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# **Intimate Geographies: Bodies, Underwear and Space in Hamilton, New Zealand**

by

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the ways in which a small group of young Pākehā women use underwear to construct a range of complex gendered subjectivities. I explore how these subjectivities are influenced by both material and discursive spaces. Three underwear shops in Hamilton, New Zealand – Bendon Lingerie Outlet, Bras N Things and Farmers, and various visual representations depicting contemporary notions of normative femininity, are under investigation

Feminist poststructuralist theories and methodologies provide the framework for this research. One focus group and three semi-structured interviews were conducted with young women who purchase and wear underwear. Participant observations of shoppers in Bendon Lingerie Outlet, Hamilton and autobiographical journal entries of my experiences as a retailer and consumer of underwear continued throughout the research. Advertising and promotional material in underwear shops and a DVD of a *Victoria's Secret* lingerie show are also examined.

Three points frame the analysis. First, I argue that underwear consumption spaces are discursively constructed as feminine. The socio-political structures governing these spaces construct particular types of bodies. These bodies are positioned as either 'in' place or 'out' of place. Second, underwear shops can be understood as feminised, young and thin embodied spaces. Bodies that fit this description are hence positioned as 'in' place. However, female bodies that are 'fat' and/or old and male bodies are marginalised within the space and thus positioned as 'out' of place. Third, I consider particular forms of normative femininity by examining the ways in which underwear disciplines and contains the body. Women's underwear moulds and shapes flesh to fit contemporary feminine norms.

Examining the specific relationship between the body, underwear and space provides a means to re-theorise geography and makes new ground for understanding how *clothed* bodies are constituted in and through space.

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## •• CHAPTER ONE ••

### **(No) History of the Body, Underwear and Space: An Introduction**

This thesis is an original examination of the relationship between bodies, underwear and space. Specifically, I investigate the ways in which a small group of young Pākehā women aged between 18 to 22 years use underwear to construct a range of complex and at times contradictory gendered subjectivities.<sup>1</sup> Participants are of varying sizes, shapes and appearances, who are positioned both 'in' and 'out' of contemporary feminine (young, tall, thin and tanned) bodily spaces. They wear underwear for different reasons and I explore what these reasons are, and how they are influenced by space. The importance of my work, which has not been conducted before, is to understand a specific 'public' space – three underwear shops in Hamilton, New Zealand - and the constitutive relationship between this place and subjectivity.

Bodies and space construct each other in a myriad of complex and nuanced ways (Longhurst, 1997; Martin, 1992; Nast and Pile, 1998; Rose, 1993). It is useful to develop this notion by using the subject of underwear to understand further the relationship between identity and place. Clothing the body is one of the most important and obvious components of embodiment. Despite this, some geographers have overlooked a prominent fact: that in Western societies human bodies are not simply bodies, but are *dressed* bodies that inhabit different spaces (Banim, et al., 2001). I argue that clothing, particularly underwear, is an important constituent of gendered bodily subjectivity.

In the past geographers interested in fashion and clothing have tended to focus on production and consumption processes, posing traditional questions of retail location and the form of the built environment (Crewe and Davenport, 1992; Crewe and Forster, 1993; Lowe, 2000; Marston and

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term subjectivity, rather than identity which is more commonly used in literature on fashion and clothing (Longhurst, 2005a) because I want to highlight the spatial imperative of identity (Probyn, 2003).

Modarres, 2002). But more recently the focus has shifted to relations between fashion, clothing, subjectivity and spatiality (Colls, 2004; Crewe, 2003; Crewe and Lowe, 1996; Dywer and Jackson, 2003; Gregson, et al., 2001; Leslie, 2002; Longhurst, 2005a). Outside of geography, most notably in sociology, there is a significant amount of research conducted on the social aspects of fashion (Davis, 1992; de la Haye and Wilson, 1999; Wilson, 1985). Yet, despite the growth of academic interest in the dressed body, the literature produced by various disciplines remains largely distinct and disjointed and consequently there is little academic literature concerning the relationship between women's bodies, underwear and space.

I argue that the body (both male and female) and place (spaces of underwear consumption) are mutually constitutive. The actual materiality of the body is constructed and inscribed by the environment. Further, the body is constructed and produced through *clothes*. Guy Ali, Maura Banim and Elizabeth Green (2001) reinforce this when they argue that women wear their bodies through their clothes. Moreover, Amy de la Haye and Elizabeth Wilson (1999 3) contend that dress and fashion are part of bodily construction, constituting the materiality of the body and signifying emotion and survival. Clearly it is impossible to divorce an analysis of fashion and dress from the body. Crucially, underwear has an intimate relationship with the materiality (shape, size and solidity) of the body. Bras and underwear can mould, re-shape and smooth out the soft, fluid and indeterminate nature of the flesh. Yet, to my knowledge, this has not received any attention in geography.

The specificity of this relationship between the clothed body and space provides new opportunities to re-conceptualise the gendered body in geography and affords the opportunity for understanding further the embodied experiences of bodies. Further, it allows me to document the gendering of (underwear consumption) spaces and bodies and aspects of performative corporeality within such spaces (Johnston, 1994). In theorising

the relationship between bodies, underwear and space in this way, I attempt to bridge the gap that exists between geographic theories of the body, which frequently overlook practices of dress; and theories of dress, which often ignore the innate fleshiness of the body. This oversight between, and within disciplines, indicates that either ‘the body is thought to be self-evidently dressed (and therefore beyond discussion) or the clothes are assumed to stand up on their own’ (Entwistle, 2000a 324).

My research is an initial response to a lack of attention to the relationship between the female body, underwear and space. Feminist geographers have been engaging in a critique and reconceptualisation of the discipline for many years, and I show that research on this subject can offer new challenges to, and exciting possibilities for, social, cultural, feminist, and embodied geographies. I offer a means to re-theorise geography by fleshing out the (un)dressed body and making it explicit in the production of geographical knowledges. In responding to this lack, I reveal the ‘intimate’ geographies of the (un)clothed body and its resulting spatial relations by conducting empirical research on three underwear shops in Hamilton, New Zealand: Bendon Lingerie Outlet, Farmers and Bras N Things. These spaces are framed as ‘public’; however, this category is easily permeable and I examine the ways in which notions of ‘public’ and ‘private’ spaces blur.

My desire to examine young Pākehā women’s experiences of underwear and space comes primarily from my own experiences as a part-time sales assistant. I have worked as a retail assistant at Bendon Lingerie Outlet in Hamilton for the past three years. My experience working with women, in the intimate settings of the changing room and on the shop floor, has given me valuable insights into women’s experiences of buying and wearing underwear. It is this interaction, coupled with my geographic interest in ‘the body’ that has prompted three research questions. My first question is: how are the spaces of underwear shops gendered? To an extent this question is anchored in geographical analyses of gendered space. This leads on to my second

research question: what forms of femininity are produced by women's underwear? This draws from, and is situated in, current Foucauldian feminist concerns on women's body-management routines. My third and final question is: how and in what ways does women's underwear influence the complex relations between embodiment and place? This question draws from contemporary feminist poststructuralist debates concerning the body and its constitutive relationship with space. The specific geographical context of my research is Hamilton, New Zealand.

### **The Research Location: Underwear Shops in Hamilton**

Hamilton is located in the North Island of New Zealand, approximately 100km south of New Zealand's largest city – Auckland. It is suburban in character and surrounded by land used mainly for dairy farm production. It has an estimated population of 129,300 as at the 30 June 2004 with 33.7% of the residents aged between 15 and 34 years old. Compared to the national average – 27.6% – Hamilton's population is relatively young (Statistics New Zealand, 2001). This grouping (of which I am part) makes up a large proportion of consumers. From my own experiences I am able to suggest that this grouping is one of the highest targeted consumer audiences in Hamilton. The construction of new shopping centres such as The Base has created a new focus on consumption. The Base (which is located on the site of an old air force base) contains a variety of large commercial 'bargain' stores, such as The Warehouse, Briscoes and DressSmart. With this new focus, Hamilton is increasingly being constructed as a city of consumption for young people 18 years and over. There are a growing number of bars and restaurants in Hamilton that legally require the person to be at least 18 years to enter. Furthermore, the University of Waikato and the Waikato Institute of Technology are central institutions in Hamilton attracting a large number of young people to the city.

Underwear consumption spaces can be understood as ‘public’ spaces. They are spaces in which processes of consumption occur and where social processes categorise bodies gendered. In Hamilton there are a number of underwear shops, however, for the purposes of this thesis I focus on three main sites. The first of these is Bendon Lingerie Outlet, located in a collection of shops known as DressSmart, which is situated at The Base, Te Rapa.<sup>2</sup> This consumption space is where I locate the majority of my research. The other two: Bras N Things (located in Centre Place); and Farmers (part of a chain of department stores throughout New Zealand), are discussed to reflect the experiences of the participants.

Bendon Limited is a global lingerie company with offices in the United States, United Kingdom, Hong Kong and Singapore. Its resounding market, however, is in Australia and New Zealand. The brand ‘Bendon’ relates to a chain of retail and outlet stores throughout New Zealand which stock a range of underwear products, including Bendon Lingerie, Hey Sister, Fayreform, Bendon Men, Hickory, and the licensed Elle Macpherson and Macpherson Men brands. The name ‘Bendon’ was coined by brothers – Ray and Des Hurley – in 1947 and refers to lingerie that was designed to ‘bend on’ to the body (Bendon Limited, 2005). As an outlet store, Bendon is located in DressSmart.<sup>3</sup>

DressSmart in Hamilton is the fourth multi-million dollar outlet shopping centre to be opened in New Zealand (DressSmart Properties Limited, 2006). DressSmart covers 4,5000 square metres and features 36 retail stores. It has a strong focus on discount fashion retailing, and offers a wide range of prominent New Zealand brands, such as Trelise Cooper, Overlands and Stevens, at reduced prices. The type of bargain shops in DressSmart very much determines the profile of the shoppers. DressSmart caters to a select

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<sup>2</sup> Bendon Limited uses ‘outlet’ stores to sell large quantities of last season’s stock at reduced prices.

<sup>3</sup> Although I discuss both the brand ‘Bendon’ and ‘Bendon’ as a space of underwear consumption, unless specifically stated the term ‘Bendon’ will refer to the space of consumption.

market – youthful and mostly middle-class. Despite the selective nature of the mall, stores in DressSmart are increasingly providing a wider range of clothing sizes and styles. They are now catering for ‘ordinary’ women, who vary in size, shape and appearance.

Centre Place is another prominent shopping centre in Hamilton. Located in the centre of the central business district, it contains over 80 stores, including a food hall, a cinema complex, a gym for women and numerous clothing retailers. Bras N Things is one of the many clothing stores located in Centre Place. Bras N Things is Australia’s largest lingerie chain with 130 stores throughout Australia and 10 stores throughout New Zealand. It sells a range of products including women’s lingerie, sleepwear, swimwear and lingerie accessories (Bras N Things, 2006). It is the only site in this study that does not sell men’s products.

The underwear section in Farmers department store is the third and final space that I focus my research on. It is a large stand alone department store with an extensive underwear section. The company’s website describes Farmers to be New Zealand’s ‘foremost fashion department store’ (Farmers, 2006). Farmers operates over 55 department stores in rural and city locations throughout New Zealand and offers a range of women’s, men’s and children’s clothing, appliances, and electronic equipment, to name a few. Many of Bendon’s leading brands, such as Elle Macpherson, Bendon and Fayreform are stocked at Farmers.

### **Research Boundaries: Ethnicity, Age and ‘Ordinary’ Women**

My decision to focus specifically on young Pākehā women is a conscious and considered one. I have chosen not to consider older/younger women and women of different racial backgrounds because I want to be ‘part’ of the research and draw on my own experiences as an ‘ordinary’ woman. In doing so, I am able to give young women of similar circumstances to my own, a

‘voice’. Although my decision to focus on Pākehā women’s experiences of underwear and space could be read as essentialising ‘Pākehā’ as a homogenous group, I recognise that there is a multiplicity of experiences amongst women; identities are influenced by a variety of experiences and different socio-cultural factors. My research is *not* representative of all young Pākehā women in Hamilton. Rather I offer a select, in-depth qualitative analysis of a small group in the Hamilton community.

I look specifically at the experiences of ‘ordinary’ women. Paula Black and Ursula Sharma (2001) explain that in general women are not striving for beauty, but rather a desire to regulate their bodies in order to appear within the bounds of ‘normality’. ‘Ordinary’ women and their underwear stand in stark contrast to the underwear promoted and worn by lingerie models. Lingerie models are portrayed as the ultimate embodiments of fashion; however, they exist outside the everyday experience of bodies and clothing. This thesis challenges a hegemonic or normative concept of femininity by highlighting the myth of an idealised feminine body. With this in mind, I explore the ‘material’ experience of bodies, underwear and space; I examine how the spaces of underwear consumption construct, and are constructed by, particular types of ‘ordinary’ bodies. I explore what it is that drives ‘ordinary’ women to purchase underwear, and in turn how this contributes to the construction and performance of feminine subjectivities. My research is significant, as I have opened the (changing room) door for geographers interested in examining the mutually constitutive relationship between space and *clothed* bodies.

As discussed in chapter three – methodology – the researcher, the researched and the research are inextricably linked and influence each other. It is therefore crucial that the researcher is aware of how s/he influences and informs the research. I am aware of my position in this research and I identify as the researcher and the researched. I am an ‘ordinary’ woman. I am a 22 year old, heterosexual, able-bodied Pākehā who is accustomed to the

daily pressures of attempting to attain a normative notion of femininity. I am also a geography student conducting research for my masters thesis. I perceive my position to be useful, as it allows me to access information and people more readily, understand and empathise with participants, and draw on my knowledge as a consumer and retailer of underwear to inform this thesis.

This is only a brief outline of my position in this research. Positionality and reflexivity will feature extensively in my work, and throughout this thesis I will critically reflect on how my position has informed and shaped this research.

### **Gendering Citizens: The Role of Clothes in Governing Women and Public Space**

In order to contextualise my research and understand the historical significance of bodies, underwear and space as mutually constitutive and defining, it is useful to highlight the research of Annabel Cooper, Robin Law and Jane Malthus (2000), titled: 'Rooms of Their Own: Public Toilets and Gendered Citizens in a New Zealand City, 1860-1940'. They investigate the gendering of citizens and space during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Dunedin, New Zealand, by focusing on one expression of gendered urban space: the public toilet.

Cooper et. al., (2000) suggest that prior to the introduction of public toilets for women, bodily and spatial characteristics of 'public' and 'private' and the practices of the gendered bodies inhabiting such spaces were negotiated and managed predominantly by clothing. This negotiation can be seen most readily in the design of women's dress. Various adaptations and alterations, such as long, full skirts and several petticoats with cage crinolines (that supported and held out the skirt), were made to women's clothing to facilitate discreet urinating in 'public' spaces. And, most importantly in the context of this research, women wore drawers – crotch-less two cylindrical leg coverings



that were attached to a waistband (Malthus, 1997). Cooper et al., (2000) speculate that because of the style of clothing, particularly the underwear, it would have been reasonably easy for women to urinate inconspicuously in public spaces without revealing their body or the activity they were undertaking.

As women began entering paid employment beyond the home, notions of privacy were re-negotiated and a more public sexualisation of female bodies began (Cooper, et al., 2000). Accordingly, women's fashion was adapted to suit their new 'public' persona. However, as shorter hemlines became fashionable, women were unable to discreetly urinate in public. With this transition in clothing came a move from predominantly crotch-less underwear to underwear with crotches. This complex shift in women's occupation of space and how it was governed by clothing highlights the historical context of debates concerning the gendered body in 'public' and 'private' space and is therefore useful for understanding the significance of my research.

### **Thesis Outline**

In this introductory chapter I have highlighted the constitutive and mutually defining relationship between bodies, underwear and space and I have introduced my research questions: how are the spaces of underwear consumption gendered? What forms of femininity are produced by women's underwear? And, how and in what ways does women's underwear influence the complex relations between embodiment and place? I have outlined why my research is important: firstly, to understand a specific 'public' space, and the constitutive relationship between this place and subjectivity; secondly, to bridge the gap that exists between theories of 'the body' and fashion theories; and thirdly, to show that research on this subject can make a significant contribution to social, cultural, feminist, and embodied geographies. The research locations – three underwear shops in Hamilton – were reflected

upon, as was the historical context and significance of the relationship between bodies, underwear and space in New Zealand. I have also begun to situate myself within the research – a process of critical reflection which will ensure I remain a constant presence throughout this thesis. The remainder of this chapter outlines my thesis.

In chapter two I discuss the theoretical framework used for this research. I draw together feminist poststructuralist work on embodied subjectivities and spatialities, with geographic literature on workplace cultures. I review relevant strands of literature from outside of geography on women in space and conclude with an exploration of geographers and other theorists who explore the volatile, awkward zones of the body and its resulting spatial relations.

I detail the methodology used and the implications of each technique in the third chapter. My research is informed by qualitative feminist poststructuralist methodologies. The multi-method data collecting process is outlined. I present the rationale for, and critiques of, interviewing (semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews), participant observation and autobiography; and discourse analysis as research techniques. I critically reflect on my desire to understand the discourses that locate and influence young women, underwear and space. The chapter is brought to a close with a discussion that problematises my role as a graduate geography student, Bendon retailer and consumer, and (critical?) gazer at women's bodies.

The spaces of underwear consumption are the focus of chapter four. The gendering of underwear shops is documented using the data gained through participant observation within Bendon and autobiography of my own experiences. Data gained from interviews with employees and consumers of Bendon, and consumers of Bras N Things and Farmers is also used to critically analyse the spaces and their users. The layout, structure and norms of underwear shops as 'public' spaces affect all the other elements that go into

the construction of the participants' gendered subjectivities. I demonstrate how the spaces of underwear consumption construct bodies as either 'in' place or 'out' of place and examine each in turn.

In chapter five I focus on the intimate relationship underwear has with the materiality of young women's bodies. A focus group, semi-structured interviews and discourse analysis provide the empirical data for this chapter. I provide a situated examination of the multiple ways in which underwear influences the complex politics of embodiment. I explore the ways in which the young Pākehā women I interviewed use underwear to shape the materiality of their body and in turn construct a variety of complex and at times contradictory feminised subjectivities.

In chapter six I bring my thesis to a close and suggest avenues for further research. I reflect on my initial research questions and summarise my main arguments. I argue that there is a need for more geographical research on how clothing/fashion influences the politics of embodiment. I highlight the need to undertake empirical research on men's experiences of underwear and space; investigate the role underwear plays in containing bodily fluids; and, add other dimensions of difference, such as age to the analysis.

## •• CHAPTER TWO ••

### **Theoretical Issues and Literature Review**

#### **Introduction**

Over the past years there has emerged an international literature on embodied subjectivities and spatialities. Despite this, geographers have been slow to account for the intimate relationship underwear has with the materiality of the body and the role fashion and underwear plays in the production of feminine subjectivities. My research investigates this knowledge gap and breaks new ground by using the subject of underwear to understand further the relationship between identity and place for a small group of young Pākehā women in Hamilton, New Zealand.

Underwear influences the politics of embodiment in a variety of ways. By addressing the apparently mundane relationship between bodies, underwear and space, I challenge traditional geographical knowledges that have excluded certain topics because they have been deemed unworthy of academic attention. In doing so, I open the (changing room) door for other geographers interested in typically ‘non-academic’ subjects. This topic also provides new ground for reconceptualising the female body in geography. By discussing women’s bodies, underwear and space, I challenge the historical privileging of the conceptual over the corporeal in the production of hegemonic, masculinised and disembodied geographical knowledges. The attention given to corporeal specificity in this thesis makes for a more embodied geography.

In this chapter I address the theoretical issues and relevant literature that informs my research analysis. To contextualise my research and show how it contributes to recent theoretical debates, I highlight the recent upsurge of interest in geographies of embodiment. The epistemological implications this has for geographers interested in embodied subjectivities and spatialities are reflected upon. I then summarise feminist poststructuralist literature from

within, and outside, geography on the mutually constitutive relationship between bodies and space (Grosz, 1992; Nast and Pile, 1998). These understandings of bodies and space are combined with ideas from feminist theorists Elspeth Probyn (2003) and Elizabeth Grosz (1994; 1995) to understand how subjectivity is always constituted in and through space. Following this, I present a critical discussion of geographic literature on workplace cultures (Leidner, 1991; 1993; Leslie, 2002; McDowell and Court, 1994; Tyler and Abbot, 1998). My reason for doing this is to illustrate the usefulness of feminist poststructuralist theories of embodiment for understanding how Bendon employees' identities are produced in and through the space of Bendon. This section relates most closely to my first and final research questions.

I then draw extensively on work from outside of geography. I show how Iris Marion Young's (1990a; 1990b) work on 'oppressive spaces' can provide an in-road into examining the socio-political structures that govern women in underwear shops. Similarly, I show how feminist readings of Michael Foucault's work (Bartky, 1988; Bordo, 1989; 1993a) can offer a starting place to account for the ways in which underwear affects the materiality of the body and in turn the production of embodied feminine subjectivities. This section relates most closely to my second research question

Finally, I argue that in order for geography to become a more inclusive, diverse and critical discipline, theorists interested in the relations between place and identity need to recognise that fashion/underwear is an important constituent of bodily subjectivity. I critically review the work of a small group of geographers who are looking at the links between embodiment and fashion (Colls, 2004; 2006; Longhurst, 2005a). These scholars are offering new and exciting ways to theorise the body and its resulting spatial relations. I also review the work of Joanne Entwistle (2000a; 2000b) and illustrate how her sociological perspective on clothing provides a means to bridge the gap between embodiment and fashion literature. I then present a case for

embodied fashion literature to include the notion of abjection (Kristeva, 1982). A fashionable or normative body requires an abject Other and I am yet to find any fashion literature that considers the notion of abjection. I conclude this section by examining scholarship that considers the embodied geographies of breasts. By reviewing the work of Young (1990b) and Longhurst (2005d) on the 'breasted experience(s)' of women and men, I challenge further traditional geographical knowledges that have in the past have excluded certain topics.

### **Embodied Geographies**

In recent years there has been an upsurge of geographic interest in 'the body'. The geography discipline is currently in the midst of a 'body craze' (Longhurst, 2001 18). The socio-political structures that surround bodies and space are increasingly being critiqued and scrutinised. The popular and academic focus on the body as a singular entity reflects what Chris Shilling (1993 1) deems as the 'unprecedented individualisation of the body'. I think this may overstate personal agency and undermine the influence of social forces. Although the body is a material presence it is also true that the materiality of the body is always and everywhere culturally interpreted: biology does not stand outside culture, but is located within it (Entwistle, 2000b). Bodies and place shape each other (Nast and Pile, 1998).

Despite this recent surge of interest in embodied subjectivities and spatialities, the 'leaky', 'messy' zones of bodies and space (Longhurst, 2001 2) remain largely unexamined in the discipline. The epistemological implications of ignoring embodied corporealities means that bodies articulated in geographers' texts have tended to be theoretical, discursive and fleshless (Longhurst, 2001). And, up until now they have also been naked or *unclothed* bodies. As with Longhurst (2001 2), I want to talk about the 'leaky, messy, awkward zones' of the body and space. These topics, including the geographies of the homeless (Valentine, 2001) and geographies of domestic

spaces such as the home (Johnston and Valentine, 1995), are deemed to be overly subjective and non-academic. Fashion/clothing as an object of academic enquiry personifies ‘frivolous’, ‘feminine’ topics and threatens to ‘spill, soil and mess up, clean hard, masculinist geography’ (Longhurst, 2001 2). This is precisely what I intend to do.

### ***Feminist Poststructuralism***

Feminist poststructuralist approaches offer numerous opportunities for understanding the relationship between clothed bodies and space, because as Probyn (2003) argues, subjectivity is produced, and the site and space of its production is vitally important. Heidi Nast and Steve Pile (1998 1) comment that ‘we live our lives – through places, through the body’. They explain a more nuanced understanding of the interconnectedness between bodies and space is needed, because the articulations of the interconnections and relationships are political. ‘Bodies and place are made up through the production of their spatial registers, through relations of power’ (Nast and Pile, 1998 4). Furthermore, Grosz (1992) argues that the body is psychically, socially, sexually, and discursively produced, and in turn, bodies reinscribe and project themselves onto the social-cultural environment. There is a two-way linkage between bodies and cities; an interface. The city in its particular geographical, architectural, spatialising, municipal arrangements is one particular ingredient in the social constitutions of the body (Grosz, 1992 248). The form, structure, and norms of the city infiltrate and affect all other elements that go into the constitution of corporeality and subjectivity. Bodies and spaces construct each other in complex and nuanced ways. Bodies are performed, contested and disciplined ‘*through* space’ (Longhurst, 2005b 93). They are also performed, contested and disciplined through the wearing of clothing. With this in mind, I now move to discuss those theorists who engage in feminist poststructuralist approaches to subjectivity.

Feminist poststructuralists recognise that subjectivity is not fixed or absolute, but is temporally and spatially contingent. Probyn (2003 290) makes a useful contribution to understanding the complexity of the constitution of subjectivity. She interprets subjectivity as inherently spatial: '[t]hinking about subjectivity in terms of space or necessity reworks any conception that subjectivity is hidden in private recesses'. This is useful for my research as it creates an access point into thinking about how the spaces of underwear shops construct and are constructed by bodies.

Grosz (1994; 1995) also makes valuable contributions to understanding how bodies are constituted in and through space. Drawing attention to the dualism that implicitly genders the mind as masculine and the body as feminine, Grosz (1994 22) contends that, on the one hand, the mind has traditionally been associated with positive terms such as 'reason, subject, consciousness, interiority, activity and masculinity'. The body, on the other hand, has been implicitly correlated with negative terms such as 'passion, object, non-consciousness, exteriority, passivity and femininity' (Grosz, 1989 xiv). She notes that although men and women both 'have bodies', in Western culture white men are deemed to be able to transcend their embodiment in particular contexts, whilst women are understood as being closely tied to, and ruled by, their bodies in time and space.

Grosz (1994 22) reconceptualises subjectivity, calling for a notion of corporeality which she describes as an 'embodied subjectivity' and a 'physical corporeality'. She postulates that the body and the mind are not separate entities and whilst Cartesian thought argues that the psyche can transcend the body, she argues that the mind and body constitute each other. Furthermore, Grosz argues for articulating the specificities of subjectivity. She states:

a completely different set of perspectives – this time based on women's specificities, experiences, positions, rather than those of men, who hide themselves and their specificities under the banner of some universal humanity – is possible and needs to be explored (Grosz, 1994 xi).



Grosz encapsulates an idea that is central to feminist poststructuralism. She encourages a critical examination of the intersecting discourses that produce specific gendered subjectivities, whilst acknowledging the dimension of agency. A strength of Grosz's work is that the body she describes is one that is *lived*, thus upsetting the mind/body dualism. Grosz's attention to the materiality of bodies that are situated and constituted within place allows for an embodied reading of young Pākehā women's experiences of their bodies, underwear and space (both discursively and materially), whilst being able to situate these women's experiences within wider understandings of women in Western culture. Thus, Grosz's work is particularly relevant for social, cultural, feminist and embodied geographers as she acknowledges changes that occur to subjectivity, occur in place.

Feminist poststructuralist approaches to subjectivity are also useful for understanding the relations between embodiment and spaces of consumption. In the next section I critically review geographic literature that understands bodies as constituted in and by workspaces. Shopping practices, workplace culture and societal discourses shape, and are shaped, by bodies.

### ***Bodies at Work***

Within geographies of economies there has been a substantial body of literature produced on what Robin Leidner (1991; 1993) terms as 'interactive service occupations'. These are jobs in which the physical appearance of the person is an integral part of the production and sale of the service. Interactive jobs (this is particularly relevant for customer service roles) make use of their 'workers' looks, personalities, and emotions, as well as their physical and intellectual capacities' (Leidner, 1991 155-156). Leidner, using the examples of selling insurance and fast food outlets, demonstrates how bodily normalisation is often achieved by regulations, codes and required behaviours, as well as by mechanisms of self-surveillance. Workers in interactive jobs are often explicitly trained in techniques of self-presentation. In some workplaces staff members are required to wear special clothes or

uniforms, and are governed by prohibitions, for example on facial hair and jewellery, in order to produce a specific, usually explicit heterosexual identity. Linda McDowell and Gillian Court (1994 733) extend this to suggest that many of these occupations are 'women's work and rely on a heteronormative femininity that emphasises docility, passivity, servicing and generous attention to customers' needs'.

This significance of the manipulation of sexuality in many of these interactive jobs has been documented. Joanne Tyler and Pamela Abbott (1998) study the recruitment, training and work of flight attendants in two airlines and found that the organisations considered the employees' bodies to be a material embodiment of the airline's personality. Consequently the employees were expected to maintain the airline's desired look – poised and elegant. Tyler and Abbott (1998 440) observe applicants being rejected based on 'undesirable' physical attributes such as bad skin, messy hair and being too 'old'. Bodily norms were also evident in training programmes and were monitored by 'managerial control through which employees internalise beliefs which generate behavioural conformity'.

In a similar study, Deborah Leslie (2002) analyses the conditions of employment in fashion retailing using an individual commodity chain approach.<sup>4</sup> Although there are many benefits in using the commodity chain approach, it is Leslie's appropriation of Judith Butler's (1990; 1993) performativity notion that I find particularly relevant for my research. Leslie provides an embodied examination of the feminine identities that consumption spaces map onto retail assistants' bodies. She contends that the feminine identities of the employees continue to (re)construct and (re)produce a specific gendered environment. I use Leslie's and Butler's work

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<sup>4</sup> Recently there has been growing interest in the analysis of individual commodity chains (Cook and Crang, 1996; Fine and Leopold, 1993; Hartwick, 1998). Commodity chains are 'networks of labour and production processes whose end result is a finished commodity (Hopkins and Wallerstein, 1986 159). A commodity chain approach provides a vertical analysis that traces the movement of a product across different movements in its creation and use.

to destabilise the apparent fixity or ontological status of the feminine body and gendered space.

It has been convincingly argued that the built environment can be read as a map of the social structures and values which produced it (Women and Geography Study Group, 1997). Buildings are designed and constructed by people and are thus the outcome of the societies that produced them. For example, some feminist writers (England, 1997; Roberts, 1991; Wagner, 1984) observe that housing designs articulate assumptions about gender roles and relations; in particular they can contain ideas about the ‘proper’ place of women. It has therefore been suggested that because the built environment can embody meanings – for example what is appropriate behaviour for women and men in particular locations – it can be restrictive, especially for women. Despite a tendency to oversimplify the complex and nuanced relations between bodies and space, this idea is useful for understanding how buildings and cities are implicated in shaping people’s lives. In considering this geographic notion of the interconnectedness between bodies and space, I now move to discuss literature on women from outside of the geography discipline. I argue that these interpretations provide geographers with an in-road into understanding how clothed, female bodies are influenced by, and bounded to, spatialities.

### **Women Confined in Space**

I have found Iris Marion Young’s work on the spatiality of embodiment to be relevant to my thesis. Young (1990a; 1990b) employs a philosophical perspective of immanence and transcendence to understand the field of embodiment. Although not a geographer, her study of embodiment and lived spatialities has the potential to be understood as geographical. She demonstrates that the situated, lived body is constantly conflicting and contrasting with the social processes that inscribe ‘othered’ bodies, for example, feminine and disabled corporealities. In her essay ‘Throwing like a

girl', Young (1990b) clarifies a link between women's awareness of embodiment and space. She suggests that the threat of a masculine gaze leads women to experience an intense self-awareness about being seen in, and taking up, space. Young notes that the threat of being seen and evaluated is one of the most objectifying processes that the body is submitted, and argues that the constitution of women's bodies as objects to be gazed upon encourages women to experience their embodiment as located in space. Gillian Rose (1993 146) utilising Young's (1990b) work to discuss women's confinement within the geography discipline, contends:

[u]nlike men who believe they can transcend the specificities of their body and see themselves and their intentions as the originating co-ordinate for organising everyday space, women see their bodies as objects placed in space among other objects.

For women, space becomes something to be negotiated. It can be experienced as a hazardous arena; a territory controlled by others and a masculine gaze. This objectification evokes feelings of containment according to particularities of gender, sexuality, and colour of the body. Additionally, I suggest other socially constructed categories that are inscribed onto the female body, such as 'proper' body size, shape and appearance, can contribute to women's sense of confinement.

As I have shown, Young's (1990b) analysis of female embodiment and spatiality is useful for my thesis, particularly in relation to my first research question: how are the shopping spaces of underwear shops gendered? However, I have found her examination of the specificities of women's corporeal comportment to be limited in its conclusions. Young (1990b) does not elaborate on the 'body as a social object, as a text to be marked, traced, [and] written upon by various regimes of institutional (discursive and non-discursive) power' (Grosz, 1994 116). I agree with Grosz (1990 72) that 'what is mapped onto the body is not unaffected by the body onto which it is projected'.

It is from Michael Foucault, in particular, that geographers have derived their interest in discourse, discursive practice and surveillance. Foucault (1976) was essentially concerned with how knowledge and meaning are produced through discourse. Foucault (1972) argues that nothing has meaning outside of discourse. Although bodies may have a material existence, they only have meaning because they exist within discourse. Discourse is a material practice; it is grounded in 'historicity and lives through the body' (Lye, 1997 3). It is material in the sense that it is located within institutions and practices which define difference and shape the material world. Although it has been extensively documented that Foucault fails to address issues of gender, his acknowledgement of the (discursive) body and how it can be acted upon by power is a useful framework for feminists interested in theorising the feminine body. In the next section I address the work of those feminist writers who have adopted and adapted Foucault's work. My reason for doing this is to illustrate how these feminisms are useful for analysing a small group of young Pākehā women's body management routines. These theoretical frameworks offer a useful means for geographic understandings of the role underwear plays in the production of feminine subjectivities.

### **Foucauldian Feminist Literature**

Foucault's notion of surveillance as controlling and disciplining the body has been taken up by many feminists (Bartky, 1988; Bordo, 1989; 1993a). These scholars, known as Foucauldian feminists, have modified his conceptualisation of power and surveillance to suit contemporary analyses of practices of femininity (Deveaux, 1994). It is Foucault's disciplinary measures, encompassing the sub themes of docile bodies, surveillance and the normalising gaze, that are useful in analysing the complex relations between women's bodies, subjectivities, underwear and space within geographic discourses. This section relates most closely to my second research question: what forms of femininity are produced by women's underwear?

Susan Bordo (1993a 186) theorises the body as a 'locus of social control' in the construction of femininity. She suggests that through the pursuit of an 'ever-changing, homogenising, elusive ideal of femininity – a pursuit without limits, that requires women to constantly adhere to slight changes in fashion – female bodies become what Foucault terms “docile bodies” (Bordo, 1989 14). These obedient bodies have forces and energies that are accustomed to external regulation, subjection and improvement.

Bordo (1993a) argues that power is exercised in and through society. It is not something that is possessed by a single group. Nor is it a matter of top-down coercion; rather power is networks of practices that people exist within. She situates 'beauty' within a nexus of intersecting cultural discourses on control, femininity and the mind-body dualism. Ultimately, Bordo (1989) does not link the feminine quest for beauty with oppression, rather she suggests that women are active agents, engaging in practices that create and reinforce aspects of femininity. The participants in my research are active agents in asserting power over their bodies. They discipline their bodies in such a way that (re)produces and (re)inscribes aspects of normative femininity onto their bodies.

Normalisation is the process of constructing societal norms against which to measure, judge and discipline people's behaviour and appearance.

Normalisation is central to the workings of power (Bordo, 1993b). Sylvia Blood (2005) suggests that normalisation offers a way to understand how women self-regulate their behaviour. The following description of modern power by Foucault (1980 105) requires 'minimum expenditure for maximum return' and is organised primarily by the principle of discipline.

There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he [sic] is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising his surveillance over and against, himself. A superb formula: power exercised continuously and for what turns out to be at minimal cost.

I suggest that Foucault's modern power theory highlights the subtle ways that normalisation can be exerted. Foucault, and feminists utilising Foucault's work, draw on poststructuralist politics of fluidity in order to understand people's multiple and shifting subjectivities. Interestingly, however, while it is now acceptable to conceive subjectivities as fluid, partial, and mobile, it is still regarded as unacceptable for the flesh and boundaries of 'fluid, volatile, messy, leaky bodies to be included in geographical discourse' (Longhurst, 2001 23). Despite this squeamish paradigm of geography still dominating geography, some feminist geographers are beginning to embark on 'awkward' topics (Johnston, 2005a;, 2005b;, 2005c; Longhurst, 2005d), which in turn has allowed me to push the boundaries of geographic knowledges. In the following section I discuss those theorists who are breaking ground within and outside of geography by addressing typically 'frivolous' and 'feminised' topics. In the past these subjects have been deemed illegitimate and hence unworthy of academic attention. The scholarship I reflect upon provides initial theoretical and empirical tools to reconceptualise fundamental understandings of *clothed* bodies and space.

Douglas Kellner (1994 160) argues '[i]n modernity, fashion is an important constituent of one's identity, helping to determine how one is perceived and accepted'. Despite this, Sandra Niessan and Anne Brydon (1998 xi) contend that '[f]ashion and clothing have for a long time remained scholarly unmentionables', constructed as feminine, playful, subjective and undeserving of academics' attention. More recently, however, as conventional aspects of academia have been disrupted and boundaries have blurred, fashioning/clothing and other 'awkward' aspects of embodiment are now receiving considerably more attention.

### **Embodied Fashion**

Rachael Colls' (2004; 2006) investigation into the emotional geographies of shopping and shopping space creates an entry point into examining the

complex relations between embodiment and fashion. She utilises the context of clothing consumption to elicit the multiplicities of female embodied emotional experience as produced through clothing and consumption space. I review Colls' work because I think it is important to understand the relationship between the corporeal space of women's bodies as 'materialised by a layer of fabric or clothing and the spaces in/through which they consume clothing' (Colls, 2004 584).

In her article 'Looking Alright, Feeling Alright': Emotions, Sizing and the Geographies of Women's Experiences of Clothing Consumption', Colls (2004) works to embody emotional geographies of consumption by looking at how women feel about shopping for clothes. Colls' analysis reveals that for women, consuming clothes is an emotionally charged experience and the spatial practices involved in shopping can produce both positive and negative emotionally embodied affects. Her empirical examples highlight how particular emotions are (re)produced and (re)experienced through particular practices of body management. Colls' concludes that when shopping for clothes (this is particularly relevant for underwear), women can experience uncomfortable feelings in relation to their (un)clothed bodies.

Colls' work is particularly important for geographers looking at the embodied experience of clothing as she acknowledges the spatial imperative of subjectivity (Probyn, 2003). She notes that the spaces of clothing consumption, particularly the shop floor and changing room, provide a medium through which women form emotional relationships with their body, other shoppers and clothing. Changing rooms are places where clothing is 'displayed, touched, held up to the body, tried on, smoothed over the contours of the flesh, looked at on the body, and experienced in relation to other bodies trying on clothes' (Colls, 2004 583-584). It is thus important to address these spaces in order to understand how emotional experiences and clothed embodiment are spatially contingent.



Longhurst (2005a) also provides a means to begin the bridge the gap between embodiment and fashion literature. Longhurst (2005a) offers a situated reading of pregnant women's accumulation and wearing of maternity clothes. She examines the ways in which pregnant women in the West use clothing to produce a range of gendered subjectivities in public spaces. Her work is particularly relevant to my thesis as she argues: '[f]ashion and clothing are cultural constructions of embodied subjectivities which are intimately bound to spatialities' (Longhurst, 2005a 4). She stresses that it is vital to examine and understand clothing and clothing practices because most of the time people live their lives not as bodies, but as 'clothed bodies', who inhabit particular spaces. Despite this acknowledgement, many geographers have shown little interest in examining the embodied, situated practices of clothing.

I have found Joanne Entwistle's (2000a; 2000b) work on the social aspects of dress to be appropriate to my thesis. Although examining clothing and dress from a sociological stand-point, it is her recognition of dress as an embodied practice that makes her work particularly useful for this research. Entwistle (2000b 1) suggests that 'fashion is about bodies: it is produced, promoted and worn by bodies. It is the body that fashion speaks to and it is the body that must be dressed in almost all social encounters'.

Entwistle attempts to fill the knowledge gap that exists between theories of the body, which she notes often overlook the fundamental interconnectedness of dress, and theories of fashion and dress, which often ignore the body. Drawing on a wide range of theoretical backgrounds, she suggests that connections can be made between various fields, for example, structuralist and poststructuralist approaches in sociology (Douglas, 1984; Foucault, 1976), and phenomenological approaches (Crossley, 1996; Merleau-Ponty, 1976). The result is that Entwistle provides an important starting point for investigating dress as an embodied practice that is embedded within social discourses (Entwistle, 2000a).

Clothing is a lived and everyday experience. I agree with Entwistle (2000a) when she suggests that a study of fashion needs to connect to everyday dress, as dress plays an important role in the lives of most people. Further, dress needs to be understood as a cultural inscriber. Clothing does more than simply draw attention to the body, it emphasises bodily difference, and inscribes cultural meanings and significance onto the body. Entwistle (2000a) goes on to suggest that in much of the dress and fashion literature, there is a tendency to place too great an emphasis on fashion as a determining force in the production of identities. I argue that whilst dress is important in defining styles at a given spatial and temporal moment, these styles are always mediated by other social factors, including, age, class, gender, sexuality, 'race', occupation and body shape. Moreover, different situations impose different ways of dressing and different *spaces* require different ways of dressing. Crucially, fashion and dress needs to be interpreted as an inherently spatial and embodied activity. It also needs to be theorised in terms of what it is not.

As noted earlier, Cartesian dualisms underlie all Western understandings of embodiment. Western dualities are not simple statements of difference in the form of A/B. Dichotomies are specified in terms of a presence and an absence; in the form of A/not A. The relationship between A and not A is exclusionary. The Same or Self requires an Other against which to identify itself:

[w]ithin this structure, one term (A) has a positive status and an existence independent of the other; the other term is purely negatively defined, and has no contours of its own; its limiting boundaries are those which define the positive term (Grosz, 1989 xvi).

For example, in order to establish a fashionable (normative feminine) body, there must be a contrast with the unfashionable (abject) body.

## ***Embodied Fashion and the Abject***

In my reading of the fashion literature, I am yet to find work that considers the notion of abjection; this is why the work of French philosopher and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva is useful in understanding the spatial relations between bodies and underwear. 'Fashion', to be 'in fashion' or to have a 'fashionable' body requires an abject Other. It requires something to distinguish itself from. However, it is important to point out at this time that I am not establishing the fashionable/normative body as a binary opposition to the unfashionable/abject body. It is possible for both fashion and the abject to exist in the same body.

Kristeva (1982) develops the notion of abjection in her book *Power of Horrors*. The feeling of abjection is one of disgust, often evoking negative embodied affects. Abjection is:

the affect or feeling of anxiety, loathing and disgust that the subject has in encountering certain matter, images and fantasies – the horrible – to which it can only respond with aversion, nausea and distraction (Longhurst, 2001 28).

That which is abject is something so repulsive that it both attracts and repels. It provokes fear and disgust because it exposes the fragile border between the Self and the Other. The abject threatens to dissolve the subject by dissolving the border. It is 'ambiguous, inbetween, composite' (Kristeva, 1982 4). The abject is what threatens identity. It is undecidable; neither good nor evil, subject nor object, inside nor outside, ingested nor expelled; but something that threatens the distinctions themselves. Abjection signals the fragile hold 'the subject has over its identity and bodily boundaries, the ever-present possibility of sliding back into the corporeal abyss out of which it was formed' (Wright, 1992 198).

Many social theorists have developed Kristeva's (1982) abjection argument. Longhurst (2001) provides a situated psychoanalysis of the abject functions of

people generally regarded as ‘respectable’ such as pregnant women, business managers and able-bodied, heterosexual, Pākehā men. Young (1990a 142) makes effective use of the category ‘socially abjected groups’ to argue that some people are constructed as ‘ugly’. Young analyses the political implications of stereotyping groups as beautiful/ugly and cleanly/dirty in the cultural categorising of racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism and ableism. Young (1990a 145) argues that considering abjection enhances ‘an understanding of a body aesthetic that defines some groups as ugly or fearsome and produces aversive reactions in relation to members of those groups’. Although there is now a burgeoning body of work that recognises abjection as a driving force in society, scholars investigating the role fashion and clothes play in the production of embodied subjectivities have failed to acknowledge the fact that a fashionable or normative body requires an abject Other, in order to exist.

In the next section I look at the ‘breasted experiences’ of women and men. Although there has been a considerable amount of research conducted on women’s breasts in relation to ‘art, self-image, surgery, breast cancer, sexuality, fetishes, nursing and maternity’ there is very little literature that examines the embodied geographies of breast (both women’s *and* men’s) (Longhurst, 2005d 166). In the next section of this chapter I look at the research of Young (1990b) and Longhurst (2005d) and show that their work is useful for understanding the spatial interconnectedness between bodies and underwear.

### ***‘Breasted Experience(s)’<sup>5</sup>***

Young (1990b) provides a phenomenological study into women’s experience of having breasts. As stated earlier, Young is not a geographer; however, her

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<sup>5</sup> Iris Marion Young (1990b) initially coined the term ‘breasted experience’ to provide a positive account of what it is like for women to have breasts. Robyn Longhurst (2005d) later used the term to provide an embodied account of men who have breasts. I use the term as it highlights the situated, lived and embodied nature of breasts, thus challenging the mind/body dualism.

awareness of lived spatialities positions her within the current context of geographies of embodiment. Young (1990b 190) explores the socially constructed nature of breasts in a male-dominated society and explains that in the West 'breasts are the symbol of feminine sexuality'. Young attempts to destabilise these constructions by providing a positive account of women's 'breasted experience'.

Young (1990b 190) argues that Western culture fetishizes women's breasts. A fetish she explains 'is an object that stands in for the phallus'. Young (1990b) explains that in a phallogentric culture sexuality is orientated to the man and modelled on male desire. The patriarchal, Western, media-dominated culture objectifies breasts before a distancing gaze. Fetishized breasts are valued as objects. Objects are determinate and definable with clear boundaries. In today's society objectified breasts must be a certain shape (Young, 1990b). The 'best' breasts are like the phallus; they should be firm, round, sitting high on the chest and large, but not bulging. Young (1990b) rightly highlights the fact that the norm is contradictory. If breasts are large, gravity tends to pull them down and they are more likely to be saggy and fleshy rather than firm. The representation of breasts as solid (which is the case in most underwear advertisements) ignores the fleshy materiality of breasts. Breasts are usually the least muscular and softest part of the body.

The insights into a politics of fluidity/solidity are useful for understanding women's 'breasted experience'. Young (1990b 195) argues:

[w]ithout a bra, the fluid being of the breasts is more apparent. They are not objects with one definite shape, but radically change their shape with the body position and movements. Hand over the head, lying on one's back or side, bending over in the front – all produce very different shaped breasts. Many women's breasts are much more fluid than solid; in movement, they sway, jiggle, bounce, ripple even when the movement is small.

The fluidity and indeterminacy of breasts are hence confined, disciplined and solidified through temporary means of containment – bras. This indeterminacy is not ontologically correct, rather a function of the modes of representation that privilege the solid and the determinate over the fluid. Firm, contained breasts are privileged over soft, fluid breasts (Longhurst, 2005d). Without a bra, women's breasts become abject. Without a bra, most women's breasts do not have the high, hard, rounded look that the phallic culture posits as the norm (Young, 1990b). Therefore, the bra 'normalises the breasts, lifting and curving the breast to approximate the one and only breast ideal' (Young, 1990b 195).

Longhurst (2005d) also examines a 'breasted experience'; however she focuses on a particular form of embodiment not commonly associated with contemporary understandings of breasts.<sup>6</sup> She provides a situated analysis of an embodied space of masculinity – 'man breasts' – illustrating that bodies and space are socially constructed whilst having an undeniable materiality and fluidity. She suggests that 'man-breasts' disrupt understandings of sexual specificity and 'befuddle normative understandings' of what it means to have breasts (Longhurst, 2005d 173). Men with breasts shape, and are shaped by, a range of complex material, discursive and psychoanalytic spaces, and it is her recognition of this, coupled with the 'awkward, messy' nature of the topic, that makes important contributions to feminist, embodied and masculinity studies.

So whilst there is an emerging and exciting embodiment scholarship, there is still much more to do. Some embodiment and feminist geographers are still ignoring the situated experience of bodies that are clothed, particularly in relation to underwear. They are yet to consider underwear as an important constituent of feminine bodily subjectivity.

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<sup>6</sup> Although I have referred to both the breasted experiences of men and women, when I use the term breasts, unless specifically stated, I am referring to women's breasts.

## **Conclusions**

I began this chapter by critically engaging with feminist poststructuralist approaches to embodied subjectivities and spatialities. This section included a discussion on the interconnectedness between work spaces and the corporeal identities of the employees. It allowed me to critically reflect on my role as a Bendon consumer and retailer.

I focused on relevant literature from outside of the geography discipline . I developed feminist frameworks that look at the embodied experiences of women to understand how space can act to confine them and how underwear contributes to the construction of contemporary practices of femininity.

Finally, I paid particular attention to those theorists who acknowledge the 'leaky, messy, awkward zones' of the body and space (Longhurst, 2001 2). I argued that in order for geography to become a more critical and diverse discipline, geographers interested in how bodies are produced in and through space need to recognise clothing as an important ingredient in the constitution of bodily subjectivities. I reviewed the work of some influential geographers who are attempting to bridge the gap that exists between geographic theories of 'the body' and fashion theories. I presented a case for embodied fashion scholars to draw on the notion of abjection in order to understand further the social aspects of dress. I brought the chapter to a close by reviewing another 'messy' aspect of embodiment – breasts – and in doing so challenged traditional geographical knowledge production.

In weaving together feminist poststructuralist approaches that challenge the mind/body dualism in order to understand clothed embodiment and spatialities, I have articulated a framework that allows me to think about the 'embodied subjectivities' (Grosz, 1994 22) of a select grouping of young Pākehā women who purchase and wear underwear in Hamilton, New Zealand.

**•• CHAPTER THREE ••**  
**Qualitative Research Methods**

**Introduction**

In this chapter I discuss my use of feminist poststructuralist methodologies. Feminist poststructuralist methodologies are varied and operate within different paradigms. Sharma Reinharz (1992) contends that researchers employing feminist methodologies should not debate the usefulness of qualitative methods compared to quantitative methods, but rather, employ methods appropriate to the topic. I have found qualitative methods to be appropriate to the intimate nature of my topic.

Qualitative methods have been used extensively in geography and their implications have been reviewed in-depth (Moss, 1993; Reinharz, 1992; Sprague, 2005; Winchester, 2000). Geographers utilising qualitative methods in their research are concerned with clarifying human environments and experiences within a variety of conceptual frameworks (Winchester, 2000). They question the construction of knowledge and discourse in geography, paying specific attention to the position of the researcher and the power relations at work.

In this chapter I have three objectives. My first is to explain my use of qualitative techniques. Second, I describe the methods I used in this thesis and provide a critical examination of each. Third, I intend to discuss my role as a graduate geography student doing research and offer a critique of this position. Throughout the chapter I relate my research methods to my theoretical framework. In what follows I outline the key methods employed to collect data and the ways in which I recruited the research participants. I discuss focus group and semi-structured interviews, participant observation, autobiography, and discourse analysis. I acknowledge both the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. Throughout the chapter I weave a critical



reflection upon my positionality in order to challenge the notion that fieldwork, theory and reflexivity are mutually exclusive (Avis, 2002).

### **Qualitative Research Methodology**

I used multiple methods because they are highly compatible with feminist poststructuralist analyse. By combining different research methods I was able to create new research dimensions in geography and illuminate previously unexamined experiences (Reinharz, 1992). Multiple methods have also enabled me to produce a more nuanced and specific examination. I found that using multiple methods enabled me to reflect both my participants', and my own, multifaceted identity by acknowledging individual differences. 'An emerging postulate for feminist research – is using a variety of methods in order to generate multifaceted information' (Klein, 1986 16).

Feminist and poststructuralist theories have made the greatest contribution to qualitative research. Geographers who have embraced qualitative methods, have pointed out that the research tools have much potential for highlighting the richness of everyday life and illustrating the complexity of social issues (Avis, 2002). Theorists employing these frameworks recognise that multiple and conflicting realities coexist. Nicholas Clifford and Gill Valentine (2003) explain that feminist and poststructuralist geographers criticise the grand theories of modernism, and thus some theorists inability to recognise people's multiple subjectivities. Qualitative methods deliberately give a voice to those silenced or ignored by the hegemons in the geography discipline. They allow the voices of the informants to be heard in ways which are non-exploitive or oppressive. Qualitative research methods are about:

[t]alking with and observing human beings in their daily social context provides information that combats the tendency to see people as abstract individuals. Listening to people speak in their own words, and watching them make choices and take action, makes it easier to recognise them as subjects. Listening to people who are members of groups that have been underrepresented in conventional research

provides rich opportunities to discover what scholarly discourse may have obscured, and to see the limits of prevailing “truths” (Sprague, 2005 120).

In the following section I outline how I recruited participants for interviewing, the types of methods I used during the interviews and the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches.

## **Interviewing**

The interviewing component of my empirical data collection consisted of a focus group interview and three semi-structured interviews. Longhurst (2003) contends that focus group interviews and semi-structured interviews are about talking with, and listening to, people in a self-conscious and orderly, partially structured manner. During the interviews I assumed the role of interviewer or facilitator and directed the discussion. I prepared two sets of questions specific to Bendon employees and ‘bra consumers’<sup>7</sup> (see appendix one, pages 122-124 and appendix two, pages 125-126) and divided the questions into three themes: DVD Questions, Underwear Questions and Consumption Questions. I let the participants explore issues that were of importance to them, and used my prepared questions to direct the discussion. My reason for doing this was to ensure that the discussion unfolded in a conversational, manner and in doing so I gathered valuable information whilst ensuring that the participants felt their perceptions were valued (Longhurst, 2003). At the completion of all the interviews I checked my schedule to make sure that all of my questions had been covered, and thanked the participants for their time.

## ***Recruitment of Participants***

I aimed for intra-group homogeneity within the focus groups (Conradson, 2005). All of the participants were Pākehā women ranging in age from 18 to

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<sup>7</sup> Solely for the purpose of distinguishing between the participants, I have categorised them into two groups: Bendon employees and ‘bra consumers’.

22 years old (see appendix four on page 129 for a list of the participants' details). Pseudonyms have been used for the participants.<sup>8</sup> I asked four Bendon employees if they would like to participate in a focus group. I gave them an Information Sheet each and explained it to them (see appendix three, pages 127-128). All four employees agreed to participate. I then contacted some female friends via text message to see if they or anybody they knew would like to participate in a second focus group. I met with them, outlined my research and gave them an Information Sheet. This approach also proved fruitful as I recruited eight participants.

I arranged a time that was suitable for the first focus group session with the Bendon manager. I then confirmed with the Bendon employees that they would be present at the discussion. Despite all the participants being scheduled on to work the day of the focus group, only two were able to attend. I thus had to be flexible and adapt my methodology accordingly. I offered one employee the opportunity to participate in a semi-structured interview and the other two employees the chance to participate in a joint semi-structured interview. As a result, both interviews proceeded and provided different, but equally important, information. The following extract from my autobiographical journal reflects the anxiety I felt about conducting qualitative fieldwork.

I have just been informed that one girl that is meant to be attending my Bendon focus group won't be coming. I am really annoyed! But I am just going to have to adapt to the situation. I think instead of being a focus group it will be a joint interview – similar dynamics to a focus group but on a smaller scale. It's a horrible feeling relying on others to be a main part of your research (Autobiography Journal Entry, 10/06/06).

For the 'bra consumers' focus group I text messaged the participants to arrange a suitable time and place for their session. Six of the eight

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<sup>8</sup> I have included my details (age, occupation, relationship status) as I am part of the research group. For ethical reasons I have given the participants pseudonyms; however, I have not given myself a pseudonym as I want to be explicit in my positioning throughout this research.

participants turned up. One participant agreed to participate at a later date, so I suggested a semi-structured interview, which she happily agreed to. The focus group interview and semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded and the resulting tapes transcribed verbatim.

### ***Warming Up to Interviews***

Longhurst (1996) suggests sharing a meal with the participants, prior to conducting the interview. For the focus group I provided light nibbles and drinks. For both of the semi-structured interviews I took the participants out for lunch. And, for the joint semi-structured interview I provided the participants and the Bendon Manager with dinner. In each case the amount of time involved varied, but I used it as an opportunity to outline my research, thank the participants for attending, discuss and sign two Consent Forms; one for their records and the other for mine (see appendix five, pages 130-131).

To begin the interviews I showed a DVD of an American lingerie show – *Victoria's Secret* (CBS Broadcasting Inc., 6 December 2005). I did this for two reasons: firstly, to 'warm-up' the participants; and secondly, to provide an initial point of discussion (Longhurst, 2003 121). Occasionally qualitative research participants take time to relax, and to overcome any barriers to communications, Longhurst (2003) suggests providing an activity for the participants to focus on and engage in. I presented a five minute segment of *Victoria's Secret* to expose them to 'current societal ideals of thinness and attractiveness that are communicated through the televised media' (Blood, 2005 33). The *Victoria's Secrets* show featured women such as Heidi Klum, Giselle Bundchen and Tyra Banks; women who are often deemed the ideal embodiments of femininity.

After we had viewed and discussed the DVD, I asked the participants to draw their bodies. This research tool is gaining popularity in exploring geographies of embodiment (Gregg, 2004; Longhurst, 2005d). I then asked them to

highlight areas of their bodies that they liked and disliked. This led to a discussion surrounding their particular embodiments; why they liked or disliked certain body parts, how they wanted to go about changing them, and how they felt about their bodies in relation to others. I also participated in the exercise (see figure one, page 38). I did to work within a feminist poststructuralist paradigm that seeks to destabilise the notion of the researcher as a rational and detached observer. I also wanted to reinforce to the participants that I too was a part of the research. I am yet to find any geographic literature that presents the researcher as an *embodied* being in the form of a drawing.<sup>9</sup> By explicitly including the specificities of my body, including breasts and thighs with ‘a bit of cellulite’, I confound the notion of the disembodied, masculine geographer (Nairn, 1999).

I purposely elected to feature the drawing exercise directly after the screening of the *Victoria's Secret* show. I based this decision on my initial reactions to viewing the DVD which I recorded in my autobiographical journal.

Do ordinary women who watch these models feel bad about themselves afterwards? I certainly noted my imperfections. Even though I am slim I couldn't help compare my short legs and small breasts to their long legs and big, perky breasts! (Autobiographical Journal Entry, 15/03/06).

As I am part of the research group, I knew I would not be alone in my critical reflections.

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<sup>9</sup> Although, for an example of research that presents the participants as embodied beings see Karen Nairn's work on geography students' experiences of fieldtrips. Nairn (1999) includes a drawing that depicts the embodied specificities of a geographer, or more specifically a drawing of 'how to look like a geographer'. Although the drawing has attributes associated with femininity, particularly in relation to facial characteristics such as long hair, full lips, and eyes with long lashes, the *body* of the geographer is not overtly feminine. The geographer has a broad upper body, a physical attribute associated with masculinity and the geographer's breasts are slight, hidden beneath a tee-shirt. See also Heidi Nast's (1998) research on reflexivity and fieldwork in Kano, Nigeria for a diagrammatical depiction of herself. Nast's bodily and spatial positioning is depicted in opposition to royal concubines. Although, Nast challenges traditional representations of geographers by presenting herself as an embodied (sexed and gendered) form by including breasts in her drawing, her stick-figure representation retains an air of bodily transcendence.

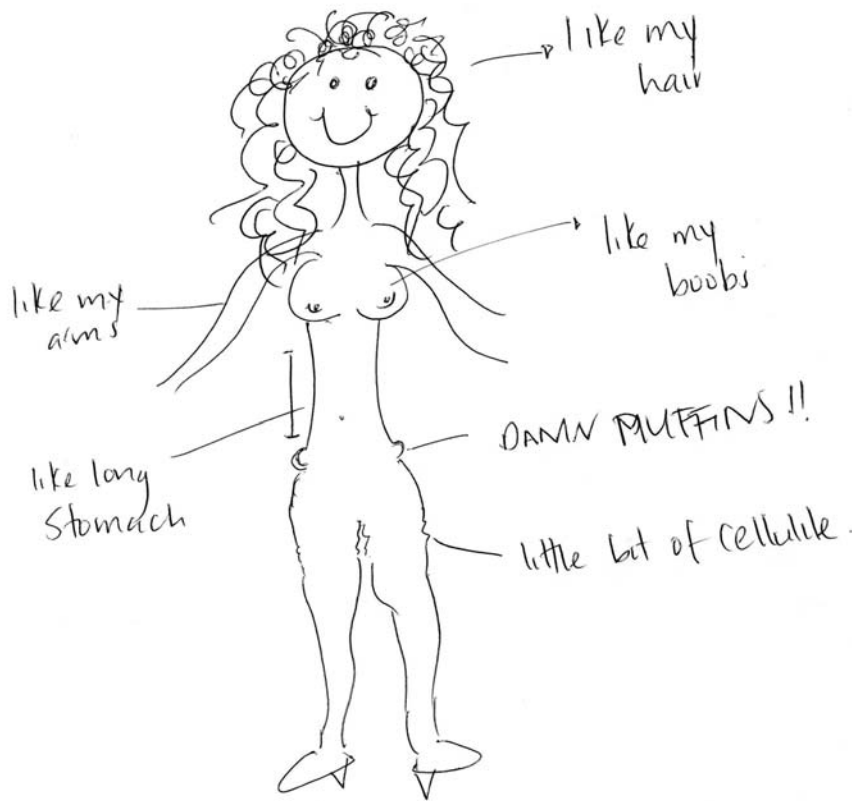


Figure One: Carey-Ann, Focus Group 01/06/06.

The drawing exercise proved to be an extremely valuable research tool. Each time I presented the exercise I was reminded that research *can* be fun. Given that much geographic research in the past has been influenced by positivism, there has been no room to talk about (or have) fun in academic research. Longhurst (1996 45) explores some reasons why there has been tension between what is deemed ‘appropriate’ research topics and methodologies for academic enquiry. Traditionally research has been represented as a purely ‘serious’ business and its ‘binary opposite – fun’ has subsequently been ‘devalued, feminised and forgotten’. Ensuring that the participants have fun during the research process is gaining popularity in geography. One example of this is Melanie Gregg’s (2004) masters thesis research on young people. The drawing exercise that the participants and I completed was certainly not

boring. It filled the room with laughter and discussion and was even as Sally described it, 'therapeutic' (Focus group, 01/06/06).

### ***Appearance and Moving Between 'Roles'***

The appearance of the researcher can influence the participants' reactions during an interview. Robin Kearns (2000) explores how participant observation techniques can be applied to interview and focus group situations. In particular, Kearns notes how the researcher smells, sounds, speaks and what they look like are important factors that can influence the relationship between the researcher and the participants. Given that I am an 'insider' in the research and wanted to destabilise the binary between researcher and the researched, how I presented myself was significant.

As previously noted, the first semi-structured interview I conducted was with one of my colleague from Bendon – Rachael. I was nervous about conducting interviews with friends as I was unsure of how to move between the role of 'friend' and 'interviewer'. I was also conscious of my position as a graduate student and how this may inform and affect the interview. Rachael obviously had similar feelings. I recorded my reactions to the situation in my autobiographical journal.

At the beginning of the interview the 'formalness' of the situation made Rachael nervous. I think this was related to her perceived idea of the academic nature of the interview and the fact that she is my friend (Autobiographical Journal Entry, 30/06/06).

Rachael's responses to the first section of the interview are incomplete and awkward. She attempted to give me answers that she *thought* I wanted to hear. In response to my question: why do you like the DVD? She replied:

I like the underwear, it's not tacky. It's a way to show your femininity and what underwear you like and why you like it and stuff and how it relates to you and ... [laugh] (Semi-structured Interview, 30/05/06).

Accordingly, I adapted *how* I asked the questions and *how* I replied. I did this by reverting back to my role as a ‘friend’ and bringing up topics not specifically related to the interview. I learnt from this and with each successive interview I was able to move back and forth between the roles of ‘friend’ and ‘interviewer’. I also experimented with other techniques in an attempt to reduce the academic tone of the interviews. In one instance, I decided to dress casually. I wore informal, yet tidy clothes and I wore my slippers. Upon reflection on the significance of my appearance on this occasion, I think it made me more approachable. This was important as it enabled the participants to feel comfortable and relaxed and this was reflected in the depth of the information I gathered.

### ***Focus Groups***

In recent years, focus groups have become an increasingly popular form of research methodology in human geography (Conradson, 2005). A focus group provides ‘a rich qualitative record of a focused group discussion’ (Conradson, 2005 129). I planned to conduct two focus groups: one with ‘bra consumers’ and the other with Bendon employees. However, I had to alter my plans because two Bendon employees were unable to attend. As a result I conducted one focus group with the ‘bra consumers’. As I am interested in the socially constructed nature of knowledge, I planned to conduct focus groups in order to examine the group dynamics and in turn the multiple meanings people attribute to places, relationships, processes and events (Cameron, 2000).

When I conducted the focus group with the ‘bra consumers’, I decided to hold the discussion at my house. As detailed earlier, creating a welcoming environment for the participants was central to my research and initially I was concerned with whether this was a suitable environment, given the sensitive nature of the topic. On discussing my concerns with my supervisor and with some of the participants I decided it would be fine to hold the



discussion at my house. Longhurst (2003) suggests that the environment where the focus group is held should be neutral, informal and easily accessible to all of the participants. Although this location was hardly 'neutral', hosting the interview in a private setting seemed appropriate given the personal nature of my topic. Also, I personally knew all of the participants prior to my research and thus did not think there would be any ethical conflicts.

### ***Semi-structured Interviews***

Kevin Dunn (2000) suggests that semi-structured interviews have a predetermined order, usually in the form of a set of questions or themes; however, the conversational manner in which they unfold ensures flexibility in the way issues are addressed by the informant. I attempted to use semi-structured interviews as a way to explore ideas that the participants presented more thoroughly.

I conducted one semi-structured interview with a Bendon employee and the other with a 'bra consumer'. The joint semi-structured interview took place with the two remaining Bendon employees.<sup>10</sup> They took between forty five minutes and an hour and a half. Despite using the same techniques and questions for the semi-structured interviews and the focus group interview, the different methods produced different information. The dynamics of each discussion may account for this. The conversation that occurred during the focus group was extremely informal and conversational. At times the participants reverted back to 'normal' dialogue etiquette – talking over one another – and on several occasions I politely reminded them to let each other finish their sentence. My role in this conversation was largely, but not solely, to listen. The dynamics of the joint semi-structured interview was similar to

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<sup>10</sup> See Robyn Longhurst's (1996) research on pregnant women's experiences of Hamilton, New Zealand for a discussion on what constitutes a focus group. Longhurst concludes that two participants and a facilitator can comprise a focus group. I, however, decided that in the context of this research two participants and an interviewer was not a focus group and hence decided to classify it as a joint semi-structured interview.

that of the focus group but on a much smaller scale. I expected that the material gained from the joint semi-structured interview would be more in-depth than focus group; however, it was quite the opposite. I found that the discussion was somewhat limited by the absence of the other participants; basically there were less ideas to bounce off each other. My experiences and perceptions played a greater part in the interview. I also found that the semi-structured interviews allowed both me and participants to discuss issues that may not have been 'appropriate' for a group discussion such as sexually overt references and personally intimate details.

Arranging a suitable time and place for both me and the participants was a simple task. I conducted one semi-structured interview at the participant's house in her bedroom. The other I conducted at my house in the dining room. I stuck with my original plan to conduct the joint semi-structured interview with the Bendon employees at Bendon, after work, on a Saturday evening.

### ***Interview Analysis***

I listened to the tape recordings of each interview and then transcribed verbatim.<sup>11</sup> I attempted to transcribe each interview before commencing the next one, as I wanted the interview and the situational information it was embedded in to remain 'fresh' in my head. Transcribing whilst continuing my data collection was useful in assisting me with asking more pointed questions in the subsequent interviews.

Once I had full transcripts of all the interviews, I printed several copies for analysis. I used Rob Kitchin and Nicholas J Tate's (2000) adaptation of Ian

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<sup>11</sup> The transcribing codes are as follow: *italics* indicate participants' emphasis on particular words, a double slash (//) indicates where one participant interrupts another, and successive full stops (...) indicate pauses. Commas, question marks and exclamation marks have been added to improve the readability of the extracts, however, I tried to keep my use of full stops to a minimum as in everyday conversation; rarely are sentences begun or ended. I also noted laughter and inaudible sections in square brackets [ ].

Dey's (1993) procedure for analysis. The procedure comprises three interconnected stages: description, classification and connection. Description involves transcribing and annotating the interviews. To annotate the transcripts I used 'free association', which is the 'jotting down of all the other things that you might associate with the particular section of the data; in a sense, a brain storming session' (Kitchin and Tate, 2000 239). This stage allowed me to gain a comprehensive understanding of the interviews. Classification centres on categorising the information into a set of master categories and sub-categories using a coding system (Kitchin and Tate, 2000 239). I had a set of pre-determined categories and also created new codes – open coding – as I read and considered the texts. These categories were not exclusive and I found that much of the data overlapped. I cut out specific pieces of data from photocopied transcripts and pasted them on to separate pieces of paper under the relevant categories (see appendix 6 for an example, page 134). In the final stage – connection – I was concerned with identifying coherent classes of data. I focused on identifying relationships and associations between themes and relevant literature and questioned *why* patterns existed (for example why the participants chose to shop at certain underwear consumption spaces) (Kitchin and Tate, 2000 235).

Although searching for themes helped with the process of data reduction, I was aware that the method may lead to other issues being overlooked, such as differences in consumption patterns between the Bendon workers and 'bra consumers'. I was also aware that this method could be seen as essentialising the participants' experiences, and thus was concerned with acknowledging the diversity of individual situations. Acknowledging and critically reflecting on the possible limitations of this research methodology allowed me to overcome this problem, ensuring that I did not universalise the accounts of my research.

I also applied this form of analysis to participant observations and my autobiographical entries. This supplemented the information I had gathered through the various interviews and produced a more nuanced and detailed

analysis. In the following sections I offer a critical examination of participant observation and autobiography and also of my positionality.

### **Participant Observation**

I conducted participant observations of shoppers in Bendon in order to understand how they negotiated and gendered the space. Reinharz (1992) examines the importance of understanding the experiences of women from their own points of view. She explains that female researchers conducting participant observations corrects a major bias of non-feminist participant observation that trivialises female's activities and thoughts, or interprets them from the standpoint of men.

I recorded the observations in my autobiographical and participant observation journal. I continued to interpret the shoppers behaviour as shaped by social context, because bodies and place shape each other (Nast and Pile, 1998). I also continued to note my interactions with, and reactions to, the shoppers being observed. I did so as I am part of the research. My embodied presence and identity influenced how I gathered and perceived the data, and how customers reacted towards me. By recording my reactions I was able to incorporate my experiences as a retailer and consumer of underwear.

Feminist fieldwork is predicated upon the active involvement of the researcher in the production of social knowledge through direct participation in and experience of the social realities she is seeking to understand (Dilorio, 1982 cited in Reinharz, 1992 46).

Participant observation helped me understand Bendon as a gendered space. To find out how Bendon consumers and Bendon employees negotiate, and are negotiated by, the gendered space, I continued my usual roles and responsibilities as a sales assistant. Participant observation provided data which in turn, framed and directed further questioning. Data gathered in

Bendon relates most specifically to my first research question: how are the spaces of underwear shops gendered?

Kearns (2000 106) refers to 'uncontrolled observation' which is a non-restrictive means of noting prescribed data. Although it is guided by goals and ethical considerations, it allows the researcher the freedom to do more than simply 'seeing'. Participant observation allowed me to remain an active participant in the spontaneity of the everyday interactions that occurred in Bendon. By adopting what Ian Cook (2005 175) explains as covert and/or overt roles, specifically 'overt participant' and 'covert observer', I was able to continue my usual work responsibilities which included being on the shop floor, assisting customers with the trying-on of underwear, and discussions with other staff members and shoppers.

Being an 'overt participant' involves telling the people that you are working with that your involvement is for research purposes. I told my Bendon colleagues that I would be conducting participant observation. I did this by hanging a Participant Observation Information Sheet in the tea room and also asked the manager to read and sign two Consent Forms to permit me to conduct participant observation during work hours (see appendix seven, pages 133-134 and appendix eight, pages 135-136). I wanted to be able to discuss with my colleagues their customer interactions and experiences.

To be a 'covert observer' the researcher must conceal their research intentions from those being watched by immersing themselves in the environment. I did not tell the customers I was observing them for my research. Also I had the added bonus of already being part of the environment. Eric Laurier (2003 135) suggests that in some instances it is difficult for an 'outsider' to enter and be accepted into a different community. My uniform and name badge ensured that I was easily recognisable as a member of the staff. I made the recordings after the observations during my tea breaks and after work. Given that Bendon has high customer numbers,

especially during the weekends, it was impossible to gain permission from each shopper. I also did not want the Bendon consumers and retailers to change their 'usual' behaviour. It was for these reasons I chose combined methods of participant observation.

I have worked at Bendon for approximately three years. I have been wearing and consuming underwear for as long as I can remember. Therefore, I am studying an environment which I myself am part of, with all the personal and emotive involvement and subjectivity that this generates. Disembodied objectivity has dominated geography. Since I am both the researcher and the researched, I intend to be explicit in my positioning.

As I emphasised earlier, observation involves participating both socially and spatially. Bodily presence brings with it personal characteristics such as 'race', sex and age. These characteristics or differences construct power relations. With this in mind, I question my role as an observer and participant in the research process. As an observer and a participant I became caught up in, and constituted by, a range of power relations which produced discursive constructs of femininity. These constructions involved my position as a retailer; as a young, able-bodied, Pākehā woman with a presumed heterosexual appearance. I became positioned and defined by these powers and constructs. Lynda Johnston (1994 41) notes this is one reason why participant observation presents 'special problems for feminist theory and politics'. I gazed (critically?) at my body and the bodies of other women in the shop and in the changing rooms.

### ***Critical Reflection***

I encountered a variety of bodily shapes and sizes working at Bendon. I always noted, both consciously and sub-consciously the size and shape of a woman's body. I observed that she may have had large, saggy breasts; or a large back with small breasts. My initial reasons for doing this were to help

me select and offer the right style bra for her body shape. However, on critical reflection I realised it was not solely for the purpose of assisting customers. It also contributed to my *own* construction of spatialised normative femininity. I compared my body with those of the customers. I compared my colleagues' bodies with my own and with the customers. This process of comparison also occurred in my watching and looking at advertising and promotional representations of women. I found that the visual materials emphasised 'sameness' amongst women; a sameness that promoted slim, but curvaceous, tall and tanned women. Not only was I attempting to analyse the representations of normative femininity, I was also caught up in critically comparing my body and others with the feminine icons.

### **Autobiography**

I recorded my experiences, thoughts and participant observations in an on-going journal. It included my experiences as a consumer of lingerie and as a retailer. I integrated my experiences within this research as I am a member of the research population and I am interested in the topic. By keeping an on-going journal I created a space to be reflexive and 'critical' about the research process. My main aim of keeping an autobiographical journal was to be a '(co)creator of storied knowledge(s)'. By doing so I lessened the 'distance from the topic'; a disembodied distance that has traditionally categorised geographical writing (Kearns, 1997 269). Much geographic writing in the past has been characterised by a dispassionate, distant, disembodied voice, which is devoid of emotion and dislocated from the everyday experience. The geographies that I have presented are 'radical and emancipatory', I have approached the topic with the intent of 'getting close to other people, listening to them, making way for them' (Sibley, 1995 184).

Feminism offers a distinct vantage point in examining experiences recorded in autobiographical form. There has always been a strong feminist interest in the autobiographical, beginning with the attempt to connect the 'personal'

with the ‘political’, and the associated emphasis on women’s experiences as a vital source in the creation of geographical knowledges (Cosslet, 2000). Moss (2001) notes that geographers, particularly feminist geographers, use autobiography. I recorded my feelings and thoughts on the tone of the focus group interview and the semi-structured interviews. The following extract is from my autobiographical journal and is reflective of what I recorded after the interviews.

I have just completed my second semi-structured interview. Beforehand I took her for lunch. We then completed the interview in her bedroom. It went well. It was not as long as the other interview – only took about forty five minutes. She wasn’t as forthcoming with her answers, so I found it difficult to develop questions from her answers (Autobiographical Journal Entry, 09/06/06).

I also recorded my participant observations and how I affected and informed the data I gathered. I then used my journal in analysis as I critically reflected on the way I gathered, presented and wrote up the information.

In the following sections I outline my use of discourse analysis. I discuss how I collected and analysed key advertorial material from Bendon, Bras N Things and Farmers in order to examine the prevailing discourses on femininity produced in and by the spaces.

### **Discourse Analysis**

Rob Bartram (2003 152 original emphasis) states that ‘visual imagery *always* produces cultural meaning, whether it involves passing a photograph around family and friends in your sitting room or watching a blockbuster film at the cinema’. Throughout underwear shops popular representations of the ‘ideal’ normative feminine body dominate the walls in the form of promotional billboards. Visual texts such as advertising catalogues and product labels also contain these ‘ideal’ images.



Reinharz (1992 146) contends that all forms of visual imagery are ‘cultural artefacts’. They are the products of individual activity, social organisation, technology and cultural patterns. Cultural artefacts have two common research properties. First, as they are not created for the purpose of study, they possess a natural, ‘found’ quality. Secondly, they are non-interactive. They do not require asking questions of respondents or observing people’s behaviour. Cultural artefacts simultaneously construct, and are constructed by, specific temporal and spatial societal norms.

I used two texts to assist with discourse analysis: Rose’s (2001) text *Visual Methodologies*; and *Feminist Geographies: Explorations in Diversity and Difference*, published in 1997 and written by the Women and Geography Study Group. Rose (2001) offers advice to students engaging in discourse analysis. She argues that discourse analysis centres on Foucault’s theories concerning discourse and society, knowledge, power and surveillance (see chapter two for an explanation of Foucault’s theories, page 21). The Women and Geography Study Group (1997 169-170), provide a series of questions (which I adopted and adapted to fit the needs of my research) concerned with investigating the images of landscapes and bodies presented in the greeting card industry.

I used discourse analysis to supplement the other methods in this thesis. The main cultural artefacts I have focused my textual analysis on are: the *Victoria’s Secret* DVD (CBS Broadcasting Inc., 6 December 2005) and advertising material that is displayed in Bendon, Bras N Things and Farmers. In the next section I offer an explanation of my positionality. I discuss how as a retailer and consumer of underwear, I am both the researcher and the researched.

## **Complex Positionality**

Researchers employing qualitative methods focus on the politics of power production in terms of researchers' positionality. Feminist poststructuralists confront the universalism, mastery and disembodiment inherent in positivist notions of objectivity (Berg and Mansvelt, 2000). Research can never be devoid of the power relations that shape situations in which people research. Furthermore, if language is constitutive of meaning and knowledge, writing practices are also embodied exercises. Accordingly, I reject the 'ostensibly model of writing in the third person', instead I locate my knowledge through 'contextuality, partiality and positionality' (Berg and Mansvelt, 2000 168).

Fiona Smith (2003) describes a strategy for addressing the power relations within the research process. First, work through the complex positionality of the researcher. Second, subject the research process to scrutiny. And, third, recognise the researcher as an embodied presence in the research process.

Thus, positionality is:

things like our "race" and gender ... but also our class experiences, our levels of education, our sexuality, our age, our ableness, whether we are a parent or not. All of these have a bearing upon who we are, how our identities are formed and how we do our research, we are not neutral, scientific observers, untouched by the emotional and political contexts of places where we do our research (Skelton, 2001 89).

I am aware of my positionality and how it affects and informs this research. I am also aware that my positionality is partial, fluid and changing. I am a white, 22 year old, heterosexual, able-bodied female. I am a geography student, a retail assistant and consumer of fashion and underwear. As with many young women, I enjoy shopping as a leisure activity. I enjoy looking at and trying on clothes. I continually inhabit the 'intimate' spaces and experiences of my research. Therefore, in this study, I occupy the position of the researcher and the researched. Part of my motivation for adopting a feminist poststructuralist approach is to help create a body of literature that

makes women's voices and experiences heard (Reinharz, 1992). This also includes my own voice. In a geographic discipline that has been dominated by disembodied, objective researchers (Rose, 1993), the way in which I am a continual presence in the written communication is significant in furthering feminist and embodied geographies. It makes for a more inclusive geography.

Clothes can be representative of a person's identity. Trying on new ranges of underwear at work allows me to explore, quite openly different sexual subjectivities. It allows me the 'fantasy of multiple and changing identities without the anxiety of losing' myself (Young, 1990b 185). Working at Bendon and owning 'sexy' lingerie is part of who I am; it is part of my identity. However, when I leave Bendon, I suspect this dimension of my identity will no longer be as prevalent, I will no longer be able to get my 'shopping fix' whilst at work. Susan Porter Benson (1986 233) argues that sales assistants are simultaneously workers and consumers:

[s]he herself was also a consumer, moving easily and regularly from one side of the counter to the other. The roles dovetailed neatly: what a saleswoman learned behind the counter helped her to consume more intelligently, what she learned from the other side of the counter enabled her to sell with extra assurance.

I perceive my position to be helpful as it has enabled me to be sensitive and understanding of my participants' experiences. As an 'insider' in the research, I have been able to encourage my participants to elaborate on issues about which I am already familiar. However, I am also aware of problems surrounding my positionality. By critically reflecting on how I gathered and constructed my research and on how my own subjectivity and assumptions as a researcher have influenced the knowledge produced, I have not universalised the accounts of my research. During my research I became aware of the problems surrounding my positionality and how I chose to record and articulate my findings. As this is an important component of feminist poststructuralist research, I will continue to acknowledge and weave these problems into the remainder of this thesis.

## **Conclusions**

In this chapter I have ranged over a wide scope of methods and methodology. I have shown that qualitative research techniques are extremely useful for researching 'intimate' topics as they highlight the richness and illustrate the complexities of everyday life. I have outlined the various interviewing methods I used, including recruitment, warm-up exercises, focus group and semi-structured interviews and interview analysis. I explained how my research challenges epistemological ideas that regard research as boring. Participant observation and autobiographical journal techniques have been charted. I briefly outlined my use of discourse analysis and throughout the chapter I have incorporated some reflections on the research process, paying particular attention to my 'insider role' in the research and the complexities that this has produced. In this thesis I have drawn on feminist poststructuralist theories in an attempt to acknowledge my position as partial and as a product of specific social settings. In the following chapter I draw on the focus group, semi-structured interviews, participant observations and autobiography in order to discuss the ways in which the spaces of underwear consumption construct, and are constructed by, the corporealities that inhabit them.

## **•• CHAPTER FOUR ••**

### **‘In’ and ‘Out’ of Place – Underwear Consumption Spaces**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter I illustrate the notion that space is gendered. I present a case study of the ‘gendered’ spaces of underwear shops in Hamilton. I look specifically at a Bendon Lingerie Outlet; however, to reflect the consumption patterns of some of the participants I also include two other underwear shops: Bras N Things and the underwear section of Farmers department store. These spaces of underwear consumption are discursively constructed as feminine. I problematise the concept of gendered space by paying attention to corporeal specificity and the discursive meanings of places and space (Johnston, 1994). Discursive meanings are central to constructions of power and the female body. The power of discourse can be understood as productive on the one hand and controlling and repressive on the other (Barnes and Duncan, 1992). This concept is useful in my analysis of gendered underwear shops.

In this thesis I pursue the argument that the discursive power operating in underwear shops is productive. This approach affords me with the opportunity to understand the social processes and outcomes of these spaces as both positive *and* negative. My research shows that feminised spaces of underwear consumption produce positive results in two main ways. Firstly, they can provide women with a sense of freedom to be able to negotiate their bodily identity in a space that is designed for them. Feelings of confinement and being located in ‘oppressive spaces’ are re-occurring images in women’s accounts of their lives (Rose, 1993). The feminised spaces of underwear shops challenge traditional understandings of (public) space as masculine. Secondly, underwear stores spaces challenge the mind/body dualism that posits men as distant, disembodied beings, who are able to transcend the specificities of their bodies. The discursive power of underwear stores

positions men as ‘out’ of place. These sites produce an environment where men become aware of, and are able to experience their, gendered and sexualised embodiments. However, through the creation of a homogenous (heteronormative feminine) space, discursive boundaries and exclusions are simultaneously created. Yet these feminised spaces remain productive, even if producing negative effects. The creation and promotion of an idealised form of femininity is a primary product of such spaces that excludes those women who do not fit the norm.

Underwear shops are hegemonically gendered. They are spaces in which bodies may be influenced, controlled and repressed. I argue that the discursive power operating in underwear consumption spaces construct bodies as either ‘in’ place or ‘out’ of place.<sup>12</sup> In the first half of this chapter I examine the socio-political processes that position bodies as ‘in’ place. Discourse analysis of billboards and promotional material in Bendon, Bras N Things and Farmers provides a means to examine contemporary notions of heteronormative femininity produced within and by the spaces. Bendon employees are also constructed as being ‘in’ place. Drawing extensively from personal experience, I move to discuss the mutually constitutive relationship between the space of Bendon and Bendon employees. In the second half of the chapter I discuss those bodies that are positioned as ‘out’ of place. Visual representations of normative femininity marginalise those women (fat and/or old) who do not fit the norm and a pervasive discourse of underwear shops as feminine discourages men from entering the space. Through this section I also weave an examination of the contemporary notions of normative femininity that are portrayed in the *Victoria’s Secrets* DVD (CBS Broadcasting Inc., 6 December 2005). This chapter addresses my first

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<sup>12</sup> Geographers have theorised bodies as ‘in’ place and/or ‘out’ of place in a variety of social, cultural, spatial and temporal contexts. Rob Kitchen (1998) explores the marginalisation and exclusion of disabled people in ‘mainstream’ society. He argues that space, as well as time, are instrumental in (re)producing and sustaining disablist practice. ‘Spaces are currently organised to keep disabled people “in their place” and “written” to convey to disabled people that they are “out of place”’ (Kitchen, 1998 343). And, Tim Cresswell (1999) documents the exclusion and ‘othering’ of female tramps and hobos in the United States between 1869 and 1940. Focussing on issues of gender, mobility, power, exclusion and resistance, Cresswell (1999 176) argues that female tramps produced a social crisis as American people attempted to make sense of these ‘bodies-out-of-place’.

research question. It also has relevance to my second and third research question.

Bendon at The Base is a large, open space that is divided into areas based on underwear brands and price. New, expensive stock from Bendon, Fayreform and Elle Macpherson are located on three of the outer walls. The men's wear section is considerably smaller and is situated on the fourth outer wall. It is distinctly separate from women's wear and the changing rooms. The changing rooms are located behind the Fayreform wall and are hidden from the shop-floor view. There are patterns of consumption and patterns of consumers.

Female shoppers generally talk and mingle with one another at the five dollar bins, whereas female consumers in the other, more expensive areas tend to shop alone. Men, with their female partners, generally stand awkwardly in the men's area or follow closely behind their partner throughout the shop. The middle of the shop has the cheaper ranges. This is constantly full of shoppers. Female shoppers tend to buy more men's wear than men do, and men rarely try garments on (Participant Observation Notes, 17-18/06/06).

For the majority of the time it is mostly women who occupy Bendon, as shown in figure two on page 56. In the absence of men, the space enables female shoppers to move freely and negotiate their bodies and resulting spatial relations. Certain female bodies are thus 'in' place whilst many male bodies are 'out' of place. Through the presence of female consumers and a pervasive gendered discourse spaces and practices of feminine 'bonding' are (re)produced. In a similar fashion to beauty salons, underwear shops are the 'attainments of femininity ... where the secret routines of femininity are commodified and exemplified' (Black and Sharma, 2001 1). Moreover, Young's (1990b 184) suggestion that 'clothes often serve for women in this society as threads in the bonds of sisterhood' is useful for my thesis. However, limited in its conclusions, it still proves useful for understanding some of the social interactions within Bendon. For example, Young fails to recognise that the 'bonds of sisterhood' are often fraught with difference. At

times bodily, 'racial', cultural and sexual differences (amongst others), serve to create and justify processes of 'othering' and exclusion. These themes will be the focus of the latter half of this chapter.

The 'feminised' activities that female shoppers and retailers engage in within the space – talking, laughing, trying on and purchasing (or not purchasing) underwear – work to establish and confirm Bendon as a feminised space. It also continues to construct bodies within the space as either female or male. Underwear consumption spaces produce an environment where corporeality is socially, sexually and discursively constructed.

It is significant that all of the visual representations within Bendon feature women. Popular visual representations in the form of promotional billboards and advertising catalogues, not only constructs but reinforce notions of normative femininity.



Figure Two: The Space of Bendon and its Consumers  
*Source:* Author



## **Bodies that are ‘In’ place**

Many ‘rules’ of femininity are culturally transmitted through visual representations. People are no longer directly told what ‘a lady is’ or what femininity consists of. Rather, as Bordo (1989) explains, people learn the ‘rules’ through bodily discourse: through images which portray certain clothes, body shapes, movements and behaviours as appropriate. The socio-political structures in feminised underwear shops produce particular types of bodies. Bendon’s visual representations articulate this normative femininity.

The physical attributes of contemporary ideologies of femininity are present in my observations of underwear shops. The socio-political structures of underwear spaces construct and confirm particular kinds of stereotypical feminine bodies. The ‘cultural’ environment inscribes and constructs the ‘natural’ materiality of the body (Johnston, 1994 59).

### **“Tall, Skinny, with Big Boobs” – Normative Femininity**

The normative femininity articulated in Bendon privileges a specific physical appearance.

Carey-Ann: And what types of bodies do they [the lingerie models] have?

Toni: [They are] skinny with big boobs, pretty much [laugh].

Lisa: Tall, skinny with big boobs (Joint Semi-structured Interview, 10/06/06).

Lisa’s comment (see figure four, page 59) – ‘tall, skinny with big boobs’ – encapsulates contemporary Western notions of normative femininity. Bendon is constructed as, and actively constructing a, thin embodied space. The promotional booklet for the brand Bendon reinforces this form of normative femininity (see figure three, page 58).

The 'rules' of femininity produced through bodily discourse, as illustrated in figure three, also construct female bodies as submissive. Phil Hubbard (2000 193) explains that imaginings of men as reasoned, rational and modern are intimately bound with heterosexual male desires to conquer, subdue and suppress the 'natural' sexuality of women. Bendon uses subtle yet effective means to 'soften' the model's sexual power and agency. The model's passive facial expression, the submissive and suggestive way her body is positioned, the neutral tones of the underwear and architecture all moderate her feminine sexuality. Another important point to make here is that the spatial setting in figure three challenges many traditional representations of women positioned in space.

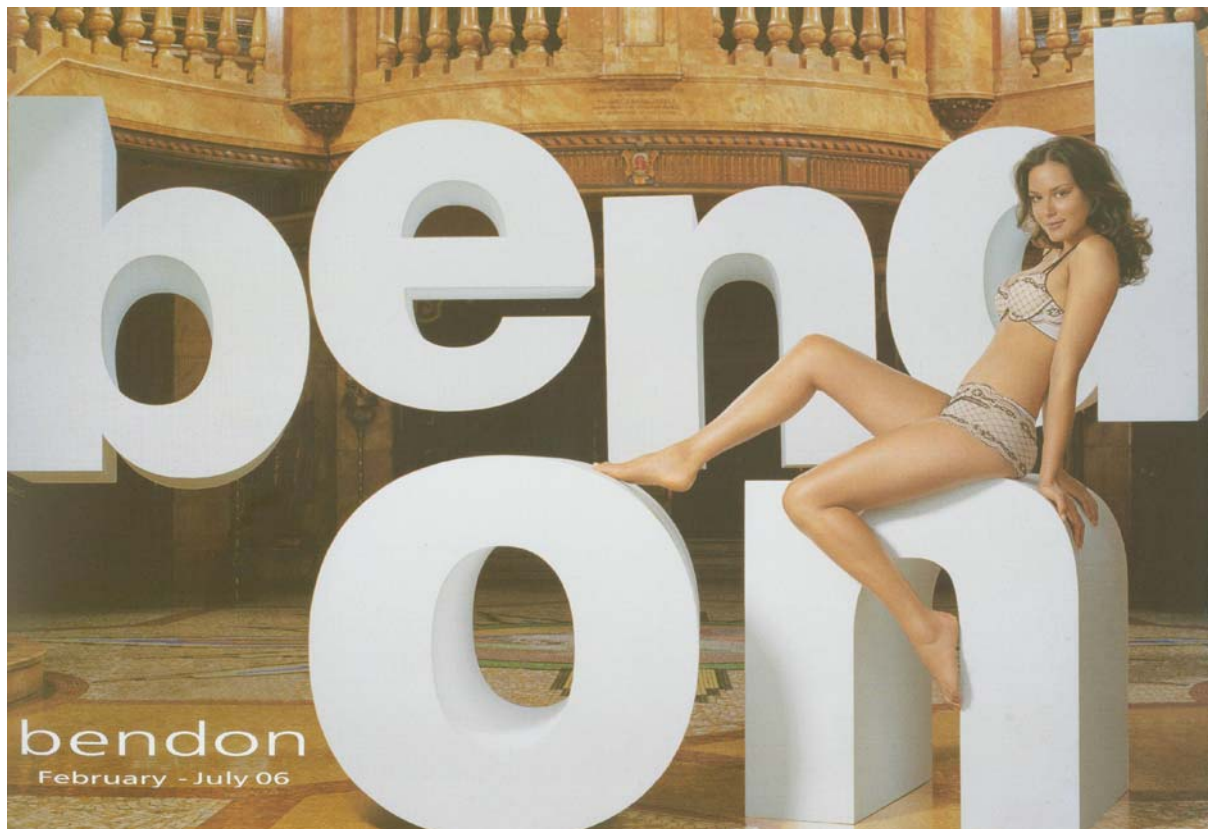


Figure Three: Bendon's Catalogue  
*Source:* Author



Figure Four: Lisa, Joint Semi-structured Interview, 10/06/06.

McDowell and Court (1994), in their study on the representations of merchant bank workers, suggest that conventional pictures of women portray them as passive and domestic; as private rather than public. The model in figure three is pictured in a public space – the entrance of a hotel. Further, McDowell and Court (1994) observe that in many pictures, women do not look straight at the camera. The observer of the image, therefore, is constructed as the voyeur, watching the women. In figure three the model is looking directly at the camera. She still retains bodily comportments associated with feminine desirability and submissiveness such as her sideways glance, but by looking directly at the camera she owns and activates the ‘male gaze’ (Kaplan, 1984).

The participants are aware of and discuss the physical similarities between the Bendon models and the *Victoria's Secret* models. As well as referring to the models' body size and shape as a constituent of normative femininity; the participants discuss the age, ethnicity, skin colour and hair of the models.

Joanne: They were all young women (//)

Liv: (//) Um, quite young.

Anna: Really, really slim.

Joanne: Yeah like 16/14 [years old].

Liv: And tall, yeah really tall.

Joanne: All different nationalities, European (/ /)

Carey-Ann: (/ /) Yeah that's what I thought was interesting. I thought there would be lots of blonde models, but they've there is actually a lot [with] brown hair (/ /)

Cassie: (/ /) And, they all had long curly hair. It made it look all flowing (Sally agrees). None of them had short [hair], it was all like (/ /)

Liv: (/ /) [The models were] all really tanned.

Elizabeth: Yeah they all had the same kind of tan, even though they probably weren't all from Brazil or South America. So I mean they're almost trying to make them look all the same – they don't want any differences. They want them all to have long hair that looks like this [indicates long hair].

Joanne: Yeah and pouty, big lips [laugh] (Focus Group Interview, 01/06/06).

I argue that the references to tanned skin in the exchange above point to a constructed association between tanned bodies and physical attractiveness. In her work on sun-tanning and New Zealand women's gendered and racialised subjectivities, Johnston (2005c 113) suggests that the female desire to be tanned reflects a particular form of 'white', 'unflawed' femininity. In this instance 'flaws' or I suggest the 'abject', is how Johnston's participants describe the cellulite on their thighs. The somewhat considered procedure of tanning acts to discipline and mediate this abject body area. Bendon constructs an image of 'unflawed' femininity by using visual representations that position tanned skin as a requirement of contemporary femininity. All of the visual representations in the Bendon shop feature models that are tanned and one of the implications of this can be seen in the following observation.

A pretty, young, white, medium sized lady tried on several bras. She brought them all out of the changing room and said 'none of them looked any good'. I replied 'how about that one, it usually looks gorgeous on?' She said 'yeah, maybe with a tan!' (Participant Observation Notes, 17-18/06/06).

In each interview, the participants discuss the billboards and advertising catalogues in Bras N Things (see figure five, page 61). In addition to highlighting similarities between the participants' consumption patterns, it gives an indication of the profound impact the billboards and catalogues have in producing particular types of spaces (material, discursive and embodied). All of the participants were affected, to a greater or lesser extent, by the images.



Figure Five: Bras N Things' Promotional Material  
*Source:* Author

The models featured in Bras N Things' visual representations embody the physical characteristics – tall, thin, large breasts, and tanned – associated with contemporary Western notions of normative femininity.

Joanne: Yeah the big posters. The girls are really hot  
[laughs].

Sally: Yeah, the girls are really hot.

Elizabeth: And it's [Bras N Things] really colourful. It's all  
lacy and stuff.

Carey-Ann: Yeah and it's also got all those sex toys type of  
things, like the edible chocolate (Sally agrees).

Anna: It's a full on shop for it all.

Joanne: Where's that?

Group: Bras N Things.

Joanne: Yeah, cause my boyfriend took me there for  
Valentines Day. We got this catalogue of this *real  
pretty girl* – she's got really big boobs.

Carey-Ann: I know the catalogue you're talking about.

Joanne: And, her waist is this big [indicates small waist size].

Carey-Ann: Yeah she's on the posters and stuff aye?

Joanne: My boyfriend was like 'let's go there, let's go there!'  
and he brought me the same outfit that she was  
wearing [laugh] and I was like [sarcastically] 'oh  
cool' [laugh] (Focus Group Interview, 01/06/06).

There are several points to be made from this exchange. First, it is interesting to note Joanne's reference to the catalogue with a 'real pretty girl' who has 'got really big boobs' and a small waist. Again, this reinforces that type of embodied space underwear shops are constructing. Bras N Things is hence a thin embodied space. Second, although Joanne fits many contemporary requirements of heteronormative femininity (she is tall, thin and tanned); her

sarcastic response – ‘oh cool’ – suggests that she still feels marginalised by the representations within the space.

Bendon employees’ bodies and identities are also socially, sexually and discursively inscribed by the space they work in. Bendon employees are thus constructed as ‘in’ place. In the following section I will discuss the gendered bodily workplace performances of Bendon employees and how their corporeal specificities affect and are affected by the space.

### ***Gendered Bodily Workplace Performances***

Workplaces are ‘institutions which attempt to shape the bodies and identities of those who work in them, and which develop specific gendered and sexualised cultures’ (Valentine, 2001 150). Bendon employees’ embodied performance involves personifying a certain image specific to the space based on physical appearance, behaviour, knowledge of stock and body size. In this section I draw on the work of Butler (1990; 1993), Leslie (2002), Leidner (1991; 1993) McDowell and Court (1994), and Tyler and Abbott (1998) to challenge and destabilise the apparent fixity or ontological status of the feminine body and gendered space. I also draw extensively from semi-structured interviews conducted with Bendon employees as well as from personal experience as an employee of Bendon.

Butler (1990; 1993) challenges fundamental understandings of gender and her theories are therefore useful in understanding the aspects of performative corporeality within Bendon. She questions feminist approaches that distinguish between sex and gender, when she argues that a binary understanding of the two fails to recognise how discourses of gender produce sexed bodies. As a result, she advocates theorising gender and sexuality (any identity) as performative. Butler (1990 33) argues that gender is:

the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.

Similarly, some geographers (Bell, et al., 1994; McDowell and Court, 1994; Rose, 1997; Valentine, 1996) argue that space is also performative. They suggest that it too has no ontological status, that is has no fixed or natural characteristics. Longhurst (2005b 93) explains that understanding space as performative does not ignore the physical reality of space. Rather, it realises space is not a backdrop for social relations. For example, someone in a wheelchair is likely to encounter 'real' material challenges in attempting to negotiate certain spaces. 'Both bodies and spaces are simultaneously real, material, imaginary and symbolic'. Understanding underwear consumption spaces as embodied and performative destabilises the apparent fixity of bodies and space as gendered.

Bendon employees have a particular type of femininity written on to their bodies. This articulation is temporally and spatially specific. Part of feminine performativity involves looking a certain way. Retail employees are hired for a particular 'look' or embodiment (Leslie, 2002). Bendon, for example, requires all staff to wear a uniform.

Carey-Ann: What are management's expectations of your appearance? It can be physical appearance, as well as, obviously we have to wear a uniform.

Toni: Tidy and presentable.

Lisa: Yeah, just to be tidy (Joint Semi-structured Interview, 10/06/06).

Repeated performances of expected appearances establish regulatory practices for women and their bodies (Butler, 1990; 1993). The regulatory practices governing Bendon employees are established and maintained through a uniform. Leslie (2002) explains that often retail workers' uniforms are desexualised and professionalised.



Carey-Ann: I remember when I first started at Bendon, and Lily [manager] used to say 'No cleavage! No midriff!' It's kind of odd when we're there to sell, not sell cleavage, but ...

Rachael: Being comfortable with it (Semi-structured Interview, 30/05/06).

Staff members are required to wear a blue shirt, black pants or knee-length skirt and black shoes. The shirts are loose fitting and are 'unflattering' (Rachael, Semi-structured Interview, 30/05/06). On numerous occasions I have discussed with the manager of Bendon the reasons for 'desexualising' the uniform. In line with Valentine's (2001) discussion on the reasons why workplaces strive to control employees' identities Bendon desexualises its uniform in order to make the employees more approachable and less likely to alienate the consumer. The result is the creation of a positive relationship with clients which produces a successful transaction. This management strategy suggests that physical signifiers commonly associated with feminine sexuality (cleavage and midriff) are, ironically, inappropriate for the space. Paradoxically, representations explicitly depicting these signifiers are acceptable. In this context, the (real) fleshy, feminine body is 'out' of place in Bendon.

Store policies also dictate other aspects of Bendon employees' physical appearance. Valentine (2001) contends that within contemporary Western economies aesthetic and emotional components of labour are increasingly more important than technological capabilities. Furthermore, 'workers' identities are not incidental to the work but are an integral part of it' (Leidner, 1991 155-156).

Carey-Ann: What about your physical appearance?

Rachael: I've like, been straightening my hair more for work and wearing it down. I've also been wearing more make-up. Now I actually make the extra effort to do my hair and wear make-up and stuff (Semi-structured Interview, 30/05/06).

Bendon encourages Rachael to practice self-surveillance in order to embody the physical 'norms' and standards of productivity and success (McDowell, 1995). This is not surprising given that an integral part of many organisations' employment strategies is to gain control over workers' corporeal capacities in order to develop certain aspects of their identity (Valentine, 2001). Bendon gains control over Rachael's corporeal identity. In doing so, Rachael internalises these disciplinary measures, and continues to (re)construct spatialised discourses of femininity.

Rachael's preoccupation with her physical appearance – to utilise Foucault's (1980) concept – renders her docile. She accepts and complies with the gendered bodily performance that requires her to manage her appearance in a certain way. This both (re)produces and (re)constructs spatialised cultural discourses of femininity, beauty and the female body (Bordo, 1989). By choosing to 'make the extra effort', Rachael highlights the intersecting discourses that produce specific gendered subjectivities, whilst articulating individual agency and power. It is also interesting to note what Rachael constitutes as making 'the extra effort' – wearing make-up, straightening her hair and wearing it down. By encouraging Rachael to engage in these processes of normalisation, the space of Bendon continues to write a specific gendered bodily workplace performance onto her body.

Retail employees are trained how to position their bodies in space (Leslie, 2002). They are not allowed to sit, slouch or lean on counters. The disciplinary practices within Bendon produce a body in gesture, comportment and posture that is feminine (Bordo, 1989; Bartky, 1988) but also 'wrok-like'. They are 'in' place as both feminine and employees. In the following dialogue Lisa highlights a correlation between being 'approachable' and bodily (dis)position.

Carey-Ann: What about how you position yourself in the shop?

Lisa: Well just like you're approachable and looking busy.

Carey-Ann: Yeah, looking busy [laugh] (Joint Semi-structured Interview, 10/06/06).

Lisa does not explicitly discuss the required feminine posture, gesture and comportment of her body. However, 'looking busy' denotes the control Bendon has over her bodily movement. She has to retain a bodily comportment that is active, even if she is not engaged in 'work'. As a Bendon employee I am not allowed to sit, slouch or lean on counters; I have to be positioned amongst the customers in the active performance of selling. Again, Young's (1990b) argument that women's space is not a field in which her intentionality can be freely expressed is useful in examining the structuring of feminised underwear shops. Bendon employees have internalised a masculine gaze that confines them within the space. In this way, the productive feminised space produces negative results as Bendon employees are required to manage their bodies in a certain way. Furthermore, it becomes repressive in the sense that Bendon employees' bodies are often used as a sizing guide by customers. They become embodied objects to be looked at (Young, 1990).

Leslie (2002 69) suggests that many retail employees feel like 'walking advertisements for the store'. Although Bendon employees do not explicitly model the product for sale, their embodied spatiality is often used as a guide by consumers to measure and compare against.<sup>13</sup>

Carey-Ann: So and do you think that the shoppers watch you and evaluate your body?

Lisa: Well some of them do. Especially guys when they come in [Toni laughs] and they're clueless of – it hasn't happened in ages – but when they're clueless of their girlfriends size and they're like 'oh bit bigger than you' (Toni agrees) or 'bit smaller than you'.

Toni: And they kind of look at your bum and they'll be like, 'yep that size knickers'. It's like 'oh God!!

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<sup>13</sup> Although, as part of a DressSmart store promotion, Bendon was required to be involved in a fashion parade. Lisa and I modeled garments from Bendon in the fashion parade and in this instance our bodies played an explicit role in selling the product.

Carey-Ann: I remember last year, Ruth was helping a man and she was asking him what size she [his girlfriend] was and she said 'come over here Carey he needs to see what size you are' [group laughs].

Toni: It's horrible aye because they're really *looking*.

Lisa: They are aye and you can't really say 'don't do that!' (Joint Semi-structured Interview, 10/06/06).

This is another example of the power of the objectifying masculine gaze. Despite working in a 'desexualised' and 'professionalised' embodied space, Bendon employees may still be subjected to processes of objectification. The spatiality of employees' bodies can still act to confine them even in a space designed with the latent intent of providing an unobtrusive space for women.

Elizabeth highlights similarities between using the spatiality of Bendon employees' bodies and the bodies of models featured in brochures as a method of size comparison.

Elizabeth: 'Cause when my guy went to buy my bra, the lady gave him the catalogue and he just had to point to what he thought looked the same [Joanne laughs]. He was like 'that one looks the same' and so the lady gave the same size 'cause she was like 'the lady in that one is a size such and such' [group laugh] (Focus Group Interview, 01/06/06).

Leslie (2002) draws attention to the similarities between retail assistants and models in the sense that they both construct norms of femininity using their bodies. Bendon employees construct feminine norms specific to the space. Clothes that are simply displayed on hangers are lifeless and disembodied. Consequently, I suggest that the fleshy, materiality of employees' bodies provide consumers with a seemingly more substantial or 'real' form of measurement than simply looking at the size of underwear as it is displayed on hangers.

Some of the Bendon employees subvert the repressive masculine gaze by reversing the process.

Carey-Ann: What about girls, 'cause you know how girls can be critical?

Lisa: Well some of them, if they don't know their brief size – if they're a small or medium – and they say 'well what are you, what size do you wear in this?'

Toni: Sometimes though, I find it easier if the person is gonna try on something that is too small and they're being a bit in denial and I say 'well I wear the medium' (Lisa agrees) to imply that 'well that's not gonna fit you!' (Carey-Ann agrees).

Carey-Ann: It's funny how you learn little things to get around [awkward situations] (Toni agrees).

Lisa: Yeah you're like 'well I've got those and I wear a medium' and they're like 'oh well I'll get a large in them' [laugh] (Joint Semi-structured Interview, 10/06/06).

Using the spatiality of their bodies to assist in sales demonstrate the employees' involvement in continuing processes of female objectification. This sales method highlights the tension between theorising female objectification and the feminised, productive space of Bendon. Employees are not passive victims in this process, although, as I have argued above, the spaces of underwear stores produce both positive and negative effects. This exchange also shows the impact that the space of Bendon has in shaping the corporeal identities of the employees. Although they all vary in body shape and appearance, the majority of my colleagues are relatively thin women.

At this time I think it is important to point out an interesting contradiction in the expected bodily performances of Bendon employees. On the one hand, my colleagues and I are expected to wear a uniform and act in a professional manner; on the other hand, we are expected to manage our bodies to fit particular feminine bodily norms. Further, it is interesting that Bendon

employees are required to engage in explicit discussion about the intimacies of people's corporealities. (expand here)

The gendered bodily performance of Bendon employees also requires extensive knowledge of stock. This includes being aware of bodily differences and the diverse requirements of consumers.

Carey-Ann: In comparison to other shops, I think that we – as employees of Bendon – generally have to do a lot more work than other retail assistants (Rachael agrees). You know because fitting someone is such a personal thing...

Rachael: Yeah, like at our store we are expected to deal with all types of customers, well, like from breast-age up. We have to deal with people that are 24Gs [large bra size] and people that are 10As [small bra size] and we have to know how to fit everyone in between; and what we should be sensitive about; and what we should look for; and what they want; and we have to recognise their needs and go find something that is going to work for them. There are *so* many different bras that could work for so many different people.

Carey-Ann: We need to know the stock really well.

Rachael: Yeah and you have to know that different people like different things; and different [breast] sizes need different products for support; and um, you need to know the little things about the bra that makes it more supportive, like the wider shoulder straps or wider back or the extra side-slings in the side of the cup. You have to be able to tell them so that they know that you know what you're talking about and what they're buying is actually worth it (Semi-structured Interview, 30/05/06).

Acquiring the knowledge needed to successfully fit and ultimately sell underwear is time consuming. Bendon employees are expected to update their knowledge on current stock by constantly reviewing in-store garments and attending workshops outside usual work hours. Part of successfully fitting a garment is being able to impart this knowledge to customers.

Bendon employees have to be vigilant about communicating product information to shoppers as Bendon management continually monitor employees' sales routines (including appearance, dress code and attitude.)

Through employee dress codes, appraisals and performance reviews, workers are encouraged or forced to be self reflexive (Lash and Urry, 1994).

Techniques of control manage the workplace performances of Bendon employees. Bendon is located in a mall and out of necessity, is spatially compact. This allows for direct surveillance and gazing by management in order to regulate employees' identities. Moreover, Bendon uses a secondary means of surveillance – 'secret shoppers' – to pervasively encourage self monitoring and discipline.

Secret shoppers are hired by retail stores to pose as customers and to evaluate the work performance of employees. Secret shoppers enter Bendon approximately once a month and then deliver a report on their 'findings'. I suggest that secret shopping is similar to forms of surveillance inherent in the architecture of Bentham's panopticon. The possibility of being surveyed encourages employees to practice self-surveillance (Foucault, 1976). For example, the possibility of having my performance evaluated by a secret shopper motivated me to practice self-surveillance.

A couple of weeks ago Bendon received its secret shopper report for May. The report is divided into a series of sections with specific criteria for each. Although we didn't get 100 percent for overall performance, I received 100 percent for my changing room etiquette. I was rewarded with a 20 dollar gift voucher and will definitely continue to be nice to *every* customer (Autobiographical Journal Entry, 26/06/06 original emphasis).

The above entry highlights one way in which Bendon shapes employees' identities. Bendon uses both positive and negative reinforcement to discipline workers in order to produce a corporeal identity specific to that space. Negative disciplinary consequences are the main motivators for Bendon employees to practice self monitoring. The effect of receiving a 'poor'

secret shopper report is the public shame of failing to meet Bendon's standards and of 'letting down the team'. All staff read the reports; and names, standard of appearance and attitude are explicitly recorded and discussed by staff. Disciplinary meetings are sometimes held to discuss poor results and the embarrassment this causes encourages staff to practice further self-surveillance and discipline.

The productive power governing Bendon also produces negative effects. Women who do not fit the norms constructed by the space (through the underwear and the visual representations) or women constructed as socially abject groups (Kent, 2001) – 'fat' and/or old women – are defined as 'Other' and are hence implicitly marginalised and excluded within the idealised feminised space. Men are also marginalised within the space. In the next section I discuss those bodies who are positioned as 'out' of place in feminised underwear shops.

### **Bodies that are 'Out' of Place**

The following observation I recorded in my autobiographical journal demonstrates how the forms of femininity produced by the underwear and the space of Bendon can exclude those female bodies that do not fit the norm.

A teenage girl enters the shop. She is wearing a tight top and short skirt. She is extremely large (both in weight and height); I guess she would be about a size 18-20. She seems very self-conscious. She finds a few Hey Sister bras to try on – small fitting, padded, pretty, colourful and 'young'. Hey Sister bras are not designed to fit and support someone of her breast size. She ends up buying one, but does not ask for any help. She is with another young girl who is a lot smaller than her. They are shopping almost separately and do not help each other. I feel sorry for her. Despite being large, she still wants to wear the same kinds of clothes – Hey Sister bras – as other, smaller girls her age (Participant observations Notes, 08/04/06 – 09/04/06).



Although the girl is not explicitly excluded from the space, she is ‘Othered’ in several ways. Firstly, she is likely to feel marginalised by the feminine norms produced by the underwear. This relates directly to my second research question: what forms of femininity are produced by underwear? Because the brand Hey Sister is aimed at teenage girls, theoretically at least, she is part of the targeted audience. Despite this, the brand excludes her by conforming to, and producing products that conform to, a current social notion that positions the female body as small and thin. Secondly, she is not represented in the visual images in Bendon. All of the models featured appear to be within the age bracket of 20-30 years. Thirdly, the mere fact that I identified her as ‘out’ of place demonstrates that my (critical?) gazing contributes to the construction of normative femininity produced in and by Bendon.

### **‘Fat’ and/or Old Women – Abject Materiality**

As discussed earlier, promotional billboards (see figure six, page 74) featuring normative feminine icons dominate the walls of Bendon. Again, the model embodies the particular form of normative femininity that Bendon constructs – tall, thin but curvaceous, young and tanned body. She also occupies a seemingly public space. Her gaze is directed at the camera – to own ‘masculine gaze’ – whilst tilting her head downwards in order to retain passive and submissive characteristics associated with normative femininity. Interestingly, however, the model featured in the billboard does not fit the material embodiment usually associated with the brand she is promoting: Fayreform. Fayreform bras are designed for large women with large breasts.

Toni: Half of the people who wear Fayreform never really look like the Fayreform model.

Lisa: No. Most of the people, if they’re bigger in the cup [breast] than they are bigger around here [body size].

Carey-Ann: She’d [Fayreform model] be like a 10E or a 10F aye? (Lisa agrees) (Joint Semi-structured Interview, 10/06/06).

The Fayreform model is a controlled form of feminine sexuality. Compared to the ‘out-of-control’ and abject materiality of the bodies usually associated with Fayreform – fat and/or old women – the model expresses ‘sexuality, but a controlled, managed sexuality that is not about to erupt in unwanted and embarrassing’ displays (Bordo, 1990 95). Lisa’s response to my queries about the Fayreform images displayed in Bendon highlights some of the implications of articulating and producing a particular form of normative femininity based on body size and shape: ‘who wants to see a *fat* person on a big poster? (Joint Semi-structured Interview, 10/06/06). Bendon, as with Bras N Things is therefore (re)constructing a thin embodied space.

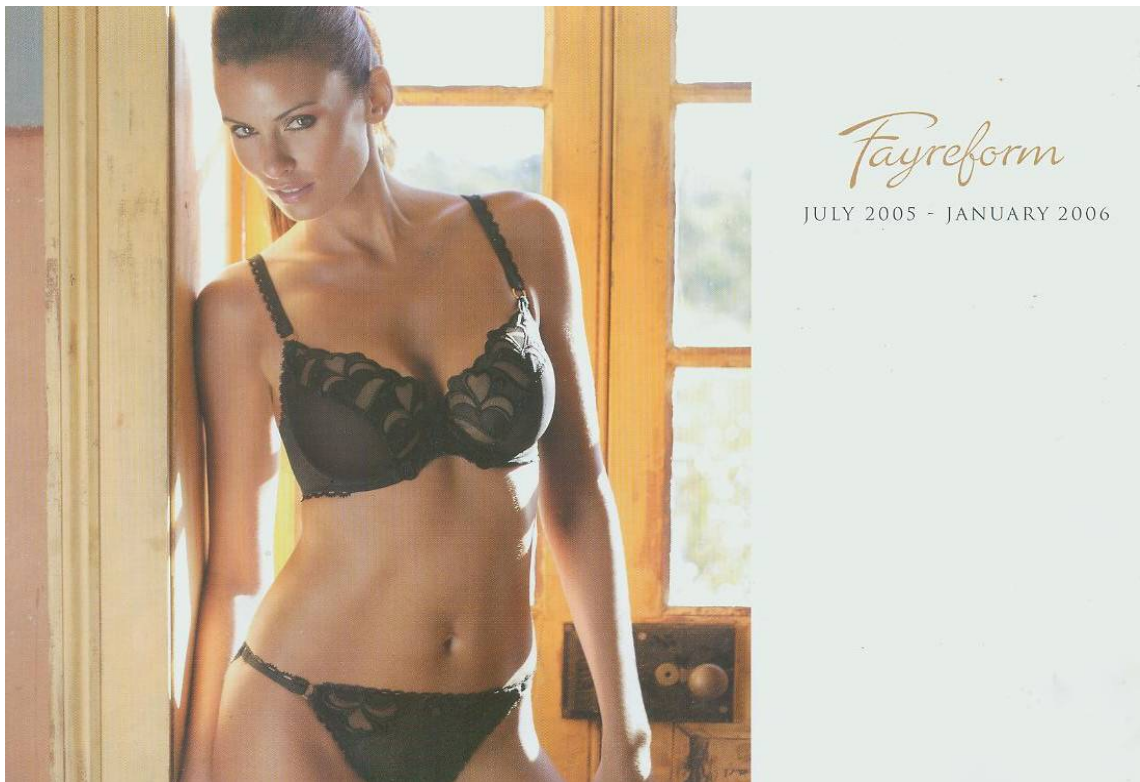


Figure Six: Fayreform’s Billboard  
*Source:* Author

Longhurst (2005c 5) explains that fat bodies tend to be constructed as ‘abject, excessive, unhealthy and diseased’. Fat bodies, especially fat female bodies, are a socially abject group (Kent, 2001). The clothing that is available to fat women is equally regarded as abject. Colls (2002 591) explains that ‘women

of size' understand the clothing designed for them as unfashionable and designed to cover up the space of the body rather than reveal its material form. Fayreform bras are designed to do exactly that; they are made with the intent of 'containing those [fat] bodies that threaten to break out' (Adam, 2001 50-51). Fayreform bras provide 'optimum everyday support, control and comfort for the *fullest* of busts' (Fayreform July 2005-January 2006 catalogue, 1 my emphasis). Additionally, reflecting an association between old and abject, which I will discuss further in the following chapter, Fayreform is constructed as 'a nana brand' (Rachael, Semi-structured Interview, 30/05/06).

Bendon is an environment where the employees are instructed on what types of underwear are suitable for abject bodies. The abject body is required to wear underwear that mirrors its abject embodiment and there are distinct boundaries that guide this association. Rachael, a Bendon employee, outlines the types of underwear she has 'learned' to associate different customers with.

Carey-Ann: So when she [customer] does ask the question: 'what types of girls buy these?' How do you handle that situation?

Rachael: Well if they're Hey Sister [the brand], we'd be like young girls, or like Bendon, like 129 [Fayreform style bra], you know those one?

Carey-Ann: Yeah.

Rachael: They're like horrible material – they look and feel yuck, and we'd say nanas, [laugh] oh we wouldn't say nana, but we'd be like older women (Carey-Ann agrees) (Semi-structured Interview, 30/05/06).

Rachael draws on the embodied sensations of seeing and touching to construct a certain brand of underwear as abject. In the past geographers have tended to privilege the visual thereby ignoring the other sensual dimensions of people's geographies (Johnston, 1994). I, however, argue that Rachael's reference to the feel of the garment provides a useful way of questioning Rachael's parallel understanding of elderly women's bodies as

looking and *feeling* ‘yuck’ – wrinkly, saggy and soft and underwear that looks and *feels* ‘yuck’.

Participant observations also point to the constructed association between ‘nana-knickers’ and abject bodies. Whilst working in and around the changing rooms, I overheard two middle-aged women joking about G-strings. They commented: ‘you have to be really young and skinny to wear G-strings’ (Participant Observation Notes, 13/06/06).

To reflect on the (negative) affects of being exposed to popular images of the ideal feminine body within underwear consumption spaces and within a wider societal context, I return to the focus group discussion on the *Victoria’s Secret* models. Although it does not relate specifically to Bendon, the participants acknowledge similar physical attributes between the models displayed in underwear shops and those on the *Victoria’s Secret* DVD (CBS Broadcasting Inc., 6 December 2005).

After watching *Victoria’s Secret* and (critically) comparing herself to the models, Cassie expresses ill-feelings towards her body. The binary relationship between models and ‘ordinary’ women constructs thin contained and disciplined bodies in opposition to fat, fluid and out-of-control bodies. It is hence that the disciplined bodies objectify Cassie’s out-of-control subjectivity.

Cassie: I hate it! [Group laugh] Because I know that I’ll *never* be like that, so you know they [the models in the DVD] don’t give me something to personally aspire to, it just reminds me of what I’m not [Group laugh] (Focus Group Interview, 01/06/06).

It is useful to understand Cassie’s response in relation to Sandra Bartky’s (1982) research on the ‘fashion-beauty complex’. Bartky discusses the negative feelings that women may experience when gazing on female models in magazines. She emphasises the point that women often internalise an objectifying gaze that deprecates and evaluates their bodies: ‘All of the

projections of the fashion-beauty complex have this in common: they are images of *what I am not*' (Bartky, 1982 136 emphasis in original). Anna (see figure seven, page 77) expresses similar reactions after watching *Victoria's Secret*:

Anna: Well they're [the models] probably like one percent, not even, one percent of the population, but there's so many of them together and it's sort of like 'well I don't look like any of them!' [Group laughs] (Focus Group Interview, 01/06/06).

Banim et al (2001 5) explain that models, although portrayed as the embodiments of fashion, actually exist outside the real experience of clothing. Furthermore, Anna and Cassie's comments imply that the models also exist outside the bounds of what they consider to be an attainable form of normative femininity. It is this disparity between the 'slender ideal of models and the fleshy attributes of ordinary women which contribute to a lived tension of disembodiment' in the inability to fulfil the ideal (Craik, 1994 67).

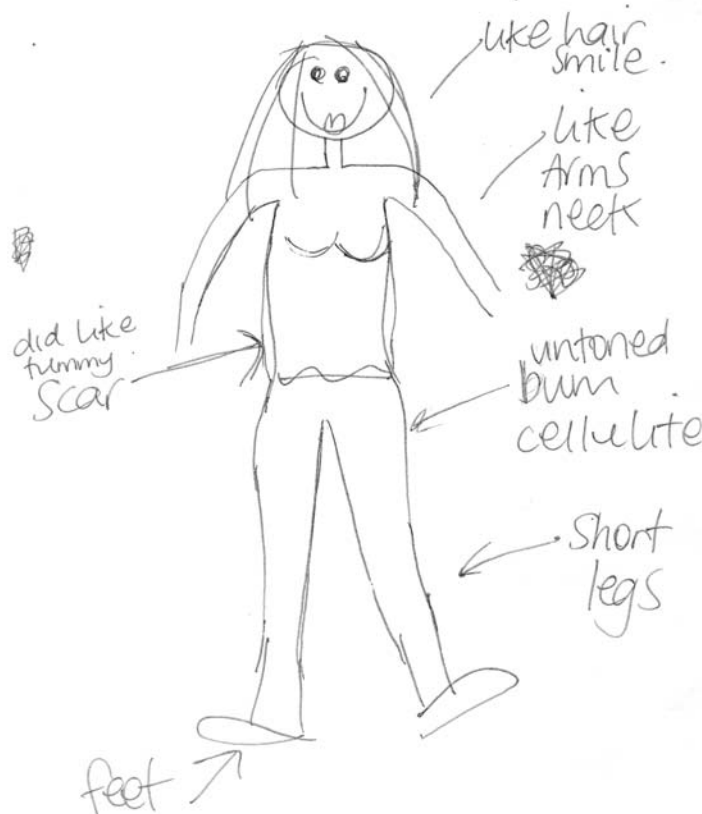


Figure Seven: Anna, Focus Group 01/06/06.

Another example of the effects of the objectifying gaze can be seen in Tracey's refusal to shop at Bras N Things. As I have demonstrated underwear shops are usually occupied by women; however, I have found that the masculine gaze is always present in the absence of men. Tracey internalises norms that requires the feminine body to be small, young and thin, and in doing so, she continues to evaluate her body (and the bodies of others) with an objectifying, masculine gaze. As outlined previously on pages 19-20, Young (1990b) theorises the spatiality of embodiment. She links an awareness of embodiment to women's sense of space not being their own. Furthermore, she suggests that the threat of being seen and evaluated is one of the most objectifying processes to which the body is submitted. It is the threat of being seen and evaluated by men that discourages Tracey from shopping in Bras N Things.

Carey-Ann: So what about Bras N Things?

Tracey: Oh yeah I have been in there. But I like Farmers because you go in and no-one can see you in there, but if you go into Bras N Things people can see you from the mall [laugh].

Carey-Ann: Oh I didn't even think of that. And, Bras N Things have got really small changing rooms that are kind of in the shop. So you don't feel comfortable with people seeing you in underwear shops?

Tracey: Nah, I don't like men seeing me buying my underwear [laugh].

Carey-Ann: Why is that?

Tracey: I don't know [laugh], I have no idea, it's just private [laugh] (Carey-Ann agrees) (Semi-structured Interview, 09/06/06).

Read in light of Young's (1990b) 'oppressive spaces' theory, Tracey's comments suggests that the location of the shop, whether situated in a mall or

positioned as a stand alone shop, and the position of the changing rooms in relation to the rest of the mall, determines the degree to which she experiences her body and the feminised space she inhabits as her own. Tracey constructs a mall as public and a stand alone shop as private. In line with Tracey's dualistic thinking, (first name) Crawford (1992 22) draws attention to the 'nascent conflict between private and public space' when investigating malls. Boundaries of public and private that guide the design of consumption spaces blur. When shopping in Bras N Things, which is located in a mall and has changing rooms that are visible from the shop-floor and the mall, Tracey is aware of the potential gaze of others. In this context it is interesting to compare the spatial organisation of Bras N Things to Bendon. Although both shops are situated within a mall, Bendon's changing rooms are hidden from direct view. This helps to reclaim the space as productive and positive because it enables women to move freely within the space without the direct gaze of men. With this in mind, Tracey finds the productive power within Bras N Things repressive as she becomes alert to the possibility that she is being gazed upon as an embodied object (Young, 1990b).

For men, experiencing the space of underwear shops is largely a matter of negotiating a space that traditionally is not theirs. This is a counter discourse to women's exclusion from public space (Wrigley and Lowe, 2002).

### ***Male Bodies***

Daniel Miller, Peter Jackson, Nigel Thrift, Beverly Holbrook and Michael Rowland (1998) trace women's constructed association to, and men's constructed exclusion from, shopping spaces (particularly department stores) back to the nineteenth century. In the nineteenth century men were rarely found in shops.

There is evidence which indicates how women continued to exclude men from the feminine terrain of the department store. The women workers in Marshall Field's [American Department Store] were noted for their scornful giggling of

men who accompanied their wives in the stores. These 'Molly Husbands' suffered both from the ridicule of breaking late nineteenth century gender stereotypes and the subtle-tactics of both women customers and workers defending their 'space' ... (Lancaster, 1995 182).

Although William Lancaster (1995) highlights the historical significance and influence of past discourses on contemporary understandings of the mutually constitutive relationship between bodies and space, I suggest that he fails to recognise one of the fundamental purposes of department stores.

Department stores (especially those containing public toilets for women) were created with the purpose of encouraging women to enter the public domain (Cooper, et al., 2000). Hence, I argue that it was/is not women who exclude men from the space; rather it is the construction of consumption spaces as feminine that deems men to be 'out' of place.

Interestingly, when men do enter Bendon, it is usually for a limited period. This highlights men's further attempts at transcending their gendered and sexualised embodiment in order to regain some 'control' of their body and resulting spatial relations. 'Masculinist rationality is a form of knowledge which assumes a knower who believes he can separate himself from his body, emotions, values, past experiences and so on' (Rose, 1993 7). By choosing to leave the shop, men choose to leave behind their gendered and sexualised embodiments. This raises some interesting questions about the socio-political structures which produce male bodies in feminised underwear shops. Further it raises questions about their bodies and identities beyond the shop, which belong to future research. Does the implicit gendered politics in underwear shops, in which the female side of the binary is privileged, position men as inferior or do men actively choose to occupy a discursively inferior space in order to exist within the bounds of heteronormative masculine subjectivities?

Lisa: Oh sometimes guys, guys with their girlfriends.

Toni: They [boyfriends] tag along and follow (//)



Lisa: (//) Yeah but they just disappear after a while cause they get a bit embarrassed (//)

Toni: (//) And stand outside. But they are very *uninterested* for something that they are very interested in [laugh] (Carey-Ann agrees) [Laugh] (Joint Semi-structured Interview, 10/06/06, original emphasis).

The *Penguin English Dictionary* (Allen, 2002 910) defines tag along as 'to go with somebody, keeping close to them', however this definition does not readily convey the negative social underpinnings attached to this phrase. On typing 'tag along' into the Google search engine I was provided with: 'someone who persistently and annoyingly follows along (Farlex, 2006). In this sense, the body position of men – behind their female partners – denotes a hierarchal spatialisation of bodies. Men that 'tag-along' occupy a discursively inferior space to their female partners whilst in Bendon. Tracey highlights another way in which men are constructed as 'out' of place in other underwear shops.

Tracey: I hate it when I'm in Farmers and there is a girl with her boyfriend like dragging him around, it makes me really uncomfortable [laugh] (Semi-structured Interview, 09/06/06).

Similar to 'tag alongs', men that are 'dragged' around by their girlfriends are either doing so because they do not want to be there; they feel 'out' of place, or because they do not want to be read as transgressing acceptable forms of heteronormative masculine behaviour. Men that do enter underwear shops destabilise understandings of masculine bodies as incorporeal and distant, as they too, are forced to become aware of their gendered and sexualised embodiments.

## **Conclusions**

In this chapter, I have shown how bodies are constituted in and through underwear consumption spaces. The gendered spaces of underwear shops are an integral aspect in the construction of embodied (sexed, gendered)

subjectivities in specific ways. Discursive power operating within feminised underwear shops positions bodies as either ‘in’ place or ‘out’ of place. Such power is overwhelmingly productive. Yet it produces both positive *and* negative effects.

Underwear shops privilege a feminised, young and thin embodiment. Bodies that fit this description are therefore positioned as ‘in’ place. This includes Bendon employees. Bendon employees have a particular type of workplace identity written onto their bodies. However, bodies that do not fit this description – fat and/or old women and men – are constructed as ‘out’ of place. Visual representations featuring icons of normative femininity implicitly marginalise fat and/or old women. This is because fat and/or women are a socially abject group (Kent, 2001). The underwear designed for them – Fayreform – is equally regarded as abject. Men are also understood as being ‘out’ of place in feminine space. However, I argue that this is a positive discursive exclusion, because it challenges the mind/body dualism that positions men as being able to transcend their embodiments. In feminised underwear shops men are forced to become aware of their gendered and sexualised embodiments.

In this chapter I have discussed observations made by myself and by the participants. Such observations problematise current understandings of gendered space and bodies as natural or fixed, and offer new ways to reconceptualise space and bodies.

Women who shop and work in underwear shops could be viewed as being produced through the disciplines of contemporary femininity. By using Foucauldian concepts of the panopticon; and theories on the oppressive nature of space, I do not intend to exclude or reduce the wide variety of female embodied experiences of underwear. As such, in the next chapter I consider the experiences of a select group of women who confirm, confuse

and contradict the relationships between power and bodies as they fashion their flesh through underwear.

**•• CHAPTER FIVE ••**  
**Fashioning the Flesh**

**Introduction**

In ‘Fashioning the Flesh’ I provide an examination of the multiple ways in which underwear influences the politics of embodiment. Specifically, I explore the ways in which the young Pākehā women I interviewed use underwear to shape the materiality of their body and in turn construct a variety of complex and at times contradictory feminised subjectivities. The feminised subjectivities they perform are spatially and temporally specific. This chapter addresses my second research question: what forms of femininity are produced by women’s underwear?

In order to understand why the participants use underwear to discipline their bodies, I firstly examine the discursive construction that women are ‘out-of-control’. The participants use language that constructs their bodies, and areas of their bodies, as ‘out-of-control’. I draw on literature that considers the politics of fluidity in relation to the articulation of feminine subjectivities (Colls, 2006; Longhurst, 2001). Secondly, I use Kristeva’s (1982) notion of abjection to examine how the participants perceive particular areas of their own, and other, (un)clothed bodies. Thirdly, I move to consider the material relationship between underwear and the body. Drawing on Foucault (1976) and feminist readings of Foucault’s work (Bartky, 1988; Bordo, 1989; 1993a), I examine the disciplinary measures the participants engage in, in order to manage and contain their out-of-control bodies. The ways in which the participants use underwear to produce a certain ‘type’ of body contributes to their construction of heteronormative femininity. Moreover, I examine the emotive role of underwear and how underwear can influence how they feel about their (un)clothed bodies. Finally, drawing briefly on the work of Entwistle (2000a; 2000b) and Young (1990b), I challenge the idea that underwear contains the body by suggesting that underwear can create and/or code the body as out-of-control.

In Western societies women's corporeality is symbolically represented as wild and uncontrollable; 'inscribed as a mode of seepage' (Grosz, 1994 203). Traditionally, 'natural' characteristics of the feminine body, such as menstruation and child birth have been read as a sign of women's 'inherent' lack of control over their bodies. Biologically essentialist understandings of the body position women in opposition to men and the distinction is well defined: women's bodies are deemed to be uncontrollable because they are 'fluid' and they 'leak', whilst men's bodies are 'solid' and 'self-contained' (Valentine, 2001). Grosz (1994 203) questions whether in the West, the female body has been constructed not only 'as lack or absence but with more complexity, as a leaking, uncontrollable, seeping liquid; as formless flow; as viscosity, entrapping, secreting; as lacking not so much or simply the phallus but self-containment'. These discourses continue to construct women as 'irrational, as polluters, as sacred but as inferior because they menstruate and because of their ability to bear children' (McDowell, 1999 44).

It is useful to understand why women are classified in this way by drawing on the work of McDowell (1993). In a review of feminist geography McDowell (1990) refers to Adrienne Rich (1986) who suggests that being a woman challenges conventional ideas of boundaries, especially the assumed boundary between the body and the object world, between the self and the other. McDowell (1993 306) explains that:

[w]omen's experience of, for example, menstruation, childbirth and lactation, all represents challenges to bodily boundaries. The feminine construction of the self is an existence centred with complex relational nexus, compared to the masculine construction of the self as separate, distinct and unconnected.

McDowell's (1993) comment about women's and men's bodily boundaries can be understood in terms of the politics of fluidity/solidity and irrationality/rationality (Longhurst, 2001). On the one hand, women are often constructed as having insecure (leaking, seeping) bodily boundaries – bodies that are 'out-of-control'. Men, on the other hand, are often believed to

possess secure bodily boundaries – bodies that are ‘in control’. Longhurst (2001 2) concludes that these conceptual systems coding bodies have little relevance to the actual ‘flesh and blood of women and men’, but in producing relationships to space they are a powerful force.

Although I draw on concepts of fluidity to examine cultural representation of the female body, in this thesis the politics of fluidity refers to fluids that leak *within* bodily boundaries. Here it is useful to draw on Colls’ (2006) adaptation of Longhurst’s (2001) notion of fluidity. Longhurst considers bodily fluids that leak *across* bodily boundaries such as menstruation, lactation and sexual fluids. Colls extends this deployment to include ‘fat’ as a bodily fluid. I agree with Colls (2006 532) that theorising the female body in terms of the politics of fluidity provides the space for geographical accounts of the ‘subjectivities and materialities of big bodies that grow and shrink and fold and wobble’. And, although I would not consider any of the participants as ‘fat’<sup>14</sup>, I agree that the underlying theories provide the potential to explore the subjectivities and materialities of bodies that are fluid and indeterminate. Body fluids and I suggest, fluid bodies, flow, seep and infiltrate; asserting the body over subjectivity (Grosz, 1994).

### **Out-of-Control Bodies**

The fluidity, or in the participants’ terms, ‘flabbiness’ of their bodies, disrupts the boundaries of solidity. They attest to the permeability of the out-of-control feminine body, and challenge the participants’ understanding of normative femininity. This may be because fluids are negatively associated with the abject, femininity and the body. Fluidity and ‘fat’ is subordinated to, and disruptive of, solid, masculine and ‘thin’ bodily boundaries.

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<sup>14</sup> In this thesis I use the term ‘fat’ in order to reclaim it as a positive signifier (Longhurst, 2005). ‘Fatness’ is an arbitrary term that can not be decoupled from history, geography, and culture.

Being fat does not simply equate to being a particular body size or shape, it is also about what Colls (2002 219) refers to as ‘emotional size’. ‘Emotional size’ is the way in which people perceive their bodies. Some ‘average’ sized or even ‘thin’ bodies understand themselves to be fat (Longhurst, 2005c). Within the context of contemporary notions of fatness and thinness, I would consider all of the participants to be ‘averaged’ size. However, the participants’ ‘emotional size’; how they feel about and perceive their bodies is vastly different. This highlights the complexities of theorising the female body and feminine subjectivities. Most of the participants perceive their bodies or areas of their bodies as ‘fat’, and the language they use to describe their ‘fat’ bodies helps to reinforce the image of women as ‘out-of-control’.

‘Hanging-out’, ‘problem areas’, ‘gross’ and ‘saggy’ are just some of the terms used by the participants to describe their bodies or particular areas of their bodies. Moreover, the participants use words such as ‘muffins’, ‘spare-tyre’ ‘pooch’, ‘roll-over’, ‘puku’<sup>15</sup>, ‘side-flab’, ‘old-nana flab’, ‘over-hang’, ‘squishes’ and ‘pot-belly’ to objectify body parts they dislike. Interestingly, the body parts that the participants most commonly dislike and hence re-name – hips, legs and stomach – are those areas most readily defined as feminine in contemporary Western society (Gillen, 2001).

Faceless bodies produced by some of the participants in the drawing exercise are another discursive means by which they construct female bodies as out-of-control. Liv (see figure eight, page 88), Cassie (see figure nine, page 88), Toni (see figure 10, page 88) and Tracey (see figure 11, page 88) do not include a face on their picture.

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<sup>15</sup> Puku is the Māori word for stomach.

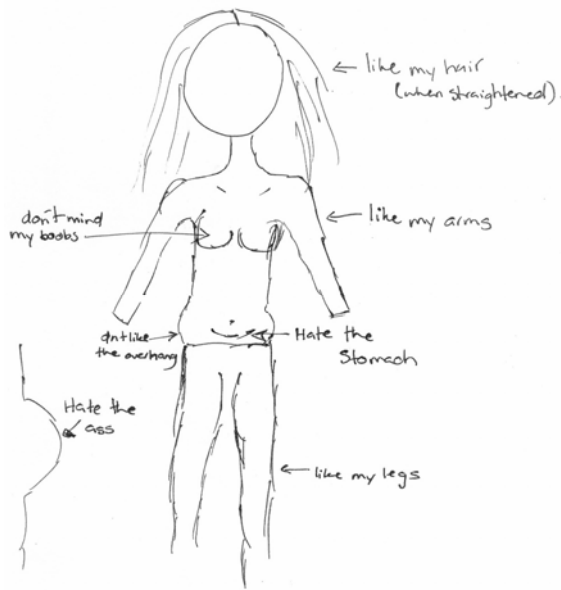


Figure Eight: Liv, Focus Group 01/06/06.

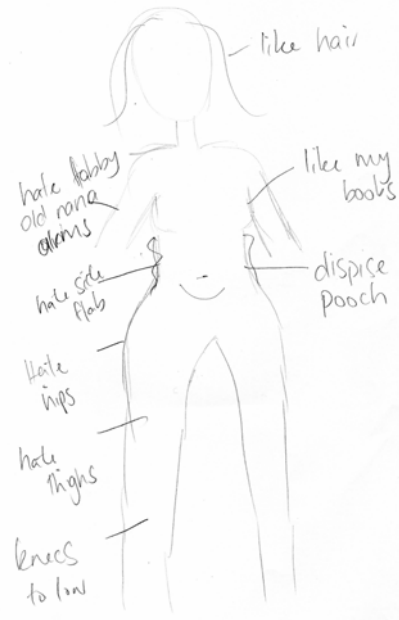


Figure Nine: Cassie, Focus Group 01/06/06.



Figure 10: Toni, Joint Semi-structured Interview 10/06/06.



Figure 11: Tracey, Semi-structured Interview 09/06/06.



The participants' decision to not include a face, I assume is an unconscious one, and the implication is that they represent their 'bodies' without 'minds'. Whilst the Cartesian separation between mind and body underlies all Western understandings of embodiment, it is even more evident when considering the faceless pictures. Their faceless pictures re-assert feminist and poststructuralist arguments that the mind is coded as masculine and the body as feminine. Their drawings reinstate a gendered mind/body dualism by asserting the corporeal over the abstract (Valentine, 2001). Liv, Cassie, Tracey and Toni perhaps, by not including a face, bind themselves to their out-of-control embodiment.

It is also interesting to note the language Liv uses to annotate her picture. Liv uses 'my' to describe parts of her body that she likes and 'the' to describe those parts that she does not. Her use of the definite article 'the' in relation to *her* body parts: 'the ass', 'the overhang' and 'the stomach' objectifies, distances and gives agency to her out-of-control feminine body (Focus Group, 01/06/06). It is as if Liv's body has a mind of its own. By objectifying areas of her body as uncontrollable, Liv demonstrates her adherence to, and participation in, constructions of contemporary notions of normative femininity. Faceless pictures and language that objectifies body parts they perceive as undesirable may also be an attempt to distance themselves from the abject. The concept of out-of-control bodies can be understood further by using Kristeva's (1982) notion of abjection that is theoretically outlined in chapter two (see pages 27-28.)

### **Abject Bodies**

As discussed in chapter two, heteronormative female bodies require an abject Other. In this case, the abject Other is those female bodies that do not fit contemporary heteronormative forms of femininity. Fat, old, female bodies are heteronormative feminine bodies' abject Other.

The depiction of the fat body and in particular the fat female body as abject has been explored in depth. Longhurst (2005c) suggests that in Western society fat is considered a 'dirty' word. To be called fat is to be criticised. Commonly, being fat in a Western context is to be associated with traits of indulgence, laziness, greed, lack of restraint (Colls, 2006). In short, to be fat is to be 'out-of-control'. Le'a Kent (2001 original emphasis) suggests that within mainstream representations of the body, the fat body functions as the abject: 'it takes up the burden of representing the *horror of the body itself* for the culture at large'.

All of the participants highlight areas of their body that they do not like, and as mentioned earlier, in most instances they refer to their stomach, hips and thighs. Cassie, when reflecting on her body in the drawing exercise, discusses parts of her body she dislikes:

Cassie: Alright well mine [picture] is a bit weird. But I don't mind my hair and I don't mind my boobs, but I hate my pooch – my stomach bit – and I hate the side-flab and old nana flab on the arms [indicates underneath arms] [group laughs] (Focus group, 01/06/06).

'Flab', a word commonly used to describe body fat, features extensively in Cassie's self analysis. The term 'flab' is laden with the same negative social underpinnings as 'fat' and when combined with 'nana' adds another dimension to abject feminine embodiment. The participants construct elderly women's bodies as abject. 'Nana-ish' and 'old and boring' are some of the terms they use to describe the wearer of certain underwear styles and the underwear itself. This correlation between what they understand to be abject – feminine, fluid body parts – with growing old suggests that as the female body ages it becomes progressively abject. Old feminine bodies, in a similar fashion to fat bodies, personify the abject. Young (1990b 45) states: '[r]acism, sexism, homophobia, ageism and ableism are partly structured by abjection, an involuntary, unconscious judgement of ugliness and loathing'.

The participants' answers are not surprising given that in contemporary Western societies older bodies are often devalued because, as non-participants in the labour market, and as past the age of reproduction (especially women), they are deemed to have no economic or social worth (Valentine, 2001). The lack of social worth attached to elderly women is reiterated through the progressive social devaluing of the elderly woman's body. Normative femininity requires the feminine body to be controlled – small, slender and firm – and to be, or appear to be, pubescent. This requirement is however, largely unattainable. As women age, time and gravity is deemed to have a negative affect on the body; increasingly skin loses its firmness, and the fluidity of breasts becomes more apparent as they can begin to sag. This visual indication that a woman is 'depreciating' defines a woman's body as old because it no longer looks or feels like an adolescent. Young (1990b) suggests that an old woman's breasts signify, for an ageist dominant culture, that a woman is no longer useful for sex or reproduction. She is, therefore, a woman 'used up'.

The participants are highly conscious of their increasingly abject body and in order to mediate and reduce the visible indication of abjection, they engage in various body management techniques. The participants use underwear as a means of bodily discipline and containment. To utilise Bordo's (1990) concept, I suggest that underwear is a major phenomenon on the feminine normalising continuum.

It is useful to understand the concept of underwear as containing the materiality of the body by drawing on Foucault's (1976) book *Discipline and Punishment*. Foucault uses the notion of the panopticon, referring to Bentham's design for a prison that leaves prisoners perpetually exposed to a one way viewing tower, therefore likely to police themselves. Other prominent themes are those relating to docile bodies, disciplinary regimes, systems of surveillance and the normalising gaze. Feminists (Bartky, 1988; 1990; Bordo, 1989; 1993a) have used this work on surveillance to understand

the myriad of ways that the female body is organised and regulated. As explained in chapter two, Bordo's (1989; 1993a) appropriation of Foucault's disciplinary thesis is useful in examining contemporary practices of femininity. Furthermore, her work is particularly relevant for my investigation into the body management regimes that the participants undertake in order to self-regulate forms of femininity.

### **Containing and Shaping Fleshy Breasts**

Which shape breast do you prefer? This question proved to be an important talking point in the interviews. According to the participants, round breasts are an important signifier of heteronormative femininity. The appearance of having round breasts is the most obvious visual indicator of the relationship between bodies and underwear. Bras impact on the materiality of breasts in such a way that the resulting appearance – round, full breasts – has become the norm. In order for this norm to exist, its binary opposite – pointy bras and pointy breasts – are positioned as the abject Other. Breasts that are full and round (but not overly big and bulbous) represent female heteronormativity. The models in Bendon and in the *Victoria's Secret* DVD adhere to and construct this norm. All of the models wear bras that give the appearance of round, full breasts. The fluidity of the models' breasts is contained and solidified by bras and consequently their bodies are 'tight, contained, "bolted down", firm' (Bordo, 1990 90). In other words, underwear contributes to ideological understandings that position the ideal feminine body as having firm bodily margins. The lingerie models personify this representation.

Carey-Ann: They were big boobs but they weren't saggy  
boobs.

Rachael: Nah.

Carey-Ann: They were ... pert.

Rachael: And round, yeah.

Carey-Ann: They um, when they walked (/ /)

Rachael: (/ /) They bounced.

Carey-Ann: They bounced, yeah, but not in a way that, um, I thought 'oh they're not ...'

Rachael: They don't look gross.

Carey-Ann: Yeah when they bounce.

Rachael: They don't have the ripple (Semi-structured Interview, 30/05/06).

The participants' desire to have round breasts is a reflection of their obedience to, and involvement in, constructions of contemporary notions of normative femininity. It also reinstates the socio-political power that Bendon has in producing feminine bodies. Bendon is aware of, and helps to socially construct, this contemporary ideal of normative femininity. The rhetoric used to outline product qualities, for instance on the price tag for Bendon's Body Devotion range (see figure 12, page 94), gives an insight into Bendon's current notions of the normative feminine body.

The Body Devotion tag suggests that the bra, culotte and thong will give the wearer a 'flattering feminine shape'. It then goes one step further to note that the contoured bra gives a 'smooth, rounded shape' and the culotte and thong will 'smooth out curves and disappear under clothing'. It is interesting to note that the garments have the ability to 'smooth' out bodily bulges and lumps. The Body Devotion range offers the wearer the chance to erase the soft, rippling and fluid materiality of their body.



Figure 12: Bendon's Body Devotion range tag

*Source:* Author

Additionally, the participants' ideas of normative femininity equate to their notions of heterosexual desirability.

Tracey: I always wear, yeah, bras that will make me look nice and rounded and I like wearing underwear that will, yeah, make, you know how you wear underwear that just makes you look like skinnier [laugh] (Semi-structured Interview, 09/06/06).

Because breasts do not generally meet the desired ideal (as discussed chapter two, pages 28-30), Tracey purposefully wears a certain type of bra to discipline the materiality of her breasts. Bras, of any sort, contain the breast by acting as a temporary means of bodily discipline. Padded or contoured bras normalise the breasts, shaping the flesh and making the breasts appear round and full. By wearing padded bras, Tracey engages in processes of normalisation. She is aware of, and conforms to, contemporary societal requirements of femininity. By managing her appearance so that she fits

within the bounds of 'normality', Tracey asserts power over her body. Foucault (1990 201) points out that power exists via the actions of individuals as they discipline their bodies. It is self-surveillance which 'assures the automatic functioning of power'. Furthermore, Tracey's bodily 'improvement' practices highlight and reinforce the heteronormative preoccupation with women's subjectivities as essentially aesthetic (Blood, 2005).

Other participants engage in more drastic forms of discipline. Rachael explains how having her nipples pierced altered the shape of her breasts:

Carey-Ann: And what about your piercings? Do you like your breasts as a result of your piercings, or [do] you like your actual piercings?

Rachael: Both. Ah, 'cause I think piercings are cool and because I like, I think breasts are cool [laugh]. I like my breasts with piercings. They're not as like ... they kind of make me feel like they're not ... like I sort of didn't like my boobs before because they were pointed. But now they are, I just feel that they're nicer now, like now because I have something (//)

Carey-Ann: (//) Rounder?

Rachael: To detract from them or I don't know. I just like them (Semi-structured Interview, 30/05/06).

Rachael finds the requirements of contemporary femininity demanding. She highlights her complex and contradictory subjectivities; at times accentuating her docility and at other times transgressing it. Rachael can be partly understood as existing within each regime. She engages in self-management procedures to normalise her breasts, however, the means she takes – body piercing – can be read as non-heteronormative femininity. Rachael's self-management procedures reinforce Jennifer Craik's (1994) claim that the feminine body is a site of severe conflict and abnormal labour. Rather than simply using underwear as a temporary means of discipline, Rachael employs more permanent methods to contain her body. Valentine (2001) suggests that many accounts of body modifiers explain that their piercings are a way of

taking control of and possessing their body. Rachael uses body modification as a way of controlling her body. She permanently disciplines her breasts. Although Rachael asserts control over the shape of her breasts, for her out-of-control feminine body to be properly contained she must also discipline her nipples. Hard nipples poignantly signify a women's out-of-control sexuality.

All of the participants discuss wanting to keep the 'pebbles inside' (Elizabeth, Focus Group, 01/06/06). Again, the participants use padded or contoured bras as a means of discipline and containment to normalise their out-of-control nipples.

Joanne: I like padded ones so I don't have my nipples showing [group agrees] (Focus Group, 01/06/06).

Young (1990b 195-196) highlights the irony of the exposed nipple.

But most scandalous of all, without a bra, the nipples show. Nipples are indecent. Cleavage is good – the more, the better – and we can wear bikinis that barely cover the breasts, but the nipples must be carefully obscured. Even go-go dancers wear pasties. Nipples are no-nos, for they show the breasts to be active and independent zones of sensitivity and eroticism.

Rachael finds the binds of achieving permanent control over her body to be exaggerated. She has to take further measures to normalise her breasts.

Carey-Ann: So is that why you buy padded ones [bras], because you don't want your nipples to show?

Rachael: I don't really care about my nipples as much, it's my piercings now. Like when I took my piercing out I used to wear non-padded bras all the time. But now it kinda looks like three nipples in a row [laugh].

Carey-Ann: No, you have, like, six nipples.

Rachael: Yeah so I'm more self conscious about it now, especially with winter (Semi-structured Interview, 30/05/06).



By existing within both regimes – docility and non-normative femininity – Rachael accents the double binds of contemporary femininity.

The participants are encouraged to enter continuous processes of self-monitoring. Foucault theorises this as technologies of the self (Foucault, 1976). Systems of surveillance, including the direct gaze of others, encourage Toni to monitor her body. Toni feels her body is the object of the gaze. The threat of others (men) seeing her erect nipples motivates her to manage her body in additional ways.

Toni: When we're [she and her male partner] jogging together, kind of yeah ...

Carey-Ann: You wear a sports bra?

Toni: Yeah but um, I have ... [hesitant] yeah you know how the sports bra are so not padded? I have these little insert things so that you don't get [hard] nipple kind of thing [laugh] and so when his work mates drive past they're not like 'oh my God, look at her!' [Laugh] Yeah.

Carey-Ann: 'Look at her nipples!'

Toni: Yeah, so, but if I was on my own I probably wouldn't give a shit, but ...

Carey-Ann: So him and his, and the possibility of his friends seeing you?

Toni: Yeah, yeah.

Carey-Ann: So do you put the inserts in also to be bigger, or just for [hiding] the nipple?

Toni: Um, probably just for the nipple because you know running in the middle of winter, it's freezing [group laughs] (Joint Semi-structured Interview, 10/06/06).

Toni's body is subject to various forms of social control. She is required to contain and conceal her nipples by using bra 'inserts'. This demonstrates her compliance to, and conflict with, heteronormative standards of femininity. It

is interesting to note that Toni bought the inserts from Bendon. Also of considerable interest is that she chooses to contain her nipples for the benefit of her male partner. Her partner has also internalised an objectifying male gaze and it appears that forms of social control exerted by society also influence her partner's understanding of normative femininity.

Padded or contoured bras are also used as a means of enhancement as they can appear to increase the size of the breast. Here, Joanne (see figure 13, page 99) acknowledges the fluidity of her body and how as a result of this impermanence, she can re-shape and re-mould her flesh through exercise and underwear.

Joanne: I like my height. I hate my hips, I hate my muffins, I hate the flabby stomach, but I like my arms, I wish my boobs were bigger, but I can use a bra for that! [laugh]. I need to get a toned ass, thighs and my legs are alright (Focus Group Interview, 01/06/06).

The politics of fluidity described earlier are useful in understanding Joanne's response to her body. Joanne realises that her body has volatile, unstable boundaries. She can therefore use a variety of means from the feminine normalising continuum (Bordo 1990), such as exercise and underwear, to mould, discipline and transform her stomach, 'ass and thighs' from 'flabby' to 'toned' and make her breasts 'bigger'. Tracey also wears padded bras and here she explains why:

Tracey: Yeah, I like have one bra that I always wear because it makes my boobs look bigger and nice [laugh]. So I always like try to find bras that look good under my clothes, I don't really care as much as what they look like.

Carey-Ann: Without clothes on?

Tracey: Yeah (Semi-structured Interview, 09/06/06).

It is interesting to note Tracey's correlation between 'bigger and nice', given that bigger breasts are not always considered 'nice'. As discussed in chapter

two, there is a discrepancy between large breasts as firm and 'nice'. If breasts are large, (excluding those breasts with implants) gravity tends to pull them down and they are more likely to be saggy. They are more likely to take on the abject appearance of an elderly woman's body.

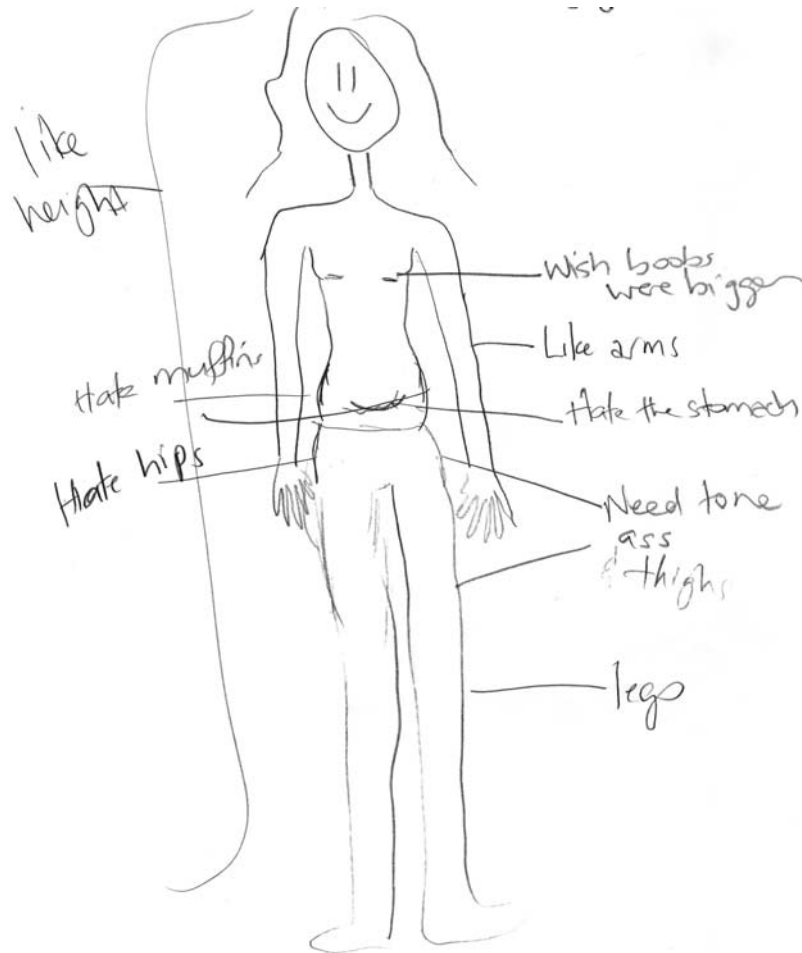


Figure 13: Joanne, Focus group 01/06/06.

Throughout the interviews, the participants continually reflect on the emotive experience of wearing underwear. At times they choose to wear underwear that makes them 'feel sexy' and at other times, underwear that 'doesn't make them feel sexy' (Rachael, Semi-structured Interview, 30/05/06). This highlights the situated experience of emotion as produced through underwear. Clearly, emotions shape people's embodied experience of time and space. An individual's sense of self is continually re(shaped) by how s/he

feels (Davidson and Milligan, 2004). How the participants manage their bodies revolves around how they *feel* about their (un)clothed embodiment in a particular time and space. These bodily management practices, which will be the focus of the next section, encourage a positive emotive experience of fashioning the flesh.

### **Looking Better = Feeling Sexy**

Matching sets or mix and match? The general consensus amongst the participants is that matching sets – co-ordinated bra and undies – look better. Matching sets produce a contained form of femininity, making them feel ‘more complete’ (Tracey, Semi-structured Interview, 09/06/06).<sup>16</sup> Wearing matching sets is a form of self-management. Matching sets may not impact on the materiality or shape of the body, but it improves the ‘packaging’ of the contained body. A contained body, in any form, is progress in making the body less abject.

Elizabeth (see figure 14, page 101) wears matching sets in order to feel better about herself. When she is not wearing matching sets, she feels ‘all over the place’ (Focus Group, 01/06/06).

Elizabeth: If I’ve got a white comfy bra with flash knickers on, I think ‘oh you look like you’ve come out of an op-shop’ [group laughs] (Focus Group, 01/06/06).

It is interesting to note Elizabeth’s reference to opportunity shops.<sup>17</sup> The implication of aligning an out-of-control state – ‘all over the place’ – with opportunity shops highlights the intersection of abjection and poverty. Nicky Gregson, Kate Brooks and Louise Crewe (2000 103) suggest that the purchase and consumption of second-hand clothing requires the negotiation of various

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<sup>16</sup> I use the colloquial term ‘undies’ to accurately reflect the participants’ words.

<sup>17</sup> Opportunity shops or ‘Op shops’ are spaces of second-hand goods consumption. People are able to purchase a range of goods from Op shops including clothing, furniture, kitchen wear, and books.

bodily constructs: 'the body as leaky excess; as polluting, contaminating, threatening order; as material, subject to disease and death'. In short, second-hand clothing, and by association, the spaces and consumers of second-hand clothing, are constructed as another component of fashion's abject Other.

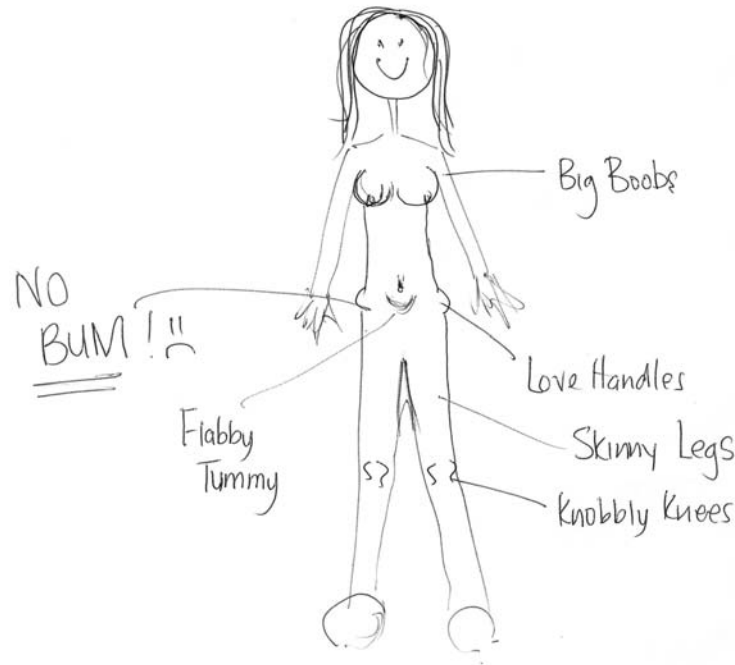


Figure 14: Elizabeth, Focus Group 01/01/06

Further on in the conversation Elizabeth discusses the importance of viewing herself in the mirror, and how this affects her embodied experience:

Elizabeth: And in terms of matching sets, I find even if no body else sees them when I put them on and look in the mirror I *think* I look good (Sally agrees) in it (Focus Group, 01/06/06).

Mirrors in Elizabeth's home encourage systems of self-surveillance. The above passage reinforces the view that women's bodies are an object of the gaze and emphasises the idea that women are observers of their own bodies. Objectification is also a feminising process (Blood, 2005; Young, 1990b). The mirrors in her home produce an environment where Elizabeth wants to self

regulate her body and forms of femininity and heterosexuality. Toni's response can be read in a similar light:

Toni: Um, I never used to give a shit at all until I was re-fitted. But now I'm kinda like this bigger size it's almost like, [voice is happy] 'oh ok' I'll have matching stuff now sort of thing, I don't know, its really strange [laugh].

Carey-Ann: Make an effort? (Toni agrees). Um, so do you think that it is how it [the bra] looks on you that is making the difference?

Toni: Nah, oh it's more how I feel about knowing that I'm a different size than I used to think I was, kind of thing, and now it's like 'oh ok' – you know little bit proud kind of thing. So and take more care, take more care and have matching underwear sort of thing (Joint Semi-structured Interview, 10/06/06).

Toni constructs large breasts as 'normal'. Now that she is closer to being within the bounds of normality – 'now I'm like this bigger size' – she wants to engage in further body-management routines. She accepts the bodily norms she is encouraged to aspire to, and thus experiences a sense of control over her body. Valentine (2001) explains that by readily accepting and adhering to bodily norms, women hope to gain admiration for the shape of their body, and admiration for asserting self-control. Similarly, I suggest that Toni's acceptance of bodily norms is also to gain societal acceptance. Moreover, Toni's suggestion that she is encouraged to engage in further body management techniques because of how she feels about knowing that she requires a bigger bra size, highlights the situated production of emotion through the consumption and wearing of underwear (Colls, 2004).

Clothing simultaneously covers and reveals the body. Clothing, particularly underwear, adds sexual meaning to the body. Underwear does more than draw attention to the body, it emphasises bodily difference. At times, the participants do not like the increased emphasis that underwear places on

certain body areas and consequently they wear underwear that purposely reveals or conceals certain body areas.

Kate Gillen (2001 87) suggests that the 'shapes of a woman's body is not something to be admired'; rather the female body 'possesses parts that must be hidden away from view'. The participants take careful steps to discipline their bodies; to conceal certain areas and reveal others. Again, the threat of someone, usually male, seeing them in an out-of-control state – near nakedness – leads the participants to discipline their most out-of-control, abject body parts. Tracey conceals body parts she perceives as abject. She also feels the threat of a male-gaze.

Tracey: Yeah, I would probably be more likely to wear just undies in front of a guy. I reckon that I look grosser in a G-string, obviously 'cause it show more of your arse (Carey-Ann agrees) [laugh]. Like I wouldn't just walk around in a G-string, I would walk around just in undies. But I wouldn't walk around in a G-string.

Carey-Ann: Yeah and that's in front of your boyfriend?

Tracey: Yeah (Semi-structured Interview, 09/06/06).

Young (1990b) summarises Luce Irigaray's (1985) male-gaze argument that is presented in *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Young explains how Western culture expresses a masculine desire and has silenced and repressed a specifically female desire. She suggests that the male-gaze theory illustrates femininity as a mirror in which man sees himself reflected. Moreover, institutions of patriarchy contribute to enhancing male subjectivity by organising women's desire to be identified with men. Although I find this explanation limiting in the sense that it constructs women as passive victims in the construction of femininity, I do agree with the suggestion that some women want to turn themselves 'into a beautiful object for his gaze' and ultimately find 'pleasure in his satisfaction' (Young, 1990b 181).

Carey-Ann: And what about, um, you mentioned before you like wearing sexy lingerie. Is there any special occasions that you particularly want to wear sexy lingerie? (//)

Rachael: (//) Um, when I'm planning on having sex [laugh]. Like, lately every time I see my boyfriend, I've been making sure that I have sexy sets on underneath [my clothes], just in case something [sexual] happens, like I wore my *stockings* the other day [laugh] and a black set – I wore Shear Ribbons [Elle Macpherson range] – I looked so good! And, I like to look good for him (Semi-structured Interview, 30/05/06).

All of the participants, except Cassie and Tracey, express enthusiasm about buying and wearing lingerie for their male partners. I use the term lingerie here, instead of underwear, to reflect the participants' opposing understanding of the two. The participants view lingerie as being invested with meanings of sexuality and pleasure.

Tracey: Lingerie, it's like, well it has connotations of being sexier [laugh] (Carey-Ann agrees). Underwear is sort of you know, just something that you have to wear [laughs] (Carey-Ann agrees). But lingerie is something that you wear when you wanna like feel sexy or even impress someone (Semi-structured Interview, 09/06/06).

Again, Tracey's comments reflect the role underwear plays in the production of embodied emotions. Banim et al (2001) suggest that women buy and embody the meanings associated with clothes and thus transfer the created meanings to themselves as wearers. The participants also associate lingerie with the bedroom.

Joanne: I saw lingerie as more like the *bedroom* stuff where you role play and [group agrees] get, kind of, the dress up stuff. What [are] those things called? (Anna: Garters?) Garters and (Carey-Ann: Suspenders and stuff?) Suspenders and corsets and stockings and real kind of lacy things and all that stuff – that's what I thought lingerie was (Focus Group, 01/06/06).



When wearing lingerie the participants re-write the sexual connotations attached to the garments onto their own bodies. These sexual connotations are intimately bound to spatialities. They also write the sexual connotations attached to lingerie onto their bedrooms.

Rachael's (see figure 15, page 105) choice of lingerie is influenced by what she presumes her male partner will like. She manages her body to accentuate a normative form of feminine heterosexuality.



Figure 15: Rachael, Semi-structured Interview 30/05/06.

Earlier in the conversation, Rachael discusses her dislike for her 'pot-belly' stomach. She explains that she therefore wears underwear that conceals and contains the area, hence, minimising the abject. Similarly, Rachael also wears

underwear that emphasises areas she likes - bottom and thighs – ‘I’ve got a big arse, but I like it [laugh]’ (Semi-structured Interview, 30/05/06). Here she accounts for why she wears certain styles of underwear:

Rachael: Well, when I wore Sheer Ribbons [Elle Macpherson brand], I wore the singlet, because it covered my belly [laugh]. I suppose I could of worn the bra, but I like the singlet better because it covers my belly. And I wore the French knickers, because Tim [past partner] liked the French knickers and so I supposed Rory [present partner] would as well [laugh] (Semi-structured Interview, 30/05/06).

Rachael’s reflection demonstrates how the female body can be simultaneously fashionable and abject. Lisa and Toni also discuss their experiences of buying and wearing lingerie for their boyfriends.

Lisa: Well ... when you’ve got, well for me anyway, when you’ve got a boyfriend at the time, I buy heaps more lingerie than when I don’t [have a boyfriend] (Toni agrees) [laughs]. Because well, you kind of buy it for them really aye? (Toni agrees) But when you’re sort of single and you’re not seeing anyone you just don’t care as much.

Toni: Yeah as long as you’ve got one good one [underwear set] to impress somebody with [group laughs]. I think it’s more personal you know, ‘cause you’re kind of like ‘hmmm I think he’d like this set’ (Both: Yeah) ‘This in particular, this colour, hmm so I might wear that’.

Lisa: Yeah exactly, so it’s kinda like you’re buying it for them in a way.

Toni: Whereas if you’re single, you’re like ‘God knows who it will be and what colour he’ll like, so who gives a shit!’ (Joint Semi-structured Interview, 10/06/06).

For Toni and Lisa the male gaze is ever present, even in the absence of their male partner. As with Rachael, the decisions about what to buy are often based on what boyfriends are presumed to like. As John Berger (1972 46) indicates, ‘a woman has to survey everything she is and everything she does

because how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success in her life’.

The notion of underwear as containing is, however, ironic. Sally, (see figure 16, page 107) an ex-employee of Bendon, highlights this when she explains that she finds ‘*proper*’ undies confining:

Sally: One thing for me is that I will never actually wear *proper* underwear. I don’t know, I think it was maybe working in a lingerie store I will always wear Gs [G-strings] now. I just can’t wear normal undies now.

Joanne: Neither. All the lines are real visible.

Sally: It just feels really strange, like I’ve got this bum holder on (Joanne agrees) [group laughs] (Focus Group, 01/06/06).

The socio-political structures governing Bendon continue to construct Sally’s identity, even though she no longer works there. Discourses produced, for example through billboards, within Bendon on ‘*proper*’ undies means that Sally will only ‘wear Gs’. In this context, proper undies hold similar abject undertones to ‘nana-knickers’.



Figure 16: Sally, Focus Group 01/06/06.

Furthermore, as well as sometimes being understood as confining, underwear has the ability to create and/or code bodies as out-of-control, especially when it does not fit properly or it transgresses clothing boundaries. In the next section I will discuss this irony.

### **Creating an Out-of-Control Body**

Underwear affects the materiality of the body. Ill-fitting underwear can reaffirm the fluidity and indeterminacy of women's bodies by moving and re-shaping the flesh to produce an abject appearance. Underwear that does not fit (this is a social construction specific to time and place), especially when it is too tight or small, becomes part of the abject, out-of-control body.

Underwear that is too tight does not and cannot contain the body, creating bulges and lumps that may not normally exist. Rachael captures this well when she describes how some women shoppers experience their underwear as uncomfortable because the size they are wearing is too small:

Rachael: Well it [underwear] shouldn't be uncomfortable if it's fitting you properly (Carey-Ann agrees). For most ladies if their underwear is uncomfortable it's because they are wearing the wrong size. Like the wire [in the bra] will be digging into them or they have love handles because they're wearing a small [size undies] instead of a large (Semi-structured Interview, 30/05/06).

Rachael also reflects on her own experiences of ill-fitting underwear. She notes the ineffectiveness of underwear that is too big.

Rachael: Well before I started at Bendon, I was wearing the wrong size [laugh].

Carey-Ann: Like everybody else in the world!

Rachael: Yeah um, I think I was wearing like a 12C [bra size] and back then I was smaller so it was too big for me, it was like my boobs would sink down to the bottom of the cup [demonstrates with an imaginary bra] and you could see it [bra] like coming up here

[high up her chest] and there was nothing like filling in up there [indicates top of the bra] (Semi-structured Interview, 30/05/06).

Entwistle's (2000b 334) work is useful to draw on in order to understand the relationship between dress and subjectivities. She uses an example provided by Umberto Eco (1986 192-194) to highlight how clothes feel when they do not fit; how they have the ability to restrict movement and how they come to constitute an 'epidermic self-awareness'. She notes clothes that fit comfortably become an extension of the body, they become a second skin. When dressed uncomfortably, people may develop the 'epidermic self-awareness' because the garment (this is particularly relevant for underwear) impinges on people's embodied experiences and highlights bodily boundaries and edges. Furthermore, Entwistle (2000b) suggests that this awareness is gendered.

A bra that fits incorrectly impacts on how a woman experiences her embodied spatialities. It makes the wearer conscious of her breasts and hence conscious of herself. Young (1990b 189) suggests that the chest (which she explains to be the 'house of the heart') is the centre of the self. Breasts are thus an important constituent in the production of a woman's identity.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, for many women their breasts are an important component of body self-image. All of the participants remark, to a greater or lesser extent, on the size of their breasts. In *Breasts: Women Speak About Their Breasts and Their Lives*, Daphna Ayalah and Isacc J. Weinstock's (1980) comment on the varied and numerous instances of causality which links women's breasts to their identity Ayalah and Weinstock (1980 23) state that they 'were amazed at how basic and profoundly fundamental the experience of having breasts actually was in women's lives'. The following quotation taken from Ayalah and Weinstock's (1980 23) book illustrates the point: '[h]ow women are has a great deal to do with how their breasts are – our breasts are so

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<sup>18</sup> Although see Robyn Longhurst's (2005) publication 'Man-Breasts: Spaces of Sexual Difference, Fluidity and Abjection' in B. Van Hovern and K. Horsechelmann (eds) *Spaces of Masculinity* for a discussion of men who have breasts and wear bras.

involved with who we are. My breasts have always been a real point of my identity'. Young (1990a) concludes that women rarely hold a neutral stance on their breasts; they either like them or dislike them. Efrat Tseëlon (1997 61) extends this, noting that a woman's sense of self is frequently a 'fragile' one, and dress (especially bras) can either strengthen the confidence of a woman or make her acutely aware of her body.

Occasionally, Toni also experiences her underwear as uncomfortable. Although she has been an employee of Bendon for several years, her bras have been ill-fitting.

Carey-Ann: It's funny how we're meant to be selling bras but we can also be wearing the wrong size. So going on from that – that all your bras *should* fit you – are they all comfortable?

Toni: Now that they're fitting right?

Carey-Ann: Yeah.

Toni: Yeah, God, yeah. I can't believe the difference [laugh], it's amazing aye! (Joint Semi-structured Interview, 10/06/06).

Toni's comments reflect the fundamental relationship underwear (style and size) has with the materiality of the female body. Her embodied experience is positively altered, by wearing a bra that feels comfortable. In the next section I will discuss underwear that transgresses clothing boundaries and hence has the ability to code bodies as out-of-control.

### ***Coding Bodies as Out-of-Control***

Grosz's (1994) suggestion that particular bodily zones serve to emphasise both women's difference and Otherness to men is particularly relevant for my thesis. The onset of puberty and secondary sexual characteristics such as the development of breasts, pubic hair and the beginning of menstruation constructs women's bodies as leaky and dangerous, attuned to hormones and

reproduction. In contemporary understandings of the normative feminine body, these bodily areas are considered to be the most out-of-control zones. Underwear that can be seen through clothes, such as the outline of undies, is a visible indicator of feminine sexuality and difference (to men). Visible underwear poignantly highlights out-of-control feminine bodily zones.

Tracey is careful to ensure that she does not transgress clothing boundaries and etiquette. She makes a considered decision to only wear G-strings with jeans, to guarantee that she does not have visible panty line. Visible panty line or VPL accentuates out-of-control feminine sexuality. The seams and hems of undies, which sometimes show through clothes, act to frame and highlight a woman's genitalia.

Carey-Ann: And what do you wear?

Tracey: I usually wear comfortable stuff, just 'cause I don't usually have anyone that I want to impress [laugh]. If I had, if I really liked my boyfriend [laugh] I'd probably want to impress him [laugh] (Carey-Ann: Yeah) but I don't really care [laugh].

Carey-Ann: So you're an undies girl?

Tracey: Yeah, oh I wear like G-stings and stuff just with jeans. I'd never wear undies with jeans; I'm like afraid of visible panty line [laugh] (Semi-structured Interview, 09/06/06).

In examining the presentation of the self in social interactions, Entwistle (2000a) suggests that ideas of embarrassment and stigma play a crucial role, and are managed in part, through dress. It is, however, the shame of failing to meet the moral standards of social space that causes people's embarrassment. It is interesting to note that Tracey is 'afraid' of having VPL. This comment suggests that women who have VPL will be subjected to negative social repercussions. The participants view women who have VPL or who unintentionally show parts of their bra as disrupting normative bounds of dress etiquette. In a sense, the women and the underwear she is wearing becomes the abject Other.

Joanne: Well people are wearing their bras hanging out these days.

Sally: Yeah exactly. You'll see some people that wear like a low cut back top and then their bras will stick out the top (//)

Anna: (//) Yeah you wonder if they notice it (//)

Sally: (//) Yeah well I couldn't do that. I wonder whether they know or whether they just don't care (Focus Group Interview, 01/06/06).

Wilson (1985 8) suggests that the social implications of seeing a woman's underwear is more than simply witnessing the breaking of social and dress etiquette, it is witnessing something 'much more profoundly ambiguous and disturbing ... the naked body underneath clothes'. Although Wilson's (1985) comment is useful for my thesis as it points to the abject materiality of bodies, in particular the abject functions of the feminine body, she fails to recognise the profound impact underwear has on the materiality of body and its ability to code bodies as out-of-control. She also neglects to acknowledge the spatial imperatives of dressing. Different situations and spaces require different ways of clothing the body. It may be appropriate in some spaces to reveal underwear, but in others, it is deemed to be out-of-place. Underwear that can be seen through clothes troubles social binaries. Underwear is designed to go *under* clothes and when women's underwear can be seen through clothes (this is dependent on temporal and spatial settings), the wearer and the underwear are constructed as the abject Other.

## **Conclusions**

In this chapter I have focused on the multiple ways in which underwear influences the politics of embodiment and gendered subjectivities. I have focused on the clothed female body as contextual within socio-spatial differentials. Arguing for corporeal specificity, I have presented a variety of ways in which underwear moulds and shapes the materiality of the body.



Aspects of hegemonic power inscribe the clothed female body. These inscriptions are intimately bound to embodied spatialities.

The participants construct their bodies, and areas of their bodies, as 'out-of-control'. The language they use, such as 'hanging out', 'saggy', and 'muffin', to describe areas of their bodies (legs, hips and thighs) helps to reinforce this discursive image. They also construct these areas as abject. To moderate the abject, and contain their 'out-of-control' bodies, the participants use underwear as a body management technique. Social constructions of contemporary Western notions of normative femininity position the ideal breasts as round and full. Padded bras help the participants to achieve this ideal. They shape and mould the flesh, making their breasts appear round and full. They also disguise the appearance of nipples.

Underwear is also influential in the production and experience of emotions. How the participants manage their bodies revolves around how they feel about their (un)clothed bodies in particular times and spaces.

Finally, I argued that as well as containing the body, underwear can also create and/or code the body as out-of-control. Visible panty line and visible bra straps highlight bodily areas associated with feminine sexuality. Underwear conceived as affecting the materiality of the body, contests ontological constructions that position the female body as natural or fixed.

## **•• CHAPTER SIX ••**

### **Conclusions**

This thesis examined the ways in which *clothed* bodies shape, and are shaped by, space. I have argued that clothing, in particular underwear, is an important constituent of bodily subjectivity. My research has focused on the experiences of a small group of young Pākehā women who reside in Hamilton, New Zealand. I have investigated the ways in which these young women use underwear to construct a range of complex and at times, contradictory gendered subjectivities and how these subjectivities are influenced by material (underwear shops in Hamilton) and discursive (advertising and promotional material) space.

In this chapter, I reflect upon my initial research questions about bodies, underwear and space. I conclude by indicating some possible research avenues that would open further (changing room) doors into investigating the debates surrounding embodied subjectivities, fashion and spatialities.

In chapter one I outlined the questions that framed my research and made explicit the reasons for focusing on the experiences of young Pākehā women who purchase and wear underwear. I also highlighted the importance of conducting research on this topic and the implications it has for social, cultural, feminist, and embodied geographies. Examining young women's experiences of underwear and space provides a means to re-theorise geography. The attention given to corporeal specificity in this research makes for a more embodied, inclusive and diverse geography. The historical context and significance of my research was reflected upon, as was the research locations – underwear consumption spaces in Hamilton.

In chapter two I provided the theoretical framework for my research and critically reviewed the relevant literature. The recent upsurge of geographic interest in 'the body' and the various epistemological implications this has

had for human geography was discussed. I proceeded to review feminist poststructuralist contentions that posit bodies and space as mutually defining and also discussed those theorists who engage in feminist poststructuralist approaches to subjectivity. This included a critical discussion of geographic literature that focuses on workplace cultures. By engaging in this literature, I was able to begin a critical reflection on underwear shops; how the spaces shaped me and the participants, and in turn, how we shaped the spaces. I then moved to discuss relevant research from outside of geography. Iris Marion Young's (1990a; 1990b) work on oppressive spaces and feminist readings of Michael Foucault's work (Bartky, 1988, Bordo, 1989; 1993) are useful frameworks for investigating the relations between bodies, underwear and space. To conclude the chapter I pointed to those theorists who focus on the 'awkward' and 'messy' aspects of bodies and space. I presented a case for geographers interested in embodied subjectivities to consider the subject of fashion/underwear and discussed the work of some influential geographers who have taken heed of the role clothes play in spatialised identities. I also argued that embodied fashion theorists need to consider the notion of abjection (Kristeva, 1982) in order to understand fully the social aspects of dress.

The focus of chapter three was on methodological epistemology and practice. I discussed my use of qualitative techniques; described the methods used and provided a critical examination of each. I charted the steps for recruitment, how I transcribed and analysed the transcripts of the interviews and autobiographical entries (including participant observation records.) Throughout I discussed my role as a young, female, Pākehā feminist geography graduate student and offered a critique of this position.

In chapter four I set about answering my first research question: how are the spaces of underwear shops gendered? However, as the chapter progressed it became obvious that it also related to my two remaining questions: what forms of femininity are produced by underwear? And, how and in what ways

does women's underwear influence the complex relations between embodiment and place? Bodies produce, and are produced by, underwear consumption spaces. They are located and interpellated by ideological systems specific to the space. I argued that spaces of underwear consumption are gendered. Further, they are discursively constructed as feminine. Socio-political spatialities within underwear shops help constitute the corporealities of the retailers and shoppers and the discursive power operating in underwear shops produces an environment that positions bodies as either 'in' or 'out' of place. I illustrated how the discursive power operating in underwear shops can be productive and produce both positive *and* negative effects. Participant observations, autobiography and interviews with Bendon employees were the main research methods that enabled me to identify those bodies who were understood as normative and those that were 'othered' within the space.

Bendon privileges a feminised, young and thin embodied space. Visual representations, such as promotional billboards and advertising catalogues, construct this notion of normative femininity. Bras N Things and Farmers also promote a similar idealised space, where tall, thin, tanned and curvaceous feminine bodies are constructed as the norm. Employees are also positioned as 'in' place. Bendon produces its employees' identities by writing a gendered bodily workplace performance onto their bodies. One implication of this temporal and spatially specific normative femininity is that all of Bendon's employees are small/thin women. The gendered bodily workplace performance is carefully monitored by managerial surveillance which encourages employees to be self-reflexive (Foucault, 1976). However, as with any space that is attempting to create a homogenous environment, further boundaries and exclusions are created.

I argued that 'fat' and/or old female bodies and male bodies, are constructed as 'out' of place. One negative outcome of understanding underwear shops as feminised is that they tend to promote an idealised form of femininity that excludes those women who do not fit the norm. Fat and/or old women are

constructed as a socially abject group (Kent, 2001) and hence excluded within the space. The clothing available to them, (in this case the brand Fayreform), is equally regarded as abject. Fayreform bras are designed to cover and contain fat, feminine bodies and are negatively understood as a 'nana bra'. Hence, there is correlation between abject bodies and certain types of underwear. The abject body is hence required to wear underwear that echoes the abject embodiment.

Another significant grouping positioned as 'out' of place are men. I argued that understanding underwear shops as feminine, and hence as spaces that position male materialities as 'out' of place, produces positive results. Feminised underwear shops challenge the mind/body dualism that posits men as distant, disembodied beings, who are able to transcend the specificities of their bodies. In feminised underwear shops men can become aware of, and able to experience their, gendered and sexualised embodiments.

In chapter five, titled 'Fashioning the Flesh', I addressed my second research question: what forms of femininity are produced by women's underwear? In order to produce a more embodied and reflexive geography I examined the experiences and corporeal specificities of 10 young Pākehā women. I provided an account of the multiple ways in which underwear influences the politics of embodiment.

In order to examine the discursive construction that women are 'out-of-control', I drew on the language that the participants used to describe their bodies. 'Hanging-out', 'problem areas', 'gross' and 'saggy' are just some of the ways the participants described their bodies and I argued that describing them in this way, positions their bodies, or areas of their bodies, as 'out-of-control'. It is significant that the main areas that the participants focused on are those areas that most readily define them as feminine in Western society – stomach, hips and thighs (Gillen, 2001). Further, they understand these body parts as abject (Kristeva, 1982). Additionally, language such as

‘nana-ish’ and ‘old and boring’ align that which is abject – uncontrollable, feminine body parts – with old bodies. Hence, old feminine bodies, in a similar fashion to fat bodies, personify the abject.

Underwear has a crucially intimate relationship with the materiality of the body. The participants use underwear as a means of bodily discipline; to shape and contain their bodies. Drawing on the work of Foucault’s (1976) and feminist interpretations of his work (Bartky, 1988; 1990; Bordo, 1989; 1993a), I examined the disciplinary measures that the participants took to self-regulate and produce particular forms of femininity.

The participants’ use padded bras to change the shape and/or size of the breasts. The participants equate round breasts with heteronormative femininity and sexual desirability. Wearing padded bras to discipline the shape of the breast is a reflection of their adherence to, and participation in, constructions of contemporary Western notions of normative femininity. It also reinstates the socio-political power that the spaces of underwear shops have in producing feminine subjectivities.

Throughout the interviews, the participants continually reflected on the emotive experience of wearing underwear. Underwear either made them ‘feel sexy’ or not ‘feel sexy’. I argued that this highlights the situated experience of emotion and how it can be produced through clothing. How the participants felt about their clothed bodies effected how they experienced their bodies during sexual encounters. The participants were aware of and had internalised an objectifying masculine gaze and thus took careful steps to discipline their bodies; to conceal certain areas and reveal others.

In the final section of the chapter I challenged ideological understandings of underwear as containing. I suggested that underwear can create and/or code, the body as ‘out-of-control’, especially when it does not fit properly (although this is a social construction specific to time and place) and when it can be seen

through clothes. Ill-fitting underwear thus becomes part of the out-of-control body and visible underwear such as bras straps and visible panty line can code the body as out-of-control by highlighting bodily areas associated with feminine sexuality.

### **Future Research**

This research makes valuable theoretical and methodological contributions towards feminist, social, cultural and embodied geographies. It opens the (changing room) door into investigating the constitutive relationship between clothed bodies and space and thereby produces a myriad of possibilities for future research. To conclude, I offer some lines of geographical inquiry to build on my thesis, in particular I suggest three avenues of possible research. First, inquests into men's experiences of underwear and space would be useful for geographers interested in issues of corporeality and space/place. Second, examining underwear as a source of bodily fluid containment would prove fruitful. And finally, investigating the intersection of gender with other axes of difference such as age could provide valuable contributions to geography.

In this thesis I have focussed specifically on women's experiences of underwear and space. However, research on men's purchasing and wearing of underwear, the role underwear plays in the construction of their gendered subjectivities and how their subjectivities are negotiated by space is also important and currently under-researched. Men are increasingly being subjected to the same body objectification as women and both heterosexual and gay men are now expected to look trim, taut and terrific (Aaronovitch, 2000). Popular media images of men are producing heteronormative masculine 'ideals'.

Key New Zealand sporting figures, particularly rugby players, are now being positioned as the norm, a norm that requires a muscular, athletic, young man

who engages in some, but not too much, self-regulating activities. Currently in New Zealand, Daniel Carter – modelling Jockey underwear – occupies an idealised discursive space amongst New Zealand’s ontological understandings of what constitutes a ‘man’. Research that examines constructions of male bodies, underwear and space, as culturally, historically and spatially specific would call into question dominant understandings of female bodies as the sole subjectivities regulated by societal understandings of a normative appearance. It also challenges geographical knowledge production that positions research on fashion and bodies as feminised, frivolous and unworthy of academic attention. Given the recent growth in masculinities studies in geography this is an area to which geographers could usefully contribute.

Secondly, I have focused on underwear as containing ‘fluid’ bodies. In this context, ‘fluid’ has referred to fluids that leak *within* rather than *across* bodily boundaries. Body fluidity in this thesis has constituted body subjectivities and materialities that are indeterminate (wobble, giggle and move.) Therefore, I think it would prove fruitful to examine the relationship underwear has with bodily fluids that leak across boundaries. Undies become ‘soiled’. Undies are the primary material that absorbs bodily fluids. They soak up and contain menstrual blood, urine, faeces and sexual fluids and within changing rooms, clothes have an immediate, albeit temporary relationship, with the body. Clothing (bras and undies) tried on in underwear shops come into direct contact with the most ‘dangerous’ body zones; breasts and genitalia.

Finally, with the growing body of literature on children within geographic scholarship (Aitken, 2001; Crewe and Collins, 2006; Holloway and Valentine, 2000), examining pre-teenagers and teenagers experiences of underwear and space would afford many opportunities for understanding how the clothed body is a site and space for display and identity (re)formation. What needs to be addressed is the:



means through which children's tastes, preferences, and identities become embodied through fashion consumption – consumption which is in part shaped through media influences, but which is mediated by and refracted through social networks and parental choices, controls and material capital' (Crewe and Collins, 2006 11).

In summary, clothing is a significant component of bodily subjectivity. There has been little geographic research into the role underwear and space plays in the production of feminine subjectivities. In this thesis I have investigated this knowledge gap and made new ground by using the subject of underwear to understand further the relationship between identity and place for a small group of young Pākehā women in Hamilton, New Zealand.

## **Appendix One: Focus Group and/or Semi-structured Interview Schedule for Bendon Employees**

### **Video Questions**

- What are your initial reactions to the *Victoria's Secrets* video? Prompt: like it? Didn't like it? Why?
- What kinds of women were in the video and what were their bodies like?
- How do the women in the video make you feel about yourself?
- What do you think the video says about what it means to be feminine?
- This video is from the U.S, do you think it relates to us here in New Zealand?

### **Drawing Discussion**

Now I'll get you to draw a picture of your body – not with clothes on. On the picture highlight and label what you do and don't like. After you have finished drawing we will quickly discuss what you have drawn and why.

### **Underwear Questions: Thinking about Underwear Specifically...**

- What do you think is the difference between underwear and lingerie? Explain prompt: do you wear underwear or lingerie? Is it sexy or comfortable? Does this apply to you?
- Does wearing particular underwear make you feel a particular way? Why?
- Do you wear matching sets or mix and match your bras and bottoms? Why?
- What kinds of underwear do you wear for certain occasions? Prompt: sports bras at the gym, 'sexy' lingerie in the bedroom, 'comfortable' underwear at home.
- Do other people eg your partner influence your decision to wear particular types of underwear in particular spaces?
- Who is allowed to see you in your underwear? Prompt: how do you feel about it?

- Did you know about bra sizes before you started working at Bendon? Yes, no? Where and when did you learn?
- What influences your choice to purchase underwear? Such as comfort, affordability, customer service, outer appearance.
- What's your ideal body shape and what role does your underwear play in achieving this? For example padded bra gives you bigger breasts.

### **Consumption Questions**

- How often to you shop for underwear?
- Where do you buy your underwear from? Prompt: Bendon? Why? Why not?
- What brands do you usually buy? Prompts: why?
- How has working at Bendon influenced your feelings about underwear?
- How has working at Bendon influenced your feelings about your body? Prompt: improved? Decreased? Why?
- When you're at work, how do you think your appearance influences or affects shoppers?
- Do you think that shoppers watch you and evaluate your body?
- How do you feel about seeing customers in their underwear?
- What 'kinds' of women buy what kinds of underwear? Prompt: size, shape, appearance, age, 'race'.
- Why do you think women are embarrassed about buying and trying on underwear? Prompt: body issues? Can you provide an example? How did you react towards the customer and the situation?
- How do women feel about their bodies whilst trying on underwear? Prompt: good? Bad? Happy? Unhappy? Combination of above? Is it related to their size and shape?
- Have you ever assisted a woman who is completely happy with her body? Prompt: yes? No? Why was she happy/not happy? Can you describe a specific situation? Did she tell you about her feelings towards her body?

- What are management's expectations of your appearance? Prompt: uniform, physical appearance.
- What are management's expectations of your interactions with customers? Prompt: sensitive in relation to size and appearance etc.

## **Appendix Two: Focus Group and/or Semi-structured Interview Schedule for ‘Bra Consumers’**

### **Video Questions**

- What are your initial reactions to the *Victoria’s Secrets* video? Prompt: like it? Didn’t like it? Why?
- What kinds of women were in the video and what were their bodies like?
- How do the women in the video make you feel about yourself?
- What do you think the video says about what it means to be feminine?
- This video is from the U.S, does it relate to us here in New Zealand?

### **Drawing Discussion**

Now I’ll get you to draw a picture of your body – not with clothes on. On the picture highlight and label what you do and don’t like. After you have finished drawing we will quickly discuss what you have drawn and why.

### **Underwear Questions: Thinking about Underwear Specifically...**

- What do you think is the difference between underwear and lingerie? Explain prompt: do you wear underwear or lingerie? Is it sexy or comfortable? Does this apply to you?
- Does wearing particular underwear make you feel a particular way? Why?
- Do you wear matching sets or mix and match your bras and bottoms? Why?
- What kinds of underwear do you wear for certain occasions? Prompt: sports bras at the gym, ‘sexy’ lingerie in the bedroom, ‘comfortable’ underwear at home.
- Do other people eg your partner influence your decision to wear particular types of underwear in particular spaces?
- Who is allowed to see you in your underwear? Prompt: how do you feel about it?

- Where and when did you learn about bra sizes? Prompt: do you know what your bra size is?
- Does all your underwear fit comfortably? Prompt: yes? No? Why?
- What influences your choice to purchase underwear? Such as comfort, affordability, customer service, outer appearance.
- What's your ideal body shape and what role does your underwear play in achieving this? For example padded bra gives you bigger breasts.

### **Consumption Questions**

- How often to you shop for underwear?
- Where do you shop for underwear? Prompt: if it's at Bendon, what do you think of the store? If it's not at Bendon, where else do you shop and why?
- What influences your decision to shop at certain stores eg customer service, product availability?
- Who do you shop with? Prompts: why? Alone? Friends? Partner?
- Are there certain 'times' when you shop for underwear? Prompts: before a date/special occasion, after dieting, when your underwear wears out, as a 'treat' for yourself?
- How do you feel about sales assistance seeing you in your underwear?
- Do you ever ask to be fitted for bras? Why, why not?
- Does the sales assistance's appearance eg age, race, size and shape influence your decision to ask for help?
- How do the sales assistance's reactions towards you for example comments on how good something may look influence your choice to purchase and on how you perceive your body?
- What brands do you usually buy? Prompts: why – comfort, affordability, look, 'brand'?

## **Appendix Three: Information Sheet**

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### **INFORMATION SHEET**

in the research project

### **Intimate Geographies: Bodies, Underwear and Space in Hamilton, New Zealand**

My name is Carey-Ann Morrison and I am a Masters student in the Department of Geography, Tourism and Environmental Planning at the University of Waikato. My supervisor is Dr Lynda Johnston, Senior Lecturer, Department of Geography, Tourism and Environmental Planning, University of Waikato.

Working at Bendon Lingerie Outlet and being interested in issues relating to women has prompted me to think about the relationships between women, their underwear and space. In particular, I am interested in how and why women use underwear to construct different identities and in turn, how these identities are influenced by different spaces. My research is academic and independent of any governmental organisation. My research has been approved by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Human Ethics Research Committee, University of Waikato.

### **What does it mean to be a participant in this research?**

You have a choice of being involved in either a focus group and/or an individual interview. A focus group is much like having coffee with a group of friends, and will consist of two to ten people and myself. We will meet at a time and place that suits everybody. Our discussion will be audio tape-recorded, and will last between an hour and two hours.

An individual interview will be a discussion between you and me, and will last between an hour and two hours. Again, the discussion will be audio tape-recorded, and we will meet at a time and place that suits us both.

## **What are my rights as a participant in this research?**

If you choose to be a participant in this research, you have rights that protect your personal safety. These rights are:

- The right to refuse to answer any particular question(s);
- The right to ask any further questions about the research that occur to you during your participation in the research; and
- The right to withdraw from the research up to four weeks after the interview without question.

## **What will we talk about?**

In this research I am interested in finding out about *your* experiences of underwear consumption. The sorts of things we will be talking about are:

- What influences your choice to purchase underwear?
- How do you feel about yourself when you're in your underwear?
- Do you wear underwear for certain occasions?

There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers – I am interested in hearing your stories about your underwear experiences.

## **What will the information be used for?**

The data collected from semi-structured interviews and focus groups will be analysed and the results will contribute to my thesis. Upon its completion, my thesis will be available at the University of Waikato's Central Library. You may request an executive summary of the thesis. Aggregated data from the study may be included in further work, such as in future academic journal articles that I write.

Anything we talk about will be kept confidential by me and a pseudonym (fake name) will be used in any publications and presentations so that you remain anonymous.

## **If you want to be involved**

You can call me or email me at. You may also contact my research supervisor, Dr Lynda Johnston or Charlotte Church at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee if you have any queries, comments or concerns about the research.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Carey-Ann Morrison



### Appendix Four: Participants' Details

<b>Participants' Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Relationship Status</b>
Joanne	22	Student	Long-term, Heterosexual
Anna	21	Student	Single, Heterosexual
Elizabeth	22	Student	Long-term, Heterosexual
Tracey	20	Student	Single, Heterosexual
Sally	18	Retail Assistant	Long-term, Heterosexual
Cassie	22	Student	Engaged, Heterosexual
Toni	21	Student	Engaged, Heterosexual
Lisa	21	Retail Assistant	Long-term, Heterosexual
Rachael	18	High School Student	Long-term, Heterosexual
Liv	20	Student	Long-term Heterosexual
Carey-Ann	22	Student	Long-term, Heterosexual

## Appendix 5: Consent Form

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### CONSENT FORM

in the research project

### **Intimate Geographies: Bodies, Underwear and Space in Hamilton, New Zealand**

**DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT:** In this research I aim to examine the relationships between bodies, space and underwear. Specifically, I am interested in how women use underwear to construct different identities, and in turn how these identities are affected by space.

I (your name) \_\_\_\_\_ **agree to participate** in the research project 'Intimate Geographies': underwear and space in New Zealand which is being carried out by Carey-Ann Morrison of the Department of Geography, Tourism and Environmental Planning, University of Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton, New Zealand (mobile: e-mail: ) Queries or complaints about the research can be forwarded to Charlotte Church at of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee.

I understand that:

- a) All the data collected will remain **secure** under lock or on a computer database accessible by password only.
- b) My identity will remain **confidential** and **anonymous**, unless I specifically state otherwise.
- c) I have the **right to withdraw** from the research any time up to 4 weeks after the interview without explanation. If I choose to withdraw, my tape-recorded material will not be used in any publications.
- d) Information will be used for the researcher's **final thesis, journal articles and seminars**. As stated earlier, individuals will **NOT** be identified by name in any publications or reports.

I wish to obtain a summary of the completed thesis (please circle)    Yes/No

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/2006

Signature of Researcher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/2006

## Appendix Six: Example of Interview Analysis

Disciplining body r(b)Round vs Panty - Moulding - Bras Bodie)

N. Yep, yeah, I think more so bras because of the wires and stuff (yeah) wires give you shape [laugh]

C. Um and what type of shape do you think?

N. Round. (Round shape, yep) Um maybe that Elle Macpherson everything is rounded as well (they are aren't they?) I don't think Elle Macpherson has any pointy bras so that could be ...

N. Both. Ahh cause I think piercings are cool and because I like, I think breasts are cool [laugh] - I like my breasts with piercings, they're not as like...they kind of make me feel like there's not....like I sorted of didn't like my boobs before because they're pointed. But now they are, I just feel that they're nicer now, like now because I have something (rounder) to detract from them or I don't know - I just like them.

J. um, yeah I always wear yeah bras that will make me look nice and rounded and I like wearing underwear that will yeah make, you know how you wear underwear that just makes you look like skinnier [laugh] (yeah) and stuff

N. yeah, I usually try to avoid the people until I am paying, but if it makes me look pointy through a tee-shirt or something horrible like that [K. agrees] then I don't like it, but price [S. agrees] cause I go to those look at the wall of Bendon Intimates, and its sort of like this hallowed ground [laugh] because its so

T. well, you like, some bras make you more pointier (L. yeah), and some may you more rounded kind of thing (L. yeah)

## **Appendix Seven: Participant Observation Information Sheet for Bendon Employees**

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### **INFORMATION SHEET FOR BENDON EMPLOYEES**

in the research project

### **Intimate Geographies: Bodies, Underwear and Space in Hamilton, New Zealand**

My name is Carey-Ann Morrison and I am a Masters student in the Department of Geography, Tourism and Environmental Planning at the University of Waikato. My supervisor is Dr Lynda Johnston, Senior Lecturer, Department of Geography, Tourism and Environmental Planning, University of Waikato.

Working at Bendon Lingerie Outlet and being interested in issues relating to women has prompted me to think about the relationships between women, their underwear and space. In particular, I am interested in how and why women use underwear to construct different identities and in turn, how these identities are influenced by different spaces. My research is academic and independent of any governmental organisation. My research has been approved by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Human Ethics Research Committee, University of Waikato.

### **What is participant observation?**

Participant observation involves the researcher actively observing and recording people in a set location and time. I will observe and record experiences, interactions and reactions with Bendon customers in a diary during my breaks or after work. Participant observation allows the researcher to be actively involved in the spontaneity of everyday interactions, whilst maintaining usual roles and responsibilities.

### **What types of information will be recorded?**

In this research I am interested in finding out about the underwear consumption of Bendon shoppers. The sorts of things I will be actively observing and recording include:

- What types of underwear different types of women purchase;
- How shoppers react towards myself and other shoppers;
- How women feel about their bodies and underwear.

### **How will this affect you?**

The research will not have any direct affect on you or your work. Because participant observation involves watching people in their 'usual' environment, going about their 'usual' activities, you will not have to do anything differently. I will also be continuing *all* of my usual work roles and responsibilities, so your workload will not be affected.

### **What will the information be used for?**

The data collected from participant observations will be analysed and the results will contribute to my thesis. Upon its completions, my thesis will be available at the University of Waikato's Central Library. Aggregated data from the study may be included in further work, such as in future academic journal articles that I write.

Anything I observe and record will be kept confidential by me and a pseudonym (fake name) will be used in any publications and presentations so that participants remain anonymous. Any other identifying information such as appearance will also be altered to ensure anonymity.

### **If you have any questions**

You can call me on call me on or email me at You may also contact my research supervisor, Dr Lynda Johnston on or Charlotte Church at of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee if you have any queries, comments of concerns about the research.

Carey-Ann Morrison

## Appendix Eight: Consent Form for Bendon Manager

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### CONSENT FORM FOR BENDON MANAGER

in the research project

### Intimate Geographies: Bodies, Underwear and Space in Hamilton, New Zealand

**DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT:** In this research I aim to examine the relationships between bodies, space and underwear. Specifically, I am interested in how women use underwear to construct different identities, and in turn how these identities are affected by space.

I (your name) \_\_\_\_\_ **agree to allow** Carey-Ann Morrison to conduct participant observation in Bendon Lingerie Outlet for her research project 'Intimate Geographies': underwear and space in New Zealand. Queries or complaints about the research can be forwarded to Charlotte Church at of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee.

Participant observation involves the researcher actively observing and recording people in a set location and time. I will observe and record my experiences, interactions and reactions with Bendon customers in a diary during my breaks or after work. Participant observation will allow will me to be actively involved in the spontaneity of everyday interactions, whilst maintaining my usual roles and responsibilities as a Bendon employee.

I understand that:

a) All the data collected will remain **secure** under lock or on a computer database accessible by password only.

b) Identities of Bendon employees and shoppers will remain **confidential** and **anonymous**.

c) Information will be used for the researcher's **final thesis, journal articles, and seminars**. As stated earlier, individuals will **NOT** be identified by name in any publications or reports.

Signature of Bendon Manager \_\_\_\_\_ Date  
\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/2006

Signature of Researcher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/2006



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