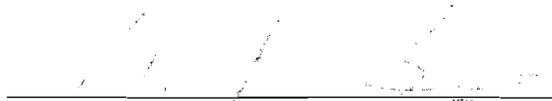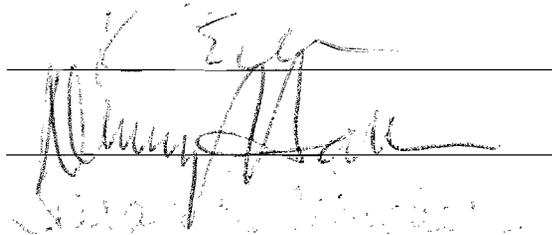THE POLITICS OF STYLE: FASHIONING THE STUDENT BODY

by

Caroline Pendry
A Thesis
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
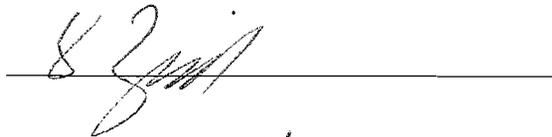The Requirements for the Degree
of
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Sociology

Committee:

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_____ Dean, College of Humanities and Social
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Date: _____ Spring Semester 2012
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

The Politics of Style: Fashioning the Student Body

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at George Mason University

by

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Bachelor of Science
Western Carolina University, 2009

Director: Amy Best, Professor
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ABSTRACT

THE POLITICS OF STYLE: FASHIONING THE STUDENT BODY

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This study investigates how students at George Mason University negotiate and construct

their identities through dress, hairstyles, and other alterations to the body. Whether we

see ourselves as an environmentalist or feminist, Muslim or Christian, female or male,

black or white, we employ clothing and hair styles that both reflect and reify these

affiliations. Style is also deeply imbedded within youth culture and shown to be a

primary mode of distinction in which youth are involved in positioning themselves within

the social, cultural, and political landscape. Through clothing and hairstyle, the students

in this research consume cultural materials in an effort to express and represent individual

identity claims that simultaneously locate them within social categories relating to race,

class, gender, and sexuality. The politics of style emerge as students use marks of

distinction to draw symbolic boundaries in which they align and distance themselves with

moral and ideological belief systems.

INTRODUCTION

I arrived at George Mason University in fall of 2009, ready to start my graduate career. I had spent the last four years in the rural college town of Cullowhee, North Carolina attending Western Carolina University. I was new to the area, new to Mason, and new to graduate school. But I was not new to first-of-the-semester orientation programs. Standing at orientation, we were divided into groups by our academic program. I began to look around and like many sociologists I couldn't help but notice the patterns of the groups in the room. I leaned over to one of my fellow classmates, "isn't it interesting how you can sort of tell who belongs to which program?" For one reason or another it struck me how much we read others based on their appearance. I realized that the body and outward appearance of students said a lot about where they fit into the landscape of the university. When this observation turned into a class research project I became fascinated with how and why we examine others, their clothes, hairstyle, and body in an effort to draw conclusions about who they are without ever actually speaking to them.

Style is a window to the self, and whether consciously or not, we are saying quite a lot about our 'self' by how we fashion the body. By focusing attention on fashion and style we can address issues that rational discourse cannot. As (Bovone 2006) writes, "clothes have the capacity to communicate outside the rules for rationality, in a sui

generis language, such as non-verbal language of the body" (374). Style is a non-spoken short-hand in which cultural objects are used to enhance or deflect race, class, and gender identities in addition to being used to align or distance individuals from other social categories. For this research I use Diana Crane's understanding of fashion to refer to "strong norms about appropriate appearances at a particular point in time" (2000:1). Crane further distinguishes between three categories of fashion: luxury design fashion, industrial fashion, and street styles (2000). Throughout this work I will be primarily concerned with what she terms street styles, encompassing the distinct ways in which people express themselves and communicate using clothing and hairstyle. I question how style becomes a way for students to both articulate claims of individuality as well as facilitating claims of collective membership and social belonging. How is style used to project a self independent of groups while simultaneously maintaining membership within social categories? By asking these questions we can better understand the role of material culture and consumerism in social life as well as the meaning making process in terms of the modern self and individuals' attempts to navigate the tension between individualism and belonging.

As a form of material culture, clothing comes to carry various symbolic meanings and is therefore a tool individuals and groups use to respond to and exercise influence in social life (Bovone 2006). A critical approach to style provides a field of research that examines how people adopt cultural materials and appropriate them for their own purposes within a particular moment in space and time. In his classic work on subcultural style, Dick Hebdige (1979) argues that style is the arena where definitions and meaning

are communicated. Most importantly, we need to understand that style has the unique ability to tell us about how power is distributed in society, most notably by considering which groups have how much to say in defining, ordering, and classifying acceptable forms of dress and appearance (Hebdige 1979). Through fashion and style, both men and women are engaged in communicating social status positions. Historically, sartorial laws in western society communicated one's access to economic and political power (typically men), while on the other hand women's dress was an indirect reflection of status relating to their family (Davis 1992). However, in late modernity, the notion that style communicates power and social status is a slippery slope. One must be careful not to assume that styles and fashions directly imply or represent one's social position. For example, fashion and style are considered feminine social arenas, but we must be cautious as to not assume that all or even most women occupy a privileged position in determining what is fashionable or "good" style.

The study of fashion, clothing, and style provides a field for examining a range of social and cultural phenomena as they relate to the body. The ability to understand and illuminate social inequalities as they become apparent in everyday life and more specifically on the body has been of interest to a number of scholars (Skeggs 1997, Best 2000, Bettie 2000, Espiritu 2001). It follows from Goffman's conception of the body that clothing and hair are significant means by which individuals mark themselves and draw symbolic and status boundaries. Bettie provides that the "symbolic economy of style" is the ground on which race, class, and gender relations play out (2000). In the economy of style, hair, makeup, dress, and nail polish become key markers in which to express group

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membership as the body is converted into a site upon which difference is inscribed (Bettie 2000). Extending Bourdieu's insights relating to embodiment, Skeggs further argues that the body is the primary site in which the relations of race, class, and gender become embodied and practiced (Skeggs 1997). The body thus takes on a central role when we talk about style, and it is also through this talk that the body becomes an entity inscribed with race, class, gender, and sexuality.

In addition, talk about the body exposes forms of social categorization as something that is achieved through investments of time, money, and resources in alterations to the body (Best 2000). In her work on high school proms Best writes, "more than just a set of frivolous practices of primping, these are fertile sites of identity negotiation and construction where girls are making sense of what it means to be a woman in a culture that treats the surface of their body as the consummate canvas on which to express the feminine self" (2000:46). Best points to the centrality of the body in identity construction, particularly for young women in our current culture. From these understandings we can begin to look at style as an aspect of the political nature of the body in contemporary society. The politics of the stylized body emerge as style becomes a means by which we articulate group membership to social categories like race, class, gender, and sexuality, as well as membership to ideological commitments such as environmentalism and feminism. Style is political in that it publicly communicates our internal belief systems as well as our social group positions.

Setting the Scene

This research takes place within the complex space of a university campus with a number of competing accounts of what the reality of this space is. Even though the university is first considered an educational space it also a site where youth cultures emerge. For the last century, the university has become a highly social space where forms of youth culture intersect with forms of adult culture (Fass 1977). As young adults (typically aged 18-24) dominate the space, we see the university as an important site where youth are engaged in the construction of norms, values, and practices relating to their social world. Recent research has established educational settings as sites for identity construction that embed youth in a matrix of social and institutional relationships that provide the symbolic material with which youth fashion social and collective identities (Best 2000, Perry 2002, Wilkins 2008). Perry (2002) suggests that since youth have limited access to adult identity markers such as occupations, political affiliations, and civic responsibilities, they explore and define who they are through music, clothing, hairstyles, sports, and other leisure activities. But the youth in this research are also present on campus as students, here to engage in academic and intellectual pursuits. These college students seem to fall somewhere in the middle, attempting to negotiate both adult and youth identities. Clothing, music, and hairstyle all become significant markers of political and professional identities. It seems as young adults enter college and are faced with declaring a major and considering their course towards adult spheres they are also faced with negotiating claims of youth identity. The college space also brings

about a new sense of autonomy and identity exploration. Separate from parents, new friendships and opportunities are available at the collegiate level that may not have been present before. One of my participants, Sue, speaks to this concept,

> *I think when I left home suddenly I was buying my own clothes and I could pick whatever the heck I wanted. I started listening to different music in college…I started listening to like Rage Against the Machine and Marylin Manson and it just naturally, the music kind of morphed into the presentation, ya know? But that didn't last long cause I think in college I tried on several personalities. When I got more into the anti-war movement or animal rights, things like that, then I think my clothes, my persona, my presentation changed.*

With a new sense of freedom and autonomy Sue began to explore different music genres and clothing styles. As her political identity and ideological beliefs were taking shape, her presentation of self was also undergoing a shift to better reflect her emerging sense of self. Sue's talk suggests that college provides a space in which students "try on" different identities and lifestyles. University life is filled with countless opportunities to engage in the work of crafting a self. Deciding a major, joining campus clubs and groups, and increased exposure to other youth all influence how young people invest in the labor of presentation of self and answer questions of who I am and who I want to be in the future[i]. Considering students engagement in crafting a sense of self in relation to the campus environment it seems that university *life* is a *style* in itself.

George Mason University

This research was conducted at George Mason University, located in suburban Northern Virginia, just outside of the District of Columbia. Arguably, Mason is one of the most diverse universities in the nation, hosting students from around the world.

Almost everywhere you look, a variety of programs, websites, and literature boast that Mason is known for its diverse student population. In 2002, a Princeton Review survey of over 110,000 students claimed Mason to be the most diverse campus in the nation ("Diversity at Mason" 2011). The 2010-11 student enrollment demographics reveal that people of color account for over 47% of the student body in addition to almost 2,000 international students ("Diversity at Mason" 2011). Considering the heterogeneity in the student population one cannot help but wonder what the social scene truly looks like. According to an article published in the *Mason Gazette*, students, faculty, and staff agree that while academically students are engaged in broader, multicultural understandings, social life remains fairly homogenous (Anzalone, Herron, and Zinzer 2006). Considering the landscape of the Johnson Center and its patterns of cliques, insofar as these cliques are based on observable categories, it seems that despite being one of the most diverse institutions in the nation we still exhibit forms of social segregation. While the classroom provides a space to engage with others who are different than us in addition to multicultural perspectives, the social space of the university takes another shape. These forms of segregation however have a productive social function. According to Richard Sennett (1994), segregation is an adaptive strategy that works as a shield against oppression. This strategy also facilitates our ability to develop a sense of community and group identity. Smaller social groups provide essential aspects of identity that we use to construct our sense of self, which lays the foundation for us to compare ourselves with others. But this is not the end of the conversation. Social life requires a delicate balance between diversity and similarity as scholars from Georg Simmel (1908) to Sennett (1994)

have noted. According to Simmel (1908), for new and better forms of community to develop, smaller and more diverse communities must exist.

This research provides an opportunity to explore the campus climate at Mason and see whether students are socially active and engaged with others who are different from them. Student conversations about fashion and style allow us to see the ways in which students define themselves and sort themselves into social groups. By investigating the processes of distinction and alignment in which students attempt to distance themselves from one way of life while aligning with another I hope to engage in a discussion that uses the campus environment to illuminate larger social and cultural issues as they relate to diversity and multicultural relationships.

Notes

1 For more on identity exploration and the developmental period between the ages of late teens to late twenties see Jeffrey Arnett's conception of emerging adulthood. According to Arnett, in the last fifty years what most young men and women experience between the ages 18 to 29 has changed dramatically in industrialized societies. Instead of entering into marriage and family roles in their early twenties, most people now postpone these transitions to adulthood until at least their late twenties, and spend their late teens through their mid-twenties in self-focused exploration as they try out different opportunities and lifestyles. Essentially, Arnett has conceived of a new developmental stage between adolescence and young adulthood.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To explore my research questions it is helpful to consider several bodies of existing literature including work on self and identity formation, fashion and the body, consumption, performance of race, class, and gender, and diversity and civic life. In order to better understand the processes of identity formation and negotiation the work of George Herbert Mead provides a grounding in the theoretical concepts of the Self and provides the foundational understandings of the relationship between the individual and society. We learn from Mead that the self is constructed through a reflexive awareness in which the individual must become an object to herself, internalizing perceptions and predicting how others might receive her (1934). This objectification is based on the ability to take the role of the other, which is only possible where experience is social, common, and shared (Mead 1934). Mead explains, "The self is something which has development; it is not initially there at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, it develops in the given individual as a result of their relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process" (1934:135). Georg Simmel shares a similar perspective, suggesting that individual personality arises from the dialectical tensions between individual persons and society; individuals are free, creative agents in addition to being products of socializing forces outside of their control (1971). Both Simmel and Mead's writing on the self and identity are fundamental concepts that enable

an exploration of the ways in which students fashion their identities in individual and collective ways in addition to formulating a conception of the self that is displayed and embodied.

As with many studies, this research requires an awareness and consideration of the historical time period in which it takes place. Anthony Giddens' work unpacking how modernity has influenced social life provides an understanding of how historical forces guide social behavior. Giddens argues that contemporary social life is shaped by a "post-traditional order" in which identity is not ascribed but something in which one invests in through displaying aspects of the self (Giddens 1991). In the course of modernity, the self along with the body has become less and less a given but a reflexively mobilized phenomenon subjected to a variety of choices, options, and preferences which take the form of lifestyles (Giddens 1991). These lifestyle choices extend to decisions that relate specifically to the body such as what to wear and how to style one's hair transforming symbolic bodily displays into meaningful gestures that regulate our relationships within society (Best 2006). Lifestyle choices, such as what to wear also become representative and symbolic of one's moral and political values (Giddens 1991).

I also draw from Diana Crane and Laura Bovone's (2006) conceptualization of values as individualized preferences for states of being and self-enhancement that are intimately connected to one's personal identity. In this current historical moment these values and states of being have not only become individualized but also organized into lifestyles that guide and direct social interaction (Giddens 1991, Crane and Bovone 2006). More importantly, Giddens writes that lifestyle choices within the local and global

intersections raise moral issues that cannot be ignored (1991). For instance, the

worldwide debate surrounding the headscarf and its moral claims to modesty have indeed

influenced public policy (Rottmann and Ferree 2008), in addition to the way we think

about women's participation in public life (Mahmood 2005). It is therefore the concept of

lifestyles and their influence in social life that is particularly significant for my research.

Because Mason's campus is so diverse there is potential to explore the levels of

interaction between students who exhibit various identities and lifestyles. Through my

research we can look at Mason's campus as an arena where multiple lifestyles interact

with each other and how students talk about these interactions.

It is important to take a generational approach to the notion of lifestyles. It is in

this historical moment that the consumption of cultural materials to signify one's position

within society has taken a prominent role in today's youth. In her work *Fast Cars, Cool

Rides* (2006), Amy Best looks at the ways in which the consumer market is utilized as a

way to craft an identity both inside and outside social constraints. Best's work guides my

research in understanding how youth culture is entrenched in a consumer society where

life is given expression through material objects. In addition, Andy Bennett's work

(1999) forces us to revaluate the way sociologists theorize youth culture and subcultural

group membership. Bennett suggests that the term 'neo-tribe' is better suited to describe

youth's group membership, arguing that in the post World War II period group

membership has increasingly become unstable with shifting cultural affiliations and

boundaries that are articulated through stylistic preferences. Bennett (1999) argues that in

the late modern era lifestyles are more accurately described as "sensibilities employed by

the individual in choosing certain commodities and patterns of consumption and in articulating cultural resources as modes of personal expression" (607). He encourages us to look at style within a historical time period where youth have increased levels of autonomy, disposable income, and live in a society where consumerism offers the individual new ways of negotiating identity claims.

Both Bennett and Giddens write that the modern era is characterized by shifting affiliations where the consumer market provides individuals with a diversity of options and choices with which to construct a lifestyle. Here lifestyle is not to be confused with a way of life but rather a freely chosen mode of expression (Bennett 1999). For Giddens (1991) lifestyles become increasingly important to the constitution of a self-identity representing the material and physical forms that provide meaning for a particular identity. This notion is similar to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus as an underlying principle of judgments and a system of classifications of practices (1984). Lifestyles, for Bourdieu, are established when the habitus becomes a formula that accounts for practices, products, and judgments which give rise to a system of distinct signs and symbols based on practices that can be traced backed to objective social conditions (social origin and education) (1984). It is when the habitus is internalized that it begins to produce meaningful action and practices for an individual or groups of individuals that comprise a lifestyle. For both Bourdieu and Giddens it is important to recognize that cultural goods such as clothing are used for social purposes, whether to align oneself with a particular way of life or distinguish oneself from another way of life.

The habitus also extends to the way individuals relate to the body and how cultural taste is embodied. Bourdieu states, "it follows that the body is the most indisputable materialization of class taste" (190) manifesting in multiple ways. Bourdieu's work relates directly to my proposed research in how cultural products are used a forms of distinction. I am specifically interested in how conscious modifications to the body through clothing essentially become signs of one's social conditions and conditioning. I agree with Bourdieu in viewing dress as a way to assert one's position in a social space and propose to explore the ways in which students in particular inhabit space.

Bourdieu's critique suggests that taste for cultural goods such as clothing, food, and music constitute a particular lifestyle and are principally assertions of difference. For Bourdieu, assertions of difference unite and separate individuals into categories based on similar social conditions. Moreover, the similar tastes of a class, across multiple practices and fields, is primarily a product of the unity of the habitus that is the underlying principle of actions. Taste, according to Bourdieu, is the expression of particular ways of life or existence. Simmel might agree as he writes, "It may also be considered a sign of the increased power of fashion, that it has overstepped the bounds of its original domain, which comprised only personal externals, and has acquired and increasing influence over taste, over theoretical convictions, and even over the moral foundations of life" (1904:545). As material objects like clothing take on an aesthetic position and become associated with ways of life they also become distinctly tied to ethics and morality. As one's life-style, like their clothing style, are considered in comparison to others social

segregation and diversity become apparent. Bourdieu writes, "aversion to different lifestyles is perhaps one of the strongest barriers between the classes" (1984:56). However, this aversion is more than between classes and can be stretched to encompass the points of distinction between races, ethnicities, cultures, and even political commitments.

It is also important to realize that the habitus is also a social construction and system that is based on responses to social interaction. A way of life needs to be understood as both a reaction to approval or disapproval and also a social force that in turn affects the world. Through this understanding we can begin to better understand the ways groups develop tastes and the consequences of their existence. The capacity for lifestyles to reproduce their conditions and legitimate social differences is a strong force in perpetuating social inequality. To cultivate an atmosphere of respect for differences however we must understand how lifestyles as well as identities originate, paying specific attention to how these concepts relate to the body.

The Body Project (1997) by Joan Jacobs Brumberg provides a historical perspective and maps how young women's views about their bodies have changed over the course of a century. In addition, this work illustrates how social, economic, and political factors have influenced the ways in which young women see and think about themselves in addition to being an active part in the construction of their identity. Brumberg concludes that in the course of the past century young women have become increasingly focused on their body and beauty regimens, resulting in "projects" that center on modifications to the body in order to conform to increased social expectations.

Brumberg's work further supports Giddens' presumption that in all modern life, the individual is expected to have complete and unending control over the body is all social settings. Here we must consider that the idea of bodily control does not map equally across races, classes, or genders. Through a number of studies we can see that varying levels of control over the body are demanded dependent on social location as well as in differing ways within those subjective locations (Skeggs 1997, Wilkins 2008). It is through demeanor that bodily control becomes an integral aspect of what we cannot say in words because it is the necessary framework for what we can say or can say meaningfully (Giddens 1991). For example, this idea is played out in the performance of respectability as Beverly Skeggs' points out in her work *Formations of Sex and Gender* (1997). For the women in Skeggs' project, the stylized body becomes a primary means for communicating with others. By performing a respectable identity, working class women establish a valued and legitimate way of being that relies on bodily control and performance of feminine norms (Skeggs 1997).

Given that the body is a site upon which distinctions can be drawn (Skeggs 1997), Bourdieu's concept of symbolic boundaries provides a useful framework to understand embodiment. According to Bourdieu, distinction is the principle means by which social life is organized (1984). Michele Lamont and Virag Molnar contribute to the definition of symbolic boundaries as "distinctions made by social actors to categorize people, practices, and even time and space" (2002:168). In addition, symbolic boundaries can be understood as the means by which individuals and groups struggle over and agree upon definitions of reality (Lamont and Molar 2002). Provided that distinctions are constructed

and maintained by the consumption of symbolic cultural products the study of fashion and style presents a more than appropriate field in which to analyze the formation and reproduction of symbolic boundaries. Furthermore, boundaries become political as they "freeze a particular state of social struggle, i.e. a given state of the distribution of advantages and obligations" (Lamont 1992: 6). By taking a closer look at the different relations groups have to symbolic objects, we can better understand domination and oppression (Lamont 1992). The politics of style therefore emerge as groups develop and embody boundaries based on lifestyle distinctions.

Keeping in mind that symbolic boundaries are defined by cultural consumption (Bourdieu 1984), it is important to consult the literature on consumption practices. Sharon Zukin and Jennifer Maguire's work specifically provides an analysis of the ways in which consumption and economic structures influence social life (2004). Consumption practices can be considered creative avenues in which individuals evaluate themselves based on the imagined judgments of others (Skeggs 1997), recalling Charles Cooley's (1902) classic looking glass self, Mead's (1934) reflexive awareness of the self, and Goffman's theory of self-presentation (1959).

We must note that the study of consumption practices is not to praise or condemn consumers but to understand more thoroughly how and why people consume in various ways over time (Zukin and Maguire, 2004). It appears that the study of consumer culture requires a level of awareness to the stages of human development as a number of scholars have suggested the distinct position of youth in addition to women as primary consumers. Pamela Perry (2002), Amy Wilkins (2008), and Joan Jacobs Brumberg (1997)

specifically illustrate the importance of consumption practices as they are tied to identity construction and personal style. Through these works we see how youth articulate individuality within social life and present themselves as members of various social groups. These works are exceptionally important in considering how university students use conspicuous consumption. The analysis of consumption enables us to look at how economic and market structures are employed as avenues for improving the self and drawing distinctions.

Conversations about consumption also highlight historical changes such as democratization, industrialization, and urbanization, which subsequently give rise to new forms of individualization. Zukin and Maguire (2004) argue that in contemporary society access to goods and experiences that are constantly changing provide the individual with a sense that they are free to choose their own path towards self-realization, which in the past had only been reserved for elites. This freedom to choose however comes at the cost of inner security and produces a level of fear at "getting it wrong" (Skeggs 1997 and Giddens 1991). This fear however according to Giddens is diffused by fashions and styles as they exemplify bodily control and routines that standardize experience (1991). Consumption therefore provides individuals with forms of control and order in contemporary life.

In addition to Giddens' work, Zukin and Maguire speak to the consequences of modernity in terms of consumption. It is interesting that the authors state "in periods when social mobility becomes more fluid, consumers' anxiety increases, and they respond favorably to a broadening of retail institutions and consumer guides that brings

them closer to realizing their sense of value" (Zukin and Maguire 2004:193). Perhaps this notion is telling of the influential role of economic and marketing industries in cultural production and available arenas from which individuals come to understand who they are. As noted earlier, the freedom to choose that characterizes modern life has innumerable consequences for our understandings about social life. Zukin and Maguire's statement is also revealing of modernity's legacy in how the framework for self-actualization is bounded by forms of authenticity and authenticity claims (Giddens 1991). For Giddens (1991) and Wilkins (2008), the notion of authenticity relies on the alignment of external actions and forms with internalized frameworks, similar to the structures present in Bourdieu's notion of habitus. It seems that a broadening of available options allows consumers to realize and recognize a more individualized sense of their place in the social world (Zukin and Maguire 2004). Bovone adds that in the spirit of postmodern culture, consumption can be seen as a search for experience and a sense of identity through the "aesthetization of everyday life" (2006). By understanding the historical influences on self-actualization we can see how identity processes have evolved over time and how they continue to evolve within particular spaces and time.

In comparison to Giddens' writing on modern identity formation, Bovone (2006) provides an analysis of postmodern identity processes within urban style cultures. She suggests that while modern identity is characterized by the creation of stable identities or belonging through forms of authenticity, postmodern authenticity is about riding the fragments of identity, "a departure from rules, without any sense of guilt" (375). In the

postmodern world, style choices are linked to an identity that is forced to negotiate

multiple social roles (Bovone 2006).

In this piece, identity is seen as a "construction and negotiation that emerges at

the moment when the individual is staging it, adorning it, and telling it" (371). This

perspective is important to our understandings of not only identity but of time as well. By

focusing more on the emergence of identity within specific moments in time, the

individual has stepped beyond the simple concepts of imitation and differentiation as

outlined by Simmel. For Simmel, the imitation phase is characterized by acts that enable

individuals to rise above their momentary existence. By successfully imitating, the

individual connects the past to the present and expands the present moment (Simmel

1957). Simmel explains,

> At this stage every deviation from imitation of the given facts breaks the
> connection which alone can now unite the present with something that is
> more than the present, something that tends to expand existence as a mere
> creature of the moment. The advance beyond this stage is reflected in the
> circumstance that our thoughts, actions, feelings are determined by the
> future as well as by fixed, past, and traditional factors (1957:543)

Connecting Bovone and Simmel's perspectives, to move beyond the imitative stage to

more complex stages of development, we must consider that our existence is more than

the past, more than the future, existence is within the moment and subject to that moment.

In late modernity, identity emerges out of creating a cohesive biographical narrative from

past experience (Giddens 1991), whereas, according to Bovone (2006), in the postmodern

era identity recognizes the fragments that make up the individual with consideration to

moments of time and space.

Recently a number of scholars have explored the performance and fluidity of race, class, and gender as emergent and defined by social practices. Perry writes, "race, culture, and identity are not static, immutable things; they are social processes that are created and recreated by people in their daily lives and social interactions" (2002:3). In her work, Perry argues that racial identities including white identities are shaped by a matrix of social, historical, geographical, and political factors within a given context and by the contingencies of daily life in which one is exposed to various relationships to racialized others. The importance of levels of exposure to others is further illustrated in Perry's work as she argues that the self only knows who she is because of who the other is (2002). She explains that without clearly defined racial identities, white students in her study had no terms to define their white cultural identity (Perry 2002). The author concludes that varying proximities of association with racial and ethnic others make for varying white identities (Perry 2002). Perry (2002) agrees with Mary Waters (1999) that at the same time as racial and ethnic identities are situational, choices of identities are constrained and structured by available options within a given social context. History and power relations are deeply embedded within those structures that shape one's identity. Therefore, the meanings of each identity are variable and shift depending on time and space (Waters 1999).

Perry's work also addresses how social processes urge individuals to take up certain subject positions in which the person responds by internalizing a social location into a defining aspect of the self. On one hand, racial and ethnic identities are social ascriptions with implications individuals are required to bear, while on the other hand,

those identities are meaningful sources of community and self-understanding that provide

an anchoring of oneself in the world politically and/or spiritually (Perry 2002). Style,

dress, and consumption activities are a primary means by which young people

symbolically negotiate and resolve their sense of self (Perry 2002). In response to

Bourdieu's conception of cultural capital Skeggs asserts that race, class, and gender are

key variables in how social, cultural, and economic capital is organized. She writes,

> Structurally organized social positions enable and limit our access to
> cultural, economic, social and symbolic capital and thus the ability to
> recognize ourselves as the subject positions we occupy.
> (Dis)identifications from/with and (dis)simulation of these social and
> subject positions are the means by which identities come to appear as
> coherent (1997:13)

Therefore, by recognizing ourselves within the context of our social positioning as it

relates to race, class, and gender, we employ strategies of distancing and aligning

ourselves with ideals that aid in the construction of our identities. Skeggs' statement

encourages us to look at how structure organizes and influences the ways in which we

understand who we are. For the students in her study Perry finds that admittance to racial

and gender groups depends heavily on conformity to style, values, and demeanor. To be a

part of the group you must successfully perform the accepted norms and expectations of

that group.

A number of scholars have emphasized the role of schools and their influence

both as providing a ripe social environment as well as a socializing force in identity

formation (Best 2000, Bettie 2003, Perry 2002, Skeggs 1997, and Wilkins 2008). Most

research is concentrated on the role of primary and secondary schools in identity

formation but limited in the exploration of identity in post-secondary settings. It is here

that this research contributes to the literature and possibly opens up further areas of inquiry. I agree with Perry's (2002) assertion that school norms, practices, and expectations provide symbolic materials that students draw from to make sense of their experience and define who they are. Best's (2000) work on proms as cultural practice, adds that not only do youth pull from school norms and practices but suggests that larger cultural trends and understandings about the feminine body play out within the educational setting. My research contributes to this topic by specifically focusing on how style plays a particular role at the collegiate level.

Another important body of literature focuses on the role of class performance in structuring one's racial and ethnic identity. Waters' (1999) research outlines the influence of class and material resources on individual identity choices, finding that middle-class immigrant youth were more likely to have a strong ethnic identity whereas working-class immigrants were more likely to cling to an immigrant identity or American identity such as Mexican-American. While Julie Bettie's (2003) research also focuses on the interplay of race and class, she specifically outlines how the performance of class and class identity is influential in racial categorization. What is interesting about Bettie's research is the creative ability for individuals, in this case women, to construct alternative symbolic economies in which "badges of dignity" are earned and displayed. In addition, these alternative versions of gendered performance were shaped by individuals' knowledge and experience of racial/ethnic and class hierarchies (Bettie 2003). Bettie's work speaks directly to women's understanding of themselves in opposition to other women. Multiple social hierarchies are at work here in the styles that individuals employ. For example,

feminine performance is understood as inseparable from class and racial or ethnic performances (Bettie 2003). These works can be used to see how students deflect or enhance their racial or ethnic identity in order to negotiate dominant cultural norms. Perhaps students at Mason, like many youth, develop alternative ways of being and appreciation within groups. This research allows for a way to understand how multiple standards and symbolic economies are constructed in defiance to mainstream expectations and culture.

A number of scholars have approached the constructions of racial categories in order to better understand social organization and the ways in which minority experiences differ from those considered dominant (Perry 2002, Collins 2000). In her work, *Shades of White*, Perry (2002) establishes that white culture and white identity claims are often taken for granted, especially in spaces predominately comprised of white people. However, taking whiteness for granted and the perception that being white means being cultureless, is a signifier of racial power dynamics. To suggest that one is cultureless is to suggest one's racial superiority (Perry 2002). On the other hand, Patricia Hill Collins is one of the most notable scholars to explore the unique experiences of African American and Black women. Using Collins (2000) approach we can see how intersecting inequalities of race, class, and gender identities influence social status and interactions. In her work, Collins (2000) points out how historical structures of institutional inequality have led minorities to develop alternative ways of being. These lifestyles have had both positive and negative effects in which my research aims to explore as cultural values are symbolically expressed through dress and appearance in racial and gendered ways

To better understand the formations of gendered identity I turn to the works of Candace West and Sarah Fenstermaker (1995), Best (2000), Bettie (2003), and Skeggs (1997). West and Fenstermaker (1995) posit that race, class, and gender identities are ongoing interactional achievements. The authors put forth an understanding of race, class, and gender not only as accomplished through social interaction but concepts that are simultaneously experienced and performed in various social contexts. Skeggs (1997) and Bettie (2003) further explore the ways in which feminine performance is constructed and affected by class and race. Using Bourdieu's framework of class- based distinctions, Skeggs' (1997) work is an ethnographic study of the formations of class and gender identity drawing from interviews and observations with working-class women and their conceptions of femininity. As white, middle-class femininity is considered the ideal, the women within her study struggle to achieve aspects of an ideal outside of their grasp. Their enrollment in "caring courses" enables them to fulfill the ideal of femininity while still working and providing financial support for their families. Skeggs' work is also influential in exploring the role of respectability as it relates to women and interactions between networks of women (1997). In addition to the caring courses, the women in this study understood appearance as a central marker of feminine respectability. Yet to achieve respectability women must position themselves against other women. In Skeggs' words, "they use imaginary others dialogically to create distance from known others" (1997:85). These works provide a framework for understanding feminine culture as it relates to race and class.

What we can conclude from recent scholarly works is that identity and our sense of who we are is something conceived as fluid, malleable, and influenced by outside social forces within society. We must also consider the historical period in which identity processes emerge including how the body is a primary means by which we tell others who we are (Skeggs 1997). Best's (2000) work is also resource for my research in looking at how the body becomes an important site for women to stake an identity claim. By looking at how identities are constructed and understood we can learn about individual and group experience and the categories in which discrimination and oppression become embodied.

It is also important to carefully consider the space on which this research is focused. The relatively autonomous nature of the university campus provides a distinctive environment that is significant for our understandings of diversity and civic life. I think of diversity in the sense of consisting of multiple points of difference. I consider Mason a diverse space in that the campus is comprised of students, faculty, and staff from different class, race, religious, and cultural backgrounds. This campus is made up of individuals who not only represent every state in country but also various countries worldwide.

My research aims to discuss the role of the university as a space that enables distinctive points of contact between diverse populations within a setting that is both a learning environment and social setting. To examine the unique and heterogeneous student population that occupies comparatively minimal physical space, I turn to the works of Simmel and Sennett to provide a theoretical framework of how human interaction takes place within diverse spaces. Simmel's "The Metropolis and Mental

Life" (1903) looks at how densely populated, metropolitan areas structure our interactions with others in comparison to less densely populated areas. Throughout his work on the metropolis, Simmel argues that a rich human existence is dependent on our ability to interact with those who are different (1903). However, for Simmel, in response to the overwhelming emotional demands of modern life and its connection to the money economy, the metropolitan develops the blasé attitude. Essentially, the blasé attitude is an indifference towards difference. As the seat of the money economy, the space of the metropolis comes to have a rational and intellectual character that carries over into social interaction. According to Simmel (1903), intellectualistic people that make up the metropolis become indifferent to all things personal and unique. By taking a blasé attitude in social interaction one is protected from social and intellectual conflict while at the same time preventing interactions that promote full and healthy forms of life (Simmel 1903). Simmel's theory is useful in considering how students use style as a way of articulating difference while maintaining a sense of belonging to social groups. In many ways, style is a means by which individuals negotiate the demands of social interaction in modern life. Like the blasé attitude, clothing and hairstyle provide a resource by which individuals ease tensions and anxieties through the intellectual classifying and ordering of difference into categories of style. Style enables individuals to rationalize and draw conclusions about others without engaging in emotional, more personal interaction, which according to Simmel and Sennett has bearing on social progress.

Sennett's work also addresses how diverse spaces provide a unique arena for social growth. In his book, *Flesh and Stone* (1994), Sennett argues that the multicultural

city provides an ideal environment not only for self-realization but also engaging with "the Other". For Sennett, the multicultural city is ideal in that everyday experience has the potential to challenge and shake our assumptions about coherence and social life (1994). My research connects to Sennett's in examining how a multicultural institution is similar to a city in that it provides students opportunities to interact with a variety of others and looking at how these processes play out. We can use this literature to explore and think about the various ways in which life at George Mason compares to life in a diverse, densely populated environment. Of course there are notable differences in the structural makeup of Mason compared to a city, but I believe that we can draw from Simmel and Sennett's work to gain a better understanding of social life in this space.

Sennett's work also informs my research through his concept of civic bodies. Sennett (1984) argues that in modern society our own bodies have become similar to ghettos. While he uses this analogy based on his writings about the segregation of Jews at various points in history I find it a relevant concept in today's society. Both Sennett and Simmel's illustrations of creating physical and cognitive distance from others as well as forming affiliations between people is something that underwrites my research. In the relatively bounded physical space of the university, how do students create distance between themselves while at the same time articulating group membership through physical and symbolic methods as they actively work to project a self? By examining the role of fashion and style we can better understand how students negotiate diverse spaces and the ways cultural objects are used do so.

METHODS

To answer my research question I proceeded using feminist qualitative strategies. As outlined in Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2007), feminist research practice allows for the researcher to incorporate and acknowledge their own social positioning within the research process. I employ the feminist strategy of strong reflexivity, where the researcher is reflexive about her positioning and the ways in which one's social position influences the research process (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2007). My history and experiences become part of this research by guiding my research interests, the people I interview, the questions I ask, and a part of the written analysis. Throughout this work I occasionally bring in my own experiences related to style to draw comparisons or clarify an argument.

Since my research attempts to understand the diversity of experience on Mason's campus with regard to self formation and style, I have attempted to include participants from multiple ethnic, racial, class, and gender classifications. These interviews attempt to get at the questions outlined above and having students talk about the ways in which they experience campus life through the body in terms of fashion, style, and dress. Specifically, what does style mean for students on campus? How do students "read" each other based on appearance? What do students infer from others appearance? Do students use style as a ways to mark themselves as part of a group and if so how does this process

work? Perhaps more importantly, do students build bridges between these groups? Is style used as a marker of difference and therefore seen as a barrier between groups? Or do students adopt versions of Simmel's blasé attitude and simply appear to be indifferent to difference?

Since August of 2009 I have collected 10 one-on-one interviews, three focus groups, one with one woman and two men, one with five women, and another with three women. In addition I have collected three sets of fieldnotes. My one-on-one interviews were informal, unstructured, and primarily consisted of college-age men and women ranging from 18-23 with one interviewee in her late 20s. I interviewed four white women (Sue, Maria, Alice, and Jessica), one Chinese-American woman (Emily), one Black-American woman (Dee), one Ethiopian woman (Rihannon), one Somalian woman (Amira), one white man (Chase), and one Black-American man (Rick). My first focus group consists of three members of Mason's Environmental Action Group (EAG), Chase, a white male, George, an Indian-American male, and Alison, a white female. My second focus group was comprised of five Black females who are active in a student organization on campus dedicated to creating a sisterhood of minority women on campus. It is important to note that the organization's aims are focused in reclaiming an identity that connects to an ancestral past through the use of performance art. I will refer to this organization as a Black Women's Performance Group (BWPG). The final focus group consisted of three white freshman women who recently became friends upon entering Mason (Whitney, Erin, and Kristin). I had no previous connection with these women and randomly met them in the Johnson Center. Whitney is from Colorado and Erin and

Kristin are from southern Virginia. At the time of the interview, Whitney was a new member of a sorority on campus.

The interviews I conducted were informal and unstructured. I typically began each interview with a brief statement about my research, telling participants that I was interested in talking about style and wanted to hear what they thought about the topic. Sometimes I asked students what they thought of when I said style as opposed to fashion and let their responses guide the conversation. I asked participants where they liked to shop, what they typically wore to class, and how they perceived other students dress style. When I asked students directly about their own style it was much harder for them to articulate their thoughts and I found it more beneficial to have students talk about style in relation to others. At some points during the interviewing process I played the role of the novice researcher, asking for more explanation despite my knowledge of the terms used. During other points, as when I interviewed women of color, my position as an outsider was both useful and problematic which I will discuss more in the next section.

I utilized participant observations around campus, primarily in the Johnson Center (JC). The JC is a prime spot to observe social interaction because of its centrality on campus and the vast number of individuals and groups who study, eat, work, and "hang out" in the space. Through these observations I was able to witness how groups are spatially organized in addition to being socially and structurally organized by typical race, class, and gender categories. In these observations I remained vigilant of how students sort themselves based on difference and how style and demeanor patterns emerge. Given that materials are constantly being mediated and influenced by space and

time within the specific contexts that give them a particular meaning (Hebdige 1991), I remained cautious and attentive to the context and framework within which meaning is established and communicated. For that reason I worked through my data using analytical inductive coding strategies aligned with grounded theory, focusing on the emergent properties of analysis that are primarily concerned with the current student population at George Mason University (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995 and Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2007).

A number of scholars have made use of an interactional approach and effectively established that social categories such as race, class, and gender are emergent categories that take on meaning in the context of social interaction, making race, class, and gender something that is achieved, not something that we do (West and Ferstermaker 2002, Perry 2002). By taking an interactional approach to social inquiry we are enabled to see the ways in which structural inequality has the power to shape interaction as well as the ways in which interaction shapes social structure (Blumer 1969). However it is important to acknowledge that structural features set conditions for action but do not determine them (Blumer 1969). Herbert Blumer writes, "social organization enters into action only to the extent to which it shapes situations in which people act, and to the extent to which it supplies fixed sets of symbols which people use in interpreting their situations" (1969:88). It is social situations that provide a theater in which bodily displays are enacted and read (Goffman 1982). My analysis takes this perspective and hopes to illustrate the ways in which social location influences one's bodily display through clothing and hairstyle.

Moreover, if social categories emerge through interaction and become embodied through style then acknowledging the role of intersecting inequalities is imperative. The movement towards an intersectional approach draws from the works of Kimberle Chrenshaw (1989) and Patricia Hill Collins (2000). This perspective is particularly useful in understanding how patterns of inequality are not only interrelated, but are bound together and influenced by the systems of race, gender, class, sexuality and ethnicity (Collins 2000). While I do not intend to strictly adhere to the intersectional approach outlined by Chrenshaw and Collins, I attempt to make use of the understanding that social categories of race, class, gender, and sexuality all work together to make up a complex system that influences one's practical action in social life. As exemplified in my interviews and observations the prominence of performance and embodiment of one social category over others is contingent on the context of the social encounter. However, the most common thread running throughout my research has been my focus on women and feminine stylistic and beauty practices, thus my analysis privileges gender while also making an attempt to explicate the various raced and classed meanings individuals attach to style.

Methodological Issues

Race, class, and regional identities

What has been interesting about this study has been my own negotiation of style and how my identity has both helped and hindered the research process. In this research I have realized that I am no exception to being read based on my style choices. Throughout

my interviews, participants responded to me based on the self I project and social identities that I couldn't necessarily control. I found that conversations with other white women were situations where I was an insider and took for granted talk that may have led to further analysis on whiteness. However I found myself feeling like an outsider even while talking to other white women who were from the northern Virginia area or other urban areas. Being from rural North Carolina became more important than I anticipated. When I didn't understand what someone meant by Frye boots and the DC Hipster culture, I recognized my class and cultural positions as an outsider. In addition, my southern accent and use of "y'all" seemed to identify me as someone obviously "not from around here." It's difficult to imagine exactly how much my southern identity influenced my research. In some ways I think my interest in fashion and style was sparked because dress and appearance mean very different things in rural and urban areas. Being from a rural area made urban notions of fashion and style seem like something just foreign enough to intrigue me.

My outsider status was especially apparent during a number of my interviews with women and men of color. During focus group with five Black women the participants consistently asked if I knew what they meant or stopped to rephrase and clarify their points. These efforts resemble what Best might call "constructing whiteness through talk" (2003). In the first few minutes of the interview Lisa says, "Now, I'm from North Carolina ok, but I'm from Black North Carolina." I wasn't quite sure how to respond and conceded uncomfortably, "yea, I guess I'm from white North Carolina," to which someone else responded, "let's help the girl." Thinking back on the situation I'm

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not sure if that was the best response. Replying that I was from "white North Carolina" accurately implied that I had not grown up around blacks, or other people of color. It also seems that she was attempting to construct her Black identity and subsequently my white identity, to which I only reinforced. Interestingly, North Carolina can be broken down regionally where it is known that the Western part of the state (where I am from) is predominantly white, as opposed to more Urban areas and the Eastern part (where Lisa is from), which have larger Black populations. Further into the interview Kendra mentions a popular rap video, Tip Drill, and Lisa exclaims, "like she knows what Tip Drill is," effectively solidifying my whiteness again. Lisa's talk as well as my own highlight how the interview itself becomes a space where racial identities are managed, negotiated, and solidified (Best 2003).

The construction of our racial identities continued when Kendra asked if I knew what "natural" meant. This time I attempted to manage my ignorance by responding, "tell me what you mean by natural." At one point I even apologized for asking for clarification on the term "permed" and decided not to inquire about the next phrase for fear of being further excluded from the group and shown to be ignorant. In this instance, where one might assume that as a white researcher I would occupy a position of power in relation to the participants as knowledgeable on the interview topic, I in fact felt powerless. It is important to note my position as a white researcher in this encounter not only because whiteness often is associated with a privileged position but also because our understandings of style were so different based on experiences that have been greatly influenced by racial group membership. When I asked for clarification for the term

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"birds" someone whispered "chicken heads" to me. Even though I was somewhat sure about the term "chicken heads" when Lisa asked if I knew what she meant I responded, "well, tell me more." As Best (2003) examines, in research settings where participant and researcher are of a different race the role of novice and comments such as "tell me what you mean" can be read as an expression of whiteness that both position the researcher as an outsider and cement racial identities. This was true in my case and I found myself holding back from playing the novice because I was in many ways attempting to be seen as someone on their side. I didn't want this interview to seem like the stereotypical middle-class white feminist researcher in a position of privilege over women of color. But it seemed that no matter how hard I tried it was clear that many of them were skeptical of presence.

Another interesting point in the interview came when Kendra mentioned "vanilla folk" and rubbed the inside of her palm, signaling the lighter skin on her hand. I hadn't heard what she said so when I asked her to repeat it I can imagine how that could have been misinterpreted. This sparked an exchange between the women that eventually led to the end of the interview. When Lisa asked Kendra, "What was all of this?" making the same motion with her hands, I could tell that the others were uneasy, as if saying "I can't believe you said that in front of the white girl." Kendra looks to me and responds, "That's like, like you are not vanilla folk, you're not this, you are what I would consider a down white person, you and Michelle, and Christina and other Women and Gender Studies people." Lisa comes back, "Well, why do we consider her a down white person? Just cause we've gotten to know her if I would've just saw her on the street, I'd been like oh."

Kendra continues somewhat defending me by saying that she assumed that I was "down"

simply because I was student in Women and Gender Studies. This however did not

matter to Lisa who responded, "well, when I think of Women and Gender Studies I think

of women as in feminism and you know how I feel about that."

This exchange was both extremely interesting and enlightening. I understand

more so now than ever the reasons why there continue to be fractures within feminism as

a movement. Historically feminism has been labeled a white middle-class movement

pursuing interest relevant to white women. Lisa seems to be aware of this issue and

resistant to align herself with a politics that fall short on representing her position in

society.

As I think about my own anxieties, from the beginning of this research I have

been apprehensive to engage in any sort of race analysis. I am reminded of my own

positioning as a white middle-class woman from an overtly white place where race was/is

typically discussed in racist terms. As uncomfortable as it is to admit, I grew up in a

community that either didn't talk about race at all or expressed explicitly racist

sentiments. Furthermore, I have had extremely limited exposure to diverse populations.

Ruth Frankenburg states,

> White women have to repress, avoid, and conceal a great deal in order to
> maintain a stance of "not noticing" color. From this point of view, there
> are apparently only two options open to white women: either one does not
> have to say anything about race, or one is apt to be deemed "racist" simply
> by virtue of having something to say (1993:33)

I fear that I relate to Frankenburg's statement in that I was hesitant to say much of

anything in regards to race. However, as a researcher committed to feminist goals and

anti-racist ideology I wish to acknowledge race and attempt a level of analysis that illuminates it as an important variable in my research. That being said, this interview encounter made me question my own racial identity in new and complex ways, and rightly so.

Relationships

In my attempt to learn about my role as a researcher and active participant in the social world, I have made an effort to be conscious of times in my life that I play the role as researcher, and times when I am non-researcher, that is, just an average person. Since my topic of interest is a part of everyone's everyday life I have had to learn distinctions between the field and my personal life. Being able to discern times as a researcher and times as a friend is something I have taken note of through this process. Not every comment pertaining to dress is one I must scribble down into fieldnotes, which is something I was inclined to do in the beginning but thankfully refrained from. Although it has been challenging to make distinctions between the field and my life, it has been especially difficult for me to negotiate my role as a Sociology student with ties to Women and Gender Studies and that of the average person, less likely to be engaged in a hyper-reflexive stance towards the social world. Since the very idea of feminism is bound by the connections between personal and political actions it has become quite a challenge for me to not be overly critical of myself as well as society. Along with my research on dress, qualitatively I have engaged in a theoretical project of dress from a feminist perspective. Sometimes this makes getting dressed in the morning a feat and something that is harder to take for granted.

Over the past two years of this research process I have developed and sustained varying levels of friendship with a few of my participants, namely Alison, Maria, and Sue. Alison is probably the one to whom I am closest. We met by chance on a group hike early in fall 2009 and instantly connected. That day I asked Alison if she and a few others would be interested in helping me out with my research and doing an interview. The next week after exchanging a few Facebook messages Alison and two other members of the Environmental Action Group (EAG) met with me to talk about style. After the focus group, Alison introduced me to her roommate, Maria, with whom I also developed a friendship. Over the course of these years we've done what friends do, eat together, drink together, meet up for coffee, and go to concerts together. Maria even lived with me for a summer. Sue, on the other hand, is a fellow graduate student and someone whom I have been able to talk to about my project on a level that is distinct from the ways in which Alison and Maria talk about my research.

It would be hard to say that conversations with these women haven't influenced my thinking and research. Our relationships illustrate how the research process and the lines between researcher and participant are blurred. The theories in this research are not simply informed by academic readings but also intellectual conversations with those who participated in my study outside of the research setting. Though I have tried to establish reasonable boundaries I feel it would be dishonest (and maybe disrespectful) to ignore the role these women have played through this process. I have had a number of conversations with fellow students about my project but the relationship with those who have consented

to interviews provides a unique situation in that they are in many ways influencing the

analysis of their own words and experiences.

CHAPTER 1 THE POLITICS OF STYLE: STYLE AS WOMEN'S (BODY)WORK

In her classic piece, Simone DeBeauvoir wrote, "The body of woman is one of the essential elements in her situation in the world. But that body is not enough to define her as woman…" (DeBeauvoir 1952:37). DeBeauvoir sets out to understand how historical, political, social, and biological forces have shaped the human female. One of the fundamental points we learn from her is that to comprehend the situation of women we must also examine women's relationship to the body. Many feminists have continued this tradition and place the body at the core of their analyses of social control, oppression, and power relations (Bordo 1993, Bartky 1988, Jeffreys 2005). Other feminist scholars have contributed to this field in their attempts to challenge the idea that femininity is inherent, asserting that the category of female and its associations with femininity are achieved through work on the body and experiences of social constraint (Best 2000, Bettie 2003, Brumberg 1997, Skeggs 1997).

In another early work, Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) suggests that women's interest in beauty, appearance, and body adornment, are social consequences of historically being denied access to education and outlets that develop the mind. She writes, "taught from their infancy that beauty is woman's scepter, the mind shapes itself to the body, and roaming around its gilt cage, only seeks to adore its prison… men have various pursuits which engage their attention, and give a character to the opening mind" (1792:47). While

attempting to make a case for women's education, Wollstonecraft portrays women as "savage," and suggests that women have not been allowed to act in accordance to their own reasoning. She writes, "An immoderate fondness for dress, for pleasure, for sway, are the passions of savages; the passions that occupy those uncivilized beings who have not yet extended the dominion of the mind" (1792:122). Wollstonecraft's words exemplify the mind/body dualism and the hierarchy imposed on the concept that suggests work of the mind is superior to work on the body. She suggests that investments in developing the mind through education are not only in opposition but superior to investments made in the body. These sentiments also illustrate the ways in which the mind/body dualism maps across gender, men are granted pursuits of the mind and defined by those pursuits, women are defined by their bodies and the adornment of the body.

When we consider the work of Joan Jacobs Brumberg (1997) we see how the gendered mind/body dualism plays out in today's culture. Brumberg outlines how young women of the twentieth century began to invest in their body like never before. According to her, the body has become a "project" in which women increasingly invest time and resources into modifying the body to conform to ever changing expectations of femininity. Not only are the expectations of femininity constantly shifting, but often times put women in a double bind facing multiple messages of what it means to be a woman in today's society.

Unlike the women of Wollstonecraft's time, women today have greater access to education and other public arenas previously dominated by men. However, we find that women are still increasingly tied to displays of the feminine body as signifiers of

character. Time and historical context become important when we consider the growing expectations of women to be successful in multiple arenas including school, home, career, and beyond. As young women are expected to attend college and make good grades, while simultaneously investing in feminine beauty the question becomes "what should a young woman on campus *look* like?" To answer this question we might use the words of one student at Duke University. In response to questioning about the status of women on campus an undergraduate woman replied, "effortless perfection." The authors of the Duke Women's Initiative (2003) went on to say that one of the key findings of their research was the constraining experience that undergraduate women felt to be smart, popular, accomplished, fit, and beautiful all without visible effort.

The notion of effortless perfection and the constraining expectations of style is further complicated when we consider the competing realities of the university space. Given that the university setting is primarily concerned with education focused on advancing the mind, we see that the university has historically been not only a male dominated space, but also a masculine space. However, thanks to the feminist movement, women not only have greater access to education, but are entering college at higher rates than their male counterparts. As women continuously outnumber men on campus, the university has experienced a shift in its gendered scene. This is not to say that the university is now a feminine space, despite recent claims, but more to say that women's increased presence in this space is a historical reality.

Women's connection to effortless achievements stretches beyond campus culture and speaks to a larger body of literature throughout sociology and feminist studies. Many

feminist scholars have shown a similar and recurring theme that women are often expected to perform numerous and sometimes contradictory roles in social life without actually appearing to do the labor. While the concept "invisible labor" is often referred to in relation to care work (DeVault 1991, Diamond 1992), work on the body may also be recognized as another form of invisible labor. Both Marjorie DeVault (1991) and Timothy Diamond's (1992) work illustrate forms of invisible labor women perform that maintain their subordinate position. Arguably, style can be better characterized as a form of women's invisible work and from my research I conclude that we can think about style in similar ways. Talking to women about style, and the ways in which they fashion their bodies reveals the hidden time, energy, skill, and labor invested in displays of the feminine body. At the same time this research enters into the discourse around the mind/body split, it reveals the myth behind this notion. Work on the body involves mental and emotional labor.

Too Much Yet Not Enough

Essentially style demands some level of effort from everyone. Most people, especially young women and men, invest time, money, and resources in fashioning the body to project a self that communicates various identity claims. However, what is important to understand is *who* invests how much and to what extent. Students' talk of style reveals that while both women and men experience various forms of social pressure around appearance and displays of the body, expectations of femininity are more pronounced and more labor intensive. When I asked Chase if he thought there was more

pressure for men or women to look a certain way on campus he responded, "its so much stronger for females, like what people expect them to look like, like with males, we can get away with being kinda sloppy, but with women, if you're sloppy it's just unacceptable. With guys, its just like who cares." This is not to say that men do not invest in their appearance or that many women don't reject feminine expectations, but better illustrates the ways in which gender shapes experience.

Feminine bodily displays play an important role throughout this research as it relates to the campus environment. In this previously male dominated arena, I found in my research that women experience contradictory ideals of femininity on campus. The women who I spoke with expressed both feelings of "doing too much" and not doing enough. According to Best (2000) this sort of talk exposes femininity for what it is, a display of the self that requires work and alterations to the body. The idea that one might be "doing too much" for campus is in line with Skeggs (1997) as she suggests displays of the body differ by social setting and expectations and therefore are not viewed as necessary or beneficial all the time. She argues that femininity may accrue high profits in arenas such as marriage and heterosexuality while devalued in others such as the labor market and education (Skeggs 1997). Skeggs might offer that feminine performance is downplayed on campus because femininity is not seen as a profitable investment on campus. However, the social pressure still remains that women are expected to invest in appearances in social space leaving women pulled in various directions.

Doing too much

　　The amount of effort and time spent on the body and feminine performance is something that female students negotiate carefully. The awareness and fear of "doing too much" for campus is something that guides the actions of many of the female students I interviewed. When I asked students what they typically wore to class and around campus responses varied only slightly. Several women explained their morning routine as "rolling out of bed" sometimes without looking in the mirror or fixing their hair and "throwing on" sweatpants and t-shirts. However, after class was over students talked of going back to their dorms or houses to "actually get ready for the day." In addition to wearing sweatpants and t-shirts a number of women I interviewed were cautious of wearing too much makeup or other styles of dress that might lead one to accuse them of "going out of their way." What's interesting here is the distance from typical feminine bodywork where makeup, dresses, and form fitting clothing are typically embraced. By wearing styles of dress and fashioning oneself in less feminine ways, female students attempt to downplay their presence in the educational space of the classroom as women, desiring to be seen absent of gender.

　　Like the undergraduate students from the Duke Women's Initiative, the women I interviewed expressed similar pressures to carefully negotiate displays of femininity on campus. In my research, the performance of gender became an important consideration for women when they decided how they were going to dress and style their hair depending on the whether or not they were "going out" or going to class. When I asked Maria, a freshman, what she wears to class she responds, "oh, I just bum it, just like

sweatpants and like t-shirts and sweaters or something. Then when I'm done with class

I'll come back and take a shower and put in my contacts." I asked her what she wears

when she "goes out" and Maria responds, "if I'm going somewhere like a party or

something like that then I'll dress up and wear like a cuter outfit, that's more dressing

looking." Dee, a senior, echoes Maria's logic. I ask if she "belts" her tunic style shirt and

she responds, "When I go out I belt it, I don't like to belt it around campus, I feel like

that's doing too much." These women express an understanding that feminine

appearances were "too much" for campus and spoke of simply "putting their hair up" or

"bumming it" for class. They suggest a lack of feminine labor both in dress and hairstyle

though this too is thoughtfully crafted. Jessica expresses similar sentiments when she

says,

> *I usually just wear like sweatpants and a t-shirt. I don't really ever dress*
> *up unless I have a presentation. I'd just rather be comfortable. I don't see*
> *the point in dressing up if you're just going to class, it's just kind of*
> *pointless I guess. But yea, if I have a presentation I'll wear like nice dress*
> *pants and like a sweater or something.*

Jessica sees dressing up and feminine displays through clothing as "pointless" in class

and on campus. If she has a presentation where she is the direct object of attention,

Jessica invests in the work of style. This action illustrates one's awareness of the social

situation and the presentation of self in the presence of peers also embedded within a

youth cultural space.

　　　　Another way to think about this phenomenon is to consider feminist literature that

illustrates the ways in which women inhabit space. Sandra Bartky (1988) and Susan

Bordo's (1993) feminist critiques of Foucault's theory of discipline suggest that the

female body is disciplined to produce a subject distinctly female. Female forms of discipline include: dieting and plastic surgery to regulate and normalize the body's size and shape; restrictions in posture, movement and comportment to control how much space the female body takes up; and proper displays of femininity through skin care, hair care, clothing, and makeup (Bartky 1988, Bordo 1993). Bordo (1993) writes, "through fashion and the ever-changing ideal of femininity, female bodies are transformed into docile bodies, whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, and improvement" (165). The disciplined female body subjects herself to bodily regimes and modes of demeanor, and adornment that regulate the body's appearance and comportment in space (Bartky 1988).

Considering this work, we can see style as a form of discipline that facilitates feminine visibility in space and look at students' relationship to the university space. These women on campus effectively take up less space as feminine subjects when they "bum it" to class. Just as Young (1980) argues that young girls are taught from a young age to not take up space, young girls are also taught to not take up space through visible bodily displays, though this depends on the social setting. In the club and at the bar where women are often objects of sexual desire we see the contrast between feminine performance and that on campus where young women shy away from overly feminine display. It could also be argued that these women employ alternative forms of feminine performance on campus in an attempt to distinguish their sexual sense of self from their academic, intellectual self.

In addition, Bartky (1988) is helpful in understanding the devaluing of femininity. She writes, "A woman's effort to master feminine bodily display will lack importance just because she does it; her activity partakes of the general depreciation of everything female" (Bartky 1988:102). If we dismiss and downplay social actions and performances associated with the feminine, it is not surprising that women seem to downplay femininity in a primarily intellectual institution such as the university. Moreover, we can consider the brains versus beauty dichotomy at play here. As students downplay feminine performance on campus in opposition to other social spaces we see female students drawing symbolic boundaries between what women on campus look like versus what women at the club look like.

Not doing enough

Young men and women set out for college with preconceived ideas not only about university life, but also about the campus culture and what students look like. It seems as though many students have been socialized to a style ethos, particularly in relation to the campus environment before actually becoming a student. While many women expressed anxieties of doing too much on campus, some women responded to the same pressure to display the feminine body as a form of effortless perfection in a different way. All the women I spoke with felt pressure to display the body in a certain light on campus. Some women responded to these expectations by being cautious of doing too much and attempting to downplay their investments in femininity. Other women responded with concerns that they weren't doing enough. While I was interviewing three freshman

women early in their first semester I asked if they went on a special shopping trip before coming to Mason. They replied,

> *Whitney: I bought a lot of sweatpants because I was under the impression that like, college kids rolled out of bed everyday in their sweatpants and slippers and went to class.*
> *Erin: Surprise, surprise people were dressed.*
> *Kristin: Yeah, people actually make an effort for their appearance except on Friday when it's like, socially acceptable to wear sweatpants.*

While several women were wary of "doing too much" for campus, these women considered wearing sweatpants and "bumming" it to class less socially acceptable. Here, we get a glimpse of the expectations of the college experience and how students perceive the college scene before actually being immersed in university life. These sentiments also illustrate the behind the scenes questioning of what young women should look like and how one should appear in a youth setting. However, the answers to this question vary among groups. Whitney's impression that students rolled out of bed was eventually disrupted by her experience and she has since renegotiated her understanding of what a student looks like. From their experience we see that expectations of femininity on campus vary. The unspoken rules of feminine performance are negotiated individually through social experiences on campus. As one reflexively asks the question "what does a female student on campus look like," one must negotiate their social location and fashion the body accordingly.

The fact that women expressed anxiety over "doing too much" in addition to "not doing enough" illustrates the expectations for women to fashion themselves to be seen (Best 2000). Bartky said it best, "woman lives her body as seen by another" (1988:100). The self-surveillance that young women speak of further illustrates multiple expectations

of femininity. The idea that women on campus are expected to maintain and perform multiple and sometimes conflicting forms of femininity and body displays is something of great importance. *Who* experiences the conflicting pressures to appear a certain way in space and *who* has more freedom from these expectations? My research then supports Bartky's claims, "she is under surveillance in ways that he is not" (1988:108).

On one level, we can understand standards of appearance in terms of the gendered patterns of behavior where women are subject to more than one gaze. Perry states, "It is almost absurd to suggest that standards of beauty could be anything but a reflection of inequality – roughly correlating to the distribution of power in terms of both the decision as to what is beautiful, as well as the evaluation as to who consumes beauty and who is consumed by it" (2006:583). Tension arises while women attempt to display a feminine appearance within the confines of opposing measures that contribute to women's awareness that they must fashion themselves to be seen at all times, from multiple angles.

Emotional Politics of Style

Style is often perceived as an effortless, natural phenomenon. However, to see style as a natural process is to overlook the physical, mental, and emotional labor demanded in crafting a self and displaying that self through the body. As Chase says, "I think [style] is something that needs to come naturally, its something that should be inner, like you shouldn't have to force it." However, Chase's words are countered by Alice when she says, "everyone always think that style is some innate force, like having a soul or something, its so stupid cause it's not true." Their talk highlights the paradox of style

in that one's style is something that is achieved through work on the body that must

appear natural and effortless. Chase's words suggest that style just *is*, that its something

that emerges without visible effort. But Alice adamantly points out that style is a practice

that is generally taken for granted. Its also interesting that these statements seem to reflect

the speakers' gendered position. Chase, a young white man, sees style as something that

requires little effort, an expression of an inner core, while Alice, a young white woman,

understands the intricate outward demands of style in achieving an authentic self.

Considering Chase and Alice's sentiments, authenticity of self is a gendered

phenomenon.

While on one hand style is a form of work on the body that is a source of

pleasure, pride, and strength, style can also be something that induces anxiety and

discontent. In many ways style provides a bridge, as compliments and talk of style

become a means by which women connect to other women. The numerous shopping trips

many young women take with their mothers and friends offer the chance not only to shop

for the self but a space to maintain close ties. However, style is also an avenue for

breaking bonds with other women and group identifications/affiliations. Through this

research we see the role style plays in our emotional ties to others and how we feel about

ourselves.

Bridging work

While style is used as a vehicle for individuals to distance themselves from others

through methods of distinction, it is also key in attempts to bridge relationships between

women. My interview with Alice draws attention to how dress, style, and appearance

become factors in forms of disconnection between women. She says, "I know I'm intimidated by really well dressed women initially, but then I always tell them I like it." Alice reveals her own feelings of intimidation but also provides a social solution by using compliments. For Alice, compliments appear to be a way for her to shake feelings of intimidation and spark a conversation with another woman. She provides an example,

> *Like my friend Kate. Last year we met in class and she sat next to me and had this awesome military jacket, it was soo great. She's petite with long brown hair and blue eyes, she had these sick boots on, and an awesome military jacket, and I couldn't tell. I was like, oh she's so stylish and I was like, I don't know if she's going to be like a bitch or is she going to be nice to me. And she was pretty, and that's intimidating. And I just started talking to her, I said 'I love your jacket, that's really really fabulous.' And she was like, 'oh I love yours too!' And then we became really close friends.*

Alice's description of Kate highlights how style and appearance become meaningful in attempting to draw conclusions of others. Kate's dress not only intimidated Alice, but provided the grounds from which she could draw assumptions about who Kate is as a person. We can understand this interaction as form of bridging work that women invest in using the language of style. By taking the first step and complimenting Kate's outfit Alice was able to use clothing to break the ice and initiate a conversation that resulted in a friendship. It must also be noted that admiration played a large role in Alice first noticing Kate that influenced her decision to speak to someone she didn't know. Compliments like these serve as a form of recognition of the effort put into style, given a particular audience. Sarah Thornton's (1996) expansion of Bourdieu's species of capitals to youth culture is useful in illustrating this point. Thornton puts forth the concept of subcultural capital and suggests that in youth culture, capital is embodied in the form of

being "in the know" in relation to a given subcultural category (1996:11). Alice and

Kate's individual styles conferred their statuses only to the extent that they are both

members of the same social group with similar taste in clothes. Referring back to my

earlier point that style is a form of women's work, we can see how compliments between

women are a means of acknowledgement and appreciation for time spent on the body as

well as a form of distinction.

Bonding with style

Connections with female friends were also important as shopping trips and

"getting ready" provided women a space to share in experiences of what it means to be a

woman. However, the shopping experience also seemed to be a space that produced its

own levels of anxiety. Whitney best explains this paradox,

> *I like to shop alone because I hate shopping with people and I hate trying
> on clothes, not because I don't love clothes cause I have a lot of clothes
> and I like to try on clothes but it makes me feel self-conscious when I try
> on clothes because things don't fit me right. Things that look really cute
> on someone else don't look cute on me, and so when I go shopping with
> my friends often I'll come home and if I haven't bought a lot of stuff it
> makes me feel depressed because I don't have the right body type. And
> then if I go shopping with friends and I get a lot of stuff it makes me feel
> really great because I had a lot of fun with my friends and I got a lot of
> stuff and I feel really accomplished.*

Here we see how shopping can be both a pleasurable and painful experience as women

are faced with a social situation that enables self-comparison. Whitney's emotional ties to

others and herself became reflected in her market experience. Finding a lot of clothes that

fit her body and reflect her style facilitated a feeling of accomplishment and pride. On the

other hand, the effects of trying on clothes that don't fit and fall short of enabling her to

fashion an authentic identity leave her feeling depressed and discouraged. Whitney's experience also illustrates the labor involved in managing social relationships with other women in contrast to a shopping experience that focuses on the self. In contemporary consumer culture, the mall and spaces for consumption have become prime spaces for relating to other females around us (Brumberg 1997).

Breaking ties

While in many ways style provides an arena for bridging relationships with others and maintaining close ties, style also presents a means by which women signify disconnection. Interestingly, one woman that I spoke with expressed feelings of guilt about her hair in regards to feeling connected to other black women. Rihannon, an Ethiopian woman, explains that she feels awkward around African American women when the topic of managing hair comes up because she doesn't "struggle" the way they do. She tells me,

> *African American women will just come up and touch it, or ask me what I do to it. I'm just like, nothing, and I feel weird. I feel guilty. Even with products, I can't use African American's because its too strong and I can't use white products because its not strong enough, so I have to mix things. I'm in the middle.*

Rihannon feels both a connection and disconnection with African American women through her relationship to hair. It is interesting that African American women approach her and actually touch her hair, showing both admiration and an assumed a shared experience. Moreover, Rihannon's guilt stems from an empathetic understanding of the constraints that black women and African American women in particular feel in American society. On another level, Rihannon's feelings of being in the middle point to

the ways in which we feel connected to ourselves through the body. Her experience of

not fully fitting in with either black hair cultural practices or white hair cultural practices

leaves her in a unique position. It is interesting that much of our conversation centered on

Rihannon's immigrant identity and struggle to find a place between cultures. In many

ways her social reality is reflected through her bodily experience, leaving her feeling an

emotional identification as well as disidentification with those who look like her.

Rihannon also provided an interesting story about her current hairstyle. During

the interview I told her that I thought her hair was cute and asked "didn't you have longer

hair when I met you?" She responded, "Yeah, I had it down my back and then I shaved it

off as a big F you to my family." Rihannon's experience reveals how hair is used to

communicate a rejection of the confines of gendered cultural expectations but also a

vehicle to navigate the emotionally treacherous terrain of intimate bonds. She continues,

> *In our culture, a woman's hair is her beauty. So my parents always made*
> *me grow it long, and it used to be down my back, and it was soo long and*
> *hard to take care of. Curly hair sucks, ok, its hard. No, for real, if you*
> *don't put something in it every day and get the curls right, it looks frizzy.*
> *And so my family was annoying me and they're like, "you're in your*
> *twenties you need to find a boyfriend, you need to find a husband." And*
> *one day I just went and shaved it and then my mom didn't talk to me for a*
> *few months.*

Both men and women that I spoke with associated style with female family members.

Mothers and sisters took on a significant role in purchasing clothes, learning how to style

one's hair, and providing a model of femininity in which to either distance or align

oneself.

In addition, many women who I spoke with expressed having to negotiate their

class, political, and cultural identities between what Bettie (2000) conceptualizes as

"inherited identity" and "chosen" public identity. Rihannon's decision to shave her head was in direct contrast to her inherited (immigrant) identity and serves as a symbolic gesture of breaking ties with cultural expectations of feminine beauty. Her low, close cut hairstyle is both a form of distancing herself from her immigrant feminine identity and a form of expressing her chosen public identity, one that asserts she is beautiful despite her hair and bodily displays. While style is very much about displaying the body, style is also about erasing the body.

Decisions to wear one's hair natural and fashion the body in what appear to be alternative ways often sparked conflict between the women I interviewed and their families, primarily their mothers. Rihannon and others talked of a disconnection with their mothers through their disapproval of their style. Though we could attribute these interactions to generational differences I argue that there is a deeper aspect. Perhaps it is that these mothers, primarily black mothers, are fearful of their daughters not displaying what they believe to be a respectable racial identity. In a related way that mothers are cautious of their daughters wearing revealing clothing and being sexualized, these black mothers are cautious of their daughters appearing as "aggressors" and political subjects rooted in American cultural racism (Davis 1994).

Similar to the way oppressions of race and gender mark bodies with social meanings, so too does heteronormative logic (Collins 2000). By not maintaining a feminine hairstyle, two women in my research risk being labeled lesbian. While I hadn't fully intended to take up the issue of what style communicates in regards to sexuality, the topic proved to be significant in relation to conventional standards of feminine beauty.

Similar to Rihannon, Dee's symbolic challenge to white standards of femininity leads her to subsequently be perceived as a lesbian. She tells me about a time when she went to get "shaped up,"

> *So we're having this conversation, like getting our hair cut or whatever and the woman sitting next to me is like, 'so, what does your boyfriend think that you get your haircut this way?' And I go, 'oh I don't have a boyfriend.' She goes, 'why not, you're gorgeous!?' Woman cutting my hair, who previously gave me a fade, is like, 'well maybe she's a lesbian! You know lesbians get their hair cut this way.' And I'm just like, 'uh, actually no, that's actually not true,' and then she was like, 'no they do!'*

Interestingly, Dee is first assumed to be in a heterosexual relationship, and then questioned about what her boyfriend might think about getting her hair cut in a way that is far from normative standards of feminine beauty. Regardless of whether Dee had a boyfriend, the woman cutting her hair reads Dee's style as not only outside of gender norms but also outside of normative heterosexuality. Collins argues that when it comes to black women's sexuality, what is needed is a framework that analyzes heterosexism that links to race, class, and gendered systems of oppression (2000). I think through these women's experiences we can see what Collins is getting at. Dee and Rihannon's hairstyles are the embodiment of race, class, and gendered systems that also have implications for our understandings of heterosexism.

Conclusion

Style not only provides a means by which we relate to others, but also ourselves and our bodies. The emotional aspects of style emerge as women express both pleasure and pain in investments made in the body. The uneasiness and resentment that women

feel as they struggle to fashion their bodies and style their hair along acceptable gender and race lines is apparent. It is clear that the women I spoke with cared about how they were viewed by others and understood some level of constraint that determined their style whether in keeping with gendered or raced performances or not. Skeggs points out that appearance is intimately linked to self-worth, knowing oneself, and being accepted as part of a group (1997). For women, work on the body through style is a significant marker of belonging and understanding one's social and political location. Feelings of respect and dignity are also important to one's sense of self and gained through displays of the body as noted by Best (2000) and Skeggs (1997).

The women I interviewed are products of a historical, social, and political time where "the body has become a consuming project because it provides an important means of self-definition, a way to visibly announce who you are to the world" (Brumberg 1997:97). The body has been and remains one of the sites where women feel autonomous, even if that feeling is an illusion or outcome of oppressive structural arrangements. What is interesting is the capacity fashion and dress have to paradoxically transform the individual into a knowable subject, a docile body, and simultaneously a free and autonomous political subject. Through the work of style, women are active participants in the construction of their sense of self as well as the presentation of that self, even if that presentation represents and reflects a subordinate social position.

The relationship women have with their body is often determined by their social location in a web of intersecting categories. What is interesting is the not only the racial codings of the body but the highly gendered and classed notions that provide a glimpse

into the everyday understandings of social organization. Women on campus are expected to maintain various and often conflicting models of femininity throughout the educational setting, all the while appearing effortless.

Style is something tied not only to race, class, and gender but one's internal belief system about how to be in this world. From these conversations about style we can better understand the ways in which ideology is embodied. However, it seems that for many, the politics of style are about negotiating the various demands made on women to appear in accordance with expectations of ones race, class, and gender while simultaneously displaying sexual morality. Work on the body is also an attempt to possess a sense of power, control, and visibility by claiming public space (Best 2000). Paradoxically, style is a resource through which one is enabled to transcend constraints of the body through the body. As many women work their hair in ways that challenge dominant models of appearance they also maintain symbolic boundaries that reinforce difference. By using style as a way to say "I am more than my hair" or "I am more than my body," women also reconstitute work on the body as feminine work.

The work involved in fashioning the body is not restricted to physical acts but also involves deep mental and emotional investments. Like all dualisms, the mind/body dualism is problematic in that it neglects the mental efforts involved in structuring the appearance of the body and the ways the body affects mental structures. The way we choose to fashion the body is significantly connected to the interior work of crafting a self. Just as there is emotional labor involved in work on the body to display the self, there is emotional labor involved in crafting a self.

CHAPTER 2 FASHIONING THE STUDENT BODY

"I always use clothes as a way to reflect myself" –Alice

Style is deeply connected to one's presentation of self and identity. As we know

from past literature, the self is something that develops over time; it is a process in which

individuals are constantly involved in crafting and projecting a sense of who they are in

the world socially and politically (Mead 1934, Giddens 1991). Goffman's work on the

presentation of self and in everyday life is helpful in understanding the ways in which

individuals project and perform a self while in the presence of others. Goffman's key

point is that the self does not derive solely from the individual but is generated within the

interaction as a whole. Style is essential here in that one's demeanor is central in

influencing the way they are received by others. Identities therefore take shape as

individuals display the self before others. I use identity throughout this work similarly to

Best (2006) in her work on youth and car culture. I think of identities as ongoing projects

that emerge and materialize within social interaction (West and Fenstermaker 2002). In

this sense, identity is not something that is ascribed but achieved through symbolic

practices contingent on the historical moment, time, and space (Giddens 1991, Goffman

1959). Aspects of identity then become actions and practices that are carried out and

displayed differently across space and time.

Giddens' work unpacking how modernity has influenced social life provides another avenue for understanding aspects of self and identity. Giddens argues that contemporary social life is shaped by a "post-traditional order" in which identity is not ascribed but something in which one invests through displaying aspects of the self (Giddens 1991). In the course of modernity, the self along with the body has become less and less a given but a reflexively mobilized phenomenon subjected to a variety of choices, options, and preferences which take the form of lifestyles (Giddens 1991). These lifestyle choices extend to decisions that relate specifically to the body such as what to wear and how to style one's hair transforming symbolic bodily displays into meaningful gestures that regulate our relationships within society. For Giddens, the modern self is a reflexive project where one is expected to know their inner, true self, considering their biography and past experiences both internal and external. This way of conceptualizing the self becomes relevant considering notions of authenticity. The self is a project on which we must work.

As we look deeper into the process of identity construction and contemporary ways in which identities emerge in social interaction, we see the importance of methods of distinction as outlined by Bourdieu (1987) and Skeggs (1997). According to Bourdieu, the very practice of distinction is the principle means by which social life is organized (1984). Skeggs (1997) utilizes Bourdieu's work and writes, "(dis)identifications from/with and (dis)simulation of these social and subject positions are the means by which identities come to appear as coherent" (13). Distinctions assume different forms and highlight the ways in which individuals position themselves in relation to the social

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world and others to make sense out of their social location, their sense of self, and their interactions. Thornton adds, "distinctions are never just assertions of equal difference; they usually entail some claim to authority and presume the inferiority of others" (1996:10). In her work on youth culture, Thornton (1996) points out that distinctions are a means by which young people negotiate and accumulate status within their social worlds. Forms of distinction therefore have a lot to tell us about social relationships and the ways in which individuals position themselves in society through identity claims.

Fashioning an Authentic Identity

"That looks like a Caroline shirt," said my friend Sara as we were browsing through the Lucky Brand Jean store. I didn't hesitate for a second after she said this because I knew exactly what she meant. She meant that the shirt I was looking at aligned with not only my previous style choices and presentation of self but also with what she perceives to be my identity based on our interactions over time. Most of us have heard if not made comments like "that's so you," "that's not my style," or "you can pull it off," but rarely do we critically analyze the message being sent. When we talk about style and whether we can "pull it off" we are essentially talking about projections of a self and claims to an authentic identity.

In our everyday interactions with others, being seen as authentic is of great importance. Authenticity according to Giddens is not only being knowledgeable of an inner, true self, but also being able to display that knowledge to others (1991). Wilkins writes, "authenticity is an ongoing achievement that relies on the display of the race,

class, and gender meanings assigned to identity" (2008:244). Authenticity requires more than the alignment of one's inner self with their outward presentation and is achieved and sustained through appearance, actions, and emotions. To be seen as authentic to oneself and one's style, one must wear the appropriate clothes, have the proper hairstyle, listen to a certain genre or style of music, have certain political beliefs, and communicate in ways others in the group relate to and understand. One must also consider that authenticity is achieved through forms of emotional labor in which one's presentation of self must also match their emotional attitude. For example, Alice mentions the DC hipster culture. I ask her to explain what a hipster is and she begins to describe hipster clothing style as a mixture of various fashions but she also describes their attitude, she says,

> *I think, it's just like a way that people feel a certain superiority. Its like, 'oh so intellectual,' or 'I'm so cool cause I do this,' or 'I'm so with it.' So they try to feel all relevant... Its very apathetic culture, just like ohh, yea, whatever, so bored, uhh... Like there's this kind of flippant attitude about everything.*

Alice's perspective suggests that being a part of hipster culture is not simply about the clothes you wear, but about the manner and outlook of the person. In other words, an outward presentation of self must be in alignment with an inner core. To be a hipster, one must not only *look* like a hipster and *act* like a hipster but *feel* like a hipster inside. If one does not perform accurately across these aspects or loosely performs the aspects of identity, one is quickly labeled a poser. On the other hand, must be careful not to try too hard, for putting in too much effort or over-performing is a sure sign of inauthenticity (Thornton 1997). It is the continual maintenance of a number of aspects of identity that positions one as part of a social group.

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Because we read style constantly both from others and ourselves, the very nature of style is reflexive in that it both reflects and represents one's identity. Style and identity have a dialectical relationship in that style is a form of identity performance while at the same time aiding in the construction of one's identity. Style can then be considered part of what Giddens terms "practical consciousness," which entails a deliberate set of actions in which individuals are actively, yet "non consciously" constructing an identity in response to the social world (1991). Skeggs (1997) adds that the body specifically becomes a site for this construction and subsequently the means by which individuals tell others who they are. It is through dress and other body alterations that we can read each other and make inferences about one's personality, lifestyle, and politics. Alignment of appearance with an inner core is thus the central element of the reflexive project of the self. Fashioning an identity in today's society requires one to adopt cultural symbols that help to organize a sense of self and then project that self back at society. It is important to note that the forging of this identity is key to achieving a sense of authenticity.

The assertion of an authentic identity is something that runs throughout my research regardless of talk about clothing style, hairstyle, or tattoos and piercings. Fundamentally, authentic identities must be negotiated along strict race, class, and gender lines because membership claims to a group rely heavily on the proper performance of identity. Because identity is also constructed in our interactions with others and through a dialectical process, identities are rarely freely chosen. We may choose some aspects of our identity and our presentation of self, but our choices are within a historical and social

context where we don't always get to pick. Our choices are always constructed and influenced by outside social forces beyond our control.

Underneath everyday talk, the work and investment in crafting an authentic identity is often erased with statements like "I just threw this on." On one level, style is a form of bodywork that must appear as a natural expression of who one *is*, otherwise one is categorized as "trying too hard" and at risk of being labeled a "poser." In a conversation about style Chase brings up the idea of authentic style versus posers, he says,

> *I was sort of breaking it down into two different categories. Like, people that actually, like their personalities align with the meaning of the style, and people who don't but they want to so they dress that way even though it doesn't match up. Like their personality, the way they act, and who they are doesn't really fit with the meaning of the style. I think [style] is something that needs to come naturally. Its something that should be inner, like you shouldn't have to force it.*

Chase explains how style is a reflection of one's inner self and the importance of continuity in one's self-presentation. Style must be combined with other components of identity to ensure that authenticity is achieved. If one's presentation "doesn't match up" to their personality, they and their style appear inauthentic. We can draw from Thornton's (1996) work to understand this point as she explains, if one fails to perform multiple aspects of an identity or performs an aspect loosely, one is seen as inauthentic and essentially a poser. The loosely performed identity is one that is inauthentic.

Chase's point that one shouldn't "have to force it" speaks to the construction of style as a "natural" phenomenon, something that is often taken for granted in our day-to-day lives. In another sense, the assertion that style comes naturally is a means by which

individuals position themselves as anti-style. Statements like "I just threw this on" become an identity claim in which people project an image of the self that is not concerned with or invested in the rules and labor of style. However, a comment such as that is also simultaneously a recognition that style does matter. By saying "oh I just threw this on," individuals displace the work of style and position themselves as one who doesn't care but recognizes that style is central in our social experience.

Anti-style emerged as students talk about their shopping practices. Dee says, "when I was in high school I think I was more into brands and stuff, but I don't think I even own anything that has a label on the front of it anymore." She continues by telling me that she like to "thrift" instead of shopping at brand name stores. Rick shares a similar perspective, "I honestly don't shop very much, I can't even really recall the last time I went out with the intention of buying anything." He just wears "whatever is laying around." Both Rick and Dee are engaging in the work of projecting a self that doesn't care about fashion and displaces the work involved in style. However, as the interviews continue it is clear that both Rick and Dee care deeply about how they are perceived and invest in style through various forms of body-work.

Both Rick and Dee are engaging in the work of projecting a self that doesn't care about fashion and displaces the work involved in style. However, as the interviews continue it is clear that both Rick and Dee care deeply about how they are perceived and invest in style through various forms of body-work. For example, I ask Rick, "What do you think about hair?" and he responds laughingly, "That's funny, I don't care for hair at all. I'm laughing because I'm 23 years old and I'm starting to loose my hair." He goes on

to tell me a story of when he was younger and got a skin infection near his hairline. After

taking antibiotics and getting over the infection Rick noticed that a small patch of hair

was missing. He says,

> *And so since then…the hair right here in this little corner doesn't grow*
> *back fully. So that was actually a turning point in my life… I was like*
> *traumatized as a kid you know and then now at this point again, like being*
> *23 and really, really wishing I could grow my hair out right now, but like I*
> *can't even try cause if I go like two or three weeks without cutting it really*
> *short its like falling back, the hairline is falling back.*

Rick is quick to position himself as someone who doesn't care about his appearance

despite the length of conversation about a patch of hair missing. His use of "turning

point" and "traumatized" highlights the importance of this event in how Rick later feels

about his appearance. Interestingly, Rick connects this past event to his current struggle

with a receding hairline illustrating an awareness and concern for the way he is viewed

by others based on his hair, or lack thereof. This sort of talk is also invoked in

interactions as a form of impression management as outlined by Goffman (1959). Rick's

attempts to demonstrate that he is not someone who invests in style illustrates one of the

ways in which he is actively trying to control how others perceive him. In this instance,

the interaction becomes just as important as the action. The interview encounter between

a female researcher and male participant on the topic of style presents an interesting

gender dynamic in which the male participant emphasizes his distance from style, and

concern for appearance.

We can also think about these instances of anti-style as form of distinction in

which individuals position themselves against what is considered mainstream. In her

work on youth culture, Thornton (1996) suggests that the mainstream is an abstract entity

to define oneself against. In this case, the use of comments that displace the work involved with style and position oneself as anti-style attempts to establish distance from the masses and express one's individual and cultural worth.

If we understand style as a reflection and representation of identity then we must also consider the ways in which one's moral and political convictions guide stylistic choices. I think of morality as one's beliefs about what is right and wrong and views of the proper ways to live in the social world. Style comes to carry moral and political meaning in that, like all cultural objects, materials become symbols of something more than the mundane. Style is a meaningful language in youth culture when political messages are attached to fashions and embodied through dress. Thornton (1996) argues that youth appropriate political issues as a way of making their culture more meaningful. In addition, Lamont's (2000) work illustrates how morality claims are a means by which lower status workers maintain a sense of self-worth, dignity, and position themselves as superior. Considering these perspectives, we can see how the students that I interviewed, as individuals who fall somewhere between adolescence and adulthood, find themselves negotiating aspects of both youth and adult identity claims by using political issues and morality claims to attribute meaning to their everyday actions. By suggesting that one's political stance and moral values influence their style, youth give meaning to their cultural forms and sustain a sense of self-worth, dignity, and lay claims to a superior status.

When asked about what influenced their style the most, students largely pointed to their moral and political beliefs. The men and women I interviewed suggested that

their style choices were predominately reflections of who they are and how they want to be seen based on an internal belief system. For them, style is about reflecting that one is a certain kind of person, mainly a person of integrity who lived their life according to a set of moral values. I provide more examples of this claim in the following sections but to give one brief illustration consider Sue's experience,

> *When I got more into the anti-war movement or animal rights, things like that, then I think my clothes, my persona, my presentation changed. Especially when you're thinking about animal rights, the environment, the entire system of oppression of animals, of workers, of all those things, you're not going to go out to Wal-Mart and buy a t-shirt because its cheap anymore when you've aligned yourself with certain political beliefs.*

First, Sue's comment supports the idea that presentation of self is fluid and ever changing in relation to experience and knowledge gained over time. As Sue positioned herself with the "animal rights crowd" certain aspects of her self-presentation changed as well as her consumption patterns to better link her actions to a group identity claim, thus maintaining an authentic self. Here, the paradox lies in that to achieve authenticity one must perform style in distinct ways. When Sue brings Wal-Mart into the conversation it seems that she is not directly talking about the "cheap shirt" in terms of class but suggests that her political position overrides the appeal of inexpensive clothes. This illustrates that style is not about pragmatism, if Sue just wanted a shirt, the place where she bought it wouldn't matter. The issue here is not price, but a political stance, and in Sue's case, a stance against contributing to corporation interest.

The Branded Body

"It's all about brands" – Alison

In today's late modern capitalist society it is hardly news that consumerism is a powerful force. It is in this historical moment that the consumption of cultural materials to signify one's position within society has taken a prominent role among today's youth. Bettie writes, "the expression of self through one's relationship to and creative use of commodities is central practice in capitalism society" (2000:14). Bettie's symbolic economy of style suggests that style becomes the ground on which class and race relations play out. Her work looks at how gender specific commodities are used as markers of distinction among different groups who performed race and class specific forms of femininity. As the body becomes a site on which difference is inscribed, hair, clothes, and makeup become key markers of group membership. Additionally, this symbolic economy of style requires a knowledge of the "field" in which it takes place. Style then becomes a performance of group membership in which each group is more or less tuned into other's stylistic preferences and aware of their own style in opposition.

Bennett's work (1999) encourages us to look at style within a historical moment where youth have increased levels of autonomy, disposable income, and live in a society where consumerism offers the individual new ways of negotiating identity claims. Both Bennett and Giddens write that the modern era is characterized by shifting affiliations where the consumer market provides individuals with a diversity of options and choices with which to construct a lifestyle. Here lifestyle is not to be confused with a way of life

but rather a freely chosen mode of expression (Bennett 1999). For Bourdieu (1984), lifestyles become increasingly important to identity in that they represent the material and physical forms that provide meaning for a particular group. It is important to recognize that cultural goods such as clothing are used for social purposes, whether to align oneself with a particular way of life and people or distinguish oneself from another way of life or people (Bourdieu 1984). As students make use of the market to both lay claims to identities and distinguish themselves from others we see how consumer culture influences social interaction in our everyday lives.

In my research I found that the market and brands take on a highly significant role in the social lives of my participants. Alice suggests that brands and the consumer market in general capitalize on lifestyles centered in youth culture. She tells me, "the whole [hipster] culture is supported by Urban Outfitters and American Apparel which are two very large corporations." Corporations in the fashion industry profit from and aid in the modern push for individuals' self-expression through commodities (Giddens 1991). However, we are not mindless consumers; individuals actively discriminate between available products and invest meaning in their own terms given the social structure.

Brands emerged as significant markers as students talked about social groups and lifestyle categories. Sue says, "in the mall you have Abercrombie and Fitch and other stores and there's a certain style of clothing they're selling, there's a certain lifestyle that they're selling." According to Allison, depending on your style "you sort of market yourself as part of that group." When I asked a focus group what they thought of the idea that stores market a lifestyle Erin responded, "I think that's true because like every store

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has their image and I know people will buy stuff at Hollister or American Eagle but there's a certain type of person that will buy all there clothes there and then there are people who shop at Forever 21, it's a certain type." Interestingly, the store Forever 21 came up in several interviews and in some ways can tell us about how social categories are given expression through style. For instance Whitney says,

> *In Forever 21, like no matter what kind of person you are on the inside*
> *you can give that impression to people on the outside by going to a bigger*
> *store. I feel like in Forever there's a lot of hipster style, like they have a lot*
> *of indie clothes… but I also feel like they have really innocent stuff and*
> *edgy stuff, they have like all different kinds of styles. Like, I feel like*
> *everyone can find something that they like at Forever 21.*

Forever 21 primarily offers clothes for young women and in this instance appeals to a number of styles and their corresponding groups. Stores like Forever 21 provide a resource for many women who fit into the social categories they appeal to. For young women who see themselves as the type of woman who is "innocent," "edgy," or "indie," Forever 21 might be a one-stop shop. These sentiments about Forever 21 also illustrate how the consumer market appeals to a limited group but attempts to offer multiple options. Shopping at Forever 21 may at once be a signal of one's gender and age group but allows for a diversity of options for one to express their personality.

Considering Best's (2000) and Skegg's (1997) work illustrating the ways in which the body becomes a primary site in which women and girls craft a respectable identity, we see how style becomes a form of work on the body with distinct race, class, and gender implications. Across the board, the women I interviewed expressed a clear awareness of their body as a raced and gendered entity while class-based aspects of the body remained hidden. Class, however, was present but often rendered invisible because

it was couched in other forms of talk that gave primacy to gender and other social differences. The class-based aspects of style that I encountered will be discussed later.

In many ways, the Black women I interviewed expressed dilemmas in fashioning an identity that depends on the market. These constraints included having to make a greater effort to find clothes that not only fit their body shape but also helped them forge a respectable black femininity. Many women of color talked of the difficulty in finding clothes that fit "the big girl body." Kendra starts by talking about her struggle to find the right size bra, she says, "this is why I'm anti-bra, its that if you are in the quote normal range of boobage, you'll always be able to find a cute bra, for big girls the only cute bras I've seen in my life were at Torrid and I'm not about to pop out $50." Then Nancy adds, "that's how I feel about jeans." Consider this conversation,

> *Nancy: First of all, its very difficult to find long jeans that don't break my pocketbook.*
> *Kendra: And meant for black women.*
> *Nancy: Exactly my point. When I find long jeans, then its like 'oh, she's a 35 to 37 inseam and all tall girls have no shape.' I seriously feel like that when I put on jeans. Don't they know that some tall girls have big hips like me? So, I'm putting on jeans, the length is there but my hips don't fit. Even though its my size, the waist never fits.*
> *Alicia: Or they do fit but your jeans come up here.*
> *Kendra: That's my thing. I hate the fact that when people think of stuff in bigger proportions, they think you've become blind all of a sudden.*
> *Lisa: Like big girl jeans. People in their mind think that plus size is one shape, like we just all come in one shape. No, I am a figure eight. I'm not bottom heavy in proportion to the rest of my body.*
> *Kendra: You have curves.*
> *Lisa: Not just curves, I have, I call them indentions because I start here, and that's it, cause my stomach, I have a long torso, so I have to find shirts that fit over the rest of my stomach, but jeans that come up just enough to fill. But they're not going to fit in the back, because I have this much of a waist compared to where my hips start spreading out and my behind comes in. So I have a big butt, big hips, small waist, big titties, long torso, and big feet. Please don't get me started on shoes.*

Their struggle to find bras, jeans, and "cute tops" that are fitting, in fashion, and reflect

their personality has a distinct racial tone. Finding clothes that fit "the big girl body" was

also about finding clothes that fit the Black woman's body. What is more, the women talk

of the ways the whole shopping experience is actually shaped by the body. For plus size

sections, Lisa tells me, "I have to either take a safari all the way to the back of the store,

or the basement just to go find clothes even my mother wouldn't wear because she's not

that old yet." Alicia adds, "it's impossible, all the cute tops are in the misses section."

Lisa relates this back to the body when she says, "And you gotta wear spanks, and your

good bra, and you gotta suck it in all day, you gotta make it work." Their talk signifies

the added physical labor in shopping for a body that doesn't fit into prevailing ideals of

the female body, given that the socially accepted model is constructed around white,

middle class femininity. The experiences these women share with me suggested an

exasperation and frustration in the lack of available products that forge a respectable self

that also reflects their racial identity.

On the other hand, the white women I interviewed only briefly expressed

constraints related to the body and rarely outright attributed these constraints to race.

Consider this conversation with three white freshman,

> *Whitney: I was at a department store the other day, and if I go to the juniors section the clothes are too tight or too short. Kind of like skanky, which is kind of how our generation dresses I guess. So, like if I go to the women's department things fit a lot better and I feel a lot more comfortable in their clothes but they feel too old for me, and they're not the styles that I would choose to wear.*
> *Erin: That's how I am Khols. Its like old lady shit or like little whore stuff.*

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For Whitney and Erin the constraining aspects of shopping don't come from traveling to the far ends of the store, or searching for clothes that reflect their racial identity, but in finding clothes that reflected their personality, age, and sexual morality. It appears to be important for both Black and white women that fashion positions them within youth consumer culture. They must still be seen as knowledgeable agents of fashion trends. Sexual morality claims are also at play. Whitney's talk of "too short", "too tight", and "skanky" clothing can be read as too revealing of the body, implying sexual misconduct. Erin's blatant use of "whore" clearly conveys a message that clothing styles and fit have the potential to mark the body as a sexual entity with various readings of sexual morality. While it is important to point out that within this research, talk about style became wrapped up in the language morality, we should not neglect how social categories such as race, class, and gender interact to aid in the construction of one's beliefs and practices as Bourdieu (1984) and Skeggs (1997) suggest.

Alice, another white woman, tells me about when she was a young girl she would draw clothing. She says, "I would love to look at Vogue and I was like oh look, there's a world of infinite possibility." This talk illustrates the ways in which the market offers a wider assortment of products that aid in the fashioning of a respectable identity. It is critical that we understand the concept of respectability as constructed and defined in white cultural terms. Thus it is not surprising that fashioning a respectable racial identity entails increased amounts of work for women of color in comparison to white women.

If we think about different types of stores, department, brand name, thrift, or otherwise, we must consider issues of access. Shopping at a store like Forever 21 versus

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Khols, supplies women with cultural commodities used to fashion certain identities within a particular space. Whitney explains, "[Forever 21] has stuff you wouldn't find in like a JC Penny or a store that's everywhere." The understanding here is that stores like JC Penny are more readily accessible both geographically and to a range of races and classes. Thinking back on my own shopping experiences, I am reminded of my own various levels of access to the fashion world. While my hometown had stores like Kohls, JC Penny, and Belk, until I moved to Northern Virginia three years ago, I lived more than an hour away from popular stores like Forever 21, H&M, American Eagle, and Urban Outfitters. As a child I had access to these popular youth stores through my middle-class position. But looking back that access takes on another meaning and appears as a reflection of my rural identity. Growing up, shopping at American Eagle and the like became part of my gendered class identity but in another time and place it signifies a separate aspect of my identity relating to access.

Inequality appears when we consider that certain bodies have more options than others. Skeggs writes, "Just as we are born with access to different amounts of economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital we are also born with a physical body which may or may not fit into the sign systems which define what is to be attractive" (102). As feminine beauty is predominantly judged against a white, middle class form of respectability we see that some groups have far more alternatives as to how they can be in social space and greater freedom to define their self-identity through bodily display. Simply stated, the white women I interviewed have more access to commodities that help them fashion authentic, respectable selves in comparison to Black women. Its not simply

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a matter of access to stores, but to the size and styles of clothes stores offer. If style is a means by which we communicate to others who we are then it is important to consider who has greater access to the forms of communication. Access to certain stores and the styles of clothes they carry help shape our visions of social categories.

Those girls: chicken heads and sorority girls

Bridging Gidden's (1991) idea that consumption patterns provide individuals forms of self-expression with Skeggs' (1997) notion of female respectability, we can see that appearance is central in making judgments about women's morality. The students I interviewed often read brands within a cultural framework that reveals how women negotiate respectability and position themselves against other women in terms of what they buy and wear.

In this research, brand names and niche market stores emerged as marks of distinction in which individuals positioned themselves in relation to others. On one level, talk about brands are expressions of difference, but as one looks deeper into this talk we see that brand names and in many ways the market has become a principle mechanism for morality judgments. As students talked about stores they shopped at in relation to others, it became apparent that comments about one's social position and sexual morality were couched in the language of style where the use of brands became codes for something more. Consider this conversation during a focus group with five black women.

> *Nancy: I hate going to Demo, and Ecko, or Rocawear, and Apple Bottom.*
> *It's all got gold on it and it's called urban wear.*
> *Kendra: It just doesn't fit my style. I would never look right in a Baby*
> *Phat track suit.*

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Karen: I mean, what do you want urban wear to look like? I mean that's what I want to know.
Kendra: But the thing is, I am a man without an island, cause I can't go into the, I don't even know, the Old Navy, I don't go to Old Navy. Its not my style, that's all. I like stuff that looks antique, or stuff that was clearly, like when you look at it you say 'that's Kendra.' But the stores that do have stuff for my body shape, its that nasty, well not nasty, but it would look nasty on me. Baby Phat does not look good on me. Bebe does not look good on me.

Brands like Demo, Ecko, Rocawear, and Apple Bottom are forms of "urban wear" and codes for Black fashions. In this instance, Old Navy is used in opposition of Black brands and arguably code for middle class, white fashion which doesn't provide Kendra with products that reflect her racial identity. But the stores that do offer clothes for her body, the black feminine body, also fail to provide her with the materials needed to forge a morally respectable identity that is separate from sexuality. "Nasty" reads as morally lacking, unclean, and questioning of sexual standards. The conversation continues,

Lisa: It's just that I can't, it's gawdy and gold, and I don't have a problem with urban wear having flair. I don't have a problem with the little cat on them or Apple Bottom. Apple Bottoms are actually really good jeans for women who have bigger bottoms. Its just, I guess it depends on how you wear it cause once you see that girl with the full Apple Bottom outfit on, you kinda look at her.
Alicia: I feel different, a different kind of way about you, oh she's that kind of girl.
Lisa: Yea, that girl.
CP: What do you mean?
Lisa: Girl, that girl is in the club legs spread, she's drunk, she's bent over every song, they could be playing the Hokey Pokey.

It's important to recognize that the Apple Bottom brand itself does not inherently carry meaning, but the meaning of the brand becomes socially constructed around *who* is wearing it. For these women, Apple Bottom is not only a race and gender signifier but also becomes associated with a type of woman lacking in morality. In addition to using

the language of brands to make distinctions, women across races made use of the term "that girl" as a means to draw symbolic boundaries between other women. In an attempt to distance themselves from immoral behavior and align themselves as respectable, these women speak of "that girl" in stylistic terms through what brands of clothing she is wearing. This talk highlights the ways in which style provides a language for groups and individuals to distinguish themselves as members of a group possessing some level of moral superiority.

The women from this focus group also attempt to establish boundaries between themselves and those who they call "birds". When asked to explain what they mean by "birds" someone whispers "chicken heads." Assuming that I didn't know what chicken head meant, Lisa asks "Do you know what a chicken head is?" I hesitated because I had a general idea of what this meant but wanted to hear how these women defined other women as birds. I respond, "Well, tell me more." Nancy replies, "Loud!" and everyone starts repeating "a girrl!" "Oww!" Nancy immediately suggests, "Coogi dress" and Lisa says, "like you probably have on something from a store named City Trends, probably gold." Throughout the interview the Coogi dress as well as "birds" became raced, classed, and gendered codes that also carried moral significance. For these women, brands and the ways other women dress is an embodiment of disposition with regard to sexual display. Furthermore the Coogi dress signified a group that these women do not want to be a part of. The works of Bettie (2000) and Wilkins (2000) are helpful here in realizing how these comments might hint about class categories.

Bettie argues that understanding group differences as differences of "style" is a way to simultaneously displace and recognize class difference (2000). She writes, "class can be conceptualized as performative in that there is not *interior* difference (e.g. innate and inferior intelligence or taste) that is being expressed; rather, institutionalized class inequality creates class subjects who *perform*, or display, differences in cultural capital" (Bettie 11). Recalling Wilkins (2000) point that identity performance demands emotional labor we see how aspects of attitude and emotional expression relate to classed-based identities. She argues that loudness and a combative emotional stance are typically associated with lower status women (Wilkins 2000). By using the language of style and the code "birds" to refer to other black women, Lisa and Nancy highlight how inequality is given expression through performances and bodily display. Similar to the ways in which "that girl" is used to distinguish oneself, "birds" also became an abstract idea of feminine performance but distinctly tied to a form of black culture.

It is important to see that notions of "that girl" were used across race and class. For white women, it seemed that women who were referred to as "those girls" we're representative of stereotypical middle-class feminine performance lacking their own personal style. Brands like Ugg, Northface, Express, and Gucci signified classed-based gender conformity. These brands also emerged as codes for white women and were used to talk of women's social location and moral standing. During my focus group with three white, freshman women talk of "those girls" centered on women who "try to hard" or display a dominant ideals of femininity. Consider this conversation,

> *Erin: that's the thing about those people [women] who dress really, really well, you can tell they put a ton of effort in. I'm almost deterred from them*

*because like I don't do that, I wear jeans and a shirt or sweater for
everything… It makes you uncomfortable, and I feel like I kind of judge
them, that they're snooty or whatever, but that may not be true.
Kristin: You can tell those people.
Whitney: I feel like I do the same thing but I don't do it as much with
clothes as with makeup, I feel like girls who take hours to put on makeup
and never have a flaw and their eyeliner is half an inch think
Erin: I think they're compensating for something, like what you're missing
in brains, of what you're lacking in. Maybe that's totally wrong I don't
know I'm just deterred from people who seem like they tried too hard.*

The women from this focus group use style and appearance to read others on many

levels. First, Erin and Whitney speak of actively judging others on their presentation and

criticize a form of feminine display. By distancing themselves from a certain

performance of femininity Whitney and Erin effectively position themselves as different.

Their assertions against women who try too hard and wear too much makeup are

principally assertions of superiority, positioning themselves as the proper performers of a

gendered identity. Thornton (1996) is helpful here as she suggests that when one visibly

tries too hard, their efforts are presumed displays of inexperience and lacking

authenticity. In addition, these women suggest that those who spend increased amounts of

time on the body are compensating for lack in another realm. Erin implies that work on

the body is an attempt to make up for an intellectual deficit, supporting the dichotomy of

brains versus beauty against which many women must battle.

What is more, when I suggested that maybe I should I go interview some of these

women they were referring to one woman quickly responded, "go interview a sorority, or

sorority girls." It appears that in this instance, for whites, the "sorority girl" can easily be

substituted for "that girl." In an interview with Alice when I mentioned sorority women

as a distinct group on campus she quickly responded, "I would say the dead give away is

the Northface-Ugg combo, like not that that's a bad thing by any means, but it's very safe, because if something is popular there's less thought about it and there's less ways to feel insecure, and I understand that." Here, these two prominent brands signify a highly visible, mainstream style that indicates one's group membership and conformity. By distancing themselves from the sorority girl and the Northface jacket-Ugg boot combo, Alice, Erin, and others assert their individuality and ability to stand out in the crowd. A style is "safe" in that it privileges the group over individual identity. It seems that conformity comes to carry moral meanings. In this talk, one that is insecure and plays it safe by buying in to mainstream fashion trends is positioned as inferior.

In this research I found that sorority women were often used as a group other women positioned themselves with or against. Greek letter organizations have historically been criticized for their exclusivity along race, class, and gender lines. For sororities, membership primarily consists of young, heterosexual, white, middle-class women. Considering that prevailing models of femininity are constructed around this same group it follows that on campus, sorority women are seen as a distinct group that performs gender in ways that are intimately linked to race and class performance. The very nature of sorority life implies superiority through its exclusivity. That one has to be, or fails to be invited to join a group stirs up conflict between women. It's interesting because this controversy seems to happen within the in-group (young, white, middle-class women). In this instance, white middle-class women have to position themselves against other white middle-class women and the grounds they do it on is based in style codes. Now the position becomes about one's ability to not be a part of the group but a

person with individuality and feelings of inner security enough to stand out. Women who are not involved in sorority culture then attempt to distance themselves on the grounds of autonomy.

By identifying "that girl" or "those girls" women attempt to distance themselves from a certain style and demeanor. Through talk of different styles and brands women imposed distinction and use a discourse of style to set themselves apart from other women and essentially other forms of femininity. Skeggs is useful here in understanding how style enables women to display how different they are from others by using imaginary others to create distance from known others (1997). "That girl" is many girls and perhaps all girls. Throughout this research, women consistently used a imagined ideas of "that girl" to distance themselves and forge a respectable identity.

The Politics of Hair: Disentangling Race, Class, and Gender

Through this research it became clear that I could not talk about the notion of style without also talking about hair. Like clothing style, hairstyle is a display that renders the body readable by others. While each interview made mention of hair the relative importance of hair and the ways in which it is styled varied along race and gender lines. During my focus group with five black women Kendra turned to me and said, "there's a song that goes 'you are not your hair', but that's not true, you are your hair… it's part of our identity." It was clear that Kendra was not simply talking about the importance of hair for women but also as a signifier of racial group.

In contrast to clothing style, hair seems to be a bit more complicated than the ability to simply "try on" different identities through styles of dress. In the words of a recent guest on Oprah, the famous TV talk show, "hair is your greatest accessory and you wear it everyday." While on one hand, hair can be your "greatest accessory" and a source of pleasure, pride, and strength, hair can also become something that induces anxiety and discontent (Heckert and Best 1997). Recalling Hebdige's (1991) notion that style can tell us about power relations, I argue that as more than an extension of the body, hair can not only tell us about power relations but also help illuminate normative standards of feminine beauty as well as raced and classed notions of acceptable feminine practice.

Despite my initial recognition of the prominent role hair plays in the lives of women while interviewing Black women, as I looked back through my conversations with the other men and women, hair was mentioned in very meaningful ways, several times without my asking. Primarily hair was closely connected to one's racial and gender identity. All the woman of color I spoke with talked of hair in relation to their racial and ethnic identity, while white women that I interviewed rarely, if ever, connected hair to their race. When the conversation turned to hair, white women rarely expressed feelings of a constraining experience with "having to deal with their hair", as one black woman says. This is not to say that hair is not an "issue" for white women but rather illustrates the importance of race to the topic of hair. The relative silence of white women in these instances gives credence to the black women's sentiments that "hair has everything to do with race" (Best 2000).

Political hair

I sat anxiously waiting for the women to finish their meeting before beginning our scheduled interview. I was nervous in part because this was my second attempt at facilitating a focus group and it was with five Black women whom I had never met. In addition, while I was waiting I increasingly felt like I was encroaching on a hidden world of black womanhood to which I had never been exposed or invited. The women laughed and talked openly about campus life and recent developments in their organization. While I was still waiting the conversation soon turned to hair as Karen began talking about her most recent hair struggle and why she was wearing a hat that day. Nancy responds by giving the others tips on which products to use and warning the others that "you gotta make sure it's 100% natural shea butter." In the midst of their talk Kendra calls me over and I can't seem to get the recorder on fast enough as I fear I will miss out on some prime information. Consider this scene,

> *Nancy: So I scrub my scalp, then I make a deep condition with avocado, olive oil, well its an infused oil with green tea and rosemary, its great for your hair, it stimulates growth and helps keep the moisture in. And Suave 89 cent conditioner, a little bit of that. Oh! And silk peptide powder.*
> *Kendra: Which you can get at Sally's. The Chinese use it all the time.*
> *Nancy: I use it on my face, its amazing for your hair and it makes your hair shiny, it makes your hair soft, it makes your hair moist, its just, its great.*
> *Karen: Then how bout you write this down for me.*
> *Lisa: Yesterday, I did the raw sugar and the conditioner for my hair and then for the actual conditioner I used some cholesterol and honey and I mixed that, and god my hair is softer.*
> *Karen: It looks soft.*
> *Nancy: Avocado is wonderful because it has more protein than cows milk, its full of fatty acids and sterols, which is the plants version of cholesterol if you don't want to use animal fats on your body, which I don't.*
> *Kendra: Nancy! Once again, how do I loosen my curls?! Cause my curls are too tight.*

> *Nancy: I'm going to send you a YouTube link about this lady, she has this show called the best darn detangling method ever.*

Nancy appears to stand out as the hair expert in the group and the others listen attentively, asking her to write down which conditioners to buy and directions on mixing natural ingredients like avacado, honey, and rosemary to make their own. Nancy then exclaims, "They're ripping you off! Herbal Essences, all these people, I was looking at a Garnier Fructis commercial, they're like 'we have a new shampoo now with shea butter and avocado oil' and I was like whom whomp whomp, I've been up on this forever." It is through this type of talk and not only the sharing of experiences but knowledge and tips that constitute the foundation of Black women's everyday life that is taken for granted (Collins 2000).

Most notably, hair has been a central aspect of both style and identity politics for the African American community (Banks 2000). In her work, Perry (2002) writes that style is the arena where young people negotiate and resolve the dilemma of their identities through a process of investment in and identification with the meanings attached to ones social categories such as race, class, and gender. She suggests that racial identity provides not only a meaningful sense of community and self-understanding, but also a way of anchoring oneself in the world politically and/or spiritually through a sense of shared characteristics and solidarities (Perry 2002). These sentiments seem to hold true for a number of women I interviewed, and more so for black women. Nancy is the first to bring up the topic of communities and their shared experiences based on race. She says,

> *I don't, I never want to down play a community identity or, from my experiences, just from being a black woman, I don't know how important hair is for white women but as black women, its here (pointing to her*

head). Its so engrained, and it comes back, it comes from slavery, and when it was the whole white is better. Everything white is better, so straight hair is better, a thinner nose is better, lighter skin is better. We've gradually moved away from complexion, or at least I feel like we're gaining solidarity, you know, with complexion, but the hair thing. It's still there.

Her talk seems to illustrate a sense of solidarity between black women in their experiences not only with hair but other feminine beauty norms. This sentiment also speaks to a sort of group identity claim as an act of self-preservation. Black identity emerges here in response to shared constraints on the body. Nancy also draws attention to the division between Black and white women rooted in a racial history that privileges aesthetics. Her language also points to how racial systems of aesthetics set the stage for a self-understanding that is "engrained" and embodied through hairstyle. She illustrates one instance in which race and gender meanings simultaneously work together to inform internalized judgments and subsequent action.

Its interesting that these women use the term natural given the work and investments they actively make in styling their hair. With their conscious awareness of the raced and gendered meanings of hairstyle, and black women's hairstyle in particular, the women of this focus group all choose to wear their hair "natural", arguably exemplifying the tension between feminine ideals and racial pride (Banks 2000). The very term "natural" and its socio-political connotations have long been of interest to feminists considering the identification of women with nature as central to the objectification of women (de Beauvoir 1952). In addition, attempts to portray groups, and particularly women, as savage and distinctly connected to nature have historically been deployed to support a system of domination in colonialism (Collins 2000).

However, as these women talk about their hair as a natural hairstyle we see the

moral and political meanings underlying the term natural as they use it. The labeling of

their hairstyle as natural is in itself a moral and political statement. In opposition to past

frames of the natural, through a process of symbolically reclaiming the image of natural

hair as a declaration of racial authenticity, many women rework and redefine the natural.

While these women work to style their hair in a way that challenges the way we think of

black women and their hair, they simultaneously lay claim to an authentic racial identity

through their hairstyle. In this instance, "natural" hair is a paradox and comes to have its

own set of consequences. Angela Davis (1994) writes from her own experiences in how

an image of her with an afro served as the generic image of black women who wore their

hair in a natural style, further politicizing fashion in terms of hairstyle. Davis argues that

the "unruly natural hair" became a symbol of black militancy in the 60s and 70s and has

had lingering effects today. In what seems to be an effort to educate me on black hair

culture the group takes up the topic of "natural hair."

> *Nancy: I've seen it, or heard it referred to as political hair.*
> *Lisa: Dreadlocks and dreads, and afros with you're hair tightly coiled,*
> *political. Hair where its not tightly coiled and its that bouncy, curly, or*
> *like.*
> *Kendra: Or in braids like that. When you have your hair in that style,*
> *that's what she's talking about, the dominant culture will tend to view you*
> *as an aggressor, that you're there to start something. Now, it's true that I*
> *do have my hair natural for somewhat political reasons, but, but, I don't*
> *think its right to make that connection based off of the first thing that you*
> *saw was a poof of hair. I would not want someone to come to me, and tell*
> *me to do something with my hair, when I have. I have done something with*
> *it. I stayed up all morning trying to condition it etcetera etcetera, cause*
> *people don't realize the work that goes into maintaining natural hair.*
> *Nancy: Do you feel like this is projected? I feel like a lot of times its*
> *projected on you know, black people, black women.*

For these women and for many, "political hair," or "natural hair," is a means by which Black women position themselves against white standards of beauty. If hair, as a symbol of feminine beauty, is measured against white standards (long, straight, soft, and blond) (Banks 2000), then the rejection of perms and relaxers that mold Black women's hair to fit these standards signifies an attempt to distance themselves from such an ideal. However, in the process of rejecting a raced and gendered ideal, these women also construct a raced and gendered symbol in their own terms.

In addition, I want to highlight that these women recognize the intersections of race and gender and feel the social expectations for them to "do something" with their hair. While we could argue that all hair is "done", "worked", and "styled", Nancy, Lisa, and Kendra's comments highlight the gendered work that goes into maintaining a "natural" hairstyle that also reflects a respectable black femininity. Through the fashioning of hair these women forge a respectable identity through the embodiment of symbolic boundaries that are tied to both racial and gender expectations. According to Lamont and Molnar (2002) symbolic boundaries are distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, practices, people, and even time and space (168). Women like Kendra and Nancy draw from past and present cultural practices of styling Black hair to construct a symbolic boundary between black and white women.

For the Black women I interviewed, hair also has a political dimension in that it sets them apart from other Black women. What is interesting is that while they distance themselves from other black women, symbolically they are extremely cautious as to not condemn women who prefer to relax their hair. However, this was not the case when the

conversation turned to clothing style. In terms of clothing style and demeanor, several of the women referred to "that girl" as a means to position themselves as morally superior. The boundaries between black women and hair are not as clear as those outlined by Bourdieu (1984) and Skeggs (1997) in which individuals draw distinctions as a means to achieve a level of moral superiority. The boundaries these women and other black women invoke are more complicated and purposefully blurred in attempts to maintain a gendered racial solidarity.

Normal, soft, girl hair

A few months ago I was riding the DC metro with one of female friends who has dreadlocks. We were on our way home from a music show at the 930 Club when a couple of white guys, roughly my age, sat down behind us. My friend and I were chatting about the night's events and raving about the show we had just seen when one of the guys interrupts us to tell my friend that her hair is "soo awesome!" he continued, "it goes from like normal, soft, pretty, girl hair to rockin some dreads!" I couldn't help but laugh at the intended compliment and wait for my friend to respond. Confused by our laughter the guy asks why his comment was funny and in the five-minute span between metro stops we attempted to get him to see the gendered dynamics of what he said. Whether we succeeded or failed is beside the point. The point is that this guy saw my friend's hair as "normal, soft, pretty" and thus "girl hair" separate from and in opposition to the part of her hair that is dreaded. This oppositional frame also suggests that dreads, along with their political undertones, are associated with what is masculine and not to be connected with "girl hair."

What is important to realize about this interaction is the social position of the reader and their perception ideal feminine body display. This experience reminded me of the concepts of "girl hot" and "guy hot" as explained to me by Dee. Dee's recent decision to wear her hair in a low-buzzed style sparked a number of conversations with her friends, one telling her 'well, your hair is like girl hot, there's like girl hot and then there's like guy hot', She explains, "So like girl hot is like something that women would be like 'wow, different, cool, trendy', guy hot is like 'long, pretty, soft, blah blah blah'." This idea of "girl hot" and "guy hot" is interesting to me for a number of reasons. This notion suggests that women are not only subjected to a gaze from both men and women, but that the ways in which men and women perceive femininity is gendered.

Interestingly, Kendra, admits that she considers the race and gender makeup of the social setting when she styles her hair. She says, "to be honest and shallow, really the only times that I will flatten out my hair is when I know I'm going to be around boys." When asked if there is a difference in how she would get ready to be around men or women she responded, "yeah, like if I'm around women I'm like, 'fuck the men, yeah, tease it out!' or if I'm doing stuff with other black people." Here, race and gender are so intertwined they cannot be separated. The social setting and audience are important considerations that determine how the self will be displayed, such that in one moment one's presentation will display a distinct racial self and at others gender might take precedence. Kendra's talk illustrates multiple angles of visibility of the Black female body. She seems to display various aspects of her race and gender depending on the male gaze versus the female peer gaze. It seems as though Kendra presents a distinct Black

feminine self in the presence of men of multiple races but another in the presence of

Black people only. Arguably, Kendra's willingness to be seen in a more natural state is

founded on shared gendered and raced understandings of black hair.

Banks (2000) points out that desirable hair is based on texture and judged against

White beauty standards suggesting that kinky, nappy, and black hair is juxtaposed to

long, straight, and blond. It's interesting that notions of "boy hot" appear to be defined in

terms of dominant white feminine ideals – "long, pretty, soft" – whereas "girl hot"

appears in this instance to be defined in ways that challenge those same ideals. In saying

that Dee's low cropped hairstyle is "different, cool, and trendy" and thus "hot", Dee's

friend shows approval for a style not only outside the mainstream model by being

"different" and "trendy" but the words used to describe "girl hot" do not denote a

connection to feminine standards of beauty as they are constructed around a white model.

It appears that female notions of feminine beauty (i.e. "girl hot") that Dee and her friend

define are in keeping with the ways in which African American women have historically

forged models of womanhood that challenge prevailing notions of femininity (Skeggs

1997), illustrating the process of politicizing hair.

Dee admits that her alignment with feminist ideology and conversations about

Patricia Hill Collins' work in particular influenced her decision to stop straightening her

hair and eventually influenced her reaction to other's who commented on her recently

buzzed hair. When asked why she didn't want to straighten her hair anymore she

responds, "it was kind of a combination of holy shit this is bad for my hair and like why

the fuck do I straighten my hair?!" Dee's experience allows us to see how ideas become

internalized and reworked in our everyday lives. In their work, Gerson and Peiss (1985) outline the ways in which constraints in daily life lead to specific forms of gender and gendered consciousness. However, as these forms of consciousness are questioned, as in Dee's case, processes of negotiation can emerge and boundaries can be maintained or challenged (Gerson and Peiss 1985). On an individual level, the conscious styling of one's hair in opposition to dominant value systems is a symbolic gesture that paradoxically challenges and maintains boundary distinctions between masculine and feminine norms.

Femininity is informed by the network of social positions of class, gender, sexuality, age and race, which ensure that it will be taken up and resisted in different ways (Skeggs 1997). Dee and several other women I interviewed performed different versions of femininity that are intimately tied to and inseparable from their race performance and sense of self (Bettie 2000:15). What becomes clear is that Dee's hairstyle while tied to her performance of race is also a powerful challenge to feminine beauty standards.

Hair becomes more than marker of gender identity when we consider the ways in which hair is connected to cultural practices. Both Rihannon and Amira conceive hair as deeply connected to cultural notions of beauty. Rhiannon says, "In my culture, a woman's hair is her beauty." Amira echoes this as she tells me why she chooses to wear the abaya as well as the niqab. The abaya is typically a loose dress-like garment that covers the body except the face, feet, and hands. The niqab is a piece of cloth that covers

the face typically worn in combination with the hijab or headscarf. Consider our

conversation,

> CP: What about for you, what does style mean for you?
> Amira: For me, I wear what I consider like for my religion. So, like my
> religion has certain limits on what you [women] should wear so I wear
> what I consider for my religion.
> CP: So what are some of the limits and parameters around dress for your
> religion? I don't really know a lot about it.
> Amira: So you have to be like modest and cover like your skin and stuff.
> Some people, there's a difference in opinion on whether you should cover
> your face, but its recommended, like an extra thing. Like how do I explain,
> like nuns for example, you know how its not like you have to be celibate
> but its like an extra thing they do to be closer to their God, its kind of like
> that. So you should cover yourself, cover your hair, and like your beauty
> and stuff.

Amira's talk illustrates the role the body and particularly hair plays in conceptions of

feminine beauty. The cultural and religion-specific expectation for women to cover these

aspects of the body both marks it as a feminine body while at the same time attempting to

obscure the parts of the body that constitute its femininity. In this instance, through the

work of distinguishing the body as feminine, the feminine body is simultaneously

reduced. Amira's gender performance is also intricately connected to her ethnic identity.

To better understand this concept we can look to Espiritu (2001) who writes, "femininity

is a relational category, one that is co-constructed with other racial and cultural

categories" (416). Amira's gender presentation is displayed and constructed

simultaneously with her ethnic identity rooted in cultural and religious practices.

While many white women failed to see their hair as connected to their racial

identity, it was the ways in which these women talked about hair that led me to see how

hair was invoked as a mark of difference. More often with white women, hair was seen as

a display of femininity seemingly void of racial meaning and signified something about a woman's character. My interview with Alice best illustrates this. When She first mentions her hairstyle I tell her that I'm also interested in hair as an aspect of style and she quickly responds, "Oh, it's such a dead giveaway about people." I ask her to tell me more and she explains,

> *Well um, girls with short hair. Alright, so like ones with short hair there are a few stereotypes. Sometimes they're avant garde, like a little out there if they have it, and you know you can like say 'oh that woman takes risks,' you know, she's about the look. She's doing this unconventional thing because she doesn't give a shit what anyone else thinks, and that's fabulous, but of course she gives a shit what someone else thinks, or she wouldn't do that haircut.*

Ultimately, short hair does not read as feminine. According to Alice, women with short hair do the "unconventional thing", they are "out there," suggesting that women with short hair are outside the norm of feminine standards of appearance. Alice's sentiments also point to hairstyle as an aspect of style that requires a reflexive awareness of one's self and the presentation of self in everyday life. Her assertion that women with short hair care what others think is rooted in the perception that short hair is not typical for women and for a woman to have short hair they must be making a distinction about themselves as a certain type of woman, one that does not ascribe to conventional feminine beauty standards.

Salon privilege: birds, wigs, and weaves

Hair also has its ties to class status, however, these connections can be difficult to see. Julie Bettie (2000) speaks to this as she suggests that the lack of an available discourse from which to draw, talk about class leads individuals to couch sentiments in

the language of race, gender, and other cultural terms. When talk about class becomes so embedded in language around everything but class it becomes increasingly difficult to disentangle and see that what is really being articulated is class based understandings.

When I think about my own experience with hair as it relates to class, my privileged status as a white woman becomes clear. Several months ago I needed a haircut and without going through the typical feminine channels of asking my friends for recommendations I found myself behind the University Mall at a salon I had no knowledge about. I walked in without an appointment and less than an hour later all was washed, trimmed, and styled. As I stopped to pay the woman on my way out my mouth dropped as she told me I owed $60. I now realize that $60 is not high price for a haircut in Northern Virginia, but was definitely the most money I had ever spent on a haircut. Apart from the cost, something I could essentially afford, I could walk in and walk out of a salon without previous knowledge of the stylist, assured that they will know how to cut my hair. This experience has much to do with my being white and my privileged position of having greater access to salons and other feminine beauty resources. Secondly, I can afford to pay the roughly average amount of $50-$60 for a "decent cut." My experience can be contrasted to women who do not have the same accessibility and freedoms. As the Black women that I interviewed expressed, in order to "manage" their hair they rely on a feminine knowledge passed through generations and friendships as well as a limited amount of salons and stylists that know "how to deal with black hair." As one woman explains, "The thing that makes hair so complicated, or, one of the aspects that make hair

so complicated is explaining it to people, who don't, outside of black hair culture,

because it's something that's so esoteric."

Sometimes, understanding group differences as differences of "style" is a way to

simultaneously displace and recognize class difference (Bettie 2000). The Black women

with whom I spoke seemed to do exactly that as they tell me about an experience at a

"bird" party. This is the story,

> *Nancy: So we're there and you know this guy, ok, he was trying to like get a peek at my friends and I, and he bumped his head on the chandelier and all those other girls, we giggle, but they laugh like 'ahh! He blah blah blah!' Right, so he's looking at us and he's like, 'what the eff are y'all laughing at?' And we were like, 'excuse you.'*
> *Kendra: Who the hell are you?*
> *Nancy: So, it was, but it was a classy girl reaction, like 'excuse me.'*
> *Kendra: Oh, oh, I did the bird reaction.*
> *Nancy: So he was like, 'I'm just playin.' And I said, 'he musta been playin,' under my very low, and of course the bird was like 'Aww! She said you musta been playin!' But I was like, dude there's no reason for you to like get in my face. There's no reason for you to argue, you're being disrespectful… It just got into this back and forth, back and forth, so I walked out. And I didn't hear this, but my friends who were behind me, he had made a comment, he was like, 'get your stuff outta here, with your Abercrombie and Fitch looking blah blah blah' …Why? because I have a decent blouse on, a decent pair of jeans, ballet flats and a blazer and a scarf. And I had my hair off my face, pulled back in a pony tail.*
> *Lisa: And it was your hair, it wasn't a wig.*
> *Nancy: It wasn't a weave, it was my hair.*

Through the oppositional use of "classy" and "bird," these women draw boundaries

between themselves and other black women based on clothing style, hair, and demeanor.

The reaction of the bird in this story in comparison to Nancy's "classy girl" reaction can

be understood in relation to class but only after looking closely at the racial and cultural

terms used in this talk. Wilkins (2004) work is helpful here as she suggests that loudness

and combative emotional expression ("attitude") are associated with lower status women,

primarily racial and ethnic minority women. As Nancy raises her voice to illustrate the reactions of birds, and describes herself as someone wearing "decent" clothes with her hair styled a certain way, she appears to be positioning herself in relation to other women based on class distinctions. By noting that she was not wearing a wig or a weave, Nancy and Lisa suggest that the wig and weave carry raced, classed, and gendered symbolic meanings. The wig appears to be invoked to mark differences in style but also a subtle way to mark class differences.

However, it's interesting to note that the Black women in my focus group used other women to symbolically distance themselves in terms of style but remained cautious as to not put down another Black woman for her hairstyle choices. This seemed to be the case during conversation about natural hairstyles. For the Black women I interviewed, the natural hairstyle not only carries political meaning but also has distinct class implications and became a signifier in itself of class and moral standing. Natural hair is understood in opposition to relaxed/straightened hair, wigs, and weaves, all of which require the economic means necessary to maintain an image of the self. A number of black women expressed their struggle to negotiate the expectations to perform a raced femininity that was further complicated by class. Yet many poor women invest in expensive hair practices, complicating the relationship between class and hair.

Wearing one's hair natural, while primarily read as a stance against white culture came to have significance for classed boundaries as they are also embedded in gender performance. If we view natural hair as a rejection of white feminine expectations which mainstream black women have accepted, then we can understand the ways in which

femininity also becomes classed. Skeggs (1997) argues that femininity is a form of capital that one invests in as a means to gain access to limited status and moral superiority. Therefore, through the logic of capitals, if one has higher levels of one form of capital the need to invest in others is less of a priority. When limited in amount of economic capital, the use of femininity may be better than nothing at all (Skeggs 1997). Women invest in forms of feminine performance in various ways dependent on their race and class location.

In my interview with Rick, an African American male, class emerged an important aspect of feminine display and the how feminine performance is perceived by others. When I asked him about Black women's hair he initially spoke about how empowering it is for Black women to be able to move away from the natural look and now have access to Black salons. Again, one's access to resources and knowledge pertaining to hair and other feminine display is important. When I told him that several women I interviewed seemed to be empowered by wearing their hair natural he began to talk about the "counterculture movement." He says:

> *There is definitely a movement in a part of society, and in culture where its like more empowering to be natural, definitely. But I was just thinking in regards, especially in this area everyone wants to look affluent and business professional like that. For example, in New York City you're going to find a lot more like Neo soul, artistic, free loving, let your hair go, than like in the Hamptons or something. Like, where a black woman is living in the Hamptons her hair will probably be like really well done. Or in like Atlanta, as well you know, places where Black communities are well off.*

Rick clearly uses the language of class to refer to the differences in black women's hairstyle. He suggests that black women are less likely to wear their hair natural in spaces

of economic affluence. Rick might also be pointing to symbolic boundaries between mainstream and alternative styles as they relate to class. This comment also points to the ways in which Black women are expected to achieve a model of white femininity in a society that continues to privilege whiteness as the taken-for-granted norm of femininity (Collins 2000).

Bettie writes, "class can be conceptualized as performative in that there is not *interior* difference (e.g. innate and inferior intelligence or taste) that is being expressed; rather, institutionalized class inequality creates class subjects who *perform*, or display, differences in cultural capital" (Bettie 11). Hair is not simply about economic means and access to "black salons" but also a displaying of certain forms of cultural knowledge within specific social contexts. Women's hair thus becomes a display of knowledge and other various forms of capital at once. For those who have the means to decode style, depending on how one styles their hair they are inevitably read along race, class, and gendered lines. Rick's talk is not only a form of class talk but also feeds back into the idea of "guy hot" when he says that a Black woman from the Hamptons will probably have her hair "really well done", meaning relaxed or straightened. His stance throughout the interview suggested that straightened/relaxed hair is better perhaps illustrating the point that Black women feel pressure from both white and Black communities to style their hair in a way that follows the dominant feminine ideal, "long, pretty, soft, straight."

In sum, displays of the body require certain forms of knowledge. For women in the Black community, to wear one's hair natural, requires knowing what conditioners work best, what ingredients to mix, and how long to leave them in. The knowledge base

of the hair industry that encompasses Black hair is overwhelming. Women learn the ins and outs of perms, relaxers, weaves, and wigs in order to display a self that is valued both by self and in groups within society. White women and women of other races are not exempt from the hair industry and expectations to style their hair in certain ways. But the point to be made is that in whatever setting long, straight, soft, and blond hair remains as the ideal for which to strive. Women of all ages, races, classes, and sexualities are not exempt from the pressure and struggle to balance the investments made in their body with the politics of identity.

Conclusion

It is not simply the body, but the stylized body that offers a primary means by which individuals communicate with others (Skeggs 1997). Through the work of style, the body comes to signify aspects of one's identity to others. In this chapter, I have discussed the ways in which clothing and hairstyles are used to construct symbolic boundaries within and between groups of people. From this analysis, we can gain a better understanding of how categories of race, class, and gender are formed, contested, and reproduced. It is important to not underestimate the role the consumer market plays in supplying individuals the products that aid in the creation of identities and claims to authenticity. Brands emerged as a significant means by which others draw assumptions about one's social location, personality, beliefs, and actions.

The stylized body is not simply about articulating social group membership. Style is also about positioning oneself as superior. In this research, the phrase "that girl," along

with the use of brand names, allows women to draw symbolic boundaries between themselves and other women. These boundaries are constructed not only in regard to race, class, gender, and sexuality group membership, but also as an attempt to position oneself as morally superior. "That girl" does too much, wears too much makeup, appears to be compensating for a lack in intellect, and ultimately is not someone to admire or align oneself with.

Similar to the ways brands are used to articulate identity claims, hairstyle is a significant avenue for positioning oneself within the political and social landscape. In this work, I have shown hairstyle to be a display of the body that communicates race, class, gender, and sexuality. For several Black women I interviewed, "natural" and low-cropped hairstyles emerged as a political and moral statement rooted in an inseparable racial and gender identity. For these women, styling their hair was a way for them to position themselves against dominant ideals of feminine beauty. Unlike clothing, hair cannot simply be exchanged or taken off. Rather, women make considerable effort to work their hair in ways that they feel accurately says something about who they are, and how they want to be viewed by others.

DISCUSSION

*"The gestures which we sometimes call empty are perhaps in fact the
fullest things of all" (Goffman 1967:91)*

This research reveals the taken for granted nature of style in our everyday lives. From this work, is clear that we make use of style as part of an on-going process of identity construction on a routine and regular basis. Whether we see ourselves as an environmentalist or feminist, Muslim or Christian, female or male, black or white, we employ clothing and hair styles that both reflect and reify these affiliations. Enacting these identity claims involves a number of actions including conspicuous consumption, purposeful covering of the body, modifications to the body such as tattoos and piercings, and deliberate styling of one's hair.

In youth culture, style is a primary mode of distinction in which youth are involved in positioning themselves within the social, cultural, and political landscape. Through clothing and hairstyle, the students I interviewed consumed cultural materials in an effort to express and represent individual identity claims that simultaneously located them within social categories relating to race, class, gender, and sexuality. This research also illustrated that through the process of distinction, students draw symbolic boundaries to align and distance themselves with moral and ideological belief systems.

Throughout my work, I have argued that style is a form of invisible labor, often performed by women. By interviewing and focusing on conversations with young women on campus, I found that many female students experience conflicting pressures to display the body in relation to the educational setting. The anxieties and fears of doing too much or not doing enough exemplify one of the aspects of the emotional dynamics of style. Emotion emerged again in this work as women use the arena of style to bridge relationships with other women and maintain close relationships with female friends and family members. Additionally, style became a way to communicate a disconnection from other women or feminine social categories. From my analysis, we can see how style has the unique capacity to both bridge and distance networks of women through displays of the body.

Style is not simply the clothes you wear or how you wear them. The symbolic meanings invested in fashion convert our everyday life into meaningful moments that make style moral and political in nature. Through style we are engaged in displays of the self and the body, constructing symbolic boundaries, and distinguishing ourselves from others. In many ways, we are engaged in the work of constructing and maintaining differences. While difference is necessary and unavoidable aspect of social life, it also carries the potential to be the grounds on which the subordination of others is built. Thornton writes, "Each cultural distinction, a suggestion of superiority, an assertion of hierarchy, a possible alibi for subordination. In many circumstances, then, the politics of difference is more appropriately cast as *discrimination* and *distinction*" (Thornton

166:1996). The political and moral nature of style comes into view as we consider the ways in which style is used to claim a position of superiority.

At Mason, and in other diverse arenas, we are as a matter of routine confronted by difference. Sennett (1994) suggests that diverse, multicultural spaces (like a public university) provide a unique opportunity for self-realization in addition to engaging with "Others". In the space of a heterogenous university campus, like Mason, style becomes a way for individuals to simultaneously express their sense of self as well as membership in larger social groupings from race and gender categories to cultural and political categories such as hipster, environmentalist, and feminist. As students develop and formulate their understandings of diversity and difference both inside and outside the university setting, talk about style becomes sociologically relevant in terms of what it means to interact in a bounded civic space where cultural practices and social exchanges take place.

Students' perspectives on style are also revealing of some of the consequences of late modernity. As traditional frameworks for identity such as family, religion, class, and nationality weaken, the individual is granted greater freedom to choose their own path toward self-realization (Zukin and Maguire 2004). This greater freedom however also comes with increased levels of insecurity (Bauman 2000). Many scholars suggest that modernity has left us in a mass crisis of identity where we are each encouraged to engage in identity construction as a project in which to be fully invested (Giddens 1991, Bauman 2000). Identity is no longer inherited but crafted, sustained, and projected through conscious display of the body. Through style, claims to authenticity enable the modern

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individual to exhibit sustained bodily control over space and time in an effort to establish

some form of social order (Giddens 1991). In doing so, the individual resolves a sense of

insecurity and uneasiness in social life. As the realm of fashion and style supply

individuals with products that aid in the creation of group identities, the market becomes

increasingly involved in providing a sense of order in contemporary life (Zukin and

Maguire 2004)

In our consumer society, style and its symbolic meanings not only render the body

readable but also enables social categorization that sort experience into lifestyles. As we

look to the consumer market to fashion ourselves, brands become important markers of

identity and ways of being. Alice speaks to this argument when she says,

> *It's weird cause like you know, we all love spontaneity but at the same*
> *time we need control. Maybe that's like part of it with fashion, its because*
> *like we know that there's so many things you can't answer or get resolved*
> *and one way you can resolve it, is to fix your image or how you cope with*
> *the chaos, by ordering your image or your self.*

On one hand, this sentiment speaks to the dialectical tensions in social life. We crave

spontaneity, but demand control. We desire to be seen as unique individuals through our

style but long for a sense of belonging to larger social groups (Simmel 1957). Alice's talk

also supports Zukin and Maguire's claim that through the fashion industry we resolve

existential questions that generate insecurity. In this sense, the categorization and

ordering of one's self into a coherent image through style is used as a mechanism for

coping with modern life and its increased levels of insecurity and anxiety. Using style,

anxieties and fears that are present in the modern individual are eased by the ordering of

the self into an image, identity, or lifestyle.

Talk of style also provides an opportunity to see the ways we manage our emotions and connections to others in social situations. In addition to the notion that individuals are expected to maintain complete and unending control over the body (Giddens 1991), women are expected to display the body in such a way as to achieve effortless perfection. In our conversation about style Chase says, "as long as you can make it work." Alison explains this process,

> *Confidence. If its not so like, dramatic that it looks like they really, I mean, if you are wearing something that looks like it took a lot of effort to work. Like if it's a pain in the ass or takes a lot of effort to wear or to do, then people know you're doing it as a statement. That's why everyone, even if they did look for ages to find the perfect jacket, they wear it casually, cause no one look like they are going out of their way to dress. No one wants to look like they are going out of their way to dress any specific way. They just feel like this is me and this is just how I dress. People want to look effortlessly x or whatever.*

Effortless perfection in this case is the maintaining of appearances in such a way that obscures any evidence of physical and emotional labor. Using Hochschild's (1983) work we can look at how the management of emotions plays out in the realm of style. The lack of acknowledgement of the time, energy, and resources invested in the body is not only a physical feat, but something that is achieved through emotion labor. For instance, in our everyday talk, "throwing" something on without thought or saying that style is a "natural" phenomenon, we fail to fully acknowledge the underlying emotions such as fear, anxiety, and uneasiness that many women in our culture *feel*. When we think about style in the context of modern life, we can see the ways in which style provides an avenue for managing feeling. One writer recently termed "emotional beauty labor" as "a sort of low-level, frequent, and unconscious acting." She went on to explain,

You know how when you're wearing an outfit you look good in, you'll
carry yourself differently? You're aware of being looked at, you're aware
of how your body might appear in this piece of clothing that is signaling a
certain occasion. You're not lying, but you're still doing a little acting.
That's the sort of labor I'm talking about: When you are conscious of the
potential of being looked at, your behavior is altered as a result. Even if
you don't intend to do so, you are working (Whitefield-Madrano 2010)

Speaking from personal experience, this writer exposes the emotional work involved in

self-presentation. The author doesn't explicitly outline the specific forms of acting but

refers to a performance in which we adjust our attitude and demeanor to depict an air of

control and arguably the illusion of effortless appearances. This form of acting also arises

from our ability and engagement in taking the role of the other (Mead 1934).

In addition, women experience emotional ties to the body more than men and

consequently engage in the management of these emotions. As women are measured by

conflicting standards of feminine beauty and expected to achieve them without visible

effort, emotions arise in the form of fear and anxiety of "doing too much" or not enough.

Hochschild also suggests that we manage our emotions in attempts to avoid

psychological pain (1983). Avoiding, repressing, or altering a feeling however does not

mean it simply goes away, for "the difficulties that we seek to avoid do not therefore

disappear" (Sennett 1994). Sennett (1994) suggests that our insecurities and fears become

projected onto others. This is an interesting statement considering the pronounced talk of

"that girl" in my research. When women position themselves as morally superior against

other women, we could argue that they are projecting their own inner fears of being that

woman, of being the woman who got it wrong. These fears and projections are rooted in

the moral superiority claims that many of my participants expressed and a moral order

whereby people are sorted. Hochschild's makes an important point that once an illusion is defined as an illusion it becomes a lie, and to lie to oneself is a sign of weakness (1983). She writes, "it is far more unsettling to discover that we have fooled ourselves than to discover we have been fooling others" (1983:47). Perhaps this is why throughout my interviews individuals maintained that style was something natural, something that emerges from within. To acknowledge the work involved would be to acknowledge the acting demanded of performance. The unsettling feeling of fooling oneself and appearing weak is heightened in late modernity where the self operates in a reflexive mode (Giddens 1991).

The moral discourse embedded within talk about style highlights how boundaries within and between groups are constructed. As I have showed in this research, style guided by morality and inner value systems enable us to not only make sense of our place in a chaotic world, but also position ourselves as superior. However, the moral superiority claims made by students in effect mask vulnerability and feelings of insecurity, which according to Sennett, have bearing on our ability to experience pain and be confronted with difference and diversity in a meaningful way. According to Sennett, we won't see equality or civic compassion until we, as individuals, recognize our own vulnerability both physically and psychologically. He writes,

> For people in a multi-cultural city to care about one another, we have to change the understanding we have of our own bodies. We will never experience the difference of others until we acknowledge the bodily insufficiencies in ourselves. Civic compassion issues from the physical awareness of lack in ourselves, not from sheer goodwill or political rectitude (Sennett 1984:370)

Sennett presents community to us as a particular kind of social group in which people believe that they share something together and feel an emotional tie to one another (1971). However, through the management of emotions and claims of superiority we conceal our vulnerability from others and fail to engage in diversity wholeheartedly. This sort of interaction, one based on withholding our vulnerabilities prohibits us from achieving sympathetic understanding and compassion for others.

Talk of style reveals the way we relate to others and whether we feel a sense of connection and community. Race, class, and gender are important aspects of identity that aid in the construction of boundaries between groups but there are other means by which we distance ourselves from others that transcend these categories. By ordering the self into an image or style, claiming moral superiority, and managing our emotions in social interactions we fail to fully engage in diverse, multicultural relationships in a meaningful way. These actions perform social and psychological functions that ease our anxieties and manage conflict. But a number of sociologists agree that just as much as we need order and control, we also need conflict and experience to shake our foundations about who we are. The ordering of the self is not a wholly negative act, but according to Sennett, we need a fractured self to be able to have compassion for others. He writes,

> Lurking in the civic problems of a multi-cultural city is the moral
> difficulty of arousing sympathy for those who are Other. And this can only
> occur, I believe, by understanding why bodily pain requires a place in
> which it can be acknowledged, and which its transcendent origins
> becomes visible. Such pain has a trajectory in human experience. It
> disorients and makes incomplete the self, defeats the desire for coherence;
> the body accepting pain is ready to become a civic body, sensible to the
> pain of another person, pains present together on the street, at last
> endurable- even though, in a diverse world, each person cannot explain
> what he or she is feeling, who he or she is, to the other (Sennett, 1984:376)

The multiple points of contact on campus provide a more than adequate space for conflict, specifically as it enables us to connect with others. Like the multicultural city, the diverse university is an ideal space in which everyday experience has the potential to challenge and shake our assumptions about reality and coherence. Style is a means by which we reflect and represent our differences. Therefore, our attention to style is important in that to be aware of how we fashion the body is a chance to be aware of difference. By being confronted with these facts, embracing pain from within and relating to others, we can achieve a civic orientation towards the world. Seemingly innocent conversations about style with others have the potential to encourage not only recognition of differences but self-reflexivity. In the process of self-reflection we may find that we have more in common with others (like "that girl") than we initially think. In such a multicultural and individualistic society it is hardly reasonable to suggest that one could empathize or wholly understand the plight of another. But this does not mean that we cannot develop strong feelings of sympathy for others. Here, sympathy is used in its definitive sense, as sharing in the feelings of another with respect to the other. Sympathy for the other, as opposed to "feeling sorry" for the other, is the ultimate goal (Sennett 1984).

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