feelings are not the marker of authenticity they are supposed to be.

The students add an extra dimension to this complex by asserting that depth of feeling translates into knowledge. The more one likes something, usually the more one knows about it. Such knowledge, then, acts as a sign of authentic association with a place, person, or cultural product. Luke and Lance, for instance, assert that a 'true' fan of a sports team – one that has a genuine emotional connection with that team – should have knowledge of the team's history, its rank for the last few seasons, and the players that make up the team (4, 2:13). In order to judge the authenticity of association, the students test others' cultural competency regarding a cultural product they have associated themselves with. This positions the asker as someone with enough knowledge to assess competence. If the person fails to show competence, then the asker deems this person not to have an authentic connection with the cultural product. Melo, for instance, describes how, upon seeing another student with a bag depicting characters from the cult Japanese anime television show *Bleach*, she asked her to name the characters. Because this student could not, Melo denounces her as associating herself with the television programme because it is considered 'cool' rather than because she enjoys watching it (2, 3:18). In another example, Luke describes how he asks people to name their favourite songs when they tell him bands or music groups they like, and if they cannot do this, he believes them to not be authentic fans of the music they profess to prefer (4, 3:17). By not possessing the required knowledge to claim an association with the text, place, or product, the subject is seen by the students as inauthentically claiming this association and thus as faking who he is in an attempt to impress others.

Professing an emotional connection with and having cultural competency regarding the cultural product are two ways that authenticity can be demonstrated. These techniques, as well as those mentioned above such as searching for clothes in second-hand stores, suggest that authenticity is performative, that is, created through the techniques that purport to express it. This conception of authenticity dislocates it from its place within a depth model conception of identity, concerned with 'true' identity, aligning it instead with a surface model of identity, which conceives of expression as production rather than reflection. The surface conception of authenticity is found in the work of Goffman, who asserts that subjects, whether being honest or false, "must take care to enliven their performances with appropriate expressions, exclude from their performances expressions that might discredit the impression being fostered, and take care lest the audience impute unintended meanings" (1969:73). Such appropriate expressions are culturally determined and

differ from context to context. Thus while Esme, as detailed above, may authentically like Doc Marten's boots, she avoids wearing them as their status as fashionable calls into question her position as a subject who follows her emotional preferences rather than trends. Like Goffman, Gubrium and Holstein also present authenticity as performative, asserting that it is constructed "in situ", operating in practice and in relation to local circumstances (2009:123). For Gubrium and Holstein, notions of authenticity are based on what is expected in a given situation (2009:125). The 'authentic' occupation of a subject position, such as by a sports or anime fan, then, requires fulfilling characteristics that have entered into the popular imaginary regarding that subject position and avoiding any appearance and/or behaviour that challenges the occupation of this subject position. That is, the subject must embody the expected characteristics of one of who occupies that identity.

Philip Auslander argues that individuals "achieve and maintain the effect of authenticity by continuously citing the norms of authenticity" (1992:72 in Vannini and Williams 2009:9). Such norms for the students are emotional attachment, knowledge, a history of behaving that way and/or liking the product, and a devotion to the product and/or behaviour outside of the period when it is designated 'cool'. Luke, for instance, illustrates his commitment to his favourite English premier football league team the Blackburn Rovers by asserting that even if they were relegated to the second division he would still support them (4, 2:12). Further, Group Three lament 'hipsters' who start listening to a band because it is fashionable, in comparison with themselves who have been listening to these bands prior to their designation as 'cool'. Indeed, the length of time of devotion is one of the most popular ways of citing authenticity with regard to a cultural product or practice. The longer one has a relationship with such products, or has been enacting a practice, the more authentic one's relationship with that product or practice is seen. The continued use of these norms to 'prove' authenticity strengthens them as requirements of authenticity. Like the norms themselves that purport to reveal rather than construct authenticity, Goffman asserts that performances that are judged as authentic establish the 'true' self rather than reveal it. Goffman states that the self "is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited" (1969:245). Thus, emotional attachment, an enduring relationship, and knowledge of a cultural product or practice establish the subject's 'authentic' identity.

## **“The individual school”: City High and the clone**

The clone plays an important role in the students’ formulations of City High as an institution that fosters heterogeneity and authentic self-expression. The students conceive of other schools as filled with clones. Like Bach above, they stress that at City High, unlike the other clone-filled schools in the area, students can ‘be themselves’, expressing themselves authentically. The participants continually compare City High with other schools, emphasizing the homogenizing imperatives of these schools and City High’s focus on diversity. Such schools act as ‘Other’ to City High. Charlotte states that unlike the students at City High, at her old school “no one was really different” (2, 4:5). The students position these schools as encouraging students to look and act like each other. Saffron, for example, describes how she went to a party that young women from her previous all-girls school also attended. Saffron states that these young women “were all wearing almost identical black leather jackets, and it was just ridiculous cos they all looked exactly the same and they kinda looked like they were from like a gang...” (5, 1:8). Scarlet asserts that it was the students rather than the teachers at her former school who were at the forefront of the homogenizing impetus. Scarlet describes how at this school the way the uniform was worn was heavily regulated by the students, who ensured that the students appeared in a homogenous manner. Scarlet asserts,

you had to wear your uniform in the right way, you could never wear it above your knees, you had to have it below your knees. You had to- you could never wear the turtle-neck sweater, you could never wear the hat, you could never wear the long pants.... you could never ever have your shorts above your knees, it always had to be below your knees – it’s practically critical [as in life or death], and if you did everyone would give you looks” (5, 2:11).

Because of the students’ negative attitude towards difference, Scarlet did not feel comfortable wearing what she wanted on the school’s mufti (non-uniformed) days. In comparison to her former school, Scarlet asserts that at City High, she is “free!” and can wear her “crazy” clothes because “everyone accepts you here!” (5, 2:5-6). With such anecdotes, the students in the focus groups produce City High as markedly different from other schools in Wellington. The clone and the schools that supposedly encourage clones, then, are a necessary Other that anchors City High’s status as an institution that fosters authentic individuality.

The strength of the students' constructions of neighbouring schools as institutions that crush heterogeneity illustrates the investment they have in City High as a school that fosters individuality. Indeed, Group Five terms City High "the individual school" (5, 3:15). They agree with Saffron's assertion that "we're like enforced with the fact that individuality's important at High, so we try to maintain that I guess" (5, 3:15). Esme adds that at City High individuality is "something to look up to, not look down on" (*ibid.*). Group Five states that if a student were to purchase a dress item they had admired on another student, they could not wear it in the same way as the other student. Marc states this is "kind of like a unspoken rule here"; he adds, "it's like you almost do copyright your look" (5, 1:8). Indeed, as I argued earlier, it is imperative that the students do not look like others in order to be viewed as expressing themselves authentically. The individuality imperative is taken for granted as a goal to meet. The students work to achieve this goal, attempting to be different from peers. This labour to be different works hand-in-hand with the students' constant comparisons with the other schools in the district, which further cements City High's culture of heterogeneity.

The students' views regarding City High's valuing of difference and diversity are broadly synonymous with the discourse espoused by the school and other official channels. The review of the school by the Government-based Educational Review Office (ERO), published October 2010, asserts that "[t]he school takes pride in its strong kaupapa [philosophy] of embracing inclusiveness and diversity, and celebrating difference" (2010:1). Such pride is conveyed in the school's official website, which states that City High is an "an interesting, creative, co-educational campus" where "we value diversity and celebrate difference". The ERO report affirms these claims, asserting that this pride is translated into "an inclusive environment that values different cultures and respects the uniqueness of individual students" (2010:2). This claim to diversity is visible on walking through the school, where many languages can be heard and a broad range of interests is represented through the students' dress and practices. As a senior teacher asserts, at City High "there's so many different people doing so many different things" (interview, 12 June 2009). Another senior dean states that City High is "much better than lots of other schools 'round Wellington" at accepting diversity (interview, 12 June 2009).

Indeed, City High has a history of fostering diversity and individual expression. School historian Noel Harrison asserts that the school was founded in 1886 because bright students were being corralled into the rote learning of grammar subjects



rather than provided with an education that taught them to find individual solutions to problems they might face in their experiences of colonial life (1961:10). The school's website states that the first Principal of the day school, William Sanderson La Trobe, focused on teaching students to "think for themselves". The site quotes La Trobe's 1905 statement that "there would be no parrot-like repetition of teachers' words" by the students. Such statements are used to affirm the notion that students are treated as individuals by the current staff. A senior dean states that this emphasis on students as individuals, for the students, is "an important part" of "what this place is to them" (interview, 12 June 2009). The students' positioning of City High as a site of heterogeneity supports the assertion made by the Educational Review Office that "diversity is welcomed and individuality valued" (2010:3), establishing a match between the school's official Government-sanctioned discourse and the school's unofficial student-led discourse.

The fit between the official and unofficial discourses can further be seen in the student-published school magazine *The Flannel*. This magazine has a high readership among the student population and acts as a good indicator of student opinion. Like the focus group participants, *The Flannel* often compares City High to neighbouring schools, espousing City High's acceptance of difference in comparison to these institutions. An article entitled "The Cool", in the October 2009 issue, reiterates City High's commitment to individuality, for example. Echoing my fourteen-year-old self, one quotation from a popular student states, "Individuality is cool. I don't think it's cool to copy mindlessly things that other people do" (2009:11). Further, a large pull-out quotation in this article has a student describing how at her old school there was pressure to dress like others, through the wearing of designer labels. This student states, "I went to [other school] and every mufti day it was just like one big fashion show. Everyone had to dress up in their coolest clothes and if you didn't you got labelled as a loser. But here it's different. No one really cares what you wear because we value uniqueness over conformity" (2009:12).

Another article in the October 2009 issue about students who transfer to City High from other secondary schools asserts that, unlike most other schools, City High "allows students to be themselves and express who they are" (2009:58). A student quoted in the article states that he enjoys being at High as "at my old school having an opinion wasn't always a good thing but here people and teachers are willing to listen even if they don't agree, I like that". Another student asserts that "many of us are at High because we're different" (2009:59). This sentiment is also seen in a quiz

in this edition of the magazine which, describing secondary schools in Wellington, summarizes what the writers believe to be the quintessential City High attitude, that “everyone’s equal” (2009:38). The writers state that City High students “love diversity” (2009:38). As well as this, an article in the November 2009 edition of the magazine states that City High is “known for its diverse make-up of students” and attracts many different kinds of people. It further asserts that the inhabitants of City High “pride ourselves in being tolerant of difference” (2009:35). By repeatedly promoting City High as better than other schools in Wellington because of its diverse makeup and support for difference, *The Flannel* endorses the official discourses of the school that promote the school’s reputation for fostering individuality and heterogeneity.

The match between the official and unofficial discourses of the school is taut because, for many of the students, City High is a magnet school, drawing them in with its reputation for diversity. For the majority of the students, City High is not the closest school to their homes (interview with senior dean, 11 May 2009). Most of the students that attend City High have actively made a decision to come to City High. That many students eschew convenience to be at the school, choosing to cross the city to attend, helps to explain the correspondence between the official and unofficial cultures of City High. As the students in the focus groups attest, it is the school’s reputation for privileging diversity that makes it attractive compared to other schools. This diversity is made visible through the school’s relaxed dress code, which is one of the main reasons young people choose the school. Further, many of City High’s students have attended another high school previously and have chosen to come to City High based on its difference from their previous schools. The ERO Report states that contrary to the pattern exhibited by most secondary schools in Aotearoa/New Zealand, City High’s roll increases rather than decreases as the year group gets older. The ERO Report (2010:2) estimates that by year 12, only 50 percent of the students in the year group started at City High in year 9, which is the first year of secondary school in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Approximately one-third of the students in the focus groups had transferred to City High from another secondary school. The majority of these students enrolled at City High because they did not fit in to the dominant culture at their previous secondary school and desired to be in an environment where their individuality was valued. A senior dean asserts that the senior school (years 11 to 13) is “an amazing place” because “we get all these kids from outside who, who want to come here...”

(interview, 12 June 2009). The large numbers of students who transfer to City High demonstrate an affinity with the school's values through the act of leaving another school to attend City High. A new student is quoted in *The Flannel*, for instance, stating she has "wanted to come to [City] High school for so long" and that "after all [her] pleading" her father "gave in" and allowed her to come (2009:58). A Head of Department at the school asserts that it is the students who have transferred to the school who are more likely to dress in an outstanding way (12 June 2009). Since new students make up such a large percentage of the school's roll, and because idiosyncratic dress is so visible, the transfers shape the school culture, emphasizing its support of difference. The participants', and other students', support for the dominant school culture illustrates the contextual orientation of my research. The students' focus on individuality and authenticity is entwined with their attendance at City High. Arguably research with the same number of students at a different school may not have had such an emphasis on individuality as research conducted at the so-called "individual school".

The relationship between the official and unofficial discourses of the school, however, may not be as favourable as the students in the focus groups and *The Flannel* suggest. Due to the voluntary nature of focus group participation, it is not surprising that the views of the students correspond with the official discourses of the school. I cannot presume that all of the students at City High have this view. Students who respond to calls to volunteer to do extra activities at school are usually the high-performing students who identify with the school culture, rather than disaffected students. Further, the writers of the articles in *The Flannel* are students who have chosen to continue their education beyond the legal school-leaving age at City High, which suggests an investment in the school's philosophy. Thus although the focus group participants and the writers of *The Flannel* present a view that supports the school culture, this does not mean that all of the students share a commitment to this culture. I want to stress that many students were inaccessible to me, particularly those students who are traditionally positioned as disengaged from school culture, such as students who spend their breaks smoking and those who are regularly truant. These students may have espoused similar views as the focus group participants, showing a desire for the fostering of diversity, or they may have denounced the school's culture. I cannot know.

Further, the students within the focus groups are not as accepting and welcoming of diversity as they portray themselves to be. Their devastating dismissals of those

they view as 'sheep' or 'clones' do not match the inclusive atmosphere the school promotes. The students seem to equate the school's stated focus on "valuing diversity and celebrating difference" with the celebration of those students who are different from the mainstream rather than the celebration of all difference. This equation of diversity with visible difference occurs at the cost of those that express themselves in similar ways to the mainstream. The participants dismiss these students as 'weak', viewing them as aping others. Thus, contrary to the student quoted from *The Flannel* earlier who asserts that at City High "no one really cares what you wear", the students do care what others wear, condemning dress choices that are seen as conformist.

Moreover, only certain types of difference from dominant appearance norms are valued by the students. For instance, participants in Group Two and Group Four describe unpopular students against whom they measure themselves. These students are unpopular because their appearance stands out in a negative way: one because he looks like he has been "dressed by his mum" (4, 1:10), the other because she appears "plain jane" and "strange" (2, 1:2). While the focus group participants are careful to stress these students' 'right' to dress the way they do, the fact that these students lack friends and are used as a point of departure for the measurement of others' status shows that the 'inclusive' diverse environment the students claim to be part of is not as strong as they suggest. The students' focus on the 'right' of others to act and dress how they want to allows them to exhibit tolerance without being inclusive. Their claims to "accept everyone" (4, 1; 2,1; 5,2) seem to rest more on their attendance at City High than their actual views and/or practices. The staff also espouse the notion that the school is inclusive, without referring to the cracks in this inclusiveness. Interestingly, only one of the staff members I interviewed – a dean who works with many of the school's GBLTQ-identified students – stressed the need for students to be more open towards each other. This dean asserts, "this idea of the individual that gets kind of, that we, that we talk so much about here... that we celebrate diversity and all that kind of stuff, it's a myth, like- I think it's it's important that we keep on talking about it and that we keep on like working towards it but for many of the kids it's not true" (interview, 12 June 2009). The students', and arguably the staff's, reliance on and propagation of the school's reputation as fostering difference allows them to believe they are participating in the school's culture of diversity without actively practicing the inclusiveness that the reputation implies.

Since the school's culture is one that privileges those students who are visibly individual, the so-called 'clones' the focus group participants attack are being different by not abiding with the dominant school culture. Thus, ironically, the students' claimed celebration of difference does not extend to those who counter this culture. Saffron asserts that while at her previous high school it was "weird if you tr[ie]d really hard to be an individual", at City High, it is "weird if you're not an individual, like if you try not to be an individual" (5, 3:15). The so-called 'sheep' at the school are, then, 'weird', which places them in the same subject position that many of those students who have transferred to City High were located in at their old school. In a reversal of the culture of many high schools in New Zealand, the 'alternative' students now occupy the dominant position at High, with the 'clones' marked as strange. Ostensibly, then, the clones must work against the dominant school culture to maintain their identity as similar to each other, pushing against the norm of the school, just as many of the 'different' students at other high schools must. The participants who condemn the clones follow dominant school culture, and thus could be seen as engaging in clone-like behaviour themselves. Indeed, there is a paradox created through the school's culture of difference, whereby (most of) the students are trying to be different from everyone else, and are thus behaving in a similar manner.

The students' condemnations of clones illustrate the role of appearance in constructing identity. While the students in the focus groups do look different from one another, they share many other characteristics. They speak similarly, particularly within their friendship groups; they reference many of the same media texts; they undertake many of the same practices; possess similar viewpoints and share many of the same goals. If one were to take appearance out of the equation, the students suddenly become very similar. Dress, then, is one of the most salient ways that the students construct themselves and position themselves as different. Dress is an easily accessible and highly visible method of marking the self out from others. As it is such a key form of self-construction, it is the primary way in which students identify clones, an identification that is supported by the students' belief that dress illustrates personality. The so-called clones may be more different from each other than the students imagine, but because such difference is not highly visible, and similarity with others is demonstrated instead, such subjects are positioned as 'sheep', mindlessly mirroring each other. Yet it is questionable how similar clones look to one another. Granted, many persons walking along Lambton Quay – one of the homes of the clone – look alike, but they are not uniform. The

calling of these subjects clones demonstrates the wish of the labeller to differentiate herself from the masses, rather than the actual identicalness of those labelled clones.

As the assessments of the clone show, the students believe that if a subject looks like others, she will act like others. However, as the previous chapter outlined, they believe that there is more to people than appearance, that appearances cannot illustrate the entirety of a subject's identity. They continue to link the clone's appearance with her identity, however, operating within a surface model paradigm as though her appearance illustrates her identity. This tension arises in part because the clone is an imaginary figure rather than an actual subject. The clone exists to bolster the students' commitment to diversity. As diversity is a privileged goal, it requires the threat of its counterpart conformity in order that it can occupy this place of privilege. The students need the clone, then, to measure their own attempts at authenticity against. She is a fictional measure, spotted in crowds, deemed to be a follower without further investigation of her actual behaviour. Like the members of the in-crowd on another classic 'teen' film, *Pretty in Pink* (Howard Deutch, 1986), they are not all the same. Indeed, as Andie Walsh (Molly Ringwald) finds out, although a 'prep' such as Blane McDonough (Andrew McCarthy) looks and seemingly acts like his friends, he can stand on his own, countering the views of his parents and clique to be with Andie. If the students spent more time with the subjects they write-off as 'clones' they would arguably see that the decisions the clone makes day-to-day are as varied as their own, propelled by multiple criteria, of which the views of others is one concern of many. Because being different, and thus authentic, takes work, however, the clone is a necessary construction. The mass the clone belongs to forms the sky against which the lightning of the unique subject strikes; the darker the sky, the more unique the 'different' subject appears.

### **Trying to be who she is “completely not”: The tryhard**

As well as utilizing the figure of the sheep or the 'clone' to express their negative view of the inauthentic subject, the students frequently invoke the 'tryhard', a subject who further illustrates the importance of authentic self-expression. Tryhards, as Kandy succinctly summarizes, are persons who “blatantly aren't what they say they are” (1, 2:18). That is, the tryhard does not present herself in a manner that

corresponds with her 'personality'. Implicit in this notion is that there is a 'true' self to present, and that a correspondence between the self and the self's presentation is achievable. The students term the tryhard 'fake', condemning her for her lack of authenticity. The students' formulation of this figure reveals the salience of feelings and practices as signs of authenticity. Condemning the tryhard for not acting in accordance with his feelings, the students use this figure to locate themselves as subjects who are authentic in their self-expression by comparison.

Rather than mindlessly following others or being too scared to be his 'real' self in the manner of the clone, the tryhard is more calculated in his behaviour. As the name suggests, the students view the tryhard as trying too hard to win the approval of others. They position him as behaving on the basis of others' wishes rather than his own. In this way, the students' analysis of the tryhard aligns him with what Goffman posits is a 'false' performance, which are those presentations which are "painstakingly pasted together" (1969:77). Such a performance is one where others' thoughts (or, at least, the subject's perception of these thoughts) constantly influence the subject. Kandy asserts that with regard to dress-choices, the tryhard bases his decisions around those he is trying to win favour with. He thinks, "ohh will they like this?" and if he decides that they will, he will wear the outfit; if not, he will put the outfit aside. Kandy adds that if you are a tryhard, "you're pretty much letting them choose your clothing" (1, 3:17-8). There is a tension present in these assertions – the tryhard is simultaneously positioned as a calculating subject with agency, yet this agency is limited to following the (perceived) wishes of others. This indicates that the tryhard, while calculating, is not fully in control, and thus, like the clone, has a weak self, a self that is easily swayed by the views of others.

The desire for the approval of others means that the tryhard will try to draw others' attention to the information she wants them to know about her. Lance, for example, illustrates this with a comparison of two young women in his year group who have been tattooed. According to Lance, one of these young women drew attention to her tattoo, loudly and frequently referring to it and showing other students, while the other "stayed low key" about her tattoo, with Lance noticing it on the bus one day without any prompting from her. Lance and the rest of Group Four are much more favourable toward the quiet woman as she was not attempting to ensure that her peers knew that she was now tattooed and thus was not "trying too hard" (4, 2:15). Similarly, Group One states that the tryhard will continue to bring the conversation back to the topic that she wants others to know that she knows about (1, 3:18).

Further, the tryhard will often ask others directly to approve him or support his sentiments rather than receive such support in a more organic way. Group Two, for example, describe a young man in one of their Art classes who, they believe, often pretends that he thinks his work is bad in order to draw others' attention to the fact that the work is good (2, 4:25). Group One also describe a practice whereby the tryhard will continually ask for confirmation of identity from others, asking, for instance, 'I'm a bit emo, aren't I?' (1, 3:18). This concern with others' opinions is seen by the students as a sign that tryhards do not "feel comfortable the way they are" (2, 3:19). This implies that the tryhard does not securely occupy the subject position she desires to occupy. Therefore the tryhard prioritises others' opinions above her own because she does not feel confident in her own judgment, relying on others' opinions for her self-view.

All of the students, however, are reliant on others' opinions of them. In order to occupy a position, others must view that subject in this position. As the previous chapter detailed, the students attempt to ensure significant others view them as they wish to be seen, using dress to aid their attempts. Indeed, Goffman points out that all interactions involve the subject endeavouring to influence others in some way (1969:26). While the students downplay their endeavours to influence others, they enlarge the tryhard's efforts, conceiving the tryhard as too persistent and too enthusiastic in her attempt to shape others' views of her. The students position the tryhard as unlike themselves, as "obsessing" over what others think and thus tipping the balance between the wearer and others in favour of the observing others. Where the boundary lies between an acceptable and an obsessive level of taking others' opinions into account is unclear. It seems likely that the students' desire to influence how others view them ebbs and flows, increasing in certain situations, such as making a new friend, and diminishing in other situations, such as spending time with family. Arguably the students undertake behaviour at times that could be positioned as tryhard. Perhaps it is because they do 'try hard' periodically that the students construct this figure to distance themselves from, creating a whole identity for the tryhard so they can assure themselves they are not this figure and re-assert the line between 'acceptable' and 'obsessive' considerations of others' views. Although the students turn this contextual behaviour into the basis for a whole identity, being tryhard is contextual and temporary, with the so-called 'tryhard' only 'trying hard' at certain times.



Cementing the status of emotions as the location and guarantee of authenticity, the students view the tryhard's inauthenticity as stemming from her failure to act in a manner that corresponds with her emotions. The students argue that the tryhard does not enjoy the practices she undertakes, ignoring her own feelings in order to continue to fit in with the group or conform to others' wishes. Penny states that people occupy the position of tryhard when they are "doing nothing that [they] actually want to do" (3, 3:21). Group Two agrees that typical tryhard behaviour involves ignoring one's own taste in favour of something that one thinks will impress others. Aladdin provides an example of such behaviour, asserting that a tryhard might listen to a band and "really hate it" but will continue to listen to it although he thinks "ohh this is really really bad" because this subject wants to "show off" to others that he listens to that band (2, 4:14). The tryhard, then, ignores the embodied signals that are supposed to guide his behaviour and appearance. This repeated setting aside of his own feelings in order to please others marks him as 'fake'. It is this that turns the attempt to influence others from acceptable to obsessive. The authentic subject presents himself in accordance with her feelings, influencing others to position him as he is, whereas the tryhard denies her feelings, presenting himself in a manner that does not correspond with her bodily signals, therefore influencing others to view him as occupying a position his body does not.

Thus, for the students, the more one works to please others at the expense of one's own feelings, the more inauthentic one is. This means that for the participants, dress that pleases the wearer is genuine dress. Neve asserts that dress is 'true' to the wearer when the wearer is feeling the "actual emotion of *wanting* something and *wanting* to wear this" (3, 3:21). Additionally, Saffron states that dress that is genuine for the wearer is dress that makes her feel "really happy, not just happy to try and make other people happy... you know not trying to please other people, trying to please yourself" (5, 3:16). Illustrating their separation of authentic identity from acting to please others, the students do not position pleasing the self as entwined with pleasing others. They view their own happiness as the key to their authentic behaviour and associate the tryhard's lack of authenticity with a lack of happiness.

Moving back to the manner in which the tryhard is seen, as well as viewing the tryhard as not occupying the subject position she wishes to occupy, the students also position as tryhard those subjects who believe themselves to occupy a position they do not. The relationship between the two contradictory formulations of the tryhard lies in a discrepancy between the way that the tryhard sees herself and the

way that others see her. This illustrates the importance for the students of accurately perceiving how others see the self. Group Two, for instance, label one young woman as a tryhard because she “thinks she’s quite cool... she thinks she’s up with all the cool people” (2, 1:2). Melo adds that this woman “tries to be cool but she just can’t do it” (*ibid.*). Group Four assert that young Pākehā men who try to “rep a colour” – become affiliated with a gang – are tryhards as they believe that they are capable of navigating the brutal gang world, but they are not. Lance states these young men would “get slaughtered if they tried to join a gang” (4, 3:24). In another example, Group Four states that people who think they are funny but are not occupy the position of tryhard (4, 1:17). It is this gap between the tryhard’s perception of how she thinks others see her and the actual perception of others, particularly those the subject is trying to gain the acceptance of, which contributes to the subject’s status as tryhard. Because the successful occupation of a subject position relies on others viewing the subject in that position, this type of tryhard, then, does not occupy the position she places herself in.

The tryhard’s failure to successfully occupy the subject position he wishes to is largely because the subject lacks the cultural competency, emotional attachment, and/or the experiences required to occupy such a position, and thus does not adequately perform the characteristics necessary to be securely in that position. The young white men who attempt to be gangstas – they are given the derogatory moniker of “wiggas” by Groups One, Two and Four – cannot adequately fulfil the position of gangsta because they do not possess the racial characteristics, family ties, or the disadvantaged background that gang members come from. The students’ judgments of others as tryhards situate themselves as possessing the knowledge required to evaluate whether another authentically occupies a subject position. Such labelling, then, strengthens the occupation of the students’ own positions. Further, calling someone a tryhard, or fake, because she lacks the authenticating characteristics of that subject position is a means of ensuring that identity continues to have its basis in the subject’s past experiences, her cultural competency, and her emotions.

This emphasis on the basis of identity in emotions, cultural competency, and past experiences means that the subject must do more than just to look the part to be the part. The ‘wigga’ cannot put on a gang bandanna and suddenly be in the gang. The students emphasize that appearance alone cannot consolidate a subject position; one must also undertake the practices and embody the emotional state associated

with that subject position. One must feel the excitement in one's chest at hearing a song, feel sadness at the closing of a loved venue, or the uncontrollable urge to shout for joy when one's favoured sports team gets a goal, for instance, rather than act as though one feels these things when one does not. The students' opinions are contrary to dress theorists Caroline Evans and Minna Thornton's argument that "the body can be made, through dress, to play any part it desires..." (1989:62). Group Four agrees, for instance, that if one wears a clothing item associated with a sports team, one should enjoy, watch, and preferably, play, that sport (4, 3:17). The tryhard, then, is a figure the students use to emphasize their commitment to a depth model of identity. The tryhard does not portray his authentic identity as he does not have the background, participate in the interests of, and feel the emotions of the subject that occupies the position he is attempting to portray himself as occupying. Thus, the tryhard is not expressing his 'real' self, but acting as someone he thinks others want him to be.

The students are also invested in locating the tryhard because at times it is difficult to tell who is authentic and who is trying too hard. Since people can access internet forums, videos, images, and descriptions of a wide range of subject positions, different identities can be convincingly assumed without the experiences, background, and interests that, in the students' opinion, make that identity authentic. This illustrates the fragility of making judgments of others based on appearance, and threatens the use of appearance to assess authenticity, as this appearance can be mistaken as a 'real' indicator of identity. This means that the students must work hard to ensure that the person they are interacting with genuinely occupies the identity she purports to occupy. Illustrating the ease with which subjects can claim an 'illegitimate' identity, Henrietta describes how with a little research she was able to take up a subject position associated with being 'scene'. Following information she found on the internet which directed her to wear scene-associated band t-shirts, smoke tailor-made cigarettes, dye her hair a certain way, and adopt a moniker based on alliteration with her first name (such as Henrietta Horizon), Henrietta took photos of herself and uploaded them to a social networking profile which she had constructed to fit with the norms of the 'scene' scene. Henrietta found that, online at least, people took her to be 'scene' and requested her online friendship and access to her social networking profile on that basis (1, 2:17). Henrietta and the rest of the Group One laugh at how easy it was for Henrietta to be seen as 'scene' but this laughter is underscored by their harsh judgment of tryhards and those who could not

tell that Henrietta was merely playing at being 'scene' rather than genuinely 'scene'. This reiterates their belief that identity is based on more than looking the part.

Additionally, the students assert that they are suspicious of the authenticity of a subject's self-expression when the expression matches the stereotype of the identity he is presenting himself as, such as Henrietta's scene identity. Group Three agrees with Neve's assertion that such a correspondence is a sign that the subject is trying to be "some sort of definition... trying to do the whole image" (3, 3:3). Group Five state that if someone is "too perfect", they are often not presenting their 'true' self (5, 3:28). The students position these persons as mirroring a mediated version of that subject position rather than occupying the 'reality' of that subject position. That is, they view tryhards as miming the subject position as it is portrayed in the media rather than embodying the position with the nuances that are produced by an individual's experiences and emotions. This miming locates the subject as trying too hard to belong to a subject position, and therefore as inauthentic. Had Henrietta ventured from the online realm into the material world it may have been much harder for her to be seen as 'scene' by people who occupy the 'scene' subculture as her textbook performance of the 'scene' identity marks her as inauthentically in that position. Textbook performances are associated with just that: a constructed show rather than a mirror of the subject's identity. 'Natural' behaviour and appearance is often that which is flawed. As the students agree, perfection is the realm of the media rather than reality; Hollywood, rather than City High.

With the subject who consciously embodies the stereotyped characteristics of an identity position as the primary example, the students view the tryhard as too calculated in her behaviour, embodying characteristics in order that others will see her a certain way rather than because these characteristics reflect how she feels. They conceive of her as deciding to be something and then attempting to reach this identity-goal. This view is in tension with the students' own practice of desiring to embody certain subject positions, and consciously working to embody them, as outlined in the previous chapter. Some of the students are reflexive about this practice, measuring their own attempts – as well as the tryhard's attempts – to embody a subject position in relation to authenticity. These students assert that they do indeed consciously try to take on new characteristics, but because these take effort, they do not last long. They conceive of their unsuccessful attempts to change their subject positions as inauthentic. Neve asserts that she changes her style because she "want[s] to be something" but she finds that "it never really sticks".

Neve states this forced style “phases out” and is replaced by a style that is “more of a natural one that’s easier”. Neve asserts that “only the things that are really *me* will stick, things that I really like and find effortless” (3, 3:10-11). As Josef states, when a style is “not real”, that is, is not an authentic self-expression of the wearer, the wearer does not “stay that way for long” because she can only “pretend” to be the identity associated with that style for a limited time (2, 4:23). The authentic, in this formulation, is that which does not involve noticeable work. The tryhard, then, is seen as working too hard to occupy a position and thus as inauthentic.

While the students spend a lot of time stipulating what makes a subject a tryhard, they find it hard to articulate how they know that someone is a tryhard. Saffron’s statement that “you can just tell, you just have a feeling” (5, 3:27) is echoed throughout the focus groups. Highlighting the importance of appearance to the occupation of a subject position, Marc asserts that the tryhard is someone who “doesn’t look natural” (5, 2:23). For Group Five, this ‘unnaturalness’ is apparent in the tryhard’s body language, the way she talks and the way she moves. The students’ repeated assertions that they “just know” when someone is a tryhard support Bourdieu’s (1984) notion that subject positions involve the embodiment of certain dispositions, which include body language, accent, appearance, and taste. These dispositions are naturalised so that the students can spot seemingly by ‘instinct’, without conscious analysis, dispositions that are not consistent with the subject position/s the subject purports to occupy. Tellingly, the students assert that the tryhard “get[s] something a little wrong” (5, 3:27) in her enactment of her subject position; that is, she does not “pull it off right” (3, 2:13). This failure to ‘pull off’ the subject position means that the tryhard lacks the cultural competency to display the disposition required for her to ‘naturally’ embody that subject position. For instance, Group Two point out that if a woman cannot walk in high heels without difficulty, then she is trying to look like someone she is not (2, 4:2). Penny asserts that when the subject does not “pull off” the subject position she wishes to occupy, she is “not being true” to herself (3, 2:13). This positioning contradicts the students’ earlier claim that to embody a subject position too well is a sign that the subject is trying too hard and is thus inauthentic. The authentic subject must embody the characteristics of a subject position enough so that she is seen to occupy that position by others, but not to the extent that she does not display some contradictions and/or anomalies in her occupation of that position – without this nuanced occupation of the position the subject can be viewed as fake.

The figure of the tryhard haunts the students' notions of authenticity. This figure reveals the work that goes into occupying a subject position and thus calls into question the 'natural' status of identity. He highlights that the secure occupation of a subject position requires others to view the subject in that position. The students' condemnations of the tryhard illustrate that in order to be deemed authentic, the work persons undertake to securely occupy a subject position must be conducted in a manner that is not evident to others. Ideally this work is not evident to the subject either. This positions the subject's actions as not calculated, and thus as authentic, rather than "painstakingly pasted together" (Goffman 1969:77). The students are highly critical of the tryhard without considering the work they themselves undertake to embody the characteristics attached to a subject position. This is because they do not position identity as work, but as mirroring their experiences and emotions. By failing to see identity as involving cultural labour, the students can label those subjects they view as working to be positioned in a certain manner 'tryhard' or 'fake', while positioning themselves as embodying an authentic identity.

## **Identity, feelings and authenticity: Conclusion**

Dress guides the students' judgments of others' authenticity. Since dress is seen as reflecting the identity of wearer, if the wearer is judged to be expressing herself in a manner that does not correspond with her identity, she is deemed to be an inauthentic subject. Authentic self-expression is that which is different from the self-expression of others, and that which is synonymous with the background, interests, preferences, emotions and experiences of the wearer. The students' construction of the inauthentic subject – the tryhard, or the 'clone' – establishes feelings, or what Trilling terms "instinct" (1972:143), as at the heart of authenticity. The subject who repeatedly disregards her own feelings in order to influence others to see her in a certain manner, who claims an attachment to something she does not emotionally connect with, and/or undertakes practices she does not like in order to win friends, is inauthentic.

As I have argued in the previous chapter, the students view identity as an ongoing process, changing as the subject encounters new information, has new experiences, and spends time with different people. Summarizing this chapter, authentic change can be conceived as that which is based not only on the experiences of the subject,

but also on her emotions. Authentic change, then, is not calculated. Scarlet's explanation of her current dress style as developing "subconsciously" and "without [her] really knowing" (5, 3:2) exemplifies this type of change. This means that subjects cannot authentically embody an identity by making a decision to be that identity, and retroactively taking on the dress and other practices associated with this identity. Rather, authentic change in identity occurs almost unnoticeably as the result of new experiences and influences that shape the practices the subject enjoys, and the ways she makes sense of these practices. As Hannah points out, the subject often does not realize she 'is' an identity, she "just is" (2, 4:24). 'Authentic' subject positions, then, are those that do not noticeably involve work. Thus, because style is taken to reflect identity, style change must occur in the way that authentic identity is said to occur: without effort. As work is associated with inauthenticity and the expectations and desires of others, the 'truth' of the subject resides in that which is effortless and resonates with her emotions. What feels 'right', or 'easy', is arguably, the social incorporated on the body. The authentic self, then, is a social production that does not feel like a production.

## Chapter Five: (A)dressing Sex and Gender

“Heels on her feet, swear she's in heat, flirtin' wit every man she sees  
Her pants hangin' low, she never says no, everyone knows she's easy  
Nasty put some clothes on, you lookin' stank  
Nasty where's your pride, you should be ashamed”  
(Destiny's Child, “Nasty Girl”)

“New Kids on the Block, sucked a lot of dick  
Boy/girl groups make me sick  
And I can't wait 'til I catch all you faggots in public  
I'ma love it...  
And I don't wrestle, I'll knock you fuckin faggots the fuck out”  
(Eminem, “Marshall Mathers”)

“Boy or girl?”, the sales assistant asks me as I walk hesitantly around the children’s clothing store. Gender norms sharply divide the shop: frills, ruffles, gingham checks, and bunches of pinks, purples and reds on one side wave at the blue, green, brown and black straight-cut t-shirts and jeans (oh what tiny jeans!) at the other end of the store. The pinks, purples and reds are laced with declarations of love for snowflakes, puppies, hot chocolate, shopping, Paris, and, of course, BFFs (best friends forever), while the greens, browns and blues shout appreciation for motorbikes, soccer, surfing, and vocational aspirations of being a pilot or a rugby star. While it may seem clichéd to hark back to childhood clothing, the students at City High assert that it is during their childhood that they learned how ‘normal’ males and females should look. Further, children’s clothing contains a plethora of images and text that refer to the idealized adult, the adult it is imagined the child may grow into – a shopper, or a pilot, or a sports star. The separation of dress into boys’ and girls’, men’s and women’s, implies that differences between the sexes should be emphasized, that male and female creatures are, and should look, different. Dress, then, plays a key role in defining and upholding sexed identity categories, naturalizing the way the inhabitants of each identity category appear.



From the scan that tells the parents-to-be the sex of the foetus, subjects are gendered. Indeed, sex designation and its shadow, gender, are required for others to be able to recognise subjects as such. The dehumanizing of a subject frequently occurs through terming him 'it', depriving the subject of his sex. Sex, then, is a crucial part of identity. The students assert that the sex of a person is the first thing they notice in an interaction. They consider other aspects of identity secondary to sex. Sex designation shapes how the students interact with the subject. For them, one of dress's salient roles is to showcase sex. This chapter examines how dress acts as a gendering tool that reinforces notions of how each sex is 'supposed' to look, aiding the construction of the sexes as oppositional. It illustrates the students' commitment to the separation between the sexes, considering the way the students use dress to define themselves in relation to their ostensibly 'opposite' sex, and to separate themselves from subject positions that they do not wish to inhabit. It argues that the students are committed to the coherence of sex and gender. They position this coherence, on the one hand, as 'natural', with gender following from sex, and on the other hand, as achieved, requiring thought and effort. This once again illustrates the difficulties the students face in negotiating the tensions between surface and depth models of identity.

This chapter also examines the figures of the homosexual and the skank, two Others who act to strengthen the norms of sex and gender coherence. The students define themselves against these figures, presenting themselves as embodying a 'normal' union of sex and gender characteristics by comparison. The homosexual is viewed as abnormal because he does not present a gender expression coherent with his sex. The skank, on the other hand, is condemned for occupying a gendered position that coheres excessively with her sex – she is *too* feminine. The dress practices of both the homosexual and the skank that are deplored by the students are those associated with femininity, which reflects the devalued status of femininity in the West. These figures, then, are used to mark out appropriate forms of sex-gender coherence, and acceptable forms of gender practice: men should be masculine, and women should be feminine, but not too feminine.

## **Men and women are “meant to be different”: Sex, gender, and the students’ dress practices**

Gender is the embodiment of the cultural norms that mark out each sex. Acting like a woman or a man involves the continuous shaping of the body in a manner deemed appropriate for that sex, that is, through appearance, movement and practices deemed ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’. Dress items and practices are a salient culturally based form of gender designation. Dress is divided according to sex, with some items and practices designated as ‘for’ men and others as ‘for’ women. By adopting these items and practices appropriately, subjects naturalise the way each sex is deemed to ‘normally’ appear, as distinct from the other. Gender, then, is constituted in social practice, in seemingly insignificant everyday activities such as getting dressed. Sociologists Candace West and Don Zimmerman offer a useful definition of gender, asserting that it is “the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category” (1987:127). These “normative conceptions” structure the way that appearance is read: dress, body language and mannerisms are ordered in relation to gender norms, as well as norms of class, race, and place. This section examines the ways the students manage their “situated conduct” in light of these norms. That is, it considers the way the students use dress to signal their sex to others, and in doing so both naturalise the coherence of sex with gender and the conceptualization of the sexes as opposites.

The students use “gender” and “sex” interchangeably, employing both terms to refer to the anatomically based characterization of subjects. In this way the students’ language mirrors common use of the terms in Aotearoa/New Zealand, where they are routinely conflated. Within the humanities and social sciences, sex is used to refer to the biological and anatomical aspects that define a person as ‘male’ or ‘female’ such as chromosomes, hormones, and genitalia, while gender refers to the cultural expectations attached to each sex regarding behaviour, actions, beliefs, and appearance. Females are expected to be ‘feminine’ and males ‘masculine’. If sex and gender are separate, however, then being ‘female’ does not necessarily result in being ‘feminine’ and being ‘male’ does not guarantee that the subject will act ‘masculine’: a ‘female’ can be ‘masculine’ and a ‘male’ can be ‘feminine’ (Butler 1990; Halberstam 1998). Although the students do not express this in terms of the separation of sex from gender, they do make a distinction between sex and practice,

positing that women can embody traits associated with men, and men can embody traits associated with women. At the same time, however, they classify 'normal' women as "womanly" or "feminine", and 'normal' men as "manly" or "masculine". The students believe that gender presentation – the way subjects look, speak, and act – should correspond with their sex. In other words, they believe that gender and sex should be coherent, not separate.

Judith Butler's theorization of the relationship between sex and gender provides a useful tool for examining the students' belief in the coherence of sex and gender. Butler asserts that instead of gender characteristics following from sex distinction, sex is divided into the dichotomous categories of male and female to reflect gender norms. This division then works to naturalise gender norms. For Butler, gender is "the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes are themselves established", and thus the "distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all" ([1990] 1999:10). While the students themselves certainly do not characterize their use of the terms sex and gender in a Butlerian fashion, their conflation of these terms and their belief that the behaviour of 'normal' subjects corresponds to their sex signals the way in which sex and gender are viewed as one.

Sex, then, is inseparable from the cultural norms of gender, which, in the West, divide sex into the two opposing forms of 'male' and 'female'. These forms are produced through their mutual exclusivity, their status as binary oppositions. What is feminine must not be masculine, and vice versa. These sexed categories, as Hall asserts, "can function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render 'outside', abjected" (1996:5). It is necessary, then, for an identity category to have an oppositional category, an Other, in order to exist. As Simone de Beauvoir famously asserts in *The Second Sex*, the category of 'Woman' acts as Man's Other ([1949]1972:xxii). Thus it is the differences between men and women, masculinity and femininity, that are emphasized rather than the similarities. The students are committed to 'male' and 'female' remaining sharply differentiated identity categories. Lance illustrates this commitment, succinctly asserting, "we're meant to be different. Men, women". Allen adds, "we're supposed to be opposites" (4, 1:22). The students conceive of men and women as looking different, as having distinct interests, and as thinking, behaving, and communicating differently. As I outline later in this chapter, those subjects that are not distinct enough from their 'opposite' sex are policed by many of the students, who are invested in the categories of 'man' and 'woman' remaining oppositional.

Sex is a powerful identity category, shaping how subjects see themselves and are seen. It is a primary classification through which the students measure themselves and others. As Neve states, the classification of subjects by sex is “such like a basic you know thing-”. Penny interrupts, “like you see someone and you’re like ‘guy’, ‘girl’”. Neve continues, “it’s like the first thing you think when you see someone, like you acknowledge oh yeah that’s a girl, that’s a guy” (3, 2:20). The students rely on their culturally based skills of sex recognition in these classifications, which treat appearance as a primary sign of sex. They view the self – and the way the self appears – as fundamentally structured by sex. Not only is this apparent in the categorizations they make of subjects when they first encounter them, but also in the way the students speak of those subjects whose sex they are unsure of. They deem it offensive to ask a subject his or her sex because, as Marc asserts, such a query is “questioning their whole kinda personal self... their being” (5, 2:27). Thus they would not directly ask a person their sex if they were unsure. Luke states, for instance, that “when they’re not there you can ask – I’m not gonna say it straight to their face!” (4, 2:21). Questioning them “straight to their face” is too much for the students, who think that being asked “are you a boy or a girl?” would be “really horrible” for that subject (Josef 2, 3:10). Indeed, the students who had experienced their sex being queried did feel like their selves were questioned. Allen, for instance, states that these mistakes made him feel “like less of a boy”. He adds, “it’s pretty bad for your self-esteem to get mistaken for a girl quite a lot, when you don’t want to be...” (4, 1:16). For the students, then, to be a person is to be male or female. As Chapter Three argues, the secure occupation of an identity position is based on others conceiving the subject in that position. Thus Allen feels like “less of a boy” when others do not recognize him as a boy. Supporting a surface model conception of identity, in which identity is reliant on the views of others rather than inherent in the subject, the students, then, would not question another’s sex directly because this questions his or her status as a ‘full’ subject. Dress, in helping establish the sex of a person for others, acts to aid persons to be ‘full’ subjects.

Because the students are invested in men and women as oppositional, and in sex as fundamental to subjectivity, they find it difficult to interact with those subjects whose sex they are unsure of. They need to know the sex status of others because it shapes their behaviour towards the person, the topics they bring up, how they address this person, and their own gender presentation during this interaction. Aladdin states, for instance, “if you’re if you’re having a conversation with them you

don't know whether to be like 'oh um girl things' or 'ohh rugby and beer'" (2, 3:10).<sup>30</sup> Therefore, as Lance asserts, not knowing this information would result in an "awkward" conversation (4, 2:21). This is because, as Neve asserts, sex shapes "how you interact with them... you know like girls, and girls and guys, and so your interactions are a bit different" (3, 2:20). By interacting differently with different sexes, these distinctions are further naturalised. Indeed, as West and Zimmerman posit, it is through interaction that gender is constituted (1987:129). Thus, interacting with a subject without knowing his or her sex is "awkward", in part, because the student's own gender presentation is destabilized through the inability to establish sex similarity or difference in the interaction. The students, then, find it hard, if not impossible, to not know a person's sex. They state that if a subject's sex were not immediately obvious, they would investigate until they were satisfied they knew the subject's 'true' sex.

The privileging of the body over gender presentation underpins the students' search for the subject's 'true' sexed identity. If a subject transgresses the norms of coherence between sex and gender, the students frame the subject through their assumptions of his or her biological attributes, particularly his or her genitalia. Sex, rather than gender presentation, is seen as at the foundation of a person. This is apparent in the way the students refer to those subjects who do not identify with the sex they were labelled at birth. Josef, for example, has a cousin who is currently transitioning from male to female. Josef's cousin has started to take hormones and to wear what Josef describes as 'girly' items, such as earrings, headbands, nail polish and skirts (2, 1:12 and 2, 3:11). Although her cousin is in the transitioning process, Josef and the other members of the focus group continue to call her cousin a "man" and use the male pronoun when discussing her cousin. For Josef the use of the male pronoun is justified because her cousin is not getting "down there" – that is, the genitalia – changed (2, 1:12). This privileging of the body as the mark of 'true' sex is further seen in the students' references to two students at City High who were labelled 'female' at birth but currently pass as 'male'. Again, the members of Group Two refer to these subjects as "girls" on the basis of their bodies rather than their chosen gender identities (2, 1:11 and 2, 3:11). For example, Aladdin states of one of these students, "*she* looks heaps like a boy and she dresses like a boy and she acts like a boy and she's just everything about her is a boy and like she wants to be a boy" (2, 1:11). Interestingly, although "everything about" this subject's presentation

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<sup>30</sup> It is striking how easily the students gender conversation topics, which illustrates the pervasiveness of gender in social life.

marks her as a boy, Aladdin and the other students in Group Two classify her as a 'girl'. This illustrates the bias towards the body in the categorization of subjects. The body, for the students, is the final arbiter in the sex boundary. What is "down there" is what defines the sex of the person, even if the person does not identify with her sex and "everything" about her behaviour and appearance is associated with the other sex. Making recourse to "down there", then, can be seen to correspond with a depth model conception of identity, referring to the physical manifestation of the usually unseeable 'truth' of a person.

The language the students use when they refer to subjects who do not perform their gender coherently with their sex demonstrates their investment in sex as dichotomous. The focus group participants continue to refer to these subjects in terms of a dual sex and gender system, thereby illustrating the influence of language on gender intelligibility. The students see bodies defined as 'male' or 'female' as the norm and have no language to describe any body that is outside of this dichotomy. In this way, language defines sex – corralling it into opposites – yet is taken to describe what 'obviously' exists. Because of this, the students continue to label subjects according to the sex they believe them to 'really' be, even when the gender presentation of these subjects opposes the sex the students – and others – assign to them.

The students' commitment to the division of the sexes into opposites is sustained by and upholds the norm of heterosexuality. Ideologically, heterosexuality relies on the notion that men and women are 'opposites' and that such opposites desire to fit together like a jigsaw piece to make a 'whole'. This reliance serves to construct the sexes into a 'naturally' opposing dichotomy and locates desire as based on the attraction between 'biological' opposites. This naturalizes gender differences between the sexes. As cultural theorist Gayle Rubin notes, gender "is a socially imposed division of the sexes. It is a product of the social relations of sexuality" ([1975] 2006:94). Rubin terms this division, and the social relations it naturalizes, the "sex/gender system" (2006:88). This system is "the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity" (2006:88). The students' adherence to this system is apparent in their conception of desire, which can be summed up in Allen's use of the oft-repeated phrase that "opposites attract" (4, 1:22). The status of this conception as a 'truth' reverberates throughout the focus groups in the students' assumptions that heterosexuality is the norm. With the exception of the two explicitly queer-identified students, the participants

frequently refer implicitly to heterosexuality, unquestioningly presuming that men are attracted to women and vice versa.

Heterosexuality serves as a powerful force in the construction of the sexes as opposites, since desire is conceived to be, as Nagesh terms it, based on “instinct” (4, 1:22). Thus desire is taken by the students to be a phenomenon that is rooted in the body – which, as the previous chapter argues, grants authenticity – rather than culture. This view of desire is synchronous with contemporary Western ‘common sense’ which, as Weeks points out, views sexuality as “the most spontaneously natural thing” about subjects (2010:4). This so-called ‘naturalness’ of desire for the ‘opposite’ implies that men and women are naturally opposites. Butler’s (1990) notion of the “heterosexual matrix” is useful here in examining the students’ commitment to sex, gender, and desire as operating on an oppositional grid. For Butler, like Rubin, the construction of gender is framed through heterosexuality, which naturalizes the opposition of the sexes and desire. Butler states that the “institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire” (1999:31). Thus the naturalization of heterosexuality secures the naturalization of the oppositionality of masculinity and femininity. It is through the production of heterosexual desire that the sexes are stabilized as dichotomous.

Heterosexuality’s primary position in the sex/gender system can be seen in the assumptions the students make regarding the sexuality of subjects whose gender presentation does not correspond with the norms of their sex. That is, they presume that these subjects are not heterosexual. Aladdin, for instance, exclaims, “lesbian!” upon viewing an image of an androgynous woman (2, 3:8). Further, Group Four describe a young woman at City High who, according to them, “looks like a boy”. Because of this they question her sexuality, assuming that she is gay. Lance states that when he interacts with this young woman, he asks himself “is she lesbian or not?” Naturalizing this assumption, Lance posits this as a question that “everyone” thinks when they encounter this student (4, 2:20). Group Three also mention this young woman. Penny asserts that she “just straight up looks like a man”. Neve adds that “if you looked at her and found that she was a girl, you’d probably assume that she was gay” (3, 2:22). For the students, then, the woman who is not feminine is likely to be homosexual, as is the man who is not masculine. This association of those subjects who do not perform gender coherently with a ‘deviant’ sexuality

further supports Butler's notion that sex and gender are framed through the heterosexual matrix, which "assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality" (1999:208). Thus because the 'unfeminine' woman disrupts this sexualized opposition between genders, and the coherence between sex and gender, she is taken to not be heterosexual.

Appearance is the main frame within which the students judge the correspondence between subjects' sex and gender, that is, whether they are presenting themselves in a manner coherent with their "down there". The categorizations of persons as "gay" are based on the disjuncture between their gender and their sex, established through appearance, rather than explicit information about their sexual preferences. Although the subject deemed 'gay' due to her appearance destabilizes the coherence between sex and gender, she continues to be positioned as though she desires her gendered opposite, and thus serves to further naturalize the heterosexual framework of desire. Because she looks masculine (which is what causes the students to label her gay in the first place), the students believe that she wishes to attract the feminine, which continues to support the notion that opposites attract. Thus the heterosexual framework which positions desire as oppositional remains stable for the students.

The students' judgments of subjects are based on strong, unified conceptions of how men and women *should* look, which uphold the correspondence of gender with sex and naturalize as homosexual those subjects whose sex and gender do not correspond. Makeup, jewellery, skirts and dresses, long hair, fringes which sit straight on the forehead, hair that is tied-up or pulled back from the face, plucked eyebrows, high heels, and curves are deemed feminine or "womanly", while pants, thick or "chunky" jewellery and watches, collared shirts, hats, muscles, and short or shaved hair are considered to be masculine or "manly". The students' routine categorization of items according to gender norms is illustrated by Lance, for example, who breaks down a prompt-image of an androgynous woman into parts, labelling each one masculine or feminine. For Lance, the woman's face is feminine, her hair is masculine, her ear piercings feminine, and her necklace, polo shirt and watch masculine (4, 2:22). This division of the woman's appearance into masculine and feminine elements was echoed throughout the focus groups. In another example, Allen, referring to a prompt-image of a man wearing a diamond bracelet,



states that it is “a manly bracelet” because it is “thick and square and straight, like a man’s body should be” (4, 1:21). Allen adds that women’s jewellery, like men’s, is designed to emulate the body of the wearer, and is thus “curvy, slim, and flowing” (4, 1:21). Once again this assertion was made unprompted throughout the focus groups. The shared vision of these norms by the participants and the frequency with which they are referenced suggests the taken-for-granted and uncontroversial manner in which appearance is gendered. Transgressing these gendered appearance-norms means that the transgressor’s sexuality is questioned, since through this transgression the subject is drawing into question the assumed naturalness of the coherence between sex and normative gender presentation, which is secured through heterosexual desire. Yet this transgressive subject is used to re-stabilize the oppositional grid upon which sex, gender and desire are placed, as the students position her as being attracted to her opposite gender expression – if she is masculine, she is seen to desire the feminine, or, if he is feminine he is seen to desire the masculine.

### ***The sex/gender system, (mis)recognition and gender performance***

While the students consistently encounter subjects who illustrate that a subject’s gender presentation does not necessarily correspond with his or her sex, they position these subjects as abnormal, as outlaws in an otherwise consistent sex/gender system, rather than an illustration of the limited coherence of the construction of sex and gender. The students use these subjects to reiterate the naturalness of the sex/gender system. For instance, regarding a prompt-image of a woman who has an androgynous appearance, Melo states, “she just doesn’t have feminine features eye”. Aladdin asserts, “if she had a really pretty pretty face, you’d be like ‘ohh it’s a girl’”. Melo adds, “most just women have like softer jaw lines (Aladdin interjects, “yeah, softer features and stuff”), she has quite a like big jaw line type of thing, I think it’s the jaw line. But like she’s got like, her face has kind’ve got, it’s kinda more *manly!*” Further commenting on the young woman’s appearance, Hannah states, “and she doesn’t have a chest, or much of one” (2, 3:9). Rather than illustrating the narrowness of the appearance-norms for women, the model in the prompt-image is used by the students to demonstrate their investment in these appearance-norms. That the woman in this image does not have a ‘womanly’ face or a ‘womanly’ body is taken as “creepy” rather than an affront to the notion that there is a set of universal characteristics that women embody.

The students' commitment to the sex/gender system which positions gender as 'normally' following from sex, and thus that men and women look a certain way, is further seen in Group Two's reaction to the news – delivered by a student in the group – that a student in their year-group who passes for a young man is anatomically female. The students are “flabbergasted” and keep returning to this topic well after the conversation has moved on. They exhibit high levels of disbelief that this subject is ‘really’ a young woman, as the student passes so well, appearing and acting ‘male’. The students are “shocked” that they have continually judged this subject's sex ‘wrong’. Based on this subject's gender presentation, they “just assumed that she was a guy” and “never thought about it” in depth (2, 3:12). This demonstrates the routine and seemingly uncontroversial nature of sex categorizations based on gender presentation. The members of Group Two assert that other students, including this subject's friends – who are predominantly male – are likely to have also ‘mistaken’ this student's sex. Melo and Aladdin believe this student's male friends are unaware that she is ‘not really’ a man, as they recently overheard them joking that this student and a male student are “gay together”, implying that they believe this student to have male genitalia (2, 3:12). Commenting on how well this student passes as male, Hannah asserts that “she just strikes me as a guy” (2, 3:12). ‘Striking’, or passing, then, demonstrates that masculinity can be unhinged from maleness and performed so ‘authentically’ that the performer seems to be male. Rather than accepting that one's gender can be different from one's sex, however, the students subsequently refer to this student as “it”, consider his gendered appearance “shocking”, and classify him as an outsider rather than someone who illustrates the constructed status of the sex/gender system.

The students' investment in the sex/gender system is further evident in the ‘mistakes’ they have made regarding the sex attribution of other subjects. Even when contextual signs suggest the contrary, many of the students assume that appearance follows from biological sex. Hannah, for instance, relays how on a school trip with her all-girls' choir she encountered a choir with a sole male member. Although this choir had no other males, and thus this ‘boy’ would need to work hard to hold his part and ensure he was heard, Hannah continued to assume this subject was male. Hannah asked stridently, “who's he?” and was embarrassed to find out that “he” was female (2, 1:11). This event is highly memorable for Hannah, who refers to it several times over the course of the focus groups, repeatedly referencing her embarrassment at the mistake and how “sad” the choir member must have felt

to have been mistaken for a male. Josef also offers an anecdote of how she mistook a young woman for a male in a girls' changing room at school. The 'boy', upon registering Josef's shock at 'his' presence, loudly asserted that she was a girl and left the room.<sup>31</sup> Like Hannah, Josef's reaction to the situation is to feel bad for the mistaken subject. Thus, although Josef encountered a peer in a *girls'* changing room, and Hannah a 'boy' in a *girls'* choir, their belief in the transparency of gendered appearance, that gender follows from sex, overrode the clues of the contexts. Rather than destabilizing the sex/gender system for Hannah and Josef, however, such mistakes further affirm it with the notion that these 'mistaken' subjects would want to be seen as their sex and would feel 'bad' or 'sad' at being mistaken for the other sex. Thus the students see appearing as the sex one is, as embodying the gender that corresponds with one's sex, as something that is unquestioningly desirable.

That subjects frequently do not appear as the sex they were labelled at birth demonstrates that persons do not necessarily 'naturally' embody the appearance-norms for their sex. That is, gendered appearance-norms do not inevitably follow from sex. This positions gender as a goal to be achieved, for if the coherence between sex and gender was 'automatic', everyone would embody the appearance-norms for their sex. Achieving coherence between gender and sex, then, takes work. The success of this work is measured by others positioning the subject as the sex he or she identifies with. Thus, if students want to be seen as their sex, they must ensure their gender presentation recognizably belongs to their sex, which further naturalizes the notion that gender follows from sex.

The work that embodying gendered appearance-norms requires is partially recognized by the students, who assert that men and women need to emphasize the differences between them, ensuring that they look like the sex they are. This assertion is based on the notion that men and women *should* look different but do not necessarily look different without work. Melo states, for instance, that "people who are men who look like girls should probably try a little bit harder to look like guys

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<sup>31</sup> It is striking that the major examples of a lack of coherence between sex and gender presented by the students describe young women who are seen as young men. The ages of 14 to 17 are a volatile time for young men in particular, who go through puberty later than young women. With the fluctuations in voice and the large growth spurts associated with puberty, it is arguably a harder time for young men to try to pass consistently as female than when puberty is over. Further, the risks of violence when this passing fails, while present for women who attempt to pass as men, are higher for young men who attempt to pass as women.

and girls who still want to look like girls... like you know still want to be girls should probably... like try harder to not look like guys" (2, 1:12). Regarding a prompt-image of the artist Frieda Kahlo that shows her with hair on her upper-lip and ungroomed eyebrows, Group Four assert that women should alter the physical characteristics that make them look masculine, such as facial hair, because while some women may look like men, men and women should look distinct from one another as they are "supposed to be opposites" (4, 1:22). These assertions, along with the practices (which I outline below) the students undertake to ensure they look different from the other sex, illustrate the students' belief that the coherence between sex and gender is desirable, and should be worked for if the subject does not embody this coherence without conscious effort.

Although the students do not use this terminology, their recognition that gender takes work supports Butler's categorization of gender as performative. This positions gender within a surface model, constituted through repeated acts rather than 'naturally' present within a subject. Instead of reflecting the innate qualities of a person based on his sex, then, gendered acts can be seen to produce what they purport to reveal: a seemingly coherent and 'innate' relationship between sex and gender (1999:185). The performativity of gender is brought to the surface by the student discussed earlier who passes for a boy. Through the repeated iteration of gender norms associated with men, this student is positioned by his peers as a young man. The revelation that this student is passing as, rather than 'biologically', a man, however, illustrates that instead of gender being a result of sex, sex is constructed through the enactment of gender. That is, until the students were told this student was not 'biologically' a young man, they were sure he was because his appearance, his behaviour, and his friendship group mark him as 'male'.

Further granting impetus to the positioning of gender as performative, the students posit certain actions, dress items and techniques as able to make a subject 'more' or 'less' feminine or masculine. Group Four, for instance, assert that dress items that make men look "manly" include tuxedos and "wife-beater" singlets. Speaking about the current trend in Wellington for young men to wear tight-fitting jeans, Allen argues that the wearing of these jeans does not lead to the young men appearing "all sharp and manly and all that really good stuff" (4, 1:11). Alluding literally to the emasculation they attribute to this style of jeans, the members of this group term them "nutcrushers" (4, 1:6). They assert that because the jeans are supposed to be worn as tight as possible in the legs, many of the young men that wear them buy

women's versions of this style, which fit the leg more closely than the men's styles. According to Group Four the women's styles accentuate the buttocks of the male wearers, which is undesirable because, unlike women, men are not supposed to have curves (4, 1:11). Group Four's negative reaction to this jean style indicates that dress can confer or diminish manliness, rather than merely illustrates what already exists. Indeed, the male buttocks remain whether they are emphasized or not. The positioning of dress as an important part of gender performance can further be seen in Group Four's reaction to a prompt-image that shows a man with well-defined arm and chest muscles wearing a silky skirt with a hemline that sits above his knees. The young men point out that the genitals of the model can be seen through the skirt, yet the skirt is "not manly!" Allen states, "it doesn't accentuate any manliness on him at all". Lance agrees, adding that if the skirt is above the knee "any manliness is gone" (4, 1:12). That the group proclaim that the model's "manliness" is negated by the skirt, although they can, as one member puts it, "clearly see his nuts", demonstrates the power of dress in the performance of gender. Many of the other young women assert that certain dress items can make them feel more or less "womanly", stressing that they avoid those items that do the latter. The power that the students attribute to dress, then, complicates their emphasis on "down there", offering evidence that they conceive of gender in a manner that corresponds with a surface model of identity, as constituted in actions, dress practices and behaviour, rather than as automatically following from the body. If gender were an inherent attribute, then objects such as dress items would not have the ability to make or take gender.

The embodiment of masculinity and femininity involves knowledge of how men and women are supposed to look, and the skills to apply this knowledge to the body. Such knowledge is proffered frequently to subjects, particularly women, from a wide range of sources including family members and friends, advertisements, magazine articles, websites, television shows, films, makeup counters, and hairdressing and beauty salons, amongst others. This advice instructs subjects how to achieve a 'feminine' or 'masculine' appearance. These advice forums assume, like the students, that the sexes are supposed to be differentiated by appearance and that subjects desire to foster these differences. These advice sites, then, tailor their advice based on sex, encouraging men and women to appear differently. For instance, an internet search for "beauty tips" brings up the website "Tips 4 Girls", which provides instructions on how to achieve soft, "velvet" skin, information on foods that may increase breast size, and tips to ensure the "admiration" of others; whereas another webpage in the top search results, entitled "Beauty Tips For Boys",

frames its advice in relation to “hygiene”, concentrating on providing information about getting rid of acne, having clean hair, and facial shaving.<sup>32</sup> This emphasis on hygiene positions the work the young men are encouraged to do within the realm of health, which, as the next chapter argues, neutralizes the contentious nature of the association of young men with appearance-work. That the tips for girls are focused on being beautiful rather than healthy acts to further produce boys and girls as opposites. The volume of information available detailing how to embody gendered appearance-norms, then, reinforces the importance of presenting a gender that is coherent with sex while naturalizing gender norms.

These advice forums, particularly the ones focused on feminine appearance, implicitly acknowledge that gender is an achievement, yet position this achievement as an imperative. Indeed, as Butler argues, the embodiment of normative gender is necessary in order to be recognized as a viable subject; it is not something that the subject can choose to enact at will (1999:xxv, 1999:34). The advice detailing how to be sufficiently feminine or masculine individualizes the ‘problem’ of not meeting gendered appearance-norms, implying that most subjects meet these norms without work, and the individual who does not must labour to be similar to these other subjects. At the same time, however, the existence of this advice in mainstream media texts implies that it is not the case that the (imagined) ‘majority’ meet these appearance-norms without work as if there are only a few people who have to labour to meet appearance-norms, the article would be in a highly specialized niche-market media form rather than a form aimed at a ‘majority’ readership. Nonetheless, this advice often takes on a conspiratorial tone which suggests that this is a secret shared between the writer and the (singular) reader and, while the writer was once in the ‘unfortunate’ position that the reader inhabits, with the author’s advice the reader can also meet the norm that she currently does not. Excess hair is one such ‘problem’ that is deemed necessary for individuals to address. A recent *Sunday* magazine article on female hair removal details the author’s lifelong ‘struggle’ with bodily hair-growth. Rather than challenging the validity of this norm that so many women do not meet, the article describes instead the painful techniques the author has used to achieve this norm (Woulfe, 2010:20-1). This emphasis on striving to

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<sup>32</sup> Natalie Grace, “Beauty Tips For Boys” *e-How*, [http://www.ehow.com/way\\_5390150\\_beauty-tips-boys.html](http://www.ehow.com/way_5390150_beauty-tips-boys.html) and “Haircuts suited to the face shape”, *Tips for Girls*, <http://www.tips4girls.net/beauty/haircuts-suited-to-the-face-shape/>; “Aliments that make your breasts look bigger”, *Tips for Girls*, <http://www.tips4girls.net/beauty/aliments-that-make-your-breasts-look-bigger/>; “How to have a velvet skin”, *Tips for Girls*, <http://www.tips4girls.net/beauty/how-to-have-a-velvet-skin/> Sites accessed 10 September 2010.

meet gendered appearance-norms echoes the students' assertions that while many subjects do not display a gendered appearance that is coherent with their sex, they should strive to achieve this coherence.

This gap between what is positioned as 'normal', and the large number of subjects who do not meet the norm positions many gendered norms as 'naturally desirable' rather than 'natural'. Group Three highlight, for instance, the constructed status of hair-removal norms, asserting that they are based on the behaviour that a large portion of the population undertakes. As Françoise states, "the thing about shaving your arms is – why it would be so weird to shave your arms and why it would be like 'oh why did you shave your arms?' would be because nobody does it. And so if nobody, if girls didn't have to shave their legs then it would just be normal and we could just-", Penny interrupts, "people would be like 'why are you shaving your legs?'", Françoise continues,

then we wouldn't have to worry if we had hairy legs if we wanted to go to the beach that day, we would just, it would just be like our arms. So it's just because it's accepted that hairy arms are accepted in society and so it's fine. It's what is like, what is the um norm and what people do and then if you do, if you don't do it then you have pressure because, you know you want, you um you'd stand out and that would be, people would look at you weirdly (3, 1:15-6).

Thus, rather than arguing that removing hair that grows is 'natural', the students frame it in terms of what is seen as 'normal' and how others might judge them if they do not adhere to the norm.<sup>33</sup> Although these students position the appearance-norms regarding hair removal as arbitrary, they view it as desirable for individuals to conform to appearance-norms in order to avoid being seen negatively by others. The negative social consequences that entail for those who do not follow this norm mean that although this norm is positioned as constructed by the students, they are compelled to adhere to it.

It is through the recognition that adherence to gender norms is naturally desirable rather than natural that normative gender can be positioned as an achievement requiring constant work to embody and maintain. Some of the students in the focus groups detail how they failed to maintain gendered appearance-norms and were thus mistaken for a member of the other sex. Melo, for instance, describes how the previous year she had short hair and wore baggy jeans, which resulted in her being hailed as a boy several times (2, 1:15). Allen recounts how there was a period

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<sup>33</sup> I discuss the effects of the normative gaze in the next chapter, Power and Dress.

during which he was frequently mistaken for a girl, which he attributes to having long hair and what he terms “man boobs” due to excess weight. Allen recalls that shop assistants would point him in the direction of the women’s clothing section and how he would get called “ma’am” (4, 1:16). Scarlet also shares that she was frequently mistaken for a boy when she had a shaved head at primary school (5, 2:28). These students illustrate what happens when gendered appearance-norms are not secured. As Melo argues, she was mistaken so often because she did not “put effort” into her appearance (2, 1:15). Scarlet did not have a choice regarding her haircut. Her father, who Scarlet terms a “nutter”, shaved her head. This is an act which, for Scarlet, is “embarrassing for life” (5, 2:5-6), as though her failure to embody gender norms as a child forever marks her gendered appearance as not naturally following from sex. Being mistaken for the opposite sex led these students to change their appearance to avoid further mislabelling. Melo made the decision to grow her hair longer and avoid wearing trousers or shorts (2, 1:15). Allen cut his hair and lost weight, shedding his “man boobs”, in order to appear more masculine (4, 1:16).<sup>34</sup> Scarlet wore more colourful clothes and grew her hair, which is now below her shoulders. These students felt compelled to undertake this labour in order to be recognized by others as the sex they identify with and thus fully to occupy this sexed position.

As the above paragraph suggests, the students place the onus for the way they are read by others on themselves, framing misrecognition as caused by the wearer (or, in Scarlet’s case, her father) doing “something wrong” (Marc, 5, 2:28). This ‘error’ in presentation is seen as requiring correction. This ability to do gender ‘wrong’ further positions it outside of a depth model, not inherently following from sex. Regardless, for the students, the gap between gender norms and subjects’ gender expression should be minimized as much as possible. As Butler points out, however, this gap cannot be fully closed because gender is not a natural result of sex; rather, it is “an assignment which is never quite carried out according to expectation, whose addressee never quite inhabits the ideal s/he is compelled to approximate” (1993:230). Just as they manage their gendered appearance, the students expect others to ensure that their appearances approximate the gender norms of the sex they wish to be seen as. Melo stresses, for instance, that if a young woman does not wish to be viewed as male, she should “wear her hair down” or enact other

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<sup>34</sup> ‘Breasts’ are taken to be naturally indicative of femaleness, but Allen’s “boobs” illustrate that the chest shape associated with women is not embodied by females only and thus the body must be shaped in accordance with gender norms.



techniques of feminization (2, 1:12). Further, Josef states that if the androgynous woman in one of the prompt-images “cared” about being mistaken for a man, she would “wear a skirt” to mitigate such mistakes (2, 3:9). The students agree with Lance’s statement that “you’d change yourself, wouldn’t you though?” if they were read as the sex they are not (4, 1:16). Hannah, for instance, asserts that she would take such mistakes “seriously”, altering what it was about her that she believes led to the mistake occurring (2, 1:13). The importance for the students of managing their appearances so that they are seen as a man or a woman positions it as an individual failing if the subject’s gender does not correspond with her sex, rather than the failure of this norm to correspond with actual presentation. Further, it places emphasis on the control that subjects desire in shaping how others view them, and thus the subject positions they occupy.

Because they position it as the subject’s responsibility to ensure they appear as the sex they wish to be seen as (in this case, the sex they are currently, as all of the students identify with the sex they were labelled at birth), the students have many techniques that they use to ensure they embody the appearance-norms for their sex. Melo asserts, for instance, that “I don’t think anyone’s going to confuse me for a guy now I hope because I spend so much time on my hair even though it’s in such bad condition and the colour fades I’m like straighten, straighten it. Yeah I put in an effort to look like a girl” (2, 1:15). Dyeing and straightening hair is seen as a feminine activity. Further, Aladdin states that if she is wearing a “masculine” outfit, she will put on makeup and wear her fringe straight down rather than to the side, because it is highly unusual for a male to have a fringe that is worn straight (2, 1:15). Bach describes how he added to his first facial piercing, changing his ‘Monroe’ (an upper-lip piercing which is to the side of the mouth, reminiscent of Marilyn Monroe’s beauty spot) to ‘Angel Bites’ by having the other side of his mouth pierced, because the Monroe looked “too feminine” (1, 1:11). Charlotte states that if she has not made an effort to make herself look feminine through her clothes, she will wear more makeup than usual (2, 1:14). Further, Penny asserts that she also puts in effort to look like a woman, wearing jewellery and dresses particularly when she has her hair cut short as she is worried that she may ‘naturally’ look too masculine (3, 3, 2:20). Appearing as the sex they identify with, then, is not something that occurs automatically for the students. They must navigate their appearance in relation to gender norms, ensuring they offset any possibility their sex will be misread by mindfully embodying some of the appearance-norms for their sex.

In a further example of appearance management, the male students alter their facial hair to help ensure that they appear sufficiently masculine. Because the hair on their faces is not yet growing in a manner that is deemed “manly”, the young men in Group Four shave their emergent facial hair, which, ironically, is supposed to be a sign of maleness. Allen states that he wishes to avoid what he labels “first facial hair”, which is an uneven mix of long and short hair. Nagesh adds that this hair is “not like straight, it’s like curly like looped, like fluff”. Lance asserts that this preliminary facial hair is “pretty annoying”, adding, “you don’t want it there, you have to shave it because - unless it just goes ‘boof’ straight away, instead of ‘there’ and then ‘there’ [points at different parts of his face] (1, 1:19-20). This emergent hair is seen as a sign that the young man has not completed puberty and thus is not fully masculine. It links the young man to childhood and, through the lack of uniform hair, to femininity. The group agrees with Allen’s statement that it is best to “not... try facial hair until I’ve gone like way past that bum fluff stage, til I have real facial hair, then I’ll try yeah” (1, 1:20). That Allen separates ‘real’ hair from the hair that is present enough to warrant removal illustrates the importance of gender norms on the way hair is conceived. As “bum fluff” does not fit with Western notions of being a man, the members of Group Four wish to wait until they get ‘real’ hair, hair which, although not vastly different from early facial hair, fits with the ideal of masculinity. Until such an ideal is reached, to avoid being positioned as not sufficiently masculine, the students attempt to eradicate such hair.

While the young men stress their labour to appear masculine, the female members of Group Two assert that if they are confident that others will recognize them as the sex they identify with, they can relax the management of their appearance, making less effort to appear feminine. Aladdin states that she often wears loose-fitting t-shirts (which are associated with masculine appearance), but “I’m not bothered because I’m pretty sure that you can tell that I’m a girl and yeah, I’m like, all the people that I know know I’m a girl” (2, 1:14). Melo wears tops from men’s shops but is content that because she has sizeable breasts she will not be mistaken for a boy when she wears them (2, 1:15). Thus, when the young women in Group Two are secure that they will be read as the ‘right’ sex, they can break from the confines of presenting gender coherently with their sex. Interestingly, the young men in my research did not make similar statements regarding the relaxing of self-monitoring and the presentation of themselves as masculine. The pressure for men to embody masculinity continually is explored in section two of this chapter.

Although the students have provided examples of specific techniques they use to ensure they appear as the sex they identify with, many of them assert that they embody gender norms without much thought. This downplays the work that goes into performing gender, repositioning it as 'natural'. Josef states, for instance, that she does not "try" to look like a girl (2, 1:13). Further, Charlotte asserts that ensuring she looks feminine is something that she does "subconsciously, like without really knowing" because "when you're born a girl you kinda, you kind of dress like a girl" (2, 1:13). Charlotte points out that she buys clothes from the woman's section of department stores and stand-alone shops targeting women rather than men. Thus she 'automatically' presents herself in a feminine manner. Through simply traversing the rituals of everyday life the students are guided to follow the gender norms for their sex. In shopping for clothes, using segregated bathrooms, and playing team sports, for instance, the students are routinely gendered. That seemingly insignificant everyday activities gender subjects and that subjects feel like they embody gender norms 'subconsciously' indicates that gender is a lived process, embodied through everyday actions without much thought or pomp. Thus gender work is labour of the everyday, labour that is so imbued in everyday routine it does not feel like 'work'. This contributes to its position as 'normal', as the result of the 'natural' differences between the two sexes.

A tension is present, then, in the way the students view gender. They position it as taking some work but as almost automatically embodied in accordance with the sex of the subject. Further, they position the coherence between sex and gender as both something which does not always occur, yet as unquestioningly normal and desirable. As gender is one of the primary axes that constitutes identity, the tension within these positions corresponds with the way in which the students conceive of identity, referring to it in a manner that utilizes both depth model and surface model frameworks. Their belief that gender should 'naturally' follow from sex can be situated within the depth model, positioning gender as inherently linked to the sex of the subject – "down there" – which is understood as inseparable from the body. Yet the students' recognition that this coherence takes work demonstrates that they view this 'inherent' link as unstable, and concedes that gender does not necessarily follow from sex. The students' positioning of those subjects whose gender does not correspond with their sex as abnormal, however, shows their commitment to the sex/gender system, regardless of their unstable framing of it as both constructed and 'natural'.

## **‘Not like him’: The homosexual and acceptable masculinity**

The ‘homo’, ‘fag’, ‘nancy-boy’, or ‘poof’ is the most significant Other the heterosexual-identified male students construct. It is not just the man who exhibits same-sex desire but also the man who does not look or behave in the manner construed as ‘male’ who is positioned as gay by the students. The students are hostile to this figure, positing him as “strange” and someone to be avoided. This homophobia is used by the young men – the majority of which are in the all-male Group Four – to mark out ‘acceptable’ performances of gender and to distance themselves from the homosexual subject position. This section explores the way the young men construct themselves as not-like the feminine gay man, positioning themselves in comparison as displaying a gender coherent with their sex and thus as ‘normal’ subjects.

In line with the framework of the heterosexual matrix, the students associate males who undertake ‘feminine’ behaviour with homosexuality. This is based on the link between sex, gender and desire: the masculine-presenting male is aligned with heterosexuality and the feminine-presenting male with homosexuality. The construction of heterosexuality as founded on desire for the ‘oppositional’ means that (hetero)normative masculinity is reliant on the repudiation of femininity. As Jonathan Rutherford points out, the construction of male and female into a binary opposition “operates in the same way as splitting and projection: the centre expels its anxieties, contradictions and irrationalities onto the subordinate term, filling it with the antithesis of its own identity”. Yet, Rutherford adds, “the Other, in its very alienness, simply mirrors and represents what is deeply familiar to the centre, but projected outside of the self” (1990:22 in Mac an Ghail 1994:94). As the anecdotes in this section illustrate, the young male students entwine the feminine with the homosexual, simultaneously distancing themselves from both of these identity positions while creating a singular Other. These students recognise that some gay men may not adopt feminine signifiers. Further, they do not believe that femininity itself constitutes homosexuality, continuing to attribute sexuality to sexual attraction as well as gender performance. Nonetheless, due to their association of effeminacy with homosexuality these young men measure the likelihood of a male subject being gay by how effeminate he is. This is a continuation of the historical association of male homosexuality with femininity in the West. The popular view of the male homosexual in the 19<sup>th</sup> century conceived him as an ‘invert’, a woman ‘trapped’ in a

man's body (Cole 2000:15). While this is no longer the default positioning of the gay man, he continues to be conceived as effeminate (Mac an Ghail 1994: 98-9, Epstein 1997:109, Nayak and Kehily 1997:141, Frost *et al* 2002:176, Swain 2004:89). The students at City High are no exception. The fear of being positioned as gay, then, is entwined with a fear of being seen as feminine. Together, femininity and homosexuality act as the identity-axes against which heterosexual masculinity is constructed. Because, as youth theorist C. J. Pascoe asserts, "achieving a masculine identity involves the repeated repudiation of the specter of failed masculinity" (2007:5), the students must distance themselves from feminine and homosexual subject positions. With this distancing, the young men position themselves as acceptably masculine, and thus as heterosexual.

This distancing is achieved primarily through the policing of subjects who are not sufficiently masculine. By policing other men they conceive to be misperforming masculinity, the students mark themselves as knowledgeable of what is acceptable and what is not, and position themselves as normatively masculine. Further, they deflect scrutiny away from their own performances and onto others – the policing subject suggests that his distance from those he polices enables him to condemn them. This policing is principally conducted through placing into question the sexuality of the policed subject, positioning him as homosexual. That this questioning operates as an insult, and at times, a joke, illustrates the marginalized position homosexuals occupy in the West. The act of policing serves to stabilize normative masculinity, marking out what is acceptably masculine and what is not. This policing is continuous, because, as cultural theorist Richard Johnson asserts, the borders that constitute 'male' identity are unstable (1997:14). Thus the students must again and again define the acceptably masculine through defining what it is not.

The homophobia exhibited by the students was not overt. Rather than showing disgust at homosexual acts, or asserting that homosexuality is wrong, the students use terms like "nancy-boy" (a slang term used to refer to gay men) in a derogatory manner, and describe queer practices as "strange" and "too much" (4, 2:18-9). The students' lack of explicit homophobia can be situated within the context of their attendance at City High. Due to the school's emphasis on respect, diversity and individuality, overt homophobia is unwelcome. Indeed, the young men in Group Four position their school against what they view as the narrow and bigoted views of sexuality at a nearby boys' high school, asserting that I should conduct interviews at

this boys' school if I want stereotypically negative views of homosexuality because I will not find such answers at City High (4, 1:8). On the surface, then, the students support the school's institutionalized fostering of difference, displaying acceptance of the 'right' to be homosexual. While the students do not engage in homophobic statements or practices explicit enough to be labelled as bigoted by teachers or peers, they continue, however, to be homophobic, afraid of being positioned by others as homosexual.

The homophobia Group Four display, then, is used to distance the focus group members from gay subject positions, rather than outrightly condemn being gay. This distancing naturalizes the coherence of sex and gender through situating the feminine man negatively. Because the students wish to present themselves as normatively masculine, and thus to illustrate a coherent sex and gender relationship, they carefully monitor themselves to ensure that they do not present themselves or behave in a way that could be deemed feminine. The young men are particularly emphatic that they would not wear makeup, which is associated with both femininity and artifice in the West. Lance, for instance, states that the wearing of makeup by men is "not right, well, not normal" (4, 2:19). For Lance the only situation in which it is "acceptable" for a man to wear makeup is if he is using foundation to cover bruises or scars (4, 2:19). Such use is then related to a hyper-masculine identity rather than to femininity. That hyper-masculine activity offsets the wearing of makeup, thus making it more acceptable, is further displayed by Group Four's reaction to the New Zealand rugby player Ma'a Nonu's wearing of eye makeup. Lance asserts of Nonu that "everyone thought, bit of a nancy-boy, and then he starts playing awesome rugby and knocking people dead and you just completely don't care about it" (4, 2: 18).<sup>35</sup> Nonu thus mitigated his position as a 'nancy-boy' through his performance of dominant masculinity on the rugby field. This performance re-stabilized the coherence between his sex and gender, which was jeopardized by his decision to adopt the 'feminine' practice of wearing eyeliner. Nonu's reassertion of his masculinity meant that the young men no longer questioned his sexuality, assuming his heterosexuality because of his 'masculine' proficiency on the field. Thus, as Lance states, Nonu's penchant for eyeliner was no longer an issue. The members of Group Four wish not only to stress that they would not wear makeup,

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<sup>35</sup> Lance and Luke clarify their use of the term 'nancy-boy':  
Felicity: what do you mean by 'nancy-boy'? Lance: [audible breath in] Luke: gay. Felicity: ohh ok. Lance: yeah. It's kind of – I thought it is a bit strange, he is a big islander playing rugby hitting people and he puts – Luke: a bit feminine – [back to Lance:] puts mascara on before a game (4, 2:18).

but also to distance themselves from the possession of knowledge about makeup. When discussing Nonu, Lance states that the player wears mascara. When I ask if this is additional to the eyeliner that Nonu is known for wearing, the young men in the group claim to not know the difference between mascara and eyeliner. Further, when Lance does exhibit knowledge of the uses of foundation, he ensures that the group knows that he does not take foundation seriously, terming it “the powder shit” to show his lack of interest in the product (4, 2:19). As makeup is clearly designated as part of the ‘feminine’ domain, the heterosexual young men in my research wish to dissociate themselves from the knowledge and practice of maquillage.

Further repudiating male femininity, the students in Group Four also assert that they would not undertake the “womanly” practices of wearing skirts and hair dyeing. The students agree with Nagesh’s assertion that men’s skirts are “wrong” (4, 1:15). They believe that men should not wear skirts, but that exceptions can be made for special events, such as the wearing of a kilt to a wedding by a man of Scottish descent, or a lava lava to church by a Samoan male. The members of Group Four assert that skirts worn by men “do not look natural” (4, 1:15). Commenting on the wearing of a skirt by a man in a prompt-image, Allen states, “the skirt’s horrible. It’s not manly” (4, 1: 14). The skirt does not appear ‘natural’ or ‘manly’ on a male as it disrupts the assumed coherence between sex and gender presentation. Rather than suggesting that gender can be done differently, then, the students read the wearing of a non-bifurcated item as ‘wrong’, which reaffirms the notion that men should be masculine. The dyeing of hair also operates to affirm how men should appear. The young men of Group Four assert that the man who dyes his hair could be positioned as “gay” (4, 2:17). Lance states that this is because “for a girl it’s normal I suppose to dye her hair but for a guy, you stick with what you’ve got” (4, 2:17). This ‘sticking to what you’ve got’ is based on the notion that men should not be concerned enough with their hair colour to alter it. The act of dyeing hair, then, is ‘feminine’ – and thus associated with homosexuality – because of the concern with the male gaze that appearance-work implies, as well as the effort dyeing hair requires. The explicit categorization of makeup, skirts, and hair dyeing as ‘feminine’, and the distancing of themselves from such feminine practices work to further cement the borders of masculinity. This continual reassertion of the boundaries of masculinity implies that it is not the ‘natural’ result of being male. The young men of Group Four are, as Nayak and Kehily point out, “concerned with constructing an imagined identity that is uncontradictory, unitary and essentially masculine” (1997:155). Thus, the anti-

feminine, anti-gay sentiment presented by Group Four is a tool in the stabilization of the young men's identities as masculine and heterosexual.<sup>36</sup>

The need to constantly reassert the borders of the masculine is apparent in the young men's relationship with wearing colour. Colour constitutes a danger-zone for young men who wish to be seen as heterosexual.<sup>37</sup> Allen describes how his cousin, who dresses in colourful dress items he has often designed and made himself, is frequently mislabelled as homosexual because of the clothing he wears. Allen asserts that "everyone yeah when they see [his cousin] they always go like 'who's that?' to me, like 'who's that weirdo'? And then they- usually the follow-up question is 'is he gay?'" (4, 1:13). Later in the research, Group Four explain that because the gay pride flag is a rainbow, they link the wearing of colour with being homosexual. Luke asserts that upon seeing a male dressed in more than two colours, "you'd definitely question like think to yourself, why are they wearing that – are they gay?" (4, 2:10). Lance states that he would not wear bright colours because "it's an easier way to get noticed and well it's not something you want to be noticed for, if you're wearing a bloody bright purple or orange or yellow t-shirt then everyone's gonna see it and go 'ew' just cos it's not right.... girls can wear that bright stuff but somehow if I saw a [male] best friend wearing a bright big yellow t-shirt and then like big bright purple pants I'd probably be calling it a bit strange" (4, 2:3). To ensure that he is not judged as "not right", or "strange", Lance avoids wearing more than one bright colour at a time. Indeed, to be "safe", Lance usually wears blue, which he deems a masculine colour.<sup>38</sup> Like Lance, Luke also views the wearing of colour as more feminine than masculine. Luke states, "I don't think there's anything inherently wrong with wearing the bright colours, but I think if you wear them you've got to be aware that people will question why you're wearing them, especially if you're a guy – it's a bigger thing if you're a guy than a girl" (4, 2:10). It is this feminization of the wearing of colour, as well as the incorporation of the rainbow as a gay symbol, that results in

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<sup>36</sup> In contrast to their repudiation of feminine men, Group Four value the hegemonically masculine muscular men featured in prompt-images I showed them. They asserted that they desired to be muscular. Illustrating the normative status of the appearance of the men in these images, they did not have much to say about them.

<sup>37</sup> The knowledge that the young man who dresses colourfully risks being labeled gay is not restricted to the young men in Group Four, however. Group Three assert that because one of their heterosexual male friends wears colourful clothing he is assumed to be homosexual by others (3, 2:22).

<sup>38</sup> It is striking that Lance uses the language of safety here. This suggests a fear of homosexuality, which may be coded as a fear of the Other that lies within Lance's Self. As Nayak and Kehily assert, "Homophobia is the process of expulsion or projection which transfers these inner anxieties onto Others" (1997:155). Lance's use of the word 'safe' also alludes to violence that many feminine-appearing men encounter in their daily lives.



the association of colour with homosexuality and therefore as something that must be worn in limited quantity by those who want to be seen as heterosexual. This situates gender once again as performative – if it were an inherent result of sex, then an act such as wearing colour would not detract from the subject's masculinity.

The range of acceptable performances of masculinity – that is, performances that will not lead to (hetero)sexuality being questioned – is more restricted than the acceptable range under the rubric of femininity. As Neve states, “the gender role for a girl can be it's a lot more you know bendable. I mean you can be a tomboy and it's still cute and you can be a girly girl. With guys it's so you really don't have much options” (3, 1:7). Further, Penny asserts that “I mean now we've kind of you know [got] equality as far as women and men has equalled out a lot more, there's not as much sexism, but I guess it just hasn't caught up yet the whole what men can do...” (3, 2:21).<sup>39</sup> Thus, it is not just the colours the young men wear that they must monitor in an attempt to avoid being positioned as gay, but any potential deviation from the masculine appearance norm. Françoise states, “you know if a guy showed up to work you know dressed you know with like a funny looking shirt on and different little accessories everyone would think it was really odd”. Neve adds, “everyone would just be like ‘what?!’ yeah and probably assume he's gay or something” (3, 1:6-7). The limited range of appropriate performances of masculinity can be attributed to the association of appearance-work with femininity. Since the sexes are produced as oppositional, if women are to continue to be associated with fashion and an explicit concern for appearance, then young men must by comparison express their sex in a manner that does not show an explicit concern with appearances. As dress theorist Tim Edwards reminds us, fashion's long history of being associated with women rather than men continues to influence how it is seen today (1997:3). Thus the young men must avoid colour, hair dyeing, makeup, and other techniques associated with femininity and an overt concern with appearance. This avoidance works to further naturalize the restricted gender performances available to young men.

Institutional structures also work to limit the appropriate expressions of maleness. That ‘regular’, that is, masculine, men are not supposed to be as interested in appearance as women is evidenced in the content of clothing stores themselves, the majority of which are targeted at women only. In shops that sell clothes aimed at

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<sup>39</sup> Penny later goes on to state that in fact equality between men and women has not been fully achieved.

both men and women, the women's department is usually larger than the men's, and contains a wider variety of colours and styles. Lance states that "walking into Farmers [a national department store chain] you see men's over there – small little part, and you think yep, dark colours, shades of say navy blue, black, grey, maybe a bit of white, and then you look over to the [women's section] other side, [makes expansive hand gesture] big colours like everywhere and I suppose [women] have a wider range but it would suit them, yeah" (4, 2:11). Further, although in recent years there has been growth in this area, the range of personal grooming products aimed at men remains significantly smaller than those manufactured 'for' women. The disparity between the number and range of styles, colours, and grooming products targeted at men and those aimed at women naturalizes the notion that men do not, and should not, care as much about clothing and appearance as women.

The students are thus knowledgeable of and careful to avoid dress practices that place them at the risk of appearing in a feminine manner. A piercing in the wrong place, the wrong colour, or the wrong garment length can bring into question the male subject's sexuality. The collection of this knowledge, and the avoidance of these dress items and techniques involves careful monitoring, yet the notion that a man scrutinizes his appearance is not conducive to the construction of him as masculine. Thus, although they describe in detail what they themselves and other young men should and should not wear, the young men downplay how much they care about dress. Lance, for instance, describes how in response to a need for a warm sweatshirt for winter he went to Kmart (an inexpensive department store chain) and picked up a cheap sweater without effort. Lance states, "I didn't really care about the look, it basically was 'it'll keep me warm'" (4, 2:11). Luke also gives the impression that he is not concerned about his appearance, stating that he dresses only for comfort and convenience (4, 3:3-4). As well as this, he lists the pieces that make up his small wardrobe (4, 2:7) and demonstrates how little he shops by asserting that he spends \$150 a year on clothes (4, 1:8), which, with a sweatshirt costing approximately \$40 or \$50, is a minimal amount. Further establishing that they do not spend much time thinking about how they look, the young men state that they will not monitor their dress choices to ensure that they do not wear the same outfit twice in a week (4, 1:6).<sup>40</sup> Ironically, the engagement with appearance that the monitoring of appearance to ensure it is consistently masculine

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<sup>40</sup> This is in contrast to the young women in Focus Groups Three and Five who assert that they would not wear the same item to school twice in the same week. The assertions of Groups Three, Four, and Five were unprompted by myself.

requires is itself not masculine and, as such, must be played down by the young men to prevent charges of being appearance-obsessed and thus feminine. They cannot be seen to care, because caring is feminine, yet they must care because if they do not, they may not present themselves as sufficiently masculine. This monitoring suggests that the students do not embody masculinity 'naturally', as a depth model positioning of identity implies, but must work to ensure that they and others present a gender coherent with their sex.

As well as downplaying the monitoring of themselves, the students claim that they do not wish to attract the gaze of others. The frequent changing of appearance and the wearing of bright colours are taken by the students to be practices of men who wish to be noticed. Group Four view such desire negatively, positioning the solicitation of the looks of others as a feminine practice. As Luke asserts, young men do not "go out of their way to make themselves noticed" like young women do (4, 2:11). This gendered positioning of women as 'looked-at' subjects rather than men, recalls John Berger's famous assertion that "*men act and women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at" (1972: 47). Indeed, the young men make active judgments of the women presented in the prompt-images, measuring them on their sex appeal, engaging in detailed assessments of their bodies as though the women are there for their eyes. The young men in Group Four view the man who dresses to draw attention to himself as desiring the potentially erotic gaze of other males, which places him in the feminine position of 'observed' rather than the masculine position of 'observer', as well as implying that he desires homosex. The students, then, disavow that they dress for attention, and distance themselves from dress practices they deem to draw the attention of others, such as the wearing of colourful clothes.

The members of Group Four, however, trouble the notion of the man as observer-of-women, as they judge other men on how closely they adhere to acceptable masculine behaviour and appearance. It is this widespread policing gaze that is reflected in Lance's assertion that "everyone" thought that Ma'a Nonu was a "nancy-boy" for wearing eye makeup. Being 'noticed' then, is not just about the solicitation of erotic looks, but can also entail being positioned as misperforming gender. The students wish to avoid both of these types of looks as they both locate the observed man as insufficiently masculine. Thus, although, as I have outlined in Chapter Three, the students rely on the gaze of others to construct their own sense of selves, they wish to avoid the protracted gaze of other men as such a gaze is likely to be erotic

or policing. This tension between the need for others to look at them to affirm their own subject positions, their positioning of the desire for the look as feminine, and the young men's own surveillant policing practices propels the students to labour to appear masculine. Because the students are aware of how much male-to-male gazing occurs, they need to (re)assert their masculine heterosexuality continually in order to be avoid being read as insufficiently masculine and/or gay. This constant reaffirmation of their masculinity further gives impetus to the surface model positioning of gender as not inherent, not as result of sex, but as something that must be achieved.

### **'Not like her': The skank and acceptable femininity**

While the young men use the figure of the homosexual to mark themselves as distinct from the subjects who are outside the border of the acceptably masculine, the young women in the focus groups define themselves against the subject who transgresses the boundaries of the acceptably feminine: the 'skank'. Unlike the gay man who challenges the coherence of sex and gender by not being masculine enough, the skank (who is also referred to as a 'slut') is excessively feminine through her overt sexualisation. The exaggerated femininity the skank embodies is seen by the students as inauthentic. This charge is projected at both the individuals labelled as 'skanks' and at the depiction of what is 'attractive' constructed through media aimed at men, such as *Playboy*. By positioning themselves against the slut, the young women in my research situate themselves in comparison as authentically and acceptably feminine.

The skank, or slut, is a young woman who wears clothes that accentuate her body, usually revealing cleavage and/or her upper thighs. She is presumed to be (or want to be) sexually promiscuous, engaging in sex acts with multiple partners outside of a committed relationship.<sup>41</sup> Unlike the gay man, the skank is associated with the lower

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<sup>41</sup> While not every student that dresses in revealing clothes necessarily engaging in sex acts, the students' discourse in regards to the slut highlighted sex acts. I was surprised at this pervasive emphasis. In part this can be attributed to the high school setting of my research – secondary school is a time when many young adults become sexual, and is the setting for much sex-talk. Further, one of the prompt-images I used (an advert for Tab, an energy drink marketed at women) referenced the faking of an orgasm by a young woman. While the students spent more time talking about power in relation to this image than (in)authenticity and sex, such a reference would have signaled that it was okay (and perhaps desirable) to talk about sex in the focus group. Even when not addressing this prompt-image, most of the

classes. The students use terms such as “cheap”, “trashy”, and “tacky” to describe her. She is positioned as lacking the taste, restraint and etiquette of the middle classes. This categorization of the skank is in line with ethnographer Emily White’s American-based study of women who were deemed sluts at high school. White found that the majority of women branded sluts were working-class or a lower class than the peers who bestowed this label (2002:87-8). Similarly, Rebecca Raby (2010), who studied young women in Canada, and Barbara Kitzinger (1995), who interviewed young women in Scotland, also found that the skank is conceived as lower-class, with the term “tasteless” often used to describe her. Class-based attributes are what separates ‘sexiness’ from ‘skankiness’. For the students, to be sexy involves being “elegant” and “classy”, whereas the skank crosses beyond sexy and into the unacceptably sexual because she lacks these qualities (3, 2:3, and 2, 3:2). The positioning of the skank as lacking the qualities of middle-class taste reinforces these qualities as positive.

Like the homosexual, the skank is an Other that the students define themselves against. By labelling peers skanks, the young women situate themselves as not inhabiting this maligned subject position. Such situating positions the young women as lacking the qualities that they attribute to the skank, that is, it positions them as not “trashy”, not sexually promiscuous, and not “fake”. The skank, then, is a prominent figure at the edge of the female students’ identities, serving as a sign of who they do not wish to be. Raby asserts that young women utilize the figure of the slut to “indicate their skill in recognizing the safe side of the fine line between attractive and unacceptable” (2010:346). By distancing themselves from, and policing, sluts, the young women illustrate their social, gender, and fashion competence.

The younger students in my research are more condemnatory of the skank than the older focus group participants. While the older students view the skank negatively and express their desire to be distinct from this figure, they do not exhibit revulsion

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young women in the research linked revealing clothes with promiscuity. Speaking about the film *House Bunny* which features a former *Playboy* Bunny making-over ‘nerdy’ university students, Melo states that the young ‘nerds’ are “um looking at this skinny um skank (another member of the focus group smirks), um you know that’s just the first word that comes to my head, and they’re thinking ‘ohh she gets heaps of guys, I want tonnes of guys, ohh maybe I should wear more make-up and like oh my gosh’, and you know it’s kinda like looking at women as a piece of meat (Felicity: yeah), like we should be wearing makeup and we should be like- Hannah: blonde (Melo: blonde) and thinny” (2, 3:3). It is both promiscuity that these students disagree with and the notion that the adoption of normative appearance is required to be attractive to the opposite sex.

towards the skank as the younger students do. Fourteen-year-old Henrietta, for instance, terms sexually promiscuous young women “disgusting” (1, 2:16), while Josef (the same age) asserts that displaying skin is “horrible” (2, 1:18), and Melo (also fourteen) positions the sexually promiscuous woman as “sick” (2, 3:6). Further, the younger students disassociated themselves from being sexually active, whereas the older students did not. Before our last focus group session began, some of the members of Group Two joked that Melo had performed fellatio on a male peer. Melo emphatically distanced herself from this positioning of her as a sexually active woman by stressing repeatedly that she “does not have sex” (2, 4). Indeed, the young women in Group Two deem it so undesirable for young women to have sex that it can be the basis on which to end a friendship. Josef explains how she and Melo used to be good friends with a young woman, but when this young woman started having sex at thirteen they decided that they could no longer be friends with her (2, 3:19). The differences in the positioning of the skank by the older and younger students are influenced by the cultural norms regarding the ‘appropriate’ age to engage in sexual intercourse. It is more culturally acceptable for the older students – 16, 17, 18-year olds – to engage in intercourse than younger students. This is reflected in the legal age of consent in New Zealand, which is 16 years of age. While being legally ‘allowed’ to have sex does not necessarily mean that the older students are engaging in sex acts, social attitudes towards sexual intercourse are more relaxed when those involved have reached the age of consent. This could explain why the younger students convey a more negative attitude towards their peers engaging in sex acts than the older students. Because the skank in their peer group represents not only the transgression of appropriate appearance and sexual availability, but also the appropriate age to engage in intercourse, the skank provides the younger students with more transgressions to distance themselves from than the older students. Since being viewed as sexually active does not hold the same negativity for the older students in my research, while they wish to avoid being positioned as a skank, they are not as fearful as the younger students of being conceived as one.

As the students do not wish to be positioned as slutty and thus as ‘unacceptable’, they take care to ensure that they do not dress in a manner that emulates the slut’s appearance. The members of Group Two, for instance, agree that they would not wear an outfit that was, as Hannah terms it, “whorey” (2, 3:20). Hannah gives “fishnet tights and like a real short skirt and then a low-necked top” as an example of such as outfit (ibid.). Melo and Aladdin outline how they wear singlets underneath

their low-cut tops so that they do not reveal cleavage (2, 1:5; 2, 3:20). Group Two follow a guideline that helps them to determine if a skirt is too “whorey” to wear, whether it displays what they see as ‘too much’ flesh. Melo explains that skirts have to be longer than the longest finger of the wearer’s hand, if the hand is positioned flat on the thigh with the meeting-place of the wrist and the hand resting just below the hip bone. If a skirt passes this test, then it is acceptable to wear (2, 3:20-1). These techniques illustrate that the young women in my research are highly aware that their dress could be read as ‘slutty’ and thus monitor themselves to ensure that they avoid this reading, while condemning other young women they conceive as skanks. In positioning the skank as someone they do not wish to be, the students present the skank’s appearance and behaviour as undesirable, and reinforce wider social discourses which position the skank negatively.

The young women, while clearly not wishing to be seen as skanks, did not seem to be as threatened by the possibility of being positioned as sluts as did the young male participants by the possibility of being seen as gay. To be positioned as homosexual is to have the coherence of sex and gender disrupted, whereas being positioned as a skank does not involve the same disruption since the skank continues to be feminine. As Barrie Thorne points out in her influential work *Gender Play*, femininity is often framed as a dangerous contaminant for males, as a pollutant that stains, altering their masculinity (1993:75-6). This pollutant challenges the males’ status as ‘bodies that matter’. While the homosexual and the skank have a different relationship to the coherence between sex and gender, the condemnations of these two figures are based on the devaluation of femininity. The practices of both these figures are marked as feminine. Because women are supposed to be feminine, the skank must be excessively feminine through sexualisation in order for her femininity to be condemned. Illustrating the hierarchical positioning of masculinity in relation to femininity in the West, where masculinity occupies the positive pole in the dichotomy, excessive masculinity is not stigmatized in the same way that excessive femininity is, if at all.

Returning to the students’ positioning of the skank, this figure serves as an example of their depth model view that dress reflects the wearer’s personality. The students believe that from the appearance of the scantily dressed woman they can deduce information about her sex-life, her background, her desires, and her psychological health. Thus the students in Group Two do not wish to wear clothing that “gives out an explicit message” (2, 3:20). Interestingly, the skank does not have to prove that

she is sexually promiscuous; merely dressing in a revealing way warrants the students' identification of her as a skank or a slut. Just as the feminine-appearing man is taken to be gay without proof of his sexual desires, it is assumed that if the woman looks like a slut, she must be one. For instance, many of the students positioned a woman in a prompt-image photographed modelling underwear as a skank, without possessing any information about her behaviour or history. Often women who are labelled sluts are not actually sexually promiscuous (White 2002:50). While appearances may be misread, the students' view that dress reflects the wearer means that the wearing of revealing clothes is taken to be a sign of the woman's sexual promiscuity, real or imagined.

The students position the skank as dressing and behaving in a manner that she believes will attract men. This appearance is similar to what is seen on the cover of magazines aimed at heterosexual men such as *Arena*, *FHM*, and *Loaded*, television shows such as *Girls of the Playboy Mansion*, and in advertising ploys aimed at drawing male attention, such as the scantily-clad Jim Beam Bourbon promo girls that appear at bars, music festivals and sporting events in New Zealand.<sup>42</sup> The majority of mainstream media's portrayal of what is attractive to men is homogenous, featuring thin women with large breasts, long shiny hair, tanned, clear skin, makeup, groomed eyebrows, and a lack of hair on their face and body. The students assert that skanks conform to this image and dress to reveal their bodies so that they can draw the attention of men. Indeed, as the young men of Group Four agree, this style of dress is successful in attracting male interest (4, 2:25). The assumption that revealing clothes are worn to attract men underlies Hannah's and Aladdin's bafflement regarding the revealing clothes that were frequently worn to non-uniform days at the girls' high school Hannah attended before she transferred to City High. As there are no young men present at the school, Hannah and Aladdin find it strange that the students at the school would dress in a 'sexy' manner (2, 1:6). This view both naturalizes heterosexuality, links revealing clothes with sex, and positions these young women as believing that what young men, and the media, promote as attractive is what is attractive.

The students consider the woman who is viewed as attractive by men to be powerful, able to use men's desire for her benefit. They view the skank as desiring, but failing, to gain from men's desire. While the skank may draw men's attention, for

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<sup>42</sup> Jim Beam. "Event Gallery", <http://www.jimbeam.co.nz/gallery.php> Site accessed 10 September 2010.



the students any gains she achieves from this attention are temporary and minimal rather than available for her to utilize. In contrast, the students position a woman in the advertisement (used as a prompt-image) for Tab, an energy drink marketed at women, as able to gain from male desire. The advertisement depicts a man and a woman, both hegemonically attractive, seated at an upmarket restaurant. The man gazes at the woman, kissing her hand, while the woman looks at the camera, and thus at the viewer. The woman wears a low-cut tight pink dress, a black fascinator, and fishnet tights, but the majority of her body remains concealed by the tablecloth in the image. Marc asserts that the advert “makes it look like she’s completely controlling him. Like he’s just there like a slave almost, like so that he’ll do whatever she wants” (5, 1:18). Scarlet adds that the man in the advert is “blinded by her, so he’d just buy her anything, like a designer handbag or the drink” (5, 1:19). The students comment that this woman appears “classy” and “elegant”. This ‘classiness’, conveyed by the upmarket setting of the restaurant, the woman’s expensive-looking outfit and jewellery, and her glossy, neat hair and makeup, positions the woman in the Tab advertisement as removed from the subject position of skank. Additionally, the restaurant scene further distances the woman in the prompt-image from the skank as it depicts the man courting her, something the students do not associate with the skank, conceiving her relationships as based on sex only.

In contrast to the woman in the Tab advertisement, the skank fails to exploit the man for mutual gain. She does not receive designer handbags or get taken to expensive restaurants. For the students, it is the very means that the skank uses to gain favour from male desire that results in her failure to benefit from this desire. This failure is tied up with the skank’s inability to withhold availability. The woman in the Tab advertisement connotes measured availability through her position as turned away from the man, ignoring his gaze as he looks up at her and kisses her hand. This withdrawal is also referenced in her dress, which sophisticatedly plays with concealment and revelation through her fishnet stockings and the fascinator’s netting that veils her face. On the other hand, the skank’s display of skin and supposed willingness to engage in sex acts without the ritual of courting posits her as eager to give herself to men. This eagerness, for the participants, means that the skank does not receive the gains she desires as she does not compel men to work for her affections. Instead, she “gives herself away” (2, 3:6). Thus she has no leverage to receive benefits from her suitors. The skank, then, is positioned by the students as being used by, rather than using, men. The students at no stage conceive of her as simply enjoying sex. The skank’s position of used rather than

user, along with her unrestrained giving, and eagerness to please men through making herself easily sexually available, situates the skank as excessively feminine: she is too eager to please, too sexually available to men.

The students believe that because she dresses to attract men, the skank dresses in line with how she perceives men want her to appear rather than for her own comfort and enjoyment. As I have outlined in the previous chapter, the students link comfort and enjoyment with authenticity, arguing that if the subject is not comfortable then she is not being 'true' to herself. They believe that the skank could not be comfortable in the clothes she wears. Josef asserts, for instance, that dressing in revealing clothes "is actually really only for an attraction to men, like I bet she doesn't feel comfortable in that – who feels comfortable not being able to bend down?" (2, 3:4). Further, Group Three provides the example of young women wearing short, flimsy dresses on Courtenay Place (a street in Wellington known for its mainstream nightclubs) on wintery nights, asserting that these young women must ignore how cold they are, revealing skin "so guys can pick them up" (3, 2:9). This, as Françoise asserts, is "a really sad thing to do" because it means that the skank sets aside her physical comfort in order to be seen as desirable by men. The students also deem the skank 'uncomfortable' because they believe that her self-expression does not match her personality or self-perception, reflecting instead what she thinks men wish her to look like. This further positions the skank as inauthentic because, as Penny states, if "you're dressing for someone else, you're not dressing for yourself" (3, 2:9). In comparison, the students assert that they dress for themselves, in a manner that showcases their personalities. The positioning of the skank as not displaying her personality through her dress also contradicts the students' appearance-based readings of the skank as sexually promiscuous. As I outlined earlier they believe that the skank's dress reflects her behaviour, yet, if, as they assert here, the skank does not reflect herself through her dress then arguably her dress cannot be taken to illustrate her sexual preferences and activities.

The students' reductionist view of the skank's dress-audience ignores that she may not connect her dress with the male gaze, that she may instead wear revealing clothes because she likes the way they look, because they make her feel older, stronger, more confident, or more like someone she admires, for instance, and is therefore dressing for herself rather than for others. The notion that she dresses solely for others – and is thus uncomfortable – can be viewed as a fiction that is

used to condemn the skank, a fiction that is unlikely to be synchronous with how the skank views her dress practices.

The students' positioning of the skank as inauthentically presenting herself because she dresses for men offsets their own considerations of others' views when they are dressing. Thus the skank is a necessary construction to aid the students' positioning of themselves as authentic subjects. The students need to be reductive in their positioning of the skank in order to produce her as a negative Other, to distance themselves from her although they too could be seen as dressing for others. As I have argued previously, identity is based on how others see the subject, which affects how the subject views herself. There is thus an agential role in dressing – the dresser wears items in part to influence how others position her. Therefore none of the students can claim to dress only for themselves. Although the students admit that they do take into account others' views when they dress, they are adamant that this catering to others does not dilute their presentation of their 'true' selves. They view the skank as "losing" herself to please men, and thus they can distance themselves from the skank by positioning her as dressing to fulfil male desire rather than her own. With this condemnation, the students reinforce the notion that, as their dress ostensibly does not cater to others' desires at the expense of their own, they dress in a manner that is 'true' to who they are.

Entwined with the positioning of the skank as dressing for men rather than for her own comfort and pleasure is the notion that the skank's perception of herself is over-reliant on the positive appraisal of her by men. Neve, for instance, asserts that dressing in revealing clothes "just kinda shows that someone's like insecure cos you know they want someone, they want guys to come up and say that they're pretty and that they want them and – I mean I don't look down on them, ohh maybe I, yeah I guess I do. It's just sad though" (3, 2:10-11). In contrast, the students position themselves as relying on themselves for positive appraisal. The students overwhelmingly echo Neve's conception of the skank as "sad", pitying her supposed lack of self-esteem and self-respect and her reliance on the attraction of young men to feel good about herself. This emphasis on self-esteem and self-respect serves to discipline and de-individualize skanks. Thus, as Raby asserts, "if students who wear provocative dress are considered to lack self-respect, then responsibility for their marginalization is their own, rather than located in the social control of female sexuality or slut-bashing from others" (2010:344). The students' positioning of the skank implies that they view her not as a product of the social subjugation of

women's desire but as a figure who fails to be a strong, self-reliant individual. The frequent and near-universal labelling of the skank as "sad" by the students attests to the investment the students have in the norm of the strong, self-fulfilled individual. Like the neoliberal policies under which they have grown-up, the students exalt the individual, positioning the skank's reliance on the desire of others as a failure. This failure is a further sign of the skank's excessive femininity as the skank's over-reliance on male approval positions her as the weak, needy woman that man's strength is often contrasted against.

The charges of relying too much on others' opinions for her self-esteem and not presenting her 'real' self are further placed upon the skank by the students who view her as changing her appearance dramatically in order to embody the figure that *Playboy* and much of the mainstream media deems desirable to men. As Hannah states, only "one in a billion women" naturally embody the characteristics promoted as the ideal by the mainstream media (2, 3:2). Thus, for the students, emulating this ideal results in the skank looking "fake". The students, then, position the skank as undertaking a great deal of work to emulate the women the media promotes as sexually desirable – women with large breasts, long hair (often peroxide blonde), long nails, and tanned skin. The embodiment of femininity, however, requires the students themselves to work to change their bodies in order to conform to 'normal' female appearance in the West. Indeed, many of the students undertake the same appearance techniques as the skank, dyeing their hair and wearing makeup. The students' condemnations of the skank, then, are based on her going 'too far' in her pursuit of coherence between her gender presentation and her sex. Her breasts are too big, her hair is too groomed, her tan too dark, her makeup too thick. Thus the skank represents exaggerated femininity, and rather than highlighting the constructed nature of feminine appearance, she acts to reinforce the border of 'normal' appearance by overstepping the boundary into the excessively feminine. This excessiveness is compounded by the sexualised connotations of these feminine appearance norms. It is this sexual edge combined with the perceived inauthenticity of this work that results in the students condemning this excessiveness. Arguably they would not be so condemnatory of the chaste and passive über femininity proffered by Doris Day for example (which is rarely presented in the contemporary West).

The students distance themselves from this form of gender excess, which they associate with the self-abnegating desire to attract men. They assert that unlike the

skank, they dress with the approval of themselves and other women in mind, rather than in line with the perceived desires of men.<sup>43</sup> It should be noted here that the young women in my research present a heterosexist viewpoint, and their assertions that they dress “for” other women are not intended to suggest that they dress to attract them sexually. The students position other women as better judges of dress than men because they view men as having a vision of the female subject which is centred on the sexual desirability of her body, whereas they conceive of women as having a more sophisticated eye, judging the wearer’s ability to put together an outfit that showcases her personality and flatters her body shape. As Eva asserts, men think “she’s got really big boobies, she’s hot, and stuff like that” when they look at a woman, whereas women “look at style more” (5, 2:8). The young women, then, position themselves as soliciting the appreciation of their female peers, as this is more desirable than the approval of men. By positioning themselves as dressing for other women and thus circumventing the male gaze, the students promote themselves as dressing to showcase their personalities rather than their sexual desirability, thus distancing themselves from the position of the skank.

That these students explicitly state that they dress for other women rather than men undermines the assertion made by Berger that “ultimately” how women appear to men “is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life” (1972:46). This once again distances the participants from the subject position of the skank, and posits the skank as after approval of the ‘wrong’ kind. The skank is seen as measuring herself through the eyes of men – similar to Berger’s 1970s vision – whereas the young women in my study position themselves as measuring themselves through the approval of themselves and their female peers. This situates the skank as the ‘observed’ and thus as having something in common with the homosexual figure constructed by the young male students. The young women’s positioning of themselves as better than the ‘sad’ skank because they do not rely on the approval of men reflects the shift in the West since the second wave of feminism wherein a woman’s status in society is no longer based primarily on the relationship she has with a man (i.e. her husband or her father), but ostensibly on her own merits. For the students (and for the neoliberal ideal, see McRobbie 2009, 2011) these merits are her intelligence, her individuality and her independence – which are not traits associated with the devalued femininity the skank represents.<sup>44</sup> Men’s

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<sup>43</sup> This assertion is differentiated from the young men’s assertions that they wish to avoid the gaze of other men.

<sup>44</sup> McRobbie asserts that under neoliberalism, gender in “popular and political discourse is

opinions have not altogether been discounted however, as the young women still need to attract men to be secure in their identities as heterosexual. This requires them to appear in a manner that at least some men deem appealing. In order to be acceptably feminine, and thus heterosexual, the young women must perform their gender in such a way that attracts male romantic partners while avoiding the excessive sexualised femininity of the skank and meeting the approval of her policing female peers. The embodiment of 'acceptable' femininity involves skill, as to be feminine is to meet many of the same appearance-norms as the skank, therefore in their work to be feminine the students must be careful to not cross the unstable line into the excessive.

## **Conclusion: 'Natural' work and sex/gender coherence**

Illustrating their commitment to the sex/gender system, the students construct sexualized Others against which they measure their own embodiment of gender. It is in part through their encounters with, and policing of, 'unacceptable' presentations of gender, such as the man who is not masculine enough or the woman who is too sexually feminine, that the students produce themselves as embodying a gender position that is acceptably coherent with their sex. This production occurs with the gaze of others in mind, and involves the subject embodying the contemporary appearance-norms for her sex in order to be positioned by others as the sex she identifies with. Gender success means that the subject's appearance and behaviour will be seen as following from, and thus coherent with, her sex. The students' harsh judgments of subjects who fail to dress and behave appropriately for their sex suggest that they have internalized the norms of the sex/gender system. Thus they engage in routine labour to achieve these norms, and position those who do not as outcasts in the sex/gender system. Through this embodiment of gender norms the students contribute to the naturalization of men and women as different, as well as the notion that dress and behaviour – gender presentation – corresponds with a subject's sex.

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repeatedly framed along the lines of female individualisation". This "replaces feminism with competition, ambition, meritocracy, self-help, and the rise of the 'alpha girl' (much loved by the *Daily Mail*). The young woman is addressed as a potential subject of great 'capacity'. As Anita Harris (2004) puts it, she is a 'can-do girl'" (2011:181).

The students' positioning of sex and gender further illustrates the tension between surface and depth positionings of identity. On the one hand they view gender as following sex, arguing that, because of "down there", men and women 'naturally' look and behave differently; on the other hand, the students assert that they must work to embody the norms for their sex. Indeed, that there are so many examples of subjects who do not 'naturally' embody gender in a manner that matches their sex illustrates that gender does not automatically follow from sex, but must be achieved. Thus while the previous chapter demonstrated the students' commitment to authenticity and therefore to a depth model of identity, this chapter details a more even slippage between surface and depth models. Yet while the students recognize that coherence between sex and gender is not necessarily automatic, they continue to position the sexes – and desire – as based on 'natural' oppositions, illustrating that within their dual-model positioning of sex and gender, the "dream of symmetry" (Irigaray 1985, in Butler 1999:31) continues to structure how sexed identity is conceived.

## Chapter Six: Dress and Power

“Your whole appearance is a lie and it could never be true  
And if you really loved yourself then you would try and be you  
If your hair and eyes were real, I wouldn't have dissed ya  
But since it was bought, I had to dismiss ya”  
(A Tribe Called Quest, “Butter”)

North American ‘supermodel’ Marisa Miller leans against a door, one hand resting on the handle, while the other clutches a pink rose. She wears a black push up bra and matching panties, both with lace detailing, and white stay-up stockings. The underwear highlights Miller’s flat stomach, tanned skin, large breasts, and long, lean limbs. The look Miller directs at the camera, and the viewers of the US-based ‘men’s magazine’ *Maxim* in which she is featured, is one of ‘seduction’ – her chin tilted down, she stares directly into the camera with closed mouth and a knowing gaze that seems to say “I know you want me”. The image sparks emotional debate among the members of Group Two (aged 14) over whether Miller should be revealing so much flesh or not. At the same time, the group, along with the majority of the students in the study, agrees on one thing: Miller looks *good* (2, 1:18-19).

Miller embodies current Western appearance ideals of slenderness, tanned blemish-free skin, white teeth, richly-coloured glossy hair, large pert breasts, lack of facial and body hair, and proportionate features. Miller’s male counter-part would also have glossy hair, white teeth, and blemish-free skin, and he would be muscular, with little or no hair on his chest. The students of Group Two do not question Miller’s status as “hot”, taking it as given that her body is one to be emulated. Nonetheless, for the students, Miller is both a figure to be celebrated and reviled. Some members of the group view Miller as “making” women that do not look like her “feel like *crap*” (2, 1:18-9). Other members, however, view Miller’s body as something that she should “show off” in celebration of the “work” she has undertaken to maintain her body shape (2, 1:18-20). While the students agree that Miller is ‘hot’, their divided reactions – celebratory and angry – to Miller illustrate that appearance ideals are not passively accepted.



At the heart of these divided reactions is the recognition that the embodiment of appearance ideals is rare. Appearance ideals rely on scarcity for their high status. Thus, these ideals are highly desirable yet embodied by few, for if the majority of subjects embodied them they would no longer be as desirable. Since most people do not embody appearance ideals 'naturally', subjects must actively and constantly work to approximate them. This gap between desirability and embodiment creates conflicting feelings, such as the resentment and awe displayed by the members of Group Two as they respond to Miller. These feelings illustrate the power of appearance ideals; if they had no purchase, their existence would not procure such strong emotions from the students.

This chapter examines the students' negotiation of appearance ideals, which structure dress practices. It focuses on how the students resist some ideals yet accept others. It regards media to be central to the production and negotiation of appearance ideals. It considers appearance ideals in relation to power, viewing the students' negotiation of these ideals as indicative of the productive role of power and its multi-directional flow. This chapter argues that the students are not 'docile' subjects upon whom appearance ideals work. It also explores the way the students navigate the tension between their understanding of many appearance ideals as constructed and their attempted embodiment of these appearance ideals. It looks at how the students' commitment to a depth model of identity, illustrated through their concern with authenticity, shapes their relationship with these ideals. The students must reconcile their embodiment of appearance ideals with their conception of these ideals as homogenizing, and the consequent implication that this homogenization creates inauthenticity. Further, they must distance themselves from associating the embodiment of appearance ideals with caring too much what others think, and hence dressing for others. As well as this, the students must also navigate the work that the enactment of appearance ideals involves, which, as the students associate the authentic with the instinctual, further places ideals in the realm of inauthenticity. This chapter contends that the students negotiate such ideals by placing their embodiment of them within the realm of personal satisfaction and enjoyment. Further, it positions appearance ideals as operating within the neoliberal imperative to improve the self, a contemporary descendent of the modern 'progress' ideal. Examining the range of ideals the students deem constructed and those they take for granted, the chapter argues that the ideals the students accept as 'natural' are those that can be linked with health and the care of the self, which is consistent with the neoliberal drive to make the most of the self. With the internalization of

appearance ideals, based on 'improving' the self, a depth model of identity finds support in a surface model of malleability. That is, ideals which could be seen to block authenticity are embodied in a manner that is deemed authentic by the students.

## **The power of appearance ideals**

The students' negotiation of appearance ideals is based, in part, on a division between appearance ideals and norms. Throughout the focus groups the ideal, rather than the 'normal' or 'regular', is what guides the students' discourse. The students' reactions to Miller, for instance, are based on her extraordinariness and her exceptional appearance rather than those aspects of her appearance she shares with other subjects, such as her full possession of limbs or her hair length. This is to be expected, as conversation on appearance is rarely based on the ordinary, the taken-for-granted, for the seemingly universal acceptance of what is ordinary positions the normal as unworthy of comment. Appearance norms for the students are nonetheless based on the notion of a universal body which is fully functioning and healthy at birth. They deem 'normal' to be unproblematic, ordinary, average, everyday. The idea of a 'normal', universal body is based on the naturalization of class, race, location, sex and gender assumptions – with the 'normal' body being white, male, Western, and middle-class by default (Said 1978; Dyer 1993, 1997; Hall 1997). As the previous chapter examined, the fulfilment of appearance norms is required for the subject to be considered a full subject. That the students do not question appearance norms shows the hegemonic status of these norms: they are so embedded in the way the body is seen they are invisible. The students fulfil appearance norms, seemingly without complication, and do not question the 'normal' status of the norms. While both appearance norms and ideals construct certain raced, classed, sexed, and gendered appearances as more desirable than others, many of the students view a range of appearance ideals as constructed, whereas they take norms for granted. It is the negotiation of ideals this chapter investigates.

Appearance ideals are part of the artillery through which subjects are produced by and for the gaze of others. A subject is 'pretty', 'plain', 'fat', or 'wrinkled', for instance. Such labels and their connotations are constructed through the institutions of the

media, education, medicine, the family, and religion, among others. The meanings attributed to appearance ideals shape subjects' social status and the way subjects interact with each other. Dress theorists Nancy Rudd and Sharron Lennon assert that those subjects who closely approximate appearance ideals are more successful financially and socially than those who do not (1999:154-5). Sociologist Bonnie Berry echoes this argument, stating, "attractive people have social advantages that unattractive people do not have. They gain access to social power, be that power economic or more purely social, because of their looks" (2008:1). This power renders the embodiment of appearance ideals desirable. Like all power, the status gained from embodying appearance ideals is not fixed; it differs from moment to moment, situation to situation. Miller, for instance, who is seen by the students as gaining money and status from her looks, has limited choice, if any, regarding the clothes she will wear during photo shoots, how her hair and makeup will look, and which shots will be published. While the image the students discuss shows Miller staring into the camera in the powerful position of someone with an exemplary appearance, the shot does not portray Miller being dressed and posed by a team of directors dictating her moves. While those subjects that approximate appearance ideals may have higher status and greater socio-economic power than those who do not, the personal power they gain from this status is not consistent or all-encompassing.

The naturalization of appearance ideals belies their status as socio-cultural constructions. These ideals are not universal or timeless. They vary widely between cultures, and change over time. As the Flemish artist Peter Paul Rubens' Baroque paintings of women in the 1600s illustrate, the thinness ideal, for instance, has not always dominated Western visions of beauty. Within different cultures, appearance ideals reign that are far removed from those seen as 'natural' in the West. For example, a study published in the *International Journal of Obesity* ('obesity' is itself a Western socio-medical construction) on urban Senegalese women found that the most desirable body weight in Dakar was what the France-based researchers termed "overweight" (Holdsworth *et al*, 2004). The authors found that over one-third of the women interviewed wished to be heavier. This is in stark contrast to attitudes towards weight in New Zealand and other Western countries, where most subjects desire to be thin. The students in my study wished to lose, or prevent themselves from gaining, weight rather than weigh more. While in Pākehā (white) New Zealand culture, having a large body lowers the chance of the young subject being socially popular, psychologist Anne Becker (1995) and anthropologist Elisa Sobo (1994)

found that for subjects in Fiji and Jamaica respectively, large bodies show that the subject has frequent social interactions and are thus associated with popularity and high status. Such differentiation in the way the body is viewed illustrates that there is not a universal notion of beauty. Rather, appearance ideals are linked with the dominant structures within a society, and hence are not politically neutral. As feminist disability studies' theorist Rosemarie Garland-Thomson asserts, "social discrimination and political subordination are linked to the cultural valuing and devaluing of bodies on the basis of their appearance" (2001:12). Those subjects who do not fulfil appearance ideals are frequently discriminated against in the West. Thus notions of beauty are not free from power relations, floating in the sphere of the imagined universal; they are socially constructed ideals that have real effects on subjects.

The power exercised by appearance ideals comes from their status as 'truths'. The West's "régime of truth" – that is, "the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements" (Foucault 1980:151) – constructs and reiterates the desirability of appearance ideals. Such a construction exemplifies power at work. As Foucault points out, truth "is already power" (*ibid.*). That is, the designation of something as 'true' is an effect of power, and what is considered 'true' upholds the power that classifies it. The 'truth' of appearance ideals constitutes a way of seeing subjects, classifying them according to how closely they conform to appearance ideals. This vision shapes who, and what, is deemed to look 'good' or 'bad'. While the students question some of these classifications, positioning them as based on constructed ideals, they continue to measure themselves and others according to these ideals. This measurement is internalized: what the students see when they look in the mirror is deemed individual in/adequacy. In this way, appearance ideals can be termed one of the "subtle mechanisms" through which power is exercised (Foucault 1980:102). They are a way that power works on the body, constructing its shape and how it is seen.

## **“It’s what’s in the media”: Students, the media, and the improvement imperative**

The power of appearance ideals operates through the meanings attached to them. The media is one field that imbues images with meaning. Media pervades contemporary Western life; it is a major shared resource that makes appearances meaningful. While representations are countless, and can be interpreted in multiple ways, there are dominant, repeated meanings attached to certain ways of appearing. The students view the media as a key builder of the vision with which they measure themselves and others. As Group Two asserts, their interpretations of the way people look are based primarily on the way similar-looking people are portrayed in the media (2, 4:1). This is supported throughout the focus groups, with the students’ first reactions to the prompt-images used in focus group sessions often echoing dominant media portrayals of similar subjects. Acknowledging the media’s influence on their way of seeing, the majority of students agree that the media establishes what is attractive. Allen asserts, for instance, that a “hot” body is one that looks like the bodies shown in the media (4, 1:17). While the students posit the media as “responsible” for many appearance ideals, they still view the majority of appearance ideals positively, positioning them as covetable. Cultural theorist Chris Rojek argues that most subjects want to be “desired by the abstracted mass”, that is, seen as attractive by multiple others (2001:187). In order for this occur, subjects need to subscribe to appearance ideals that most persons agree are attractive, which are the ideals propagated in the mainstream media. The media is populated, then, with subjects who embody idealized appearance, acting as examples of how subjects should desire to be, to be desirable.

While the media is filled with “hot” people, unattractive subjects are not wholly excluded from the mediascape. One sphere in which they are represented is beauty and lifestyle texts, such as ‘women’s’ and ‘men’s’ magazines, makeover television shows, as well as films aimed at young adults such as *House Bunny* and *Clueless*. Such texts portray bodies that do not meet appearance ideals, offering instructions on how such bodies can more closely approximate ideals. These descriptions detail what can be wrong with appearance, inviting the audience to scrutinize themselves, and others, in the same way. This is a deficit model of measurement, whereby

appearance is viewed in relation to what is not present, to the gap between the ideal and the subject's actual appearance. The New Zealand edition of the 'men's' magazine *M2*, for instance, outlines eleven "grooming crimes" which alert the reader to what he should be concerned about with regards to his appearance: the oil his skin and hair generate, the way his hair looks, how much facial hair he has, and the condition of his nails, to name a few (February 2011). The February 2011 issue of *Australasian Cosmopolitan*, a magazine aimed at young women, highlights the problems of "bingo wings" (so-called "excess" fat under the arm), blemished skin, clogged pores, unmanicured nails, frizzy hair, and pale skin. Further, a scene in *Mean Girls* demonstrates the schooling in supposed appearance defects. The protagonist, Cady Heron (played by Lindsay Lohan), has grown up in "Africa" where she was home-schooled and not party to Western appearance ideals. Cady's new friends at the Northern American high school she has enrolled at – the group of three young, highly attractive women who are known as the 'Plastics' – stand in front of a mirror examining themselves. The young women state, "God, my hips are huge!", "Oh, please. I hate my calves", "At least you guys can wear halters. I've got man shoulders", while Cady's voiceover asserts, "I used to think there was just fat and skinny. Apparently, there's a lot of things that can be wrong with your body". The young women continue: "My hairline is so weird", "My pores are huge", "My nail beds suck". While the Plastics are, in the parlance of the film, "regulation hotties", they highlight – albeit in a comedic manner – the aspects of their appearance they view as not meeting appearance ideals rather than those that do, implying that viewers should do the same.

Indeed, consistent with the deficit model of appearance analysis endorsed in popular media, throughout the focus groups the students outline what they do not like about their appearance, rather than what they are happy with. Tellingly, the appearance characteristics they dislike are those that do not match appearance ideals. These include being 'too' heavy, 'too' pale, having thick ankles, hair that is not richly coloured, blemished skin, and, for the young men, a body that is not muscular enough and facial hair that is fluffy and uneven. Strikingly, many of the participants find their original hair colour untenable. Melo asserts, for instance, that her natural hair colour "was this horrible blondish reddish colour and it was so ratty and disgusting like it just had to be dyed, if you saw it you'd be like [pulls a horrified face].... it was the most disgusting colour I've ever seen. It was just horrible" (2, 2:18-9). In another example, Henrietta states, "If you had my natural hair colour you'd change it". Kandy adds, "mine is black, that's even worse". Henrietta replies,

“no it’s not. Mine’s like decide whether you’re blonde or brown goddamnit” (1, 2:6). The students’ frequent and scrupulous examination of their looks is also evident in Bach’s and Melo’s comments about their weight. Bach asserts that he often ignores hunger pains, skipping meals in order to stay thin (1, 1:15). Bach terms this practice “just normal” (1, 1:15). Melo views herself as carrying excess weight, which she refers to negatively as “my fucken fat” (2, 3:23). Melo states that because of this weight, she does not find herself attractive and “constantly feel[s] really self-conscious” about her appearance (2, 3:24). The strength of the students’ negative self-appraisals shows the substantial effect that appearance ideals have on the students. The existence of a gap between the ideal and the students’ appearance means that many of the students do not like what they see when they examine themselves before they have altered their appearance in the morning. Kandy, for instance, thinks he looks “disgusting”, while Penny’s first thought is “eww!”. This strong dislike for how they look compels the students to alter their appearances to more closely approximate appearance ideals.

This cycle of examining and then altering the self is normalized in teen films such as *Mean Girls*, in magazines, makeover shows, and other forums that describe the many appearance defects that subjects may have, then follow such descriptions with explanations of how to remedy these ‘crimes’. *Mean Girls* shows Regina George, the leader of the Plastics, embracing a low-calorie diet in order to lose weight and be more slender. The February edition of *M2* offers advice on how readers can fight oily skin and hair, take care of their nails, trim their facial hair properly, and style their hair in accordance with ideals. The same month’s *Cosmopolitan* gives detailed descriptions of how to look thinner, make hair glossier and legs appear longer, banish “bingo wings”, tame frizzy hair, and be tanned. Thus these media texts – and many more, such as makeover television programmes – act as instruction-guides, advising how to embody appearance ideals. They construct the imagined self – who the self could be – through images of subjects who successfully approximate appearance ideals. Attesting to the influence of these instruction-guides and the naturalised status of improvement techniques, the students have uniform conceptions of appearance problems and their solutions: if skin is blemished, wear makeup; if heavy, eat less and exercise more; if pale, sunbathe or apply fake tan; if hair grows where it ‘should not’, remove it.

The pervasiveness of these instruction-guides and the authoritative nature of their advice implies that appearance ideals are imperatives that subjects must strive to

embody. As Garland-Thomson points out, this is a marked difference from the way appearance ideals were seen in the classical West, in which such ideals were worshipped from afar rather than deemed necessary to achieve (2001:13). Due to the cross-media pervasiveness and generic nature of instructional guides, instructions come from multiple directions and many sources. This maximizes the reach of the message that the gap between a subject's appearance and appearance ideals should be closed. Further, the grammar of these guides emphasizes the imperative to meet ideals. Tabloid-style *NW* magazine tells readers to "Load your bag with healthy nibbles" such as fruit and vegetables to avoid snacking on high-calorie foods; to "Vary your work-out" so that it works different parts of the body and continues to be interesting; and to "Make your own food" in order to avoid fatty take-aways.<sup>45</sup> This use of imperative language is typical of instruction-guides, which offer their advice as "must-dos" rather than presenting it as information the reader may consider and enact if she desires. These texts imply that all readers should be working on themselves and that this work is a common, necessary struggle that all subjects undertake – even those that already appear to approximate appearance ideals, as we have seen with the Plastics in *Mean Girls*. This works to naturalise effort as a 'natural' effect of the desire to look 'good'. The texts position effort as universal, even though different subjects must put in varying degrees of work. There is a tension here: as Chapter Four detailed, the students position effort as a sign of inauthenticity, yet they accept that effort is required in order to embody appearance ideals. They do not position this effort as inauthentic, except when the subject uses her effort to excessively embody an ideal, resulting in her appearing "fake", that is, too tanned, too thin, or too made-up, for instance.

Texts guiding the reader how to meet appearance ideals portray the body as a malleable instrument controlled and altered at the individual's will (Garland-Thomson, 2001:13). They imply that discipline and the right techniques are all that is required to ensure the body emulates appearance ideals. A recent article in the Australian edition of *Grazia* magazine highlights this point of view. The author, Anna Murphy, describes how, although "much of [her] adult life has been spent in a gym", she has not been able to slim her 'problem' thighs and bottom. With her recent discovery, however, of a personal trainer in Britain who advocates working muscle groups in unfamiliar ways she has seen "remarkable" results and lost her "pear shape" (2011:74-6). Such articles naturalise the endless quest to fulfil appearance

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<sup>45</sup> *NW Online* (Australia). "Body Blitz", <http://www.nwonline.com.au/body-blitz/index.htm>. Site accessed 13 February 2011.



ideals and the notion that if one works hard enough, and searches for the right techniques, one will embody them.

The message that with the right technique and hard work *anyone* can have an ideal appearance is countered by the notion that some people “naturally” conform to these ideals. The tension between these points of view can be seen in Group Two’s framing of Marisa Miller both as working hard but also “blessed” with good looks, as though by chance. This suggests that even those subjects who work to embody appearance ideals may still fail without the genetic roulette falling in their favour. Surgery-based makeover shows such as *Ten Years Younger* and *The Swan* also imply that looking good requires a lot more than hard work; it requires a team of specialists to perform radical surgery. This further counters the myth that with hard work and the right techniques appearance ideals can be met. While the students recognize the limitations of work, they continue to work to embody ideals.

The proposition at the heart of these instruction-guides is that changing oneself to better approximate Western beauty exemplars is to improve one’s life. For instance, the classic makeover storyline – both fictionalized, in films such as *Clueless*, *House Bunny*, and *Grease*, and ‘real’, in shows such as *What Not To Wear*, *The Biggest Loser*, and *10 Years Younger* – portrays the subject as more successful (romantically and financially) post-makeover, and ‘happier’ in herself (Weber 2009, Sender and Sullivan 2009, Ouelette and Hay 2009). This message is embodied by Hannah, who asserts that when she was younger she did not “give a shit” [care] about how she dressed. Hannah states that she looked similar to a student that she and the rest of Group Two use as an example of someone they do not wish to emulate. Because of this, Hannah was teased and lacked friends. Since she began to put effort into her appearance, Hannah’s popularity has increased and she is no longer regularly teased about the way she looks (2, 2:14). Hannah, along with the countless happy post-makeover subjects, suggests that the work undertaken to ‘improve’ the self is necessary because – as the popular makeup brand L’Oréal suggests – subjects are “worth it”, that is, worth increasing their social power through climbing up the hierarchy of looks. Fulfilling one’s value, then, entails working to make oneself look better.

The emphasis on changing the body through hard work supports neoliberal ideals currently dominant in the West. The calls for constant self-improvement naturalise the self-aware, disciplined subject who desires upward mobility. This emphasis

aligns the body with a surface model of identity, which positions the subject as malleable. Indeed, the ideal neoliberal citizen is malleable, adapting herself to increase her self-sufficiency. This citizen ‘makes the most’ of herself, uses her own wits and skills for success, and showcases this success through consumption (Fries 2008, Guthman 2009). As Laurie Ouelette and James Hay point out, this subject is at the heart of the neoliberal “culture of entrepreneurship” (2009:32), where the self is the greatest asset one has. Within neoliberalism, success or failure is positioned as the responsibility of each individual rather than a result of social structures which help to create ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’. Hard work, discipline, good choices, and vision, then, are the key attributes of success within neoliberalism (Duggan 2003).

The successful subject within neoliberal capitalism is one with buying power. He can buy products to both help him embody appearance ideals, and to show his success. The association of success with consumption is crucial for many instruction-guides, which rely on advertising revenue from the brands they endorse for their existence. The Autumn 2011 edition of *NZ Fashion Quarterly (FQ)* for instance, features a double-page Gucci advert at the front of the magazine. Throughout this issue of *FQ*, Gucci clothes and accessories – as well as other labels owned by Gucci’s parent company PPR, including Stella McCartney and Yves Saint Laurent – are featured prominently in fashion shoots and ‘how to’ visual guides. A Gucci bag, for instance, is used as an example of an item readers who want to emulate the style of Australian model Abbey Lee can purchase (2011:42); and a Stella McCartney bustier, panties and garter are modelled in the fashion shoot “Class Act” (2011:78). As well as positioned as signs of success, consumption items are offered as ‘solutions’ to appearance faults, such as Clinique foundation which is promoted as enabling “flawless and radiant” skin (2011:150). The emphasis on consumption items naturalises an individualized approach to remedying the ‘failure’ to embody appearance ideals and encourages subscription to the ongoing system of production and consumption that contemporary neoliberal capitalism is based on.

Neoliberal society positions success as embodied by the celebrity: a subject constructed through media. Within our image-driven culture, the celebrity is the recipient of the admiring gaze, the same gaze which everyday subjects are taught to desire. Celebrities are figures to emulate. Rojek argues that improvement, or self-help, culture has a fundamental relationship with the celebrity, with the first improvement guides based on studies of subjects that had achieved fame (2001:117). The Hollywood myth, that these subjects have been propelled into

stardom through their hard work and good looks, acts as a framework for success within capitalism. This framework upholds the notion that success is available to anyone who works hard enough and looks good enough.<sup>46</sup> As media theorist David Marshall (1997) asserts, celebrities legitimate certain forms of subjectivity, acting as tools in the governmentality of subjects (in Rojek 2001:36-7). They show the rewards that supposedly come from hard work and the embodiment of appearance ideals. Celebrities attract the admiring gaze but also promise that this gaze will come to the subject who emulates them.

Many instruction-guides use celebrities as examples of subjects to imitate in order to more closely approximate appearance ideals. *Famous*, for instance, details diet tips stars follow, such as Kelly Osbourne's 'secret' that eating a small snack of fruit before bed can speed up the metabolism (2011:21). Magazines such as *Famous* also regularly feature "how to" guides for copying a celebrity's outfit. In the aforementioned issue, Kate Bosworth's "modern boho chic" is made available to readers in Australia with affordable pieces that look similar to the items Bosworth wears in the accompanying photo displayed with their price and the store they came from (2011:59). Further demonstrating Marshall's notion of governmentality, these instruction-guides also depict celebrities engaging in behaviour that is not fitting for the ideal neoliberal citizen who is guided by self-improvement, making it clear to readers that such behaviour is undesirable. This issue of *Famous*, for instance, chastises Blake Lively for her possible involvement in a marriage breakup; uses Kim Kardashian as a warning to readers of the dangers of plastic surgery addiction; and features an article that implies Nicole Ritchie is a bad mother due to her supposed love of partying.

Celebrity culture acts to normalise contemporary Western neoliberal society's meritocratic structure based on hierarchy and competition, a structure that the students identify with. Celebrities are celebrated for their skill, wealth, or exceptional appearance. Their success is ostensibly the result of being more talented, looking better, or having more than others. The hierarchal formation of success in celebrity culture and neoliberal meritocracy is supported by the frequent publication of lists that rank celebrities according to their appearance and/or wealth, such as *People Magazine's* annual '50 Most Beautiful People' list and the roll of the wealthiest

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<sup>46</sup> Thus there is tension between success being predicated on working hard and looking good, and the notion that one should not be seen to be trying too hard to look good or be successful that is outlined in Chapter Four.

individuals published annually by Forbes. Further, meritocracy is upheld in the sphere of the high school through ranked academic positions in classes, ranked sporting teams, as well as social awards such as 'ball king and queen'. The students demonstrate the internalization of such hierarchal measures. They compare themselves with those around them, awarding labels such as "prettiest" and "thinnest" to those they measure. Melo, for instance, is conscious that she is the largest member of her friendship group. Because of this, Melo feels added pressure to lose weight as she does not want to be seen as the "fat chick in the group" by those outside of the friendship circle (2, 2:10). Further illustrating this hierarchal way of viewing appearance, Eva, Scarlet and Saffron assert that if someone were to start wearing an item of clothing they also had, they would make a decision to continue to wear that item based on who looks better in it, discarding it if the other person appears more attractive (5, 1:8). This hierarchal framework is not invested in by the students without tension, however. Group Five are outraged when Saffron describes an acquaintance who purposely tells her friends that they look good when they do not so that she will look better than them (5, 3:26). These students subscribe, nonetheless, to the same comparison-based measurement structure, which inevitably involves one person gaining status through another's 'poorer' looks.

The improvement imperative advocated by the mainstream media supports the hierarchical model of success based on comparison. This imperative also encourages subjects to compare themselves with their past selves, measuring the 'progress' they have made towards their goals. The students take the model of improvement for granted, positioning it as 'natural' to want to improve the self. As well as their work towards non-appearance-related goals, this naturalization can be seen in the way the students view dress as a tool that the wearer uses to make herself look 'better', that is, more closely approximate appearance ideals. This tool requires skill in dress-choice and application. Possession of this skill allows subjects to choose clothing items and apply makeup, for instance, in a manner that "flatters" them. Items that flatter are items that highlight the wearer's 'good' features and/or downplay her 'bad' features. The students position wearing clothes that flatter as more important than being fashionable. For them, looking good is a major goal of dressing. As well as frequently asserting that dress should "flatter", the students also refer to the necessity of dress "suiting" the wearer, and the importance of the subject "pulling off" the dress item. If something does not "suit" a subject, it does not enhance her appearance; if the subject does not "pull off" her appearance, what she wears does not look good on her and is not worn with confidence.

The naturalised status of dress as a tool in improving appearance is apparent in the statement made by the actress Dania Ramirez, a spokesperson for the popular cosmetics brand Cover Girl, on *America's Next Top Model* that “it just feels so good to know that I’m not only representing myself but that I’m also *helping* other women find the tools to be the best that they can be” (cycle 14, episode 5). Ramirez, as well as countless makeover shows, imply that women *should* be looking for these tools, and that women should be helping each other to embody shared ideas of what looks ‘best’. This ‘best’ is the self that most closely approximates appearance ideals. The students lend support to Ramirez’s assertion, stating that they both work to look good, and help their friends to look good. They expect their friends to do the same. The students’ criticisms of (some) appearance ideals, then, do not extend to a criticism of the improvement imperative, which requires subjects to work towards the embodiment of ideals. This lack of criticism may be because the improvement imperative is a cornerstone of neoliberal capitalism (Duggan 2003; McRobbie 2009), and thus it is not just anchored to appearance, but pervades multiple fields, so that subjects are encouraged to constantly work on being a better student, a better friend, family member, and worker, for example, and therefore take this work for granted.

Subjects must learn how to use dress to ‘work’ for the self. This knowledge is offered by the aforementioned instructional guides, such as *Cosmopolitan*, which is packed with advice such as “a long pencil-skirt is your saviour if you’re short – it will give you the illusion of long legs” (Bonett, 2011:183). The students believe that subjects should actively seek and use this knowledge to make themselves look ‘better’. They show considerable skill at making the body appear more in line with appearance exemplars. Melo, for instance, buys short jackets that nip in at the waist as this gives her an illusion of having a longer torso, and better waist definition (2, 4:18). Lance and Luke believe different colours best suit their skin tone, with Lance choosing to wear blue for this reason, and Luke red (4, 3:8). Group Two also discuss which size pockets on the back of jeans subjects should choose: large pockets for making the bottom look smaller, smaller pockets to make it appear larger (2, 4:16). Further, the students actively work to highlight aspects of their appearance they believe look good, and downplay the features that do not approximate appearance ideals. Aladdin asserts, “I kinda try to hide stuff that I don’t like about my body and like show off stuff that I do like about my body. Like I know that sounds really a bit dodgy-dodgy but like yeah I try to look attractive cos like everyone does” (2, 2:13). As

Aladdin highlights, that subjects should work to 'make the most' of their appearance is naturalised to the extent that to keep up with others – to be competitive in the looks-related hierarchy – subjects must also use dress as a tool to improve their appearance.

The students judge their own and other subjects' dress decisions in relation to how much these decisions work for them, assessing whether they "pull off" their dress choices. Esme asserts, for instance, that she often thinks that a dress item looks "really cool" on someone and although she would not wear it, she thinks that this person has made the right decision, that it "works" for her (5, 3:4). Group Two negatively describe a young woman who wore revealing clothes to school, asserting that this outfit was not "flattering", and that because this woman is "not the hottest" and is "chubby" she should not have worn a revealing outfit as such an outfit highlights her less-than-ideal appearance (2, 1:11-2). When Melo asserts that she does not feel attractive because of her "fat", Hannah emphasizes that Melo should be using dress to help her better approximate appearance ideals. Hannah suggests that Melo should not wear clothes that make her appear larger, and dress instead in a manner that "flatter[s]" her body shape, that is, makes her appear slimmer (2, 3:23). Once again this implies that a subject's looks are her personal responsibility rather than measured by a socially constructed way of seeing. If a subject does not look good, it is her fault for not utilizing dress to make herself look better. This attribution of personal responsibility for appearance is further in line with the neoliberal investment in the individual as responsible for his success. The notion that dress is a tool thus helps to support the belief that appearance ideals can and should be approximated, rather than changed to make approximation involve less work.

The ease and consistency with which the students refer to dress's role as an appearance enhancer affirm the imperative for subjects to look their 'best', that is, approximate appearance ideals as best they can, as often as they can. As their negative self-appraisals and work to embody appearance ideals suggests, the students do not feel comfortable or confident with their appearance if it does not approximate some appearance ideals. This is embodied by Melo, who asserts, "I don't ever feel attractive" because looking good and emulating contemporary appearance ideals are "the same thing" (2, 3:23-4). That the media constantly advises subjects to work to better approximate appearance ideals suggests that subjects should not feel good if they do not approximate them. This occurs most

obviously in makeover formats, which emphasize the makeover subject's low self-esteem and failure in the realm of relationships or work, attributing this to her (pre-makeover) appearance. The media, then, as sociologist Janice McCabe points out, validates the feelings of personal inadequacy and insecurity felt by those subjects who do not closely approximate appearance ideals (2005:175). This works to further emphasize the lack of the approximation of these ideals as the individual's 'fault' for not working harder on her appearance.

The media, then, is a major propagator of appearance ideals. It presents a vision of what is successful and unsuccessful, stressing the necessity to approximate appearance ideals in order to be a successful subject. The media operates as a disciplinary apparatus in the Foucauldian sense; that is, it works to "characterize, classify, specialize; [to] distribute along a scale, around a norm, hierarchize individuals in relation to one another and, if necessary, disqualify and invalidate" (Foucault 1995:223). With its repeated suggestion that one's social standing can increase through the approximation of appearance ideals, the media in numerous ways supports the meritocratic structure of neoliberalism, positing that anyone who buys enough and tries hard enough can be the recipient of the admiring gaze of others – the gaze that in this visual-dominated culture confers success.

## **Who's looking at you, kid? Appearance ideals and the productive gaze**

"Don't look!" cries Saffron, mindful of the focus group participants staring at her eyebrows as we discuss eyebrow grooming (5, 2:15). This exclamation is made with the knowledge that to look is to assess, to judge. This knowledge influences behaviour. Saffron re-positions her side-swept fringe so that it hangs straight down, covering her eyebrows. This simple act of self-consciousness illustrates the effect others have on the way subjects see themselves and behave. This consciousness can be seen as the panoptic or surveillance society at work. This is the society of the gaze, the disciplining look. This is not a look cast by one person down on others, but a shared way of measuring subjects created through discourse, which is subscribed to by subjects themselves. Appearance ideals structure the gaze, which works to classify subjects and normalize behaviour. Subjects project how others might think of them based on shared appearance ideals, and they alter themselves accordingly.

As asserted throughout my thesis, the conception of others' views is central to identity. This measurement of the self based on how others see the self involves an internalization of the gaze. Foucault argues that this internalization is a primary way that power gains "access to individuals themselves" (1980:151). This access occurs through the threat of others' eyes and judgments, a threat that results in the subject acting as though she is being watched constantly. As Foucault states, the subject "who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection" (1995:205). Foucault's conception of the disciplining gaze is based on Bentham's panopticon, an architectural prison design featuring a building encircling a central tower, planned so that those in the tower can see into every room of the institution without the occupants of the building seeing into the tower. Occupants know they are being watched, but not when; thus they learn to monitor their own behaviour as though they are being watched at all times. The panoptic gaze, then, is an "inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he is his own overseer, an individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself" (Foucault 1980:155). That the students base their perception of themselves on how they imagine others to see them – whether these others are looking or not – is indicative of the spread of the gaze from the panoptic institution to a surveillance society in which people are monitored not only by superiors, CCTV and speed cameras, but by their peers.

Outside of the house, the students feel the gaze of others weighing on them. It is at the forefront of their minds, especially if they believe that they are attracting negative assessments from others by not approximating appearance ideals. Josef asserts, for example, that if she wears something that she deems to not look good on her, for the duration of the day she thinks, "oh shit people are gonna judge me, I look really bad, I hate what I'm wearing today" (2, 4:15). Aladdin further stresses that others' views are salient when the students are not embodying appearance ideals, asserting that "all day" she thinks "oh my god I look so bad I look so bad I look so bad I look so bad", it's like *all* I can think about today" (2, 4:18). These seemingly trivial descriptions illustrate the pervasive nature of the gaze. The students are extraordinarily aware of the judgments of others when they do not subscribe to the ideal for the context. In another example, Scarlet asserts that adults whom she



views as 'fashionable' give her an "evil look" when they see her. This "evil look" is also flashed by Scarlet's peers who Scarlet believes judge her for not conforming to appearance ideals (5, 1:2). This internalization of others' eyes results in the students changing their dress to avoid negative assessments of their appearance. While countless decisions are made by the students with regards to others' opinions, the most salient example of this is Scarlet's choice at Intermediate school, outlined in Chapter Four, to alter her dress style so that it was similar to her peers', in order to avoid their teasing.

Just as the students view themselves through the disciplining gaze of appearance ideals, they measure others through this gaze. They are quick to denounce subjects who do not look 'good', that is, do not adhere to appearance ideals. Scarlet, for instance, describes students at a nearby boys' secondary school who wear tight, short t-shirts that reveal their stomach fat as "repulsive" (5, 1:15). Group Four deplore women who wear baggy trousers that make their legs look big as "frumpy"; men who are sweaty and fat as "disgusting" and "gross"; and a student who wears shorts with woollen socks and tramping boots to school along with a large backpack as looking like he has been "dressed by his mum like his whole life" – a disaster for a teenager (4, 1:9; 4, 1:17). The young women in Group Three assert that they think "eww" when they see young men and women wearing sneakers outside of sporting activities, labelling such shoes unflattering (3, 2:25). These judgments further show the extent of the students' interiorization of appearance ideals: they view subjects through the lenses formed by these ideals, operating as though these ideals are 'true'.

This interiorization is viewed negatively by feminist Naomi Wolf (1990), one of many authors who position the workings of appearance ideals as detrimental to subjects (Jeffreys 2005, Forbes *et al* 2007). I want to leave the gaze momentarily to describe Wolf's views, as they illustrate a popular position; a position that, although with some merit, is problematic. Wolf contends that the power of the beauty industry has increased since the onset in the West of the second wave of feminism and women's consequent increase in power. For Wolf, the proliferation of cosmetic advertising and appearance-based judgment aims to offset the gains women have made in the public sphere, once again ensuring their bodies are, to use the Foucauldian term, docile. Wolf views beauty ideals as repressing subjects. She positions the beauty industry as damaging to women, a psychological "Iron Maiden" which traps women in a torturous cycle of appearance modification (1990:17). Indeed, the physically

harmful effects of the products and processes associated with improving appearance have been well documented (Jeffreys 2005). The carcinogens in common beauty products; lead and mercury in lipsticks; formaldehyde in nail polish; the paralyzing side-effects of botox; and countless examples of cosmetic surgery gone wrong illustrate that the quest to look 'good' can be dangerous. Wolf points out that this quest means that women's attention is diverted from 'meaningful' work in the public sphere to the body (1990:28). The effects of Wolf's 'beauty myth' are not as gendered as she presents them, however. Many of the young male focus group participants also feel pressure to embody appearance ideals. While this pressure is not as overwhelming as that aimed at young women, arguably such pressure is rising as an increased number of appearance-based products are marketed and produced for men. Further, not all subjects feel equal pressure to scrutinize and transform their bodies. A case could be made that Bach's practice of starving himself renders the "iron maiden" of beauty as more effective on him than on Kat, for instance, who thinks about appearance ideals but does not actively work to meet them (3, 1:14). While I take issue with Wolf's lack of analysis on the effect of appearance ideals on men and with her oversimplification of the techniques of beauty as torturous and oppressive, it is striking to hear the extent to which many of the students are unsatisfied with their appearance, which corresponds with Wolf's formulation of the ideals of beauty as forming a psychological prison, and shows the strength of the disciplining gaze.

Wolf's positioning of appearance ideals as wholly repressive discounts their role in the production of identities, however. Many identity-positions have their basis in their relation to appearance ideals. Subjects forge identities and bond with each other over the appearance techniques they enact. The same power that represses through appearance ideals also produces subjects. Power, as Foucault asserts, "traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse" (1980:119). For Foucault, then, one of the "prime effects" of power is that "certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals" (1980:98). It is through the gaze that such bodies are defined. Thus, rather than being a repressive force which declares "you cannot", the gaze states, "you are". Contrary to this, Wolf's argument implies that there are 'true' subjects who exist outside of appearance structures, outside of the gaze. Subjects are created by such structures, however; ideals are not imposed on a neutral surface. It is difficult, then, to view appearance ideals, and the gaze that upholds them, as solely repressive.

Indeed, many of the students view their decisions to make changes to their bodies as a way of having control over their appearance and some influence over how others see them. In this way, they are not the “docile” bodies Foucault (1973, 1977) associates with the prison, hospital and school. Rather than experiencing dress as wholly repressive, the students find power in their dress choices. Kandy, for instance, uses dress practices to distance himself from the authority of his father. Kandy asserts that “as a kid your parents would control what you do and shit, but like once you get to being a teenager you can choose for yourself” (1, 3:14). Thus Kandy has pierced his face in defiance of his father (1, 3:15). Bach, indicating the simultaneously repressive and productive nature of the gaze and appearance ideals, asserts that he straightens his hair both so that he “won’t get laughed at” because his curls “look ridiculous” and so that those subjects who share his subculture on the emo/scene cusp recognize him as a member of this subculture (1, 3:15; 1, 3:18). Further, Saffron uses makeup – which is often positioned as a repressive tool – to influence others’ views of her, ensuring she does not look like she is a “little kid” (5, 2:16). Such examples could be taken to mean the students are ‘duped’ by ‘false’ ideals. This implies, however, that the relationship between the ideals and the subjects is top-down, rather than productive. It also implies that the students take on these ideals without analysis, and have no choice over which ideals to embody and which to reject.

The gaze is power at work, shaping how subjects are seen and how they see themselves. Appearance ideals both form the network of looks that make up surveillance society and operate through them. Many visions structure the gaze, however; influenced by multiple discursive formations, the gaze is heterogeneous rather than homogeneous. Some discourses support the vision created through appearance ideals, others counter it. Enabled by the existence of counter-visions, the students question some of the standards and idealized appearances bound to certain ways of looking. That is, they resist some appearance ideals.

## **Resisting ideals: The unachievable, the unbelievable, and the sad**

The students' resistance to certain appearance ideals primarily occurs through their positioning of these ideals as media constructs. They view the media as constructing and propagating appearance ideals. The students frame the adherence to some of these ideals negatively, viewing it as a sign that the subject is not able to determine the constructed nature of the ideal. With this negative appraisal, the students distance themselves from the cultural dupe who embodies appearance ideals without question. The students' investment in distancing themselves from this 'duped' subject reflects their desire to be seen as intelligent, authentic individuals. Since they view conformity as a sign of inauthenticity, they wish to position themselves as subjects who do not 'mindlessly' follow the crowd. Showcasing his understanding of ideals as constructed, Allen asserts that to have a "hot body" one must mirror what the media presents as hot. He suggests that if the popular image of the body presented by the media changed, ideas of what a 'hot' body is would differ (4, 1:17). In another example, Group Three argue that the women presented in the pages of *Playboy* have become increasingly homogenous, which, in their eyes, has made the idealized appearance for women more homogenous (3, 1:14-5). The young women of Group Three consider many women to have been influenced by this imaging of the 'ideal' woman, and are eager to present themselves as 'seeing through' this ideal. These remarks – along with similar statements detailed in previous chapters – are used by the students to portray themselves as media literate subjects, who analyze the effects the media has on their own and others' practices.

The students' distancing of themselves from what they view as media-constructed appearance ideals is also instituted by their awareness that many of the ideals proffered by the media are unobtainable. For instance, of the notion that skin should always be blemish-free, Neve asserts, "it's an unachievable goal. It's like nobody's, nobody's like that" (3, 1:11). Referring to the female model in the Tab advertisement detailed in Chapter Five, Josef states, "like not every woman is like that you know and they try to make out that that is how every woman is supposed to be". The students assert that no one they know "naturally" looks like that (2, 3:2). The students view much of what the media presents, then, as influential fantasy. They

link this influential fantasy with the consumer culture of the contemporary West, viewing the promotion of ideals that are unobtainable for most and the marketing of consumer products as 'solutions' that will bring the buyer closer to the ideal as strategies that work together to encourage subjects to continue trying and buying endless consumables in the quest to reach the unreachable.

This critical approach is further illustrated by the students' disparagement of the simplistic product-based solutions the media offers to those who do not embody appearance ideals. Group Two, for instance, view the Marisa Miller image detailed in the introduction as promoting the notion that if a woman buys the upmarket lingerie worn by Miller she will look and feel attractive like Miller. Group Two admonish this message as a myth (2, 1:18). Further, they find the Tab advertisement problematic as it implies, for them, that all a woman needs to be "fabulous" is to drink Tab. They view this suggestion as unrealistic because 'fabulousness' is generated by the person, not what she drinks (2, 3:2). Contrary to the parallel world created by popular media where the unobtainable is made attainable with the zip-zap of a visa card, as the previous chapters attest, for the students the occupation of a subject position is not as simple as buying a product. It involves possessing the background, experiences and emotion associated with that position.

The students conceive of those subjects who, in their view, cannot 'see through' media messages, as "sad".<sup>47</sup> This "sad" figure is one who attempts to fulfil an unobtainable subject position without 'realising' that it is a myth propagated by the media and consumer culture. Neve asserts for example,

I think that the media is, it's horrific what it does to people, I mean just look at those magazines, and the shows, and it just makes, ohh, it's just a caricature of humans you know, it really is. And even T.V. shows, even movies, it's all just a caricature of what people are actually like. And it really does affect some, and I think it's sad when you see people like that with the makeup and the hair and it's just—" Françoise interrupts, "people can get so wound up in that notion of um trying to... be that ideal... they're kind of being controlled by something they don't understand and they're kinda getting taken away with it and, yeah, get so into it (3, 1:19).

Group Three agree that this "getting taken away" is the result of "a false image, an unrealistic image in the media" (3, 1:9). The sad figure, then, is one who is affected

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<sup>47</sup> There is crossover here in the language used to describe the subject who cannot 'see through' constructed media ideals and the skank, who is reliant on the sexual attraction of men. This term, 'sad', then, could be viewed as describing a subject who is not 'strong', who is overly influenced by the media or by the views of men.

by ideals that the students view as constructed. If the ideals this subject were approximating were seen as 'natural' and desirable, then this figure would not exist: she would meld into the rest of the population who are working to 'improve' themselves. Thus, Melo can assert that the aforementioned subject who bleaches her hair and rubs herself with tanning lotion "ruin[s]" herself (2, 4:27) with this activity, rather than improves her appearance. By separating themselves from 'sad' subjects, the students position themselves as able to deduce which ideals are 'false' and which are not.

This view that the 'sad' subject is unable to recognize media-constructed ideals conflates her with a lack of intelligence. This 'sad' subject includes the figure of, but is not limited to, the skank. Memorably, Josef asserts of a prompt-figure who emulates a *Playboy* Bunny that "when I look at her I think she's gonna be dumb, cos she's obviously got like five different kinds of breast implants" (2, 3:4). Breast implants act as a signifier for the students of losing control, and of not being intelligent enough to avoid buying into what the media promotes as attractive to men. The association between adhering to appearance ideals and lack of intelligence is the basis of the film *Legally Blonde* (Robert Luketic, 2001), which is held in high regard by many of the focus group participants. The film's protagonist Elle Woods, played by Reese Witherspoon, shocks those around her by succeeding at Harvard Law School and mastering the courtroom, despite her over-the-top interest in her appearance. While this film serves to undermine the binary of beauty versus brains, the fact that the film's storyline (and its sequel) revolves around Elle Woods' unexpected success implies that there is 'truth' in this entrenched binary. *Legally Blonde* certainly has not crushed this binary, which can be seen as the basis for Josef's position that the model Marisa Miller "could have done so much more with her life than that like you know like she could be smart" (2, 1:19). The Cartesian divide between mind and body, rationality versus aesthetics, then, can be seen at work in the students' conflation of the subscription to 'constructed' appearance ideals with lack of intelligence. Supporting this divide, the students position themselves as intelligent, rational subjects against the sad, out of control, and 'stupid' figure who literally "buys into" appearance ideals.

The students' construction of the 'sad' subject who is 'duped' by appearance ideals individualizes the analysis of appearance ideals as though this is a secret that some find out and others are blind to. This individualization fails to highlight education and access to a range of discourses on the constructed nature of appearance exemplars

as the key factors in the ability to position the media as constructing ideals. This categorizes the individual, rather than the social structures that proliferate these ideals, as being at fault if she takes on these ideals. Further, it suggests that the best resistance to the ideals is at the level of individual choice rather than the targeting of social structures. As this approach to resistance privileges the individual, it supports the neoliberal consumerist society within which the ideals are produced.

Along with positioning themselves in opposition to the 'sad' subject who is "taken away" (3, 1:9) by constructed appearance ideals, the students demonstrate their distance from the influence of certain appearance ideals by choosing not to embody them. Penny, for instance, asserts that she has embraced her pale skin and no longer feels the need to appear tanned (3, 1:14). In another example, Josef states that she stopped wearing makeup to school because it distracted her too much. Josef asserts, "I'd always be thinking about whether it was right, had it been smudged... that sort of thing" (2, 3:25). Further, Esme and Neve describe how they rarely wear heels because they are painful (5, 3:6; 3, 2:3). These choices show that the students are not docile subjects, passively manipulated by appearance ideals, but they weigh up whether to embody an ideal in relation to how constructed they view it. Such choices to take on an ideal or not showcase the students' agency, placing them in a position of negotiating power, not simply 'duped' by all that is deemed desirable.

This claim to be able to 'see through' media constructions proves to be less straightforward than the students make it out to be, however. The media affects the students' judgments of people and products. Charlotte states that subjects "get used to all these stereotypes and then they see them in society and then they connect the stereotype with the person" (2, 4:1). Rather than placing herself outside of this process, Charlotte uses this example to explain how and why she judges people. Describing how the media affect the way she sees dress items, Neve asserts that "sometimes I like a thing because of what I've read in a magazine", offering the example of the ankle boot style which she was not fond of at first, but, due to these boots' prominence in fashion magazines, she now finds them "cute" (3, 3:8). Further, Saffron argues that the media does not influence her in a major way because she is not affected by television shows and advertisements (5, 2:29), yet she contradicts this statement in the next focus group session, describing how she enjoys referencing cartoons through her dress. Saffron gives examples of her Minnie Mouse bag and necklace, and her new dress that features characters from the

*Flintstones* (5, 3:11). The students' cannot escape the influence of media, since, as Rebecca Coleman asserts, bodies "become known, understood and lived through their relations with images" (2009:3). Subjects, then, are formed and read through their relationship to media texts. Thus media and subjects are inseparable, and, in the West at least, stepping outside of media influence is impossible.

Indeed, while continuing to position themselves as 'hip' to appearance ideals being media constructs, many of the subjects situate the media as influential in constructing their worldviews. This situating implies that ideals, and subjects' views, change as media changes. Luke, for instance, asserts that television images are a major source of information regarding what looks good or bad. Luke states, "even before we know about it like we watch TV, like before we can consciously think.... If we constantly see women on TV with like plucked eyebrows, makeup and stuff, then we think that's normal" (4, 1:22). For Luke, what subjects see as 'normal' is what they have been surrounded by from childhood. This allows Luke to imagine that a different social structure and social ideals would be 'normal' if he had been enfolded in that structure from birth (4, 2:27). Group Three also posit ideals as changeable, viewing them as based on the behaviour of the majority of people in a society. As I stated in the previous chapter, Françoise argues that the reason the members of Group Three, and their peers, think it is "weird" when women shave their arms is because "nobody does it" (3, 1:15-6). Neve offers a further example of ideal construction with her assertion that in Japan in the Middle Ages it was common for women of status to blacken their teeth and shave their eyebrows (3, 2:15), appearance techniques that are far removed from current Western ideals. Neve states, "now that's like 'eww that's horrible!', but you know back then they obviously thought it was attractive" (3, 2: 21). The notion that ideals could be different challenges the naturalised status of current appearance ideals, highlighting their changeable, rather than fixed, status.

Indeed, the Western fashion system, with its endless cycle that constructs something as a 'must-wear' only to deem it a 'don't wear' a short time later, establishes appearance ideals as fleeting constructs.<sup>48</sup> Fashion, as Wilson points out, demonstrates "the arbitrary nature of convention" (2003:10). In line with

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<sup>48</sup> The association of fashion with temporary ideals is arguably one reason why fashion is seen as trivial as it is easy to write off its constructions as changing follies with no purchase. Wilson argues that it is precisely because fashion demonstrates the "the arbitrary nature of convention" that it is construed as trivial, as if it were taken more seriously the implications of the illustration of convention as "arbitrary" would need to be addressed (2003:10).



Wilson's assertion, the students use fashion trends as examples of how ideals change. Marc asserts that skinny jeans – the current dominant style of jeans worn by young people in Aotearoa/New Zealand – have only recently been seen as ideal and adopted by the majority of young people (5, 1:17). Group Three demonstrate how quickly this jean style – previously associated with heavy metal fans – has been naturalized, asserting that they would not wear any other fit of jean (3, 2:8). Further linking the role of the fashion system with establishing and promoting ideals, Group Two position large clothing chains as possessing the ability to normalize certain clothing items through stocking and promoting the item. They postulate that in this way skirts could be established as a 'regular' item for men to wear (2, 3:15). Once again this shows the students' analysis of the way appearance ideals are established.

The positioning of ideals as constructed and changeable does not stop the students attempting to embody some of these ideals, albeit with tension. This tension encapsulates the push-and-pull relationship of adhering to ideals the students view as mythic yet influential. Neve experiences such a conflicted relationship when she dresses in a manner that does not fit with appearance ideals. Neve states that she thinks "I'm not going to adhere to it, I'm not going to do that" but when she is faced with the gaze of others, she wishes that she had conformed to the ideal she is rebelling against (3, 3:12-3). This desire makes Neve feel worse, however, as she "*know[s]* that's not the way [she] should feel" (3, 3:13). This strain is also described by Penny, who asserts that although she recognizes that "the media makes it that way" – highlighting her status as a literate, rather than 'sad', figure – she continues to suffer from lack of confidence when her skin is blemished (3, 1:11). Penny wishes she could avoid being affected by the media, but she cannot. Neve's and Penny's assertions illustrate the complex way appearance ideals work – knowing that something is changeable and constructed does not deprive it of influence. This is a problem familiar to feminists such as Susan Brownmiller (1984), who asserts that she wishes to avoid wearing high heels and shaving her legs as these conform with patriarchal standards of feminine beauty, yet she does not find hairy legs or low heels appealing (Wilson 2003:234). This tension created between viewing the ideal as constructed, yet subscribing to it, is also present in Saffron's description of her compulsion to wear makeup. That Saffron feels compelled to justify her wearing of makeup shows that she views makeup as contentious. Saffron asserts that she rarely lets others see her without makeup on, and feels "really uncomfortable" when this occurs. Saffron views this as "really bad" (5, 3:20), yet she continues to wear

makeup, detailing her knowledge of various products and skill in application. Saffron's problematic relationship with makeup is further illustrated in her assertion that to apply makeup when she is sick would be "creepy!" (5, 2:10), yet she has used makeup since fourth form to make herself look like she is not "dying" (5, 2:16). This complex relationship with ideals illustrates that ideals do not work in a straightforward, top-down way; they require negotiation. This negotiation is not one that necessarily resolves the tension between the ideal as constructed and the ideal as desirable. Further, as I argue below, not all ideals are negotiated. Melo and Bach, for instance, who are both affected profusely by the thinness ideal, do not position this ideal as constructed. This suggests that they have fully internalized that ideal, and do not attempt to negotiate its dominant status.

Saffron and the other students who regularly wear makeup successfully navigate the tension created by adhering to an ideal they view as constructed by conceiving the practice as personally satisfying. In this manner, the contentious position of makeup is neutralized, and the social – the ideal – is transformed into the personal – enjoyable practice. This emphasis on personal satisfaction renders the practice authentic as the subject is embodying it 'for' herself rather than for others. Eva, for instance, gains satisfaction through her use of makeup to challenge herself. Eva tests her speed at applying makeup each morning, pushing herself to go faster. She feels good when she improves her time (5, 2:12). Neve and Saffron also associate putting on makeup with enjoyment. Neve asserts that she "really like[s]" experimenting with various ways to apply eye makeup (3, 2:15), often using a book she owns which explains how to create different looks with cosmetics. Saffron states that she finds applying makeup "fun", linking it to her love for art and painting (5, 2:11). Saffron asserts, "I wake up and I'm like 'yay I get to put on my makeup!'" (*ibid.*). This emphasis on enjoyment further links the practice as undertaken in accordance with the emotions of the subject, thus transforming ideals which are associated with the inauthentic into the authentic, suturing them into the depth model of identity through recourse to emotions (see Chapter Four). This negotiation again illustrates that appearance ideals are not merely repressive, with these students viewing the ideals as part of their identities, and experiencing genuine enjoyment in the process of approximating these ideals. By personalizing the social imperative to alter the face with makeup, however, the students are perpetuating the desirability of this imperative and upholding the social structures that maintain it. With their emphasis on fun and achievement, the students downplay the role that appearing in a positive manner for others has in their practices. This further

contributes to the neoliberal ideals of individual self-sufficiency and self-satisfaction, situating the subject as in control of her actions, acting for herself, rather than on the desires or opinions of others. Thus while the students use depth model discourses of emotions and authenticity in their statements on their embodiment of ideals, this embodiment also supports the neoliberal self, which is associated with a surface model of identity, showing an overlap between the notion of 'acting for the self' and the depth and surface models of identity.

As well as navigating the tension between appearance ideals as constructed and as desirable, the students must also resolve the tension between caring about their appearance and deeming appearances not to be as important as personality or social issues. This belief is evident in Henrietta's assertion that Bach "disgust[s]" her after he declares that he believes subjects should "do whatever [they] have to do to look good" (1, 3:15). Henrietta's disgust is directed at Bach's privileging of appearance above his mental and physical comfort. Many of the students argue that they "respect" subjects who do not care too much about their appearance more than those who do (2, 4:10; 3, 2: 10-11; 5, 3:9). Françoise asserts that subjects should not "over-think" dress, that they should not put too much effort into their clothing (3, 3:7). Kat also suggests that appearance is trivial, stating that when she feels dissatisfied with the way she looks she tells herself to "suck it up and get over it and get on with other stuff cos like it's not that important" (3, 1:14). Underlying these statements is the notion that effort is inversely correlated with authenticity. As I outlined in Chapter Four, the less effort a subject has to make in undertaking a practice, the more authentic her relationship with that practice. Françoise and Kat are highly attractive according to current appearance ideals. Therefore, without much effort they embody many of these ideals, which allows them to benefit from the privileges being attractive accords without actively working for them. Without an analysis of their privilege as 'attractive' subjects, or taking into account subjects' varying levels of access to appearance ideals, Kat and Françoise can position their lack of time spent on appearance positively and suggest that others should also avoid expending energy on their appearance. Perhaps if Françoise or Kat were obese, or had blemished skin (or were not Caucasian), they would not describe appearance as "unimportant", as they would be more aware of the effects of not approximating appearance ideals, and the privilege that subscribing to these ideals can grant. The claims made against privileging appearance are indicative of a depth model rendering of the relationship between appearance and personality whereby the students conceive of appearance as reflecting personality. Within this model,

work should be focused on the personality rather than on appearance, as appearance will 'automatically' change in accordance with the personality.

Two films discussed by the students also suggest that work on appearance occurs at the expense of the personality and the commitment to more 'worthy' causes. The appearance obsession of the 'Plastics' that feature in *Mean Girls* helps to portray them as 'bitchy', focused on looks rather than more significant issues such as the 'goodness' of a person or the events of the world around them. The 'Plastics' are contrasted with the 'Mathletes', whose intelligence and love of mathematics is represented in part by their lack of devotion to their appearance. When the protagonist Cady realizes that she has become a 'mean girl', a fully integrated 'Plastic', she signals her commitment to becoming a nicer person by finally agreeing to her teacher's request that she join the Mathletes and by becoming less concerned with her appearance. The film suggests, then, that being deeply invested in appearance and being a 'good', smart, and 'truthful' person are incompatible.

Further, the film *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes, 1999), discussed by Group Five, also divides 'inner' beauty from outer, emphasizing the importance of cultivating the former. Group Five agree with Saffron's assertion that the character of Angela Hayes (played by Mena Suvari) is not happy throughout the film until she lets go of the idea that outward beauty and status are all that matters. When this happens Angela "becomes happy" and displays her "inner beauty", her 'true' self (5, 3:17). The notion that the more a subject cares about her appearance the less time she spends on "inner beauty" is supported by Saffron, who describes a young woman she knows who is "obsessed" with her appearance. Saffron states, "she just tries so hard to like maintain this like perfectness that her personality is like [hits hand on the desk for emphasis] boom! Dead. Makes her ugly" (5, 3:23). In an earlier session, Group Five emphasize the importance of valuing personality over appearance, agreeing with Eva that 'hotness' "should be like the person they are deep down inside and like their personality, not the way they dress" (5, 2:8). These beliefs create pressure for the students to avoid taking on some appearance ideals for fear of being seen as concentrating too hard on their appearance at the expense of their personality and authenticity. Indeed, the students' use of discourses of health, outlined below, downplays their interest in appearance, situating this interest as health-related rather than based on a desire to look good. Yet if appearance reflects personality, then arguably the cultivation of appearance does not occur at the

expense of personality, detracting from personality, as appearance is personality's public presentation.

The questioning of appearance ideals by the students illustrates that these ideals have not achieved hegemonic status. If they had, they would be considered 'natural'. Thus the positioning of some ideals as false and unobtainable, the production of the 'sad' subject who cannot see ideals as constructed, and the notion that a focus on appearance occurs at the expense of personality, for instance, demonstrate that these ideals have not been fully internalized by these students, and consent for them has to be won and maintained. As this section suggests, the power relations underlying appearance ideals are not stable structures that are unidirectional, acting upon subjects. Rather, they are taken on, altered, and challenged by subjects who are, as Foucault states, "always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising" power (1980:98). The students' resistance to ideals encapsulates this position.

### **“Sexy. Strong. Healthy”: The incorporation of appearance ideals into health discourses**

While the students resist many appearance ideals, there are appearance ideals that remain unquestioned. These have hegemonic status and are thus invisible as constructions. These ideals are most often related to notions of 'healthiness'. Health is seen as an imperative outside of ideology, supported by the supposedly apolitical fields of science and medicine. Because they are seen as 'neutral', dominant discourses of health have 'truth' status in the West, which positions these discourses as powerful. Associating appearance ideals with health, then, draws them into the field of neutrality, which increases their power. Health, however, is not neutral. Like all disciplines, it works to define and normalize.

Indeed, Foucault's work on the productive role of medical discourses illustrates precisely the political function of health. Foucault argues that discourses of health are used as a mechanism to control the population ([1984] 2008:140). Foucault terms this control "biopower". This power is part of the modern "careful management of life" that replaced the 'god-given' power of the feudal sovereign (*ibid.*). Biopower administrates bodies, positioning them as machines that sustain society through

production and reproduction. It classifies bodies as healthy or sick, and works to prolong life expectancy and production time through the optimization of health (2008:139-40). This occurs through a whole array of techniques, including the construction and naturalization of practices of 'hygiene', the proliferation of medical clinics, the medicalization of birth, and health education. Seen through this frame, rather than the neutral effects of 'science', the discourses of health are socio-political with the goal of population control and the maximization of the labour of bodies.

The dominant discourses of health place the responsibility for being healthy on the individual rather than on the government, or society. The emphasis on self-care has increased with the neoliberalization of the West and the resulting decline in the welfare state (Duggan 2003; Shah 2010). Under neoliberalism, discourses abound which place fault with the individual who is sick, suggesting that he has been undertaking unhealthy practices and/or failing to take care of himself 'properly'. This view is encouraged by state-sponsored education tools, which emphasize individual responsibility for health. These range from gruesome pictorial warnings on cigarette packets, to washroom cartoons showing how to best wash hands, to television advertisements telling viewers to eat "5 plus" servings of fruit and vegetables per day. The emphasis on health as the responsibility of the individual is also seen in health insurance premiums, which increase if the individual regularly undertakes what is deemed 'unhealthy' behaviour such as smoking. Such a viewpoint transforms healthiness into a moral imperative where not looking after the self is considered to be a sign of bad judgment, laziness and lack of discipline. This can be seen in discourses in Aotearoa/New Zealand about obesity which position those that do not meet the appearance ideal of slenderness as victims of their own laziness and uncontrolled penchant for unhealthy foods. This fails to account for the high occurrence of obesity among subjects of low socio-economic status and the link between food prices, alienation from food production, education, and obesity. Health can be seen, then, as a moral-political tool that supports the status quo of haves and have-nots through naturalizing the idea that illness is a punishment for individuals for not maintaining a healthy lifestyle rather than the result of the uneven distribution of wealth.

Further, the notion that health is the individual's responsibility supports the self-improvement imperative advocated within neoliberalism. One can always be a fitter, faster, healthier, better-looking citizen. Indeed, Rose asserts that in contemporary society looking better and being healthier are combined under what he terms the

“new ‘will to health’” (2001:6). This is based on ‘making the most’ of oneself in order to live a fulfilled life. Rose asserts that this ‘will to health’ does not “merely seek the avoidance of sickness or premature death”, but involves the “optimisation of one's corporeality to embrace a kind of overall 'wellbeing' – beauty, success, happiness, sexuality and much more” (2001:17). The discourses of the ‘will to health’, with their marriage of health and beauty, are present in the students’ discourses of attractiveness. Neve and Françoise assert, for instance, that they feel “most attractive” when they feel healthy (3, 2:16). Aladdin also conceives of beauty as wellness, stating that she feels “most attractive” after she has had a good night’s sleep (2, 3:24). The conception of beauty as health can be seen in Melo’s formulation of thinness as healthiness (2, 1:18), and in Group Two’s positing of Marisa Miller – who they view as highly attractive – as “fit” and “healthy” (2, 1:18-9). Further, Françoise associates beauty with a lack of what she calls “self-destructive”, that is, unhealthy, behaviour: partying and drinking (3, 2:15). These assertions illustrate the students’ acceptance of beauty as health and health as beauty. Meeting appearance ideals has come to connote healthiness, and healthiness is shown through meeting appearance ideals: it is difficult to separate the two. Thus the seemingly ‘neutral’ discipline of health has successfully incorporated discourses of beauty, adding legitimacy to these appearance ideals through its neutrality.

The mainstream media contains countless examples of the incorporation of beauty with health. An advertisement in the NZ edition of *M2* for “Hydra Sensitive” a L’Oréal moisturizer aimed at men, states that it “Soothes. Strengthens. Protects” (February 2011:7). This emphasizes the role of the moisturizer as carer. Indeed the advert does not mention appearance ideals at all, stressing the moisturizer’s ability to protect skin rather than its ability to make the skin appear smoother. The February issue of Australasian *Cosmopolitan* features an advertisement for the Maybelline product, “Baby Lips”, which asserts “No more basic lip balm. Give me cell repair and hydration” (2011:2). Like the Hydra Sensitive advert, it positions the product within the realm of (health)care, stating that the balm is “clinical care” for lips. This issue of *Cosmopolitan* magazine also frequently refers in its editorial content to “beautiful” hair as “healthy” hair, and a “sexy” body as a “strong” body. In another example, an advertisement for Clarins’ “Vital Light” cream in British *Vogue* states that it “treats all the original causes of the loss of skin luminosity” and “stimulate[s] the natural elimination of oxidized proteins which are at the root of skin dullness” (October 2010:356). Good-looking skin, then, becomes “luminous”, “hydrated”, “repaired”, “protected”, and “strong”, terms typically associated with health rather than

appearance. This normalizes the merger of appearance ideals with health, particularly the notion that looking good is looking healthy.

The increasing amalgamation of beauty with health can further be seen in the rising medicalization of appearance attributes that do not conform to appearance ideals. This medicalization suggests that non-ideal appearance is a biological fault that can be remedied through medical procedures, often surgery. Such medicalization is evident in the language used by medical professionals in reference to appearance, such as the term “nasolabial folds” to describe smile lines, “excessive fatty deposits” to describe sections of the body that do not conform to the thinness ideal, and “hypoplasia” to refer to a bodily feature that is not as well-defined as the ideal (Neto and Capani, 2007:573). This medicalization of appearance acts to strengthen the power of appearance ideals by further incorporating them into the ‘neutral’ realm of health.

Because of its ‘neutral’ status, health is used to legitimize adherence to appearance ideals. This can be seen in Lance’s assertion that the wish to avoid putting on weight is “not about your appearance, it’s [avoiding] harming yourself” (Lance, 4, 1:18). Luke adds, “I’ll want to try and stay fit, I want to like be healthy” (*ibid.*). Although contradicting Lance’s assertion, Allen and the rest of the members of Group Four reiterate such ‘worthiness’, stating that they want to maintain attractive bodies “not because we have diabetes or like um some some kind of illness that we have to be really fit to survive, it’s just we want to because we want to be hot” (4, 1:17). This suggests that the group believe that such maintenance would be more ‘worthy’ if they were working towards being healthy. In using health to legitimate appearance work, Group Four are positioning health and appearance ideals as separate fields. This legitimization serves in practice, however, to further incorporate the two; by using health to legitimate appearance ideals, these practices become inseparable from health. For the students, then, the appearance practices that are the least problematic are those that are linked with health such as exercise, staying thin, having clean glossy hair, and white teeth. The more a technique can be linked with health, the more the students are likely to position it as natural, necessary, and desirable. Privileging health over appearance is a way for the students to distance themselves from the ‘sad’ or inauthentic subject who works to embody ‘false’ appearance ideals. Health, however, is measured by the subscription to certain appearance ideals, such as thinness and clear skin; thus while this privileging



portrays the subject as not 'sad', as not placing appearance above personality and well-being, it, ironically, simultaneously promotes appearance ideals.

Health discourses are at the forefront of the construction of truth, shaping the way ideals are read. They are thus a major determining factor in whether an ideal is embodied or not. As appearance ideals increasingly become incorporated into the 'neutral' discourses of health, the appearance ideals that are seen as false are arguably decreasing. Health discourses are a way that appearance ideals find their legitimate place on the body, since the alignment of beauty with health positions work undertaken to approximate these ideals as taking care of the body. This displaces appearance ideals from their position as trivial and embodied at the expense of the personality, and situates them as part of the techniques necessary to care for, and improve, the most important asset that exists in neoliberal society: the self. Embodying appearance ideals, then, involves the subject controlling her behaviour through setting goals, making "good" decisions, and working to fulfil them – that is, decisions and work that lead to the subject being 'fit' and thin. Such controlled behaviour is that which creates and supports the self-sufficient, 'successful' neoliberal subject. The subject who is working to look 'good', to be 'healthy', is helping to uphold these neoliberal ideals each step of the way.

## **Caring for the self: Ideals and self-presentation**

While there is broad consensus on health-related appearance techniques, the students' opinions differ on the appearance ideals they view as 'natural' and/or necessary to embody. For instance, Josef, who rarely wears makeup, asserts that "obviously" makeup is "fake" (2, 3:25). Saffron, on the other hand, who does not like to be seen without makeup, states that she "wouldn't be real" without it (5, 2:16). Further, Lance asserts that dying his hair would be "stupid" (4, 2:17), whereas Melo and Aladdin avoid revealing their original hair colour, because they feel "ugly" when it shows (2, 2:15-7). The frequent embodiment of an appearance ideal suggests that the subject has internalized that ideal. Those ideals she has not internalized are deemed 'fake'. Internalization involves identification, which transforms the ideal into an imperative to embody if the subject is to look like 'herself', that is, if her appearance is to mirror the way she sees herself. Due to this internalization, every subject has dress techniques they undertake as part of the everyday practice of

being themselves. Conversely every subject has a set of dress practices they would not adopt, as these are not part of 'who they are'. Henrietta, for instance, regularly dyes her hair, but agrees that she would never bleach her hair blonde or apply fake tan (1, 3:5). This need to present the self as one sees the self results in Kandy and Bach's refusal to leave the house without their hair straightened, and Lance ensuring his dreaded hair is clean, contained in a beanie. The naturalization of appearance ideals can be viewed, then, as a two-stage process: the internalization of the ideal and its consequent embodiment as a representation of the 'real' wearer.

This need to present the self in a manner that is coherent with how the subject sees herself can be considered part of the subject's responsibility to care for herself. This care involves the subject working towards optimal mental and physical health, and ensuring that she presents herself as she views herself so that others position her similarly. As in Foucault's notion of the care of the self, this involves the subject 'knowing' herself (1986:58). Unlike Foucault I am not addressing here the labour, or *epimeleia*, the subject undertakes to 'grow' as an ethical being (1986:50); rather, I am considering the labour she undertakes to be 'healthy' and to showcase herself to others. This labour can be situated along a continuum of care involving the specific placement of techniques of self-care along a spectrum of most to least undertaken. Each subject has a different continuum of care. This spectrum is not static; techniques move positions along the continuum over time. Bach, for instance, has gone from wearing eyeliner everyday to every now and then. The techniques that feature on each continuum are delimited by the knowledge of the existence of the techniques by the subject, what she considers as capable of being embodied, and what she can pay for. At one end of the continuum are those techniques that the subject unquestioningly undertakes, deeming them necessary to care for herself. For the students, these usually include eating 'healthy' food, sleeping, showering, exercising, going to the doctor, brushing one's teeth, washing and grooming one's hair, washing one's face, and applying sunscreen. At the other end of the spectrum are techniques that the subject cannot identify with and would not enact. These might include elective cosmetic surgery, being tattooed or pierced, or shaving one's head, for example. Between these two poles lie techniques that the subject embodies sometimes. The subject may view these mid-spectrum techniques to be undergirded by constructed appearance ideals but justifies her enactment of some of these practices with recourse to comfort. That is, although the subject may recognize that she is subscribing to an ideal that is not 'natural', this embodiment is required for her to present herself in a manner that is coherent with her self-

perception and consequently to be comfortable. Thus Saffron can justify her wearing of makeup by asserting she would not be 'herself' without it. The continuum of care – particularly the pole of 'necessity' – demonstrates how ideals become incorporated into a depth model of identity, which positions the enactment of ideals as part of dress's role to reflect the self.

While every subject's continuum of care is different, signalling the way that ideals are taken up and/or rejected in varying ways by subjects, many of the ideals that rest at each end of the spectrum are uniform. That is, the techniques at the 'must-do' end of the continuum are most often embodied by the majority, particularly health-related techniques, as discussed above. Those techniques that populate the 'never-do' and 'fake' end of the spectrum are those condemned in many spheres, such as elective cosmetic surgery and the over-application of makeup. This is indicative of the shared vision the students subscribe to, a vision that constructs how ideals are seen throughout the contemporary West. Regardless of their place on each person's continuum of care, none of the appearance techniques are 'natural', however; all are socio-political and work to shape the population. The division between 'fake' and 'natural' is culturally defined as well as based on internalization. Ideals are discursive constructs rather than reflections of universal 'truths'. The ease with which students name and embody ideals as self-evidently true illustrates the power of discourse to "materialize its effects", which is consonant with the power of discourse to "circumscribe the domain of intelligibility" (Butler 1993:187). Those techniques that are constructed through dominant discourses produce the bodies of the majority of subjects, naturalising the way these bodies appear.

## Conclusion: Surface, Depth and ‘Authentic’ Dress

I rifle through the racks in a vintage store on Cuba Street, the greens and blues catching my eye. Among the Hawaiian shirts and the bubble skirts I see a group of young women I recognize from City High. They pull out items from the racks, the plastic coathangers clicking as they bend and scrape against the metal. They hold up items to laugh at – a yellow tutu, and a huge woollen jersey with garish explosions of colour which meld together to form a face. They also pick out items for each other to approve. “Is this me?”, one asks, holding up a forest green leather pencil skirt. Her friends say yes, and she goes to try it on. Her friends admire the skirt when she comes out of the changing room and she decides to buy it.

The young woman’s wearing of the green skirt will impact the way she feels, the way she sees herself, and the way others see her. Dress is inseparable from the social gaze, which measures dress – and the dresser – in line with appearance ideals and norms. These ideals and norms are linked to race, class, gender, and sexuality. Dress, then, acculturates the body. As well as allowing the body to be visible and socially viable in the public sphere, it produces that body within the culture it inhabits. The students are conscious of the cultural role of dress to designate subjects as certain kinds of persons. Like Simmel over a century ago, the students view dress as communicating the self to others. They are aware of the meanings others will attach to their dress, and alter their dress according to the judgments they wish to elicit from significant others. Just as others judge them, the students judge others based on their dress. They make quick appearance-led evaluations of the wearer, locating the wearer within their own frameworks, which are influenced by the wider cultural context of Aotearoa/New Zealand and the West.

Since dress acts to communicate information about the wearer to others, the students evaluate dress as to whether it shows others who the subject ‘really’ is. As well as being concerned to present themselves accurately through dress, asking “is this ‘me’?”, the students are also concerned that others should present who they ‘really’ are through dress, posing the question “is that ‘them’?”. This concluding chapter considers the role the notion of authentic expression of the self plays for the students. It contends that the students rely on the notion of authenticity to stabilize their conception of the self, which is inherently unstable due to their subscription to

both surface and depth understandings of identity. This stabilization occurs through recourse to experience and emotions. It also occurs through the production of inauthentic Others against whom the students locate themselves as authentically embodying their subject positions. As well as distancing themselves from Others, the students also work to distance themselves from social pressures that position young people as inauthentic, as dupes of media-driven consumerism. Finally, this conclusion examines how the students nonetheless incorporate the possibility of transformation through dress into their notions of authentic selfhood, which further aids their navigation of the tensions caused by their framing of identity within a dual model.

“Who am I?”, “Who is the ‘real’ me?” is a question pertinent to adolescence, which is a time of intense identity formation. The students are eager to mark themselves as different from others, establishing their individual identity positions. Adolescence is a period when young people are transitioning from children to adults, moving away from the subject positions that marked their childhood. This usually entails, in part, differentiating oneself from the way one’s caregivers have positioned the self in the past, and attempting to produce one’s own position against those the caregivers provide. Young people wish to establish their independence, but at the same time they are concerned to be accepted by peers. They form tight friendship groups. Within these friendship groups, as well as independently, they mark themselves strongly against those subjects they do not identify with, using such Others to solidify both the friendship group and their own subject positions. Dress, as Simmel (1901) argues, is one way that subjects both signal group affiliation and produce themselves as individuals. Dress, then, plays a significant role in the production of identity.

This thesis has examined the way the students conceive of the relationship between dress and identity. I have argued that in their formulations of this relationship, the students utilize both surface and depth discursive models of identity. Their positioning of identity as based on changing experiences, preferences, and choices is conducive to a surface model of identity, yet their concern with authenticity and emotions resonates with a depth model of identity. This dual positioning is indicative of the discursive world the students occupy, which, on the one hand, positions the self as inherent and unchanging, and, on the other hand, positions the self as infinitely malleable. The students do not subscribe directly to either of these positions; rather, they weave surface and depth discourses throughout their

conceptions of identity. Indeed, they meld the two models through their conflation of appearance with being. This conflation allows for dress to be seen as both constituting and reflecting identity. The students navigate this discursive terrain by subscribing for the most part to a depth model of identity based on 'true' expressions of the self, yet they also operate according to the surface model, judging the self according to appearance (their own and others') and using dress to help them embody subject positions they do not yet see themselves as occupying. This surface model operation destabilizes the depth model, and vice versa. Thus the students engage with the relationship between identity and dress in complex and at times contradictory ways.

This thesis has anchored itself in the students' conceptions of identity and dress, privileging the students' voices. Their engagement with various discursive formations in the focus groups has directed the content of these pages, determining the themes addressed. The students' negotiations of particular discursive formations are a product of time and place – five combinations of students at a 'liberal' urban secondary school meeting three times with a young researcher. With different students, a different setting, or a different researcher, the themes that emerged would arguably be different, and the discursive negotiations would certainly have taken different forms. Apart from the introductory and methodology chapters, each chapter is based on the identity concerns raised by the students. These can be broken down into the relationship between identity and others; individuality and authenticity; the coherence between sex and gender; and the subscription to or refutation of idealized appearance. Using the second and third focus group rounds to explore the themes raised by the students in the first focus group meeting allowed me to engage with their concerns and conceptions rather than mold the groups to reflect the concerns raised within academia. Authenticity emerged as the overarching concern for the students. Illustrating the usefulness of focus groups to research, the students' commitment to discourses of authenticity is not something I could have predicted prior to the focus groups.

This concern with authenticity can be viewed as a crucial aspect of the dialectical approach to identity that results from subscribing to both the surface and depth models. The surface positioning of identity as malleable threatens the stability of the self and thus the students must hold onto the depth model notion that there is an essential substance to identity in order to steady themselves. This substance, however, is anchored by the students in experiences and emotions rather than fixed

biological characteristics. For the students, the subject changes – ‘grows’ – with new experiences. Past experiences are understood in different ways as the subject’s views and emotions change. Experiences and emotions, then, while acting to anchor identity, are themselves not static. Because the suturing of identity to emotions and experiences allows for malleability, there is a further need to appeal to authenticity to create stability. If identity, and its anchors, were stable, then the question of what constitutes and illustrates ‘real’ identity would be less prominent, if it existed at all. Since both bases the students use to comprehend identity are unstable – as inherently malleable and as tied to emotions and experiences – the requirement to stabilize identity through recourse to authenticity is strong.

The students’ concern with authenticity can also be viewed as stemming from their conflation of appearing with being. Although they assert that appearance cannot show the “whole person”, the students position appearance as indicating identity. They judge people on the assumption that their appearance shows who they ‘really’ are, and are thus invested in appearance accurately representing identity. However, they also realize that appearances can deceive, so the students are concerned to check that the subject matches his dress to his identity. While the students frequently judge subjects negatively for not authentically showing themselves, and while they make mistakes regarding the identities they presume subjects inhabit, they continue to position appearance as the communicator of identity. Thus they want to ensure that the means of this communication, such as dress, are as accurate as possible.

This preoccupation with whether others are representing their ‘true’ selves through their dress is entwined with the importance of others’ views to identity. Since the secure occupation of an identity position means that peers view the person in that subject position, the students are concerned that the subjects with whom they interact are communicating ‘true’ information about themselves in order that they can place that subject in a position accurately. The students want to locate the person in the ‘right’ position, that is, in a position that is consistent with her background, preferences, experiences, and emotions, which are deemed to make up her identity. In order for this to occur, the dresser must present information about herself that communicates these identity characteristics to others. Because of the impact that peers’ opinions have on identity, the students assert that a subject should not “mislead” others into placing her in a position that does not conform with her identity. The students are also concerned to use dress to accurately present

themselves to others. This commitment to dress as indicative of identity once again illustrates the students' investment in the conflation of appearance with identity. While they strongly believe that appearance should match the preexisting identity, the conflation of appearance with identity also allows the students to move into new subject positions. This occurs through the subject attempting to appear in a manner that suggests that he occupies a subject position he does not yet occupy, working to fulfil the expectations of those that place him within that new subject position until he occupies it without obvious work. The students reconcile this tension between their commitment to the equation of appearance with identity and their use of appearance to help them to occupy new subject positions by attributing the desire to change to an existing self's new experiences, thus incorporating it back into the enactment of authentic identity. Although the students utilize others' views to help them embody new subject positions, they continue to judge peers according to the subject positions they believe them to already embody, constantly assessing whether others' presentation accurately indicates their preexisting identities.

The students' concern with authenticity is also linked to dominant media representations of young people. The media texts the students consume, both with pleasure and resistance, shape their own identity practices and how they communicate themselves to others. In particular, the students attempt to undermine the stereotyped teenaged subject position prominent in the West which situates young people as fickle consumers who buy into branding, and the feminine teenager as 'bitchy'. In their struggle to map their own identities, the students work against these dominant representations to tell others who they are, or, more likely, who they are not.

Being 'bitchy' involves insulting peers for one's own gain. It is tied up with the hierarchic structure of status. Bitchiness often entails being disingenuous – saying one thing but believing another. It is shown prominently in the films *Mean Girls* and *House Bunny*, which are key texts for many of the students. The *Mean Girls'* character Regina George, for example, often gives others compliments on dress items she believes to be ugly or unflattering for the wearer; she is constantly rude to her mother and her friends, and tries to ensure that she remains at the top of the status table at the expense of these friends. The young women in my research, as well as the queer young men, stressed their lack of bitchiness, which they link with inauthenticity. They distanced themselves from the common representation of feminine-identified young people as bitchy. They emphasized their own practices to



be opposed to the practices of the 'bitch', particularly their relations with peers and their expression of themselves, which, unlike the bitch's, are "not fake".

Further, the students in the focus groups disassociated themselves from the popular Western image of the teenager who embraces brands and the promises of advertisements. Unlike the stereotype of the consumption-hungry young person, they view the idealized appearance promoted through media products as unachievable by all but the very few. They conceive of these images as manipulated to ensure that the figure appears "perfect", arguing that even those subjects good-looking enough to feature in these images cannot meet the ideal. The students positioned themselves as media-literate, able to see how the media is attempting to manipulate them into buying goods, while condemning the media for creating unrealistic ideals. As well as this, the students link homogeneity with inauthenticity and thus shun many popular brands, avoiding purchasing heavily branded dress items in order to not be like others. Thus they distanced themselves from the mediated figure of the inauthentic teenager, and from other young people whom they view as emulating this mediated teenager.

Further illustrating the importance of authenticity in the students' conceptions of themselves and their peers, the students produce inauthentic Others, against whom they position themselves as authentic. These Others help to resolve the authenticity-related tensions that arise from the students' positioning of identity within the discursive models of surface and depth. The Others that populate the students' worlds, filling the pages of this thesis, are the clone, tryhard, skank, homosexual, and "sad" figure duped by the media. These figures help the students to negotiate the tensions between dress as constituting identity and as reflecting identity; between dressing for the self and dressing for other subjects; between being influenced by the media and being 'overly' influenced; and between working to embody a subject position and effortlessly embodying it. These Others allow the students to construe themselves as subjects who can 'see through' the media's influence, dress for their own pleasure, conform to ideals they choose to, and embody subject positions 'naturally' and authentically, that is, in accordance with their experiences and feelings. These Others exist in order that the students can distance themselves from the subject positions Others occupy. This disassociation is crucial for the students, who at times embody the practices and views they attribute to Others – they are influenced by the media and appearance ideals, and do try hard to win the approval of significant peers, for instance. Through the creation of Others,

the students can navigate the tension caused by this embodiment, positioning this embodiment as temporary whereas the Others occupy these positions permanently.

A major tension the students use Others to navigate is that related to the notion that the subject should dress for herself, pleasing herself, rather than dress for other subjects. As this thesis has argued, however, identity and dress are inseparable from others' perceptions. The way a subject sees herself is based, in part, on the way she believes others see her. Because of this, the subject dresses with others' views in mind, using dress to influence how they position her. The students admit that they use dress to shape others' visions of themselves. To mitigate the negative implications of this, they must produce themselves as not diluting their 'real' selves for the sake of others' views. That is, they must situate themselves as continuing to dress in accordance with their preferences, experiences, world-views, and emotions. This situating occurs through constant discursive reference to dressing to please themselves and to illustrate their preferences and emotions. Most saliently, it occurs through the distancing of themselves from the tryhard, skank, or clone, figures who supposedly disregard their own experiences and feelings in order to win the approval of others. These subjects are deemed to care too much about others' views and thus "lose themselves", presenting themselves how they think their peers want them to be rather than how they are. Through their condemnation of these figures, the students present themselves as dressing authentically in comparison. Their repudiation of pandering to peers' views is also indicative of the students' privileging of the independent individual who does not rely on others. This is a figure who is venerated within the neoliberal discourse that dominates the contemporary West. Thus while the gaze of others is necessary to be a subject, the students are eager to suggest that they exist independently of the views of others, as strong, self-sufficient subjects.

Another area of tension that Others are also used to address is centred on the students' notion that authentic identity is "effortless". Since, as the students' conceptions of themselves illustrate, identity is based in part on how others see the self, subjects must adhere to the norms established for the identity they wish to occupy. This adherence takes work. Rather than recognizing this labour as something that all subjects must undertake – consciously or not – the students turn into Others those subjects who work too hard or not enough to embody certain identities, condemning them as inauthentic. The tryhard, for instance, is not only seen by the students as ignoring his 'real' self in order to be seen a certain way by

peers, but also as trying too hard to embody a subject position. This effort locates him as inauthentic. The homosexual Other is figured as not working hard enough to embody the 'true' coherence between his sex and his gender expression. The students urge this figure to 'try harder' to look like the sex he identifies with, yet this urging occurs without any recognition of the tension produced through their condemnation of the tryhard as working too hard, their dismissal of the homosexual as not working hard enough, and their own belief that 'true' identity does not require work. The students do not position the practices they undertake to be 'who they are' as 'work'. These practices can rather be seen as cultural labour, which is so imbued with routine that it is seen as 'natural', part of the habitual traversal of everyday life. Rather than illustrating the work it takes to securely occupy a subject position, then, the figure who does not display coherence between his identity and his expression is deemed to be inauthentic, ignoring his 'true' self, while the students, in comparison, are positioned as 'naturally' expressing themselves coherently with their 'real' selves.

The students also navigate the tensions produced between their commitment to a depth model and their practices, which are more in accordance with a surface model, through reframing as authentic practices that could be viewed as inauthentic. Such practices include wearing something because they know that someone else will like it, or enacting an appearance ideal that they deem to be a media construct. This reframing occurs through the incorporation of their dress practice into their notion of "comfort". Being comfortable involves ensuring that one's self-perception corresponds with one's self-expression. Thus being comfortable is crucial to presenting oneself authentically. In this manner, the tension caused by having to some extent to embody appearance ideals that are seen as constructed is successfully resolved. If the subject has incorporated into her view of herself adherence to an ideal she believes to be constructed so that it becomes part of her routine self-presentation, then this ideal becomes sutured into the realm of the authentic through the rhetoric of 'feeling comfortable'. Saffron, for example, claims that wearing makeup is necessary for her to present her 'real' self, although she simultaneously views makeup as 'unnatural'. Further, the notion of comfort helps to transform the occasions when the students do consciously work on their appearance into 'worthy' work undertaken to ensure a coherence between self-perception and self-presentation. This work is separated from the work the skank, clone or tryhard does because it is deemed to be part of ensuring that the seen self is the same as the felt self. Being comfortable also involves the belief that peers view the self as the

subject sees herself, that there is a match between the subject, her presentation and the social gaze. Thus the notion of comfort straddles both surface and depth models of identity, illustrating the students' commitment to both. Comfort implies that the subject displays her 'true' identity, yet this state is reached only when others confirm this identity, which destabilizes the depth model notion that identity lies within the subject.

As well as having recourse to "comfort", the students use their emotions to incorporate what might be seen as inauthentic dress practice into the authentic. Authentic dress is dress that accords with the emotions of the wearer. If a dress practice can be aligned with something the wearer wants to do, or can help the wearer better express his emotions, then it too is authentic, even if it is a practice that the students attribute to the Others they produce, such as the bleaching of hair or the application of fake tan. Indeed, students assert that practices such as wearing makeup or exercising are "fun", which distances these practices from dressing according to appearance ideals and for others, discursively resituating them on the side of dressing for pleasure, of dressing for the self. Further, an emphasis on feelings supports the students' embrace of appearance ideals that signal healthiness. Being healthy entails feeling good. Thus working to be healthy, although it may involve working to embody appearance ideals of being thin, being tanned, and having clear skin, for instance, can be configured as working to feel good, with the embodiment of appearance ideals a consequence of feeling good rather than a goal. By emphasizing changes in appearance as being based on feelings, the students can position the self as malleable without destabilizing authenticity.

The reframing of the inauthentic as the authentic through an appeal to comfort and emotions is a communal reframing, conducted within focus groups. All of the students in the research share a concern with authenticity. It is in friendship groups, however, that Others are produced against whom the members of the group together mark themselves as authentic, distancing themselves from the subject positions these Others occupy. Each friendship group has its own discursive frameworks that they use with each other, which supports their (re)positioning of their judgments of themselves and peers. Because this reframing happens within friendship groups, working with preexisting clusters of friends has allowed me to witness this successful navigation of the tensions that result from subscribing to dual positions on the relationship between identity and dress.

Nevertheless, the navigation of the tensions inherent to the subscription to both of these models is perhaps not as tricky as it appears to be. While surface is about what appears and depth refers to the unseeable 'truth', surface factors nonetheless bring that 'truth' into being. The self relies on the recognition of others in order to occupy a position – and dress is used to appeal to others for such recognition. Thus the act of expressing identity is inseparable from the act of constituting it. Rather than making opposing truth claims, the surface and depth models can be (re)positioned as parts of a dialectic. That is, they reinforce rather than oppose one another. The surface and the depth are occupied at the same time. For the students, surface appearance is necessary to express the identity that lies at the depth, but identity constitutes itself out of surface appearances. Like a möbius strip, surface and depth twist into each other, so that it is not clear where the surface ends and the depth begins. Identity constitutes dress constitutes identity and on and on through childhood, high school and beyond.

## Appendices

### Appendix One: Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms<sup>49</sup>

#### *Focus Group Participant Information Sheet – Students*

Preliminary study title: **Addressing High School Students – Dress and Identity**

Dear Participants,

My name is Felicity Perry. I used to be a student at [High School] and am now enrolled for a PhD degree in the Department of Film, Television and Media Studies at The University of Auckland. I am conducting research on how high school students dress. I am particularly interested in students at [High School] as you are not required to wear a school uniform. As part of my research, I will be talking to students about the clothes they wear and their thoughts on identity. I will also talk to teachers about the clothes that students wear.

As students at [High School], you are invited to participate in my research by attending three focus groups, two during the period of March to May and one during September. These focus groups will be conducted outside of class time and will take approximately an hour and a half each.

At the focus group sessions participants will be asked to complete a short questionnaire and to discuss the clothes they wear. Participants will also be shown a series of images from popular magazines and asked to discuss their opinions of them. The focus group sessions will be audio tape-recorded. These tapes, and any other information I record, will be kept in a locked storage cabinet in the Department of Film, Television and Media Studies at The University of Auckland and will be destroyed six years after the completion of my research project in accordance with research ethics policy at the University.

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<sup>49</sup> N.B. These were printed on paper that used the University of Auckland's Film, Television and Media Studies letterhead.

Focus group participants will also be asked construct a scrapbook with images that represent the way you dress and the media texts you are interested in (music, films, television programmes, internet sites, et cetera). The scrapbook will feature five recent photos of yourself from your photo collection with descriptions of the clothes you are wearing in each photo. It is up to you what else you put in the scrapbook, how long it is, and how much time you spend compiling it. It can include images that come from sources such as magazines and the internet. These scrapbooks will be confidential and will be returned to you, or should you not want your scrapbook to be returned, destroyed, when my research project is complete.

You may withdraw your participation at anytime and any information traceable to you up until four months after your initial focus group discussion. If you do withdraw, data you have provided will not be considered in my research findings, although I will not be able to delete your contributions from the tapes recorded during focus group sessions.

All information will be reported in a way that will not identify you as the source. Due to the collective nature of focus groups, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, but every effort will be made to ensure that information provided by participants will remain confidential.

I have assurance from the Principal and Board of Trustees that your participation and/or non-participation in my study will not affect your school grades.

If you wish to participate in my research, please fill in the attached consent form and return it to the school office, or to me. If you are under 16 years old, your parent/guardian must also fill in a consent form.

Thank you very much for your time and help in making this study possible. If you have any queries or wish to know more about my research, please email me at [felicity.perry@gmail.com](mailto:felicity.perry@gmail.com), or phone me on 021 042 5962.

You could also contact my supervisor, who is also the Head of Department:  
Professor Annamarie Jagose,  
Department of Film, Television and Media Studies,  
The University of Auckland,

Private Bag 92019,  
Auckland.  
Phone: 09) 3737599 extn. 87332  
Email: [a.jagose@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:a.jagose@auckland.ac.nz)

For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Office of the Vice Chancellor, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 373-7599 extn. 83711

**APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS  
ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 15 October 2008 for 3 years, Reference Number  
2008/420**



## ***Participant Information Sheet – Teachers and Senior Administrative Staff***

Preliminary study title: **Addressing High School Students – Dress and Identity**

Dear teachers and senior administrative staff at [High School],

My name is Felicity Perry. I am an ex-pupil of [High School] now enrolled at The University of Auckland for a PhD degree in the Department of Film, Television and Media Studies. I am conducting research on how high school students dress, and how they use dress to display identity. I am particularly interested in the students of [High School] as they are not required to wear a school uniform. As part of my research, I will be talking to students about the clothes they wear.

As staff at [High School], I would like to talk to you about the dress practices of students and your ideas on the relationship between dress and identity. This will take the form of a one-on-one interview at a time convenient to you. The interview will take approximately one hour and will be tape-recorded. The tapes will be kept in a locked storage cabinet in the Department of Film, Television and Media Studies at The University of Auckland and will be destroyed six years after the completion of my research project in accordance with research ethics policy at the University. There is a possibility that I will contact you after your interview if I require any follow-up information.

All information will be reported in a way that does not identify you as the source.

You may withdraw your participation at anytime and any information traceable to you up until four months after the interview.

I have assurance from the Principal and Board of Trustees that your participation and/or non-participation in my study will not affect your relationship with the school.

If you wish to participate in my research, please complete the attached consent form and return it to me or to the school office.

Thank you very much for your time and help in making this study possible. If you have any queries or wish to know more about my project, please email me at [felicity.perry@gmail.com](mailto:felicity.perry@gmail.com), or phone me on 021 042 5962.

You could also contact my supervisor, who is the Head of Department:

Professor Annamarie Jagose,  
Department of Film, Television and Media Studies,  
The University of Auckland,  
Private Bag 92019,  
Auckland.  
Phone: 09) 3737599 extn. 87332  
Email: [a.jagose@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:a.jagose@auckland.ac.nz)

For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Office of the Vice Chancellor, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142.  
Telephone 09 373-7599 extn. 83711

**APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS  
ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 15 October 2008 for 3 years, Reference Number  
2008/420**

## **Consent Form – Students**

This form will be held for six years in secure locked storage.

Preliminary project title: Addressing High School Students' Dress and the Display of Gender.

I understand that as part of her PhD in the Department of Film, Television and Media Studies at The University of Auckland Felicity Perry is conducting research on the way high school students dress.

I agree to take part in this research.

I have read the Participant Information Sheet and understand the nature of the research. I know that I have been selected to be part of this research because I am a student at [High School] and that participation in Felicity Perry's research is voluntary. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research project and, if I had any, these questions have been answered satisfactorily.

- I agree to attend three focus group sessions (two in the first research period which will take place from March to May, and one in the second research period which will take place in September), which will occur outside of class time and take approximately one and a half hours each.
- I understand that the focus group sessions will be audio tape-recorded and these tapes will be kept in a locked cabinet on the university premises and destroyed six years after the completion of the research project in accordance with research ethics policy at The University of Auckland.
- I agree to compile a short scrapbook that illustrates my interests and the clothes I wear. I understand that this scrapbook will feature five recent photos of me with descriptions of the clothes that I am wearing in each photo.
- I understand that my name or other identifying details will not be published.
- I understand that all information will be reported in a way that does not identify me as the source. I understand that due to the collective nature of focus groups, however, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.
- I agree to keep the information other students provide in the focus groups confidential.
- I understand that I may withdraw my participation in the research at anytime and any information traceable to me up until four months after the first focus group I participate in. I know that should I withdraw my data, the contributions I have made in the focus group session cannot be deleted from the audio tape-recording.
- I understand that participation in Felicity Perry's research will not affect my grades at school.

I would like my scrapbook returned to me: (please circle) YES / NO  
If yes, my address is:

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I would like a copy of Felicity Perry's research findings to be emailed to me:  
(please circle) YES / NO

I give my consent to take part in this research.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact details:**

My form class is: \_\_\_\_\_

My phone number is: \_\_\_\_\_

My email address is: \_\_\_\_\_

**APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN  
PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 15 October 2008 for 3  
years, Reference Number 2008/420**

## **Consent Form – Parents**

This form will be held for six years in secure locked storage.

Preliminary project title: Addressing High School Students' Dress and the Display of Gender.

I understand that as part of her PhD in the Department of Film, Television and Media Studies at The University of Auckland Felicity Perry is conducting research on high school students' dress and conceptions of gender.

I agree for my child to take part in this research.

I have read the Participant Information Sheet and understand the nature of the research. I know that my child has been selected to be part of this research because she/he is a student at [High School] and that participation in Felicity Perry's research is voluntary. My child and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research project and, if there were any, these questions have been answered satisfactorily.

- I agree for my child to attend three focus group sessions (two in the first research period which will take place from March to May, and one in the second research period which will take place in September), which will occur outside of class time and take approximately one and a half hours each.
- I understand that the focus group sessions will be audio tape-recorded and these tapes will be kept in a locked cabinet on the university premises and destroyed six years after the completion of the research project in accordance with research ethics policy at The University of Auckland.
- I understand that my child will be asked to compile a short scrapbook that illustrates their interests and the clothes they wear. I understand that the scrapbook will feature five recent photographs of my child with descriptions written by my child of the clothes they are wearing in each photograph.
- I understand that my child's name or other identifying details will not be published.
- I understand that all information will be reported in a way that does not identify my child as the source. I understand that due to the collective nature of focus groups, however, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.
- I understand that the information my child is party to within the focus groups must remain confidential
- I understand that my child may withdraw their participation in the research at anytime and any information traceable to them up until four months after the first focus group she or he participates in. I know that should my child withdraw their data, the contributions he or she has made in the focus group session cannot be deleted from the audio tape-recording.

- I understand that participation in Felicity Perry's research will not affect my child's grades at school.

I would like a copy of Felicity Perry's research findings to be sent to me:  
(please circle) YES / NO

If yes, I would prefer that these findings were: (please tick one and provide relevant contact details)

Emailed to me

My email address is: \_\_\_\_\_

Sent to my address

My address is: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I give my consent for my child to take part in this research.

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 15 October 2008 for 3 years, Reference Number 2008/420**

## **Appendix Two: Focus Group Questions**

### ***Question Guide for Initial Round of Focus Groups***

- Tell me about your friendship group.
- Is there a typical style of dress within your group? What is this? If not, what are some of the individual styles of dress within the group?
- How are you different from other groups at [High School]? How do you distinguish yourselves from other groups of young people generally?
- Are there any clothing items or accessories or dress techniques that you use to distinguish your group from others?
- What are some typical outfits for you?
- Where do you get your clothes from? Where does the money come from for your clothes?
- Do you ever feel compelled to dress or look a certain way? (for instance, to shave your legs or to be a certain weight)
- What do you think of these images (relates to images from popular media selected by the researcher as described in project application form)?
- What comes to mind when you think about the relationship between dress and identity?
- Anything else you want to raise?

## **Question Guide for Second Round of Focus Groups**

- Let's talk about using dress to show yourself to others. What are your thoughts on this?
- how important is it for you to be seen as a boy or a girl/young man or woman?
- When do you feel good (appearance-wise)?
- How would you feel if men and women looked the same?
- Style evolution (how dressed at primary, intermediate, and now – and when developed own sense of style).
- Why do you think style changes?
- What's 'feminine', what's 'masculine'?
- How do you know what's 'feminine' and what's 'masculine'?
- When do you recall realizing that girls are 'supposed' to look a certain way and boys a certain way?
- Re. some of the prompt-images we looked at last time, How did being unsure about the person in the image's gender make you feel?
- Do you follow or seek information about trends?
- Want to talk about 'trying' – why do you have disdain for people that are "trying too hard?"
- What do you mean when you talk about people being 'fake'?
- Makeup 'fake'?
- Why do you think we associate clothing with sexuality? i.e. assuming out-there dressed male is gay?
- What's being 'hot' or 'attractive' for you?
- Do you have any rules for clothing/how you dress?
- What do you think about when deciding on an outfit?
- Anything else?



## ***Question Guide for Third Round of Focus Groups***

Must address and check understandings of:

- 'Uniqueness'
- Identity – what? Where?
- Choice and dress
- 'Liking' and dress
- What does it mean to dress 'true' to yourself?
- Copying others' dress and being 'fake'
- Presenting self in a 'fake' manner
- Some theorists that looked at school students in America for instance, have stated that dress is a place where students play with their identities trying out different selves – what do you think of this? Do you do this? Or is it more that you match how you see yourself with your outside?
- Do you see dress as reflecting what is there or as constructing identity? When you change yourself is it bringing to the surface what has been there all along or is it something that you grasp hold of and then that becomes part of your identity?
- What does it mean to be comfortable? Check understanding.
- We dress for context. We take others into account when we are dressing. Do they agree? Why do we do this?
- What about pressure to be 'best self' – is this taking into account what others think? For instance is the notion that we are 'pretty' or 'unattractive' based on definitions of beauty that come from others? What made us think that we might be pretty or unattractive?
- They have stated that tryhard and fake dress for others rather than themselves, but if we recognize that we take into account others when dressing, where is the line between taking into account others and dressing for others?

- The tryhard is one who is not dressing 'true to themselves' – what does it mean to dress true to oneself?
- Why is the person who is deemed to not care what others think deemed authentic?
- Why is it negative to follow fashions? Follow trends?
- Is being different from the mainstream about being an individual rather than a political statement anti the ethics/values of the mainstream?
- Why is the muscly man we looked at not labelled fake but the tanned women with dyed hair are? Is it because muscles are deemed to be more natural? Where does natural end and fake being?
- [student] for instance wears powder on face and fake eyelashes and wig but you don't consider her 'fake' – why?
- Dress and control: young people often don't have a lot of control over life, do they think dress is important because it is one thing that they do have some control over?
- Anything else?

## Appendix Three: List of Prompt Images

### *Prompt Images used in Focus Groups*

N.B. Not every image was used with every focus group. The images were used to facilitate conversation with participants about appearance and gender. The same question was asked of each image, “what do you think of this image?”

1. Image of Marisa Miller in lingerie, representing exalted femininity. Taken from the contents page of *Maxim* (US), issue July 2008.
2. Image of Rachel Maddow, representing androgyny. Taken from *Gay Times* (UK), issue February 2009.
3. Image of a (white) masculine-appearing woman. Taken from *Diva* (UK), issue December 2008.
4. Image of an attractive (white) man wearing a black denim biker’s jacket, holding a motor cycle jacket, representing exalted masculinity. Taken from *Gay Times* (UK), issue February 2009.
5. Image of three muscular (white) men, one holding an American football, representing exalted masculinity. Taken from *Maxim* (US), issue July 2008.
6. Image of a young (white) female model wearing a little black dress and a fascinator, representing exalted femininity. Taken from *Pavement* (NZ), issue Autumn 2004.
7. Image of a young man (Polynesian), representing both exalted and culturally denigrated masculinity. Taken from *Spasifik Magazine* (NZ), issue September/October 2008.
8. Image of Iva Lankum, a singer (Polynesian), representing both exalted and culturally denigrated femininity. Taken from *Spasifik Magazine* (NZ), issue September/October 2008.
9. Image of a (white) woman reclining in a bikini, representing exalted femininity. Taken from *Maxim* (US), issue July 2008.
10. Image of a (white) male model wearing a skirt, culturally denigrated masculinity. Taken from *Pavement* (NZ), issue Autumn 2004.
11. Image of Frida Kahlo. Taken from the book *Frida Kahlo*. Edited by Elizabeth Carpenter. Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2007.

12. Barkers Men's Clothing advert, featuring well-dressed attractive (Māori) men, representing both exalted and culturally denigrated masculinity. Taken from *M2 Magazine* (NZ), November 2008.
13. Tab advert, featuring an attractive (white) heterosexual couple, representing culturally exalted femininity and masculinity. Taken from *Cosmopolitan* magazine (Australia), December 2008.
14. Muscular shirtless (white) man, representing culturally exalted masculinity. Taken from *Instinct Magazine* (USA), issue January 2008.
15. Attractive (Latina) woman in bikini, representing culturally exalted femininity. Taken from *Maxim* (US), issue July 2008.
16. Muscular (white) man, wearing a singlet that reveals his arms and also his torso, representing both exalted and culturally denigrated masculinity. Taken from *The Advocate* (US), December 2008.
17. Ad for Simmons Jewelry Company, featuring an attractive (lightly coloured) young man wearing jewellery, with the words "Know Your Strength", representing both exalted and culturally denigrated masculinity. Taken from *Esquire Magazine* (USA), January 2009.
18. Still image of a muscular (white) male wearing a skirt, representing culturally denigrated masculinity. Taken from Vivienne Westwood's Spring/Summer 2006 ready-to-wear catwalk show, Milan 2005.
19. Image of a masculine-presenting young (white) woman, representing culturally denigrated femininity. Taken from *The Advocate* (US), December 2008.

## Appendix Four: Questionnaire for Students

### ***Confidential Questionnaire for Focus Group Participants***

*Please fill in this form as honestly and as accurately as possible. If a question does not apply to you, please write 'not applicable' in the space provided. There is more space on the back of each page if you need it.*

Name: .....

Age: .....

Year: .....

Ethnicity: .....

Address: .....

.....

.....

Email: .....

How long have you attended [High School] for: .....

Have you attended any other high schools? (please circle): YES / NO

If yes, which ones? .....

.....

Describe your dress style: .....

.....

.....

What music do you like to listen to (give examples of genres and artists/groups):

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

What television programmes do you like? .....

.....  
.....  
.....

What internet sites do you visit regularly? .....

.....  
.....  
.....

What magazines do you read regularly? .....

.....  
.....

What films/movies do you like? .....

.....  
.....

What do you and your friends do in your spare time? .....

.....  
.....  
.....

## **Appendix Five: Staff Interview Schedule**

### ***Interview Schedule for Teachers and Senior Administrative Staff***

- How long have you been working at [High School]?
- What is your role at [High School]?
- If this is not the first school you have worked/taught at, where did you work/teach previously?
- How important do you think clothes are to the students at [High School]?
- How do the students at [High School] use dress to communicate aspects of their identities? These can include, but are not limited to, their class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, beliefs, music taste, media taste, and membership to certain groups.
- Do you think that there should be differences in the way that young men and young women dress and behave? If so, what should these differences be? What are your ideas about what is gender appropriate behaviour and dress for young men and women?
- How do you promote your ideas about appropriate gender behaviour and dress to the students?
- How does the wider school promote ideas about appropriate gender behaviour and dress to the students?
- I am particularly interested in how the students use dress to communicate their ideas about gender, their ideas on what they see as appropriate dress and behaviour for boys and girls. How do the students use dress to convey their ideas on gender?
- How do students' ideas about gender differ throughout the student population?
- Can you think of any examples of students transgressing gender norms, particularly in the way they dress?
- What other thoughts do you have about identity and the way students dress at [High School]?

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