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MASSEY UNIVERSITY

Performing Identities on Facebook:

Young Bhutanese Women Becoming 'Kiwi'

A dissertation presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
Social Anthropology at Massey University, Palmerston North New Zealand

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Abstract

This research traces the experience of resettlement among a family of five Bhutanese refugee women, a single mother and her four teenage daughters. My fieldwork involved ‘hanging out’ with the young daughters in this family. Using participant observation, semi-structured interviews and visual ethnographic methods, my findings reveal the struggles of being low caste single women in a predominantly Hindu refugee community. My participants used their research cameras to take photographs of themselves, tracking these photos led my analyses into the online world of Facebook. This research offers an anthropological enquiry into the impact of Facebook within the daily lives of young refugee women. The visual methodologies used in this project expose the private and complicated identity work that occupies Bhutanese youth in their experiences of learning how to be ‘Kiwi’. Using Judith Butler’s theory of performativity, this research seeks to understand the relationships between these young women and the complicated online and offline worlds they are a part of. My findings problematize universal notions that the identities of young refugees are a ‘singular’ or ‘fixed’ reality, centred on their inherent ‘refugeeness’. Alternatively this research endeavours to bring to light the enabling factors that allow these young women to negotiate the performative process of ‘growing up’ in a new country.

Keywords: performativity, identity, social media, refugee, New Zealand

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Introduction

In 2008, New Zealand became the first country to accept Bhutanese refugees for resettlement under the annual refugee quota. This research traces the resettlement stories of a family of young women and provides an account of being young refugee women growing up as teenagers in New Zealand.

My initial interest in this project emerged through correspondence with the Palmerston North Multicultural Centre and my personal interest in women's stories. When I met the family of young women who were to become my participants for the first time, I was surprised by their confidence and chattiness, both of which challenged assumptions I didn't realise I had about refugee women and the vulnerable positions I thought they would occupy. The women who participated in this research are a family, comprising of a single mother and her four teenage daughters.

Given anthropological research methodologies, it is not uncommon for fieldwork relationships to grow into friendship. My growing friendship with this family opened up serendipitous pathways that changed the direction of this research project. I initially designed this project using visual ethnographic methodologies: I supplied the girls with a digital camera each and asked them to make a photo album that was an expression of their identities, imagining that they would take photographs of things that represented their Bhutanese cultural heritage. As our relationship grew into friendship, the girls began to send friend requests to me on Facebook. By accepting these requests, I came to see they weren't using their cameras in the way I had expected. Instead of taking photos that depicted elements of their cultural heritage, they were taking photos of themselves and their friends and posting these photos on their Facebook walls. To understand why the girls were using their cameras in this way, I needed to explore the photos within the context used by the girls. Thus, my fieldwork ventured into the online world of social networking and this opened up new questions about the significance of Facebook in the lives of these young women.

I came to see how important, clothing, make up and fashion accessories were to these young women, as much of their leisure time was dedicated to using these materials to stylise their hair, faces and bodies in different ways, I call this practice ‘body appearance work’¹. By talking with the young women about this it became clear that they are using their bodies to interact with and learn about the world around them. As they styled their bodies in different ways they experimented with ‘taking up’ new ways of being a young woman. The photos they have shared with me for this project capture this process.

It quickly became clear that this family of young women were markedly different from other young Bhutanese women in Palmerston North, and making sense of this difference became the focus of my project. The answer to this question of difference was caste, the family revealed to me that the local Bhutanese community often excluded them due to their low caste status and because they are a family of all women. For these reasons they have made efforts to distance themselves from the Bhutanese community and adopt New Zealand ways of being. As a result of this the young women now dress in Western clothing, have friendships with other New Zealand youth and have converted to Christianity. These choices have separated them further from the Bhutanese community.

To make sense of the lives of these young women I draw from Judith Butler’s theory of performativity. Butler suggests identity is a phenomenon that is produced through the body as it interacts within the world. To understand the photos these young women take, the stories they tell and the family history and socio-cultural structures that surround them, I will draw from Butler’s concepts of embodiment, and citational gender norms. Gender norms are the regulatory discourses which demonstrate idealised constructions of gender.

When these young women take photographs of themselves with the intent of sharing the images on Facebook, they are engaging in a performative process and learning to become women. This occurs primarily through the taking of selfie photos. Selfie’s are photos taken of the

¹ Body appearance work” (p.94) is a term used by Nairn et al (2012) to explain the importance of body appearance in the practice of identity. For young people body appearance is particularly important, my participants spend a considerable amount of time preparing their bodies to be seen in the world. They draw from "Global cultural texts - music fashion images and film" (p.94) to stylise their bodies in particular ways. Consequently the word 'work' is an appropriate explanation of this practice.

photographer, by the photographer. The body is the primary instrument of this process; as the photographer choreographs her body to pose in a way that highlights her physical attractiveness. As my participants post these photos on Facebook, further meaning is added to them as their Facebook friends respond to their posts. It is through this process that identities are performed on Facebook. Therefore, Facebook, for my participants, should not be viewed as a space detached from the body but rather an embodied space of performative identity work which occurs through the sharing of photographs. I categorise these photos into three groups, selfies, friendship photos and identity performing images. Within these categories I will trace the different ways the girls style their bodies to take up particular ‘Western’² gender norms.

As they take photos of this process and share these photos on Facebook they are actively resisting Hindu norms. I will explore the complexity of this resistance, as at a glance, the photos these young women take could be understood as conventional photos teenage girls may take. However, given their socio-cultural context they are simultaneously acts of subversive resistance. Here, I explore the blurred line between conventional and subversive gender norms.

Much of the literature on refugee women paints a picture of them as traumatised and struggling victims. What this study shows is that these young women are confidently exploring their identities through the stylisation of their bodies. Though only one family, this study draws attention to the complexity and variation in the resettlement experience of refugee women. I will show that an anthropological analysis focused on the life experiences of young refugee women, spoken by them, in their own words, and presented through their own images, offers rich ethnographic insight into the gendered and adolescent experience of resettlement in New Zealand.

This study provides an explorative and reflexive account of the ways in which these four young women use their bodies and their cameras to adopt Western codes of femininity and practice subversive resistance simultaneously. Through these practices, they forge new ways of being young Bhutanese women. This study explores the gendered experience of resettlement and the

² ‘Western’ is a common term which refers to characteristics, or fashion trends that originate in Western countries, in particular the USA. Quotation marks will be dropped from this term in subsequent use throughout this thesis.

ways in which these four young women negotiate the complicated process of shedding their refugee status and taking up New Zealand norms.

“We are always changing. From when we were in Nepal to living in New Zealand now, five years later, we have been changing as girls this whole time. And even though people say Facebook is bad for young people, I think it has been good for us because it helps you figure out what suits you and what doesn’t and the type of girl you want to be. So I think as time goes on we will probably get better and better at being Kiwi girls.”

Simone de Beauvoir states “one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one” (Butler, 1990, p. 1). As the above quotation highlights, these young women are always changing. This research is a reflection of where these young women are at now in the process of ‘becoming women’ and this thesis should be read as a brief snapshot of their journey as they learn not only how to be women, but how to be women in a new country.

Methods and Reflections on Fieldwork

The methodology chapter provides a space where the writer can reveal the highs and lows of fieldwork and the ethical uncertainty surrounding this process. The reader is provided with a glimpse of the researcher's experience, their strategies for navigating the field, and the reasons why they have used particular methods for data collection. Including this information strengthens the ethnographic analysis and provides the reader with a sense of transparency surrounding the researcher's journey. This methodology chapter adopts a reflexive approach as I consider the pathways in my life that lead me to this research. In doing so, I contextualize my place within it. I discuss what constitutes 'the field' of anthropological research by reflecting on the many roles I assumed during my fieldwork experiences, as a daughter, a sister, a friend and a researcher and the ethical considerations surrounding this. I also reflect on the pros and cons of using visual ethnography within this project and discuss the other methods I used for data collection throughout my fieldwork experience.

When I was 16 my secondary school teacher asked me to choose an autobiography to read for an English project. I choose Maya Angelou's (1984) autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. From the first page I was intrigued by the vulnerability of her words and I was drawn into her story. I finished this autobiography in two days and felt restless. Maya had become my hero; I could relate to her passion for literature and her feminist world views. For weeks I could not stop thinking about her journey. This was the beginning of my passion for women's life stories. I was suddenly bored with novels and found myself wandering through the autobiography section of my local library, searching for extraordinary women to read about. I began searching for online blogs and reading women's stories in National Geographic articles. I read about women's roles in warfare, political activism, and protest. In doing so, I became more suspicious of Western media: the stories I heard through local news outlets about women and warfare were not consistent with the life stories I was reading. During this time I became a volunteer for Rape Crisis in Wellington, where my job was to research and file all media stories that contained references to women and violence. I became aware that women were regularly stereotyped in the

media and that I was developing feminist world views. Slowly, I began to identify as a feminist³. This awareness propelled my interest and passion for women's stories.

The decision to focus my project on Bhutanese refugee women developed through my initial contact with the Palmerston North Multicultural Centre. I began to think about my Master's dissertation when I was in the final stages of my Bachelor's Degree; I knew that I wanted to focus on women and women's stories. One day, when I was visiting the Palmerston North City Library, I found a newsletter about the City's involvement in hosting refugee families from the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre in Auckland. To find out more information about refugee communities in Palmerston North, I arranged a meeting with the Palmerston North Multicultural Centre. I explained my passion for women's stories and they suggested that I focus my research on young Bhutanese refugee women because they knew very little about these women and their daily experiences of Palmerston North.

Conducting Fieldwork at Home

“Once fieldwork involved catching the slow boat to some distant and exotic locale, there to combat snakes and loneliness for a year or so until one had enough data or too much malaria, and then returning home” (Omohundro, 2008, p. 59).

Anthropology's understanding of what constitutes that field has moved beyond Malinowski's era. No longer do anthropologists have to travel to exotic locations and live for a year having little or no contact with their own society. Today anthropologists readily conduct fieldwork in their own societies. Furthermore, the boundaries of what constitutes 'the field' of anthropology are continuing to expand. Ellis (1995) and Neville-Jan (2004) are two of the pioneering anthropologists of auto-ethnography. Both Ellis and Neville-Jan researched their own painful experiences of living with illness. Their raw and honest auto-ethnographies illustrated that the researcher's personal experiences, emotions, and memories were of ethnographic interest and a largely unexplored field within anthropology. Postmodern anthropologists, such as Kuntsman

³ Feminism is an ideology based on the emancipation of the rights of women and other social minorities. Feminists support and defend social, political and economic equality.

(2009) and Ashford (2009), insist that the arrival of internet cyber communities presents another new field within anthropology. Indeed, the boundaries between home and the field have become increasingly blurred as anthropologists engaging in such research no longer need to leave their living rooms to enter the field.

Like any other graduate student, I was aware that surviving fieldwork was a rite of passage all aspiring anthropologists must go through. My entrée into my participants' lives began through one of my supervisors who had connections to the Bhutanese community in Palmerston North. Through various meetings with Bhutanese families, one family in particular was excited and willing to be involved in my project. In the early stages, the younger daughters often invited me to their home. We would watch movies, cook, and listen to music together. As our friendship grew I was invited to more family events, such as, church and bible study class (which was hosted in their home), and big shared meals with friends. I am only a few years older than my participants, as a result we had much in common. For instance, they were sitting secondary exams that I had sat not so long ago, they were deciding what they wanted to do with their lives once they finished school, a difficult decision that I had faced just a few years earlier. The young women were also interested in my marital status, as I have only recently married. They frequently asked me questions about what it is like to be 'newly-wed' and about the adult world of dating and finding a partner. We found common ground in this way, as they asked me questions about the choices I had made growing up, and I could relate to the pressures they faced negotiating the border between childhood and adulthood.

During this early fieldwork, I felt both familiar and foreign at the same time. It took just a five minute drive to enter an environment in which everything seemed different: the language, the smells, the music, the food. Notions of space and privacy were all totally different to my daily life. Although I was practicing anthropology in my own society, I often felt as though I was in a different world. Feeling foreign, out of place, and clumsy became a common part of my fieldwork experience. In spite of these feelings, I had much in common with the young women and our friendship continued to grow. As this happened 'the field' began to expand. Brown (2001) found in her research on the practice of Vodou that as her friendship with her participant, Mama Lola, grew so did the field of her research, extending from Mama Lola's home to the wider Brooklyn community and beyond international borders to Haiti. Like Brown, I found that

as my friendship with the young women grew, ‘the field’ of research began to expand beyond their home and into the wider peripheries of Palmerston North.

In addition to this, the mother of these young women asked me if I would teach one of her daughters how to drive. Driving around Palmerston North with the young women in my car became a regular form of fieldwork. It was during these driving lessons that we shared long conversations about our lives, and our goals and dreams for the future. In this sense, the inside of my car had become an anthropological field of on its own. It seemed that when we were in the car we were able to open up to each other much more than when we were in other environments. Over the course of my fieldwork the family experienced some important moments, one of which was the arrival of their younger brother and his wife and son. The family invited me to come with them to Auckland to meet their brother and his family. I felt honoured to be invited to such an important family moment. This also gave me the opportunity to look around the refugee centre in Mangere as the sisters were excited to give me tour of where they used to stay.

The ‘field’ in anthropology is both a practical element of research and a conceptual idea that changes naturally as the participants and anthropologist move through different spaces in their societies. My fieldwork experiences have taught me the importance of being flexible and allowing the field to change as the participants move. These moments of transition were often pivotal moments in this research project, during which I came to understand the constructs of my participants’ lives and of myself as a researcher.

Friendship in the Field

“Whatever the degree of the fieldworker’s participation in the whole society, friendships with a few people develop and they help him to find a niche in the community. It is these friends who become the best informants.” (Powdermaker, 1966, p. 420)

Friendship is an important and often inevitable part of the fieldwork experience. The ethnographic data an anthropologist accumulates is influenced by the friendships he or she forms during fieldwork. In the 1990s anthropology began to explore the realities of fieldwork relationships. Friendship was recognised as a reoccurring theme and a necessary part of achieving a successful fieldwork experience. Sluka (2012, p. 32) states “the success of ethnographic fieldwork is in large measure determined by the ability to establish good rapport

and develop meaningful relations with research participants. When fieldwork fails it is generally due to a failure either to establish rapport or good relations or maintain them over time.”

Indeed, my fieldwork experience was shaped by a growing friendship with my participants. When I reflect on this I continue to be surprised by how much time we spent laughing. In the early stages of fieldwork my participants and I found common ground through humour. This began as we watched films and laughed together during the humorous moments on screen. As we spent more time together we began to laugh a lot during our conversations. We laughed about boys, celebrities, and school memories. As our friendship grew we began to laugh at each other in a playful way. This often occurred in front of the camera. The girls liked to play with their digital cameras. We would often take pictures of each other pulling faces, which we would then transfer to the family computer and laugh at the faces we had made. Driving home, reflecting on my fieldwork experience, I would often worry I was not taking the project seriously or that I was becoming too comfortable in my participants’ home. However, I now realise that we found common ground with each other through humour. By laughing together my rapport with my participants grew into genuine friendship. These women remain in my life. I share a close friendship with each of them, and I continue to see them on a weekly basis for family dinners.

As my relationship with my participants evolved into friendship, so did my role within their family. In the early stages of fieldwork, they introduced me to others as a friend and I was treated as a guest in the family home: I was served the biggest portions of food, allowed to eat first, and not required or allowed to help with the dishes. As my presence became more common within the family, they began to introduce me as a sister, a daughter or a twin. It became more appropriate for me to help with cooking and cleaning. The family gave me a sari so I had something to wear when we dressed up and took photos. As my relationship and role within the family changed, the boundaries of my research relationships became more complicated. Deciding when I was a researcher, a friend, a sister or a daughter became a process marked by ethical ambiguity and self-doubt. In my role as a daughter the family taught me how to wrap a sari, how to speak Nepali, and how to cook Nepali food. My role as a sister marked my position in the family, as I participated in family activities and shared the same duties and responsibilities as the younger daughters in the family. This also involved the sharing and keeping of personal secrets. In my friendship role, I would often assist the family in reading documents, navigating

social institutions like hospitals and libraries, providing driving lessons, and helping the young women with their homework. All of these roles would intertwine; there were times when I was a friend, a sister, a daughter, and a researcher all at the same time.

As I became closer and more involved with my participants, the ethical boundaries began to blur. There would be moments during my fieldwork when my participants would share very intimate and personal stories with me. At this point a battle would arise between the researcher and the friend/daughter/sister within me. Often these stories made for significantly interesting and useful data. However, the friend, daughter or sister within me would overrule the desire to use these stories as data. Consequently, I found that the only way I could continue with this project and navigate such ethical dilemmas was by placing my friendship, daughter and sister roles first. As a result many of the personal stories, experiences and photos I collected are not published in this thesis. Being a friend, a sister and a daughter became my first priority and my research came second to this. This was an easy decision to make as I enjoyed the close relationship I shared with my participants. I felt a genuine bond with them and I wanted them to remain in my life beyond this project. De Laine states “ethnographers and oral historians might develop relations of friendship and intimacy through group sessions they initiate for research ends, but the test of ‘real’ friendship comes when fieldwork ends. The question of whether friendships formed in the field are ‘real’ or only ‘friend-like’ and contrived lies at the heart of feminist debate about intimacy and friendship within professional practice” (De Laine, 2000, p. 137-8).

In hindsight, I realise the laughing, the awkwardness, the self-doubt, and the excitement all served as a necessary part of my field experience. One of the outcomes of this process was that I began to have a place within the family. In reflection of this process I am reminded of Geertz (1996) who stated “you don’t exactly penetrate another culture as the masculinist would have it. You put yourself in its way and it bodies forth and enmeshes you” (Geertz, 1996, p. 44). As I formed close friendships with my participants I also began to collect ‘thick data’. My observations and field notes grew in length, from originally describing the Sunday morning routines of my participants, to detailing lengthy anecdotes about our encounters at the supermarket or the conversations we had as we took photos. It seemed the more my friendship with my participants grew, the ‘thicker’ my field notes and observations became. Behar (1996) describes this process as a voyage. She states “the ethnography serves as the only proof of the

anthropologist's voyage, the success of the enterprise hinges on how gracefully the anthropologist's shoulders what Geertz calls the burden of authorship" (Behar, 1996, p. 7). Indeed, I have found that 'writing up' is both a frustrating and rewarding part of the process of doing anthropology. I found that in the early stages of this project I could not adequately explore the lives of my participants without including discussions about my own personal journey as an anthropologist. I shared a friendship with my participants; therefore, it felt ethically inappropriate and unnatural to remove myself from my observations and focus my analysis solely on them and writing up in this way would not provide a truthful account of my fieldwork experience. As my interest in this project also stems from my passion for autobiographies and women's stories; it felt necessary that I intertwine my own stories and experiences of this project within my analyses.

Prior to the 1980s, academic writing largely required an impartial tone. Anthropologists refrained from incorporating their personal experiences of fieldwork into their ethnographies (Clifford, 1986). This meant that the realities of fieldwork experienced by anthropologists often remained unpublished. Malinowski himself did not disclose his fieldwork experience in his original publications about the Trobriand people. However, in 1942, his personal diary was discovered at Yale University and details of his feelings of homesickness and ethnocentrism emerged (Malinowski & Firth, 1989). The publication of his personal diary originally created a storm of controversy within anthropology. Described by Geertz (1988, p. 75) as a "backstage masterpiece of anthropology, our *The Double Helix*", the blunt and honest diary has provided a transparent perspective of anthropological fieldwork.

Anthropology today has entered an era of ethnographic writing, in which ethical considerations are crucial to all fieldwork projects. Today ethnographic writing demands narratives, discussions, and reflections, as well as displaying scientific recordings and facts (Kahn, 2011). Incorporating a reflexive narrative within ethnographic writing not only an element of transparency into the fieldwork process, but also provides another avenue by which anthropologists can explore the human condition.

Visual Ethnography

Visual ethnography is a particular method of fieldwork and ethnography. At its roots, visual ethnography endeavours to explore and comprehend visual manifestations of culture and identity. This means that the items we have in our lives, the clothes we wear, the pictures and films we enjoy are often indirect displays of our cultural backgrounds or individual identity. Visual ethnographers maintain that visual culture provides a means by which anthropology can move closer to understanding the human condition within the context of culture (Allan, 2005; Bloustien & Baker, 2003; Trafi-Prats, 2009; Schwartz, 1989; Becker, 1974).

To capture and understand visual displays of identity and culture, cameras are frequently used. As a result, published visual ethnographies are often filled with images or exhibited through film. But what makes a particular image ethnographic? There is no direct way to interpret whether or not a particular image is ethnographic. Instead, visual ethnographers argue that a single image may convey several meanings to the observer (Pink, 2006). Consequently, the only way to ensure an image has ethnographic merit is to contextualise it within discussions that convey substance and insight that are of ethnographic interest. This particular method shares similarities with auto-ethnography, where anthropologists are required to differentiate between moments of personal experience and moments of ethnographic self-reflection (Pink, 2006). The two are convoluted and at times inseparable. The only way to differentiate between them is to consider which experiences are relevant to the study at hand and can be contextualised in way which invokes ethnographic interest.

When engaging in visual ethnographic research that uses cameras, it is necessary that the researcher understands that the person with the camera occupies a position of power over those who are in the camera lens. Feminist visual ethnographers such as Chaplin (1994) and Kindon (2003) argue that photographs often expose the less powerful rather than the elites because elites and their spaces are much harder to access and photograph. Barndt (1997) found this to be true during his research photographing a university sociology department. He states “it seemed much harder to get into the space of the powerful than into the space of the less powerful: the (primarily female) secretaries in the departmental office were easier prey, for example, than the (usually male) professors; you had to pass through doors and get their permission before you could photograph them” (p. 13).

I was aware that my research focused on a vulnerable group, refugee women⁴. If I was behind the camera lens and spent my fieldwork photographing them, I would have power⁵ over the direction of this research. I wanted the direction of this project to be guided by my participants. To achieve this, the participants needed to be behind the camera lens. One experience in particular confirmed my belief that the participant needed to be in control of the camera lenses. This occurred one evening when the family was taking photos to send to relatives overseas. The women wanted to take photos outside. I assumed this was because the garden was a nice backdrop for family photos. I was surprised when the women lined up in front of their car. They explained they wanted to ‘show off’ their car to their family members overseas. I realised that my understandings of what made a good photograph were completely different to my participants’ understandings of what made a good photograph and if I took the photos during this project I was unlikely to truly capture what was important to this family. As Bourdieu (1990) highlights the taking of a photograph is not random but a choice made by the photographer, and by exploring this choice anthropologists can glimpse how the photographer makes sense of their world and the world in which they live. For Bourdieu, photographs represent clues about the social groups they occupy. He states:

“the internalization of objective and common regularities the group places this practice under its collective rule, so that the most trivial photograph expresses, apart from the explicit intentions of the photographer, the system of schemes of perception, thought and appreciation common to a whole group” (p. 6).

Originally I had designed this project to focus on material culture. I was granted research funding to purchase four digital cameras, one for each of my participants. I intended to ask the women in this family to photograph meaningful materials and to use these photos as sensory prompts in focus group discussions about identity.

Most of my fieldwork was spent with the young women during their leisure time. Subsequently, I became aware of how confident and comfortable the women already were with the camera.

⁴ Although the women came to New Zealand under refugee status, they have lived in New Zealand for five years and no longer identify as refugees. Instead they consider themselves to be Kiwis.

⁵ If I was the photographer as well as the researcher, choosing what should and should not be photographed would have been at my discretion, this would have given me primary control over the direction of this research.

Their mobile phone cameras were used every weekend and in the evenings after school. The young women would dress up and photograph themselves in different poses and these photos would be loaded onto the family computer. Then their favourite photos would be uploaded to their Facebook accounts. The more time I spent with the family, the more I realised that for the young women this was a regular activity. Often the mother and the elder sisters would join in. When I realised how regularly this family took photos, it felt artificial and unnatural to ask them to photograph their personal materials as this was something they would not normally photograph. I decided, instead, that I should focus my analysis on the everyday ways they used the camera.

To understand the photos these young women took I will explore their family history and their mother's parenting strategies. I will illustrate how, for these young women, structures beyond their control have shaped their lives. In many ways they have no choice, but to 'learn to be Kiwi girls'. Drawing Butler's concept of volunteerism I will examine how these structures have initiated a sense of agency in the girls. This agency emerges in the photos they take; this will be explored in Chapter six.

For my participants taking photographs is a regular practice, this was something they did before I supplied them with digital cameras. Consequently, this thesis explores the photos these young women take in their everyday lives. The girls have selected certain photos to be used in this research taken using their digital cameras I provided and other photos and images not originally taken for this study.

Using the Camera and Using the Photos

One of the outcomes of my ongoing friendship with my participants was that I was frequently featured in their photos. These photos often captured the meeting of personal and professional boundaries as my participants would frequently use their cameras photograph us 'doing things together' as friends. Pink (2001) highlights how this is a common experience among visual ethnographers who use photography as means of generating ethnographic knowledge. Reflecting on her own fieldwork experiences she states:

“When I first returned from fieldwork in southern Spain in 1994 I had two sets of photographs: one of friends and one of ‘research’. As time passed these photographs

shifted between categories. They moved out of albums and eventually into a series of envelopes and folders. The personal/professional visual narratives into which I initially divided them gradually became dissolved into other categories as I worked through the experience of fieldwork in an attempt to translate it into ethnographic knowledge. Thus my anthropological analysis began to appropriate my personal experience and possession” (p. 27).

Similar to Pink’s experience, the photos my participants took moved frequently between two different categories: fieldwork photos and personal photos. These photos would also move from our focus group discussions to online forums such as Facebook. In this way their photos would be shared in a semi public forum, a space in which their wider circle of friends and family could view these photos and respond to them by writing messages. The photographs my participants shared on Facebook and other forums were often of us ‘doing things together’ as friends. They would appear on my Facebook homepage and on my Facebook accounts because they ‘tagged⁶’ me in them. Discussions would then take place within this online forum about the events that had occurred that day. I used these same photos to frame my interview questions and as ongoing sensory prompts within interviews and focus groups. In this sense the questions that shaped my research emerged through my interest in these photos. It is in this way that my participants had primary control over the direction of my research, steering my analysis to the online world of Facebook.

Consequently, the photos my participants took throughout this project were transitional and fluid, as they moved from one context to the next, from focus groups to personal online spaces. As these photographs moved from group discussions into other, more personal forums, the ethnographic knowledge these photos accumulated began to intertwine and appropriate my personal experiences of our friendship.

Identity Protection

Throughout this thesis my participants have shared their personal photos, and stories, this means that I cannot protect their identities from anyone who may recognise their faces. However, to

⁶ ‘Tagging’ or ‘Tagged’ is a term popularised by social media, it refers to the labelling or identifying of specific individuals in photos, videos and comments on social media forums.

further disguise their identities, the sisters shall remain nameless throughout this thesis; I refer to them as sister A, B, C or D simply to distinguish between speakers in a conversation. Consequently, sister A is not a particular participant, but the sister that is speaking first in the conversation. In addition to this, when the participants are discussing photos of themselves they will be referred to as Sister X. Their mother does not appear in any of the photos within this thesis and I have changed her name to Sarah. Writing up in this way protects identities by making it difficult for readers to attach particular stories and opinions to faces. I have been selective about the conversations and photos that appear within this research and have attempted to protect the anonymity of my participants.

The photos within this thesis show various ways my participants style their bodies as they engage in body appearance work, at a glance these photos might appear to be 'typical photos' teenage girls may take together. Yet I will show that my participants use the camera as a tool to experiment with and construct online identities. By taking photos of their in this way, they learn what looks 'good' and what looks 'bad' and they come to stylize their bodies in certain ways that adhere to particular Western gender norms.

Mapping the Field and Exploring the Literature

Traditional Malinowskian methods of fieldwork required anthropologists to move away from their own society and live for a year amongst indigenous peoples, making it difficult for anthropologists to read related literature while engaging in fieldwork (Omohundro, 2008). Today, anthropologists readily engage in fieldwork in their own communities. Consequently, anthropologists keep up with emerging literature and engage in fieldwork at the same time. The early stages of this literature review developed simultaneously with my entrée into the Bhutanese community.

I began this literature review by searching for studies closest to my own research. I looked for literature within the social sciences about both Bhutanese refugees and refugee resettlement in New Zealand. I found that a large proportion of New Zealand research on refugees seeks to understand refugees within the context of health and wellbeing. As a result, refugees are often described as ‘sufferers of poor mental and physical health’. In conversations with the girls during the early stages of my fieldwork, I would ask questions about their lives in Palmerston North and their answers frequently surprised me. They talked about their dream careers, make-up, fashion, boys, and celebrities. I realised these young women did not identify as ‘sufferers of poor mental and physical health’. The literature I was reading did not reflect my experiences talking to these young women because it focused on trauma and resettlement issues. Furthermore, this literature adopted quantitative methodologies that moved away from individual experience.

I decided to allow my participants to guide me to the issues that were important to them and developed a new method for sourcing relevant literature: I would hang out with the sisters and talk with them about their lives, ask them questions about their daily experiences and record my memory of our conversations. This raised a series of questions about what I needed to know in order to understand more about these women and directed my search for relevant literature. By using this inductive method, my participants guided me to what was important to them and; therefore, assisted in the construction of this literature review.

This approach required me to draw on a wide range of academic materials. I begin by briefly mapping the field of refugee studies and discussing the use of quantitative and qualitative analysis in refugee studies. The second section of this literature review explores the importance of recognising the gendered experience of displacement. Here I reflect on qualitative studies that focus on the gendered experience of being a refugee and highlight what can be learnt from these studies. The following section focuses on young adults and their experiences of displacement. I will also review the literature on young adults and the use of social networking websites (particularly Facebook) as a space for identity construction. Finally, I discuss research that focuses on the experiences of ethnic minority youth growing up in New Zealand.

The Importance of a Qualitative Approach

The Field of Refugee Studies

The United Nations' High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) global report illustrates that the numbers of forcibly displaced people throughout the world are alarmingly high. In 2010, the report highlighted that 43.3 million people had been forcibly displaced from their homes in the last decade, 15.6 million of whom have been granted refugee status and have been resettled in host countries (UNCHR). The number of forcibly displaced people continues to rise.

The field of refugee studies is interdisciplinary: it has roots in psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, geography, international law and history (Skran & Daughtry, 2007). Today the field of refugee studies readily adopts what is known as a 'dual imperative'. This means that many researchers not only aim to produce studies of academic interest, but also intend to play an active role in aiding the lives and wellbeing of refugees. Researchers such as Hinton (1995) and Lenette (2011) readily contribute to social policy and often act as advocates for the communities they are studying. These scholars have focused on resettled refugees and, as well as researching their lives, they have often mediated between their participants and institutions within host countries. Through her research, Hinton took an active role working with NGOs and local communities to improve the quality of life in Nepali refugee camps. "For the refugees with whom I worked, giving them a 'participatory voice' in the texts I produced was not enough. Gathering information that I alone would analyse and comment on later would not meet their expectations" (Hinton, 1995, p. 21-22).

The field of refugee studies is dominated by quantitative analysis, where the researcher conducts empirical investigations, gathering numerical data to analyse general trends across refugee groups. The problem with quantitative analysis is that individual experiences are overlooked. Researchers adopting a qualitative approach in the field of refugee studies continue to stress the need for academia to consider the experience of life in exile from an individual perspective. Anthropology readily adopts a qualitative approach when considering the refugee experience. Harrell-Bond and Voutira's (1992) review of anthropological work in the field of refugee studies highlights that the discipline of anthropology has focused on a number of issues significant to refugees: political activism and awareness among refugees, human rights in a global context, experiences of up-rootedness, social policy, and the politics of resettlement. Harrell-Bond and Voutira (1992) state, "Of all the disciplines involved in the study of human behaviour we contend that anthropology has the most to contribute to the study of refugees" (p. 6).

In her study of refugee women living in Brisbane, Lenette (2011) argues that much of the current literature about refugees understands them as either being well or unwell. If they resettle easily and adhere to their host countries 'ways of being', they are understood as healthy and successful in their resettlement. Alternatively, if they struggle to adhere to new 'ways of being', they are considered to be unhealthy and experiencing mental illness. Lenette (2011) states "it is assumed that respondents must either feel depressed or healthy. Rarely is it acknowledged that it is possible to feel both concurrently. This likelihood is constantly overlooked and such assumptions of mutually constituted exclusive binaries demonstrate how set definitions and rigid frameworks ill fit the lived experiences of unique individuals" (p. 44). This binary has trickled into many academic studies that explore refugee experiences. As a result, refugee attempts to resettle in host communities are often written about, as either good or bad, positive or negative (Lenette, 2011).

Studies on Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome also feature in the field of refugee studies (Thabet, Abed, & Vostanis, 2004; Heptinstall, Sethna, & Taylor, 2004; Blair, 2000; Friedman, & Jaranson, 1994; Van Ommeren, Sharma, Sharma, Komproe, Cardeña, & de Jong, 2002). A common criticism of quantitative PTSD studies on refugees is that psychology's understanding of trauma is based on Western interpretations of traumatic events. These interpretations are not always applicable to refugees from non-Western cultures. For example, Terheggen, Strobe and

Kleber's (2001) study focused on the experiences of Tibetan refugees living in India. Their studies highlighted how ineffective quantitative psychological surveys were at evaluating trauma. As they spent time with Tibetan refugees, they realised their participants were deeply traumatised from the events that lead to their exile. However, previous quantitative PTSD surveys had failed to recognise this, because they did not categorise the events that were most traumatising to this group, such as the destruction of spiritual buildings and monuments. Thus, the surveys failed to adequately measure the trauma experienced by this group. Terheggen et al's (2001) study highlights the necessity for qualitative methodologies in order to understand and document the refugee experience. As this "permits a deeper exploration of meanings attached to particular aspects of life in exile for distinct groups" (Lenette, 2011, p. 49).

While researching Palestinian refugees suffering chronic illness, Halabi (2005) found that literature on the life experiences of Palestinian refugees was limited. She intended to use a questionnaire to gather data; however, she discovered that most of her participants were illiterate in both English and Arabic. She began interviewing her participants instead. Through this method, she realised her original questionnaire was constructed from a Western perspective and many of the questions were not applicable to her participants. Halabi (2005) continued to find it difficult to understand the experiences of Palestinian refugees with chronic illness: "Alternative ways to capture the experiences of these Palestinian refugees had to be found. A qualitative approach was thought of as the most appropriate to start with and then to build on that for future instrument construction that would fit the language and cultural context of the population of interest" (p. 217). Indeed, by adopting qualitative methodologies, researchers come closer to understanding the human experience. Agar writes, "Without science we lose our credibility. Without humanity, we lose our ability to understand others (Agar, 1980, p. 13). Refugees by definition are people who have been forced to flee their homes to save themselves and their families, living outside of their home countries. In the field of refugee studies we cannot afford to lose our humanity, and the data we gather must be credible since the people with whom we work are often so incredibly at risk" (Omidian, 2000, p. 42).

The Gendered Experience

Qualitative methodologies provide researchers with tools that develop a closer understanding of the insider's perspective. Feminist researchers argue that when we focus on the insider's

perspective, we must pay close attention to the voices of women, as men and women make meaning out of displacement, resettlement, and their refugee status differently.

As I searched for qualitative studies about refugee women and their experiences, I noticed that much of the literature focused on their vulnerability. There are many studies that focus on refugee women's experiences of abuse and sexual assault (Hynes & Cardozo, 2000; Watts & Zimmerman, 2002; Cole, 1992). By comparison, qualitative studies that focus on the everyday experiences of refugee women are few (Daley, 1991). Zotto (2002) highlights how Western discourses within mainstream media stereotype the roles of women in non-Western countries experiencing civil unrest. She begins by describing the complex nature of women's roles within warfare. In order to document warfare stories quickly and simply, the media describes war as a series of decisions made by state actors. As a result, women's voices, experiences, and their active role in warfare remain hidden. When women's experiences are reported within Western media, they are framed in a victimising way which confirms the Western masculine perspective of warfare and conflict. She maintains that refugee women specifically are either discussed as a "monolithic group—'sea of faces', 'swarm of bodies', 'mass of waiting families'—or as a singular victim" (Zotto, 2002, p. 144). In this way, refugee women's experiences of displacement, warfare and conflict are either hidden or stereotyped by the Western media and other Western institutions.

McSpadden and Moussa (1993) highlight that the various crises refugees face intensify social constructions of gender roles. This means that as communities become displaced, traditional gender roles are simultaneously broken down and reinforced (Lenette, 2011). Qualitative studies that focus on gender have revealed dynamic differences in the ways men and women experience both life in exile and resettlement. Shoeb, Weinstein and Mollica's (2007) study adopted a gendered perspective and focused on Iraqi women. Their research highlighted limited choices for many women: their exile resulted from their husband's political activism and their experiences of everyday life in America were influenced by their personal frustrations toward their husbands. McMichael and Manderson's (2004) research on Somali refugees living in Australia also focused on the experiences of women. Their study describes how isolation was a major cause of unhappiness. As many of the women spent most of their time at home, they experienced a loss of social interaction. The women remembered their domestic life in Somalia as having continuous

social interaction with neighbours and the local community. They described their memories of their Somali domestic life as “being rich with what we might now refer to as social capital” (McMichael and Manderson 2004, p. 91). By focusing on Somali women specifically, McMichael and Manderson (2004) explored the women’s roles in their new communities in Australia and in their homeland of Somalia.

Similarly Kumsa’s (2002) study illustrates the gendered experience of resettlement of Oromo refugee women. As they resisted Western ways of being and these young women struggled to find a place of belonging. When asking the women about their ideal future partners, the women continued to identify themselves as ‘proud Oromo’ women and that their ideal partner would be a ‘proud Oromo man’. Kumsa (2002) states “these are not idiosyncratic narratives; they reveal deeper and hidden discourses that shape the women’s identities” (p. 479). Through exploring young Oromo women’s dreams of intimacy, Kumsa concluded that their lives are framed by globalisation. Even though her participants were no longer living in hostile circumstances, they continued to experience cultural and social marginalisation in their host society. Thus, Kumsa (2002) concludes that feelings of isolation were daily difficulties for these women. Their dreams of intimacy and self-identity are impacted by “multiple shifting positions of privilege and marginality in the dynamic of power relationships, which is now globalized” (Kumsa, 2002, p. 493).

These studies highlight how women experience resettlement, life in exile, and being a refugee differently to men. However, it is also important to recognise that the experiences of refugee mothers are different to the experiences of women who are not mothers. Again, much of the literature that focuses on refugee mothers pays close attention to the vulnerable and dramatic life events that refugee women have experienced, such as rape, sexual assault, the death of children, miscarriages, and stillborn children. Rajaram’s (2002) article *Humanitarianism and Representations of the Refugee* describes how refugees are understood as stateless and homeless beings. Refugees are rendered speechless and their futures are decided for them by other countries. Their physical bodies become sites of imposed Western discourses. Rajaram (2002) highlights how this is particularly the case for women with children: “When photojournalism and film focus on individual refugees, it is noteworthy that women and children tend to be prevalent. Malkki and Nyers both argue that these two groups of people embody in the Western

imagination ‘a special kind of powerlessness’; perhaps they do not tend to look as if they could be ‘dangerous aliens’ (Malkki, 1995, p. 11)” (p. 252). In this way refugee mothers are regularly generalised as victims of warfare and conflict and, as a result, their individual experiences, stories and identities have been absorbed and smothered by this discourse.

Sayigh’s (2002) research on the narratives of Palestinian women in refugee camps focuses on mother/daughter relationships highlighting the complex responsibilities refugee mothers endure. Sayigh (2002) demonstrates how Palestinian mothers are responsible for enforcing cultural traditions. The young women Sayigh interviewed described how their mother’s stories helped them to form connections to Palestine even though they had spent most of their lives in refugee camps in Lebanon. “Through the stories they told, the food they cooked, their accents and proverbs, their singing of lullabies and *ataba* (dirges) the mothers of women too young to remember Palestine formed a direct link with the land and specific origins” (Sayigh, 2002, p. 63).

Lenette (2011) also highlights how the realities of being a refugee mother are complex. Her research focuses on refugee single mothers living in Australia. She describes how being a refugee single mother offered both opportunities and barriers to the women. The women’s experiences of daily wellbeing were complicated by feelings of isolation and feelings of hope for their children’s futures. Lenette (2011) maintains human wellbeing is “a multifaceted reality” which is all the more complicated for refugee women. She notes that despite the size of the female refugee population, female refugees are readily over-looked by many institutions. They are given fewer opportunities and their experiences remain unseen and overshadowed by dominant male perspectives. Indeed, there is a need for more qualitative studies focused on the female experience of being a refugee. “Hence, when conducting research involving people from refugee backgrounds, there is a clear need for critical outlooks taking into account the distinct narratives of men and women. In this way, women’s voices can be acknowledged and included in this process.” (Lenette, 2011, p. 57)

Education and Young Adults

For the girls in my study, attending New Zealand high school was their first experience of engaging with a Western institution and a primary avenue for learning about Palmerston North

and their place within it. School is understood by sociologists to be a microcosm of cultural values and ways of being for the society within which it is situated. Schools teach students academic skills, but through their institutional structures, they also teach students the socio-cultural rituals and structures that order society.

Oikonomidou (2009) suggests that refugee and migrant students attending Western schools are marked by their ethnic differences. They are understood as foreign. As a result, their cultural background is indirectly compromised as the student moves through the school system. Oikonomidou maintains that refugee students learn that in order to be successful in the school system they need to abandon much of their cultural background. This is because refugee and migrant students present a number of challenges to schools. “Their presence, by default, challenges the pre-existing social configuration of schools. These students’ varying perspectives on life, challenge notions of belonging to one geographic location, one nation or one school” (Oikonomidou, 2009, p. 24).

A significant proportion of the research about refugees and schooling has explored students’ academic outcomes. Focusing exclusively on academic outcomes produces simplistic and inaccurate explanations of refugee students’ experiences. As I asked my participants about their experiences starting school in New Zealand they explained to me that many of the older members of the community struggled to read and write in English, as a result they were dependent on the younger school educated members of the community to help them. Qualitative studies that explore the experiences of migrant school students reveal that much learning is achieved outside of the classroom. As these students become more skilled at speaking English they often acquire the responsibility of acting as a mediator between their parents and wider society. Sarroub’s (2005) study on Yemeni American girls revealed that young women were often the only literate members of their community. As a result they were responsible for the payment of household bills and translating important letters for family members. Thus, they were reading and writing every day. Their teachers were unaware of this and missed a valuable avenue for reaching out to the young women and assisting them further in their English writing skills.

Researchers that explore refugees’ experiences of resettlement frequently recognise age as a key factor: different generations will experience daily life in their host country differently.

Mosselson's (2009) study of Bosnian adolescent refugees provides an example of this. His study illustrated that unlike adult refugees, adolescent refugees often see a future for themselves in their host country. The participants in his study saw school as a central component of their identities and a key to their future success in this new society. "Although schooling does help the students learn how to fit into the society (as discussed latter), the refugee students also describe schooling giving them a sense of control over their destinies and a sense of agency" (Mosselson, 2009, p. 270).

The Importance of Friends

Although identity neither begins nor ends in the early stages of adulthood, the onset of adulthood is, for many people, the time of life when identity is particularly important (Mosselson, 2009). Much of the literature about refugees who are young adults was framed within the context of education and little attention has been paid to young adults who resettled at an age when they were too old to attend high school, however, of the limited literature that focuses exclusively on young adults, identity and belonging are consistently recognised as significant issues. Correa-Velez, Gifford and Barnett's (2010) study of young adult refugees living in Australia identified that their participants were prone to feelings of loneliness and isolation. They state "Two key challenges shared by most of the participants were living in fragile family situations and experiences of social exclusion" (Correa-Velez, Gifford & Barnett, 2010, p. 1402). They concluded that for young adult refugees, experiencing social inclusion within the host society was particularly beneficial to the participants' experiences of wellbeing.

Facebook as a Space for Identity Work

Identity work is a term I refer frequently to throughout my thesis. When I use identity work I am referring to the work of crafting an identity. Although such work is a lifelong process, it is particularly significant for youth as they transition between childhood and adulthood. Nairn et al (2012) highlights how the crafting of an identity for New Zealand youth is marked by ongoing negotiations between, dependence and independence, studying and working, evolving family relationships, cross cultural boundaries and music, fashion and trends. For young people the crafting of identity is a multifaceted experience, and negotiating the child-adult border is a task to be accomplished at both conscious and unconscious levels. Consequently, I consider that the term identity work best describes this experience.

The identity work that takes place among refugee adolescents is often a confusing and exhausting process marked by self-consciousness. During my fieldwork, the sisters often described the difficulties they faced being young Bhutanese women in New Zealand. Beginning a new life in Palmerston North meant they were unable to be fully Nepalese, yet English language barriers and ethnic differences prevented them from feeling like full New Zealanders. In this sense, identity for refugee youth is complicated. As Camino (2012) highlights, culturally neutral spaces in which youth are not expected to conform to either 'Nepali' or 'New Zealand' identity norms, play a central role in the identities of adolescent refugees. The more time I spent with my participants, the more I began to see the how important Facebook was in their daily lives. I slowly began to see that, for them, a culturally neutral space of identity exploration existed on Facebook. As a result, literature about the role of online social networking technologies in shaping identity became an important aspect of my research.

Facebook is a social networking website that was created in 2004. It was designed to facilitate social interaction among university students. Facebook has since become a globalised phenomenon and now has more than 49 million users (Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim, Westerman, & Tong, 2008). It works through the establishment of a personal profile in which its users reveal their personal information such as birthdays, interests and hobbies, relationship status, sexual orientation etc. The user is then able to connect with other individuals and networks they already affiliate with in their offline life, such as their educational institute, the city they live in, or their local religious group. These networks may include thousands of other users or they may only include a few people. Users are also able to connect with friends via 'friend requests' in which a request to connect is made by one Facebook user to another. If the request is accepted both users are able to view each other's profiles and see each other's updates. In this way, photo albums, local and international news, personal interests and personal status updates are shared within one's semi-public Facebook community, through the Facebook news feed (Walther et al, 2008). Although Facebook was designed for university students in the United States, it has since become a global phenomenon, and as result it is no longer a space primarily used by students, instead Facebook has become a social networking service available to anyone with an email address.

As Facebook is a relatively new phenomenon, most of the research about Facebook derives from quantitative methodologies and is based in the United States. Consequently, there is limited qualitative research about the ways people use Facebook in their everyday lives. In addition to this, I could not find any research focusing on young refugees and the ways they use Facebook and other social networking technologies. However, there are two particular fields that are of increasing interest to Facebook scholars: Facebook communication and social interaction, and Facebook as a tool for active identity expression.

Miller's (2011) exploration of how Facebook is used in Trinidad, traces the role Facebook plays in shaping the everyday lives and personal relationships among Trinidadians. Miller explains that anthropology as a discipline views individuals within the context of their culture and as belonging to a series of circulating relationships. This is similar to the way Facebook functions, as it connects people to the relationships they share in their offline lives. He maintains that an anthropological exploration of the ways Facebook shapes individual lives of everyday people is important. He states, "There are good reasons to view Facebook through an anthropological lens. After all one definition of anthropology might be that while other disciplines treat people as individuals, anthropology has always treated people as part of a wider set of relationships" (Miller, 2011, p.x). Miller goes on to maintain that whilst Facebook was created in the United States it has since become a globalised space that does not bear any association to America, he argues that non Americans who become Facebook users are not simply engaging in a process of "Americanization" (Miller, 2011, p. xii). Rather, Facebook offers a culturally neutral blank space available for different communities to use in different ways. In this sense Miller (2011) maintains that there is no 'true' Facebook, instead Facebook is appropriated by different communities in different ways. Miller suggests that we should not view Facebook's global force as a process of Americanization, he states:

"That Trinidad is some poor peripheral island buffeted by the storms that emanate from the great powers. So the 'real', the 'proper' Facebook is that which we find the US, where it was invented, while other places are reduced to inauthentic copies. This is a common perspective, especially in cultural studies and sociology, but I have always viewed anthropology as a place where things could and should be seen differently" (Miller, 2011, p. xii)

Miller goes on to explain that Facebook is used differently in Trinidad than it is in other places, for these reasons Miller refers to Facebook as “Fasbook” which is a local term for Facebook. Miller’s research suggests that Facebook is a culturally specific space, yet most of the academic attention focuses on Facebook users from the millennial generation (those born between 1982 - 2004) who are living in Western countries. Scholars are beginning to explore the social interaction and relationships taking place on Facebook among groups of young adults. Most of this research employs quantitative methodologies and attempts to map the many ways young people communicate and interact with each other through this medium. Pempek, Yermolayeva’s and Calvert’s (2009) investigation of 92 college students using Facebook found that young adults use Facebook for an average of 30 minutes per day as a part of their daily routine. Pempek et al (2009) asked their participants to keep a diary detailing the amount of time they spent on Facebook and the various activities they conducted whilst doing so. These activities included posting photos, looking at postings on their walls and the walls of others, reading their news feed, and looking at friends’ photos.

Facebook, like other social networking websites, is designed to foster social interaction within an online community. For this reason, much of the research that explores Facebook makes theoretical connections to the concept of social capital. For instance, Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007) discovered that young adults use Facebook in order to maintain already existing relationships rather than establish new connections to other people. They state:

“the strong linkage between Facebook use and high school connections suggests how SNS’s help maintain relations as people move from one offline community to another. It may facilitate the same when students graduate from college, with alumni keeping their school email address and using Facebook to stay in touch with the college community” (p. 1164).

Lenhart and Madden’s (2007) exploration of adolescents and social networking websites reinforces Ellison et al’s findings. They noted that adolescents enjoyed using Facebook because they were able to keep in touch with friends they rarely saw. These authors highlight that a primary incentive for using Facebook is the ability to maintain relationships with friends and family from a distance and at one’s own convenience. In this sense, social networking websites

provide free and convenient ways for young people to maintain relationships with friends as their lives move on and change.

Most of the research exploring Facebook interaction focuses on the active ways participants use Facebook; i.e., through posts comments and other forms of active interaction. However, Facebook is designed to allow people to view other people's profiles and social interaction without actively engaging through comments. Suzuki and Calzo's (2004) study of Facebook interaction found that young people spent a considerable amount of their Facebook time simply reading and observing the Facebook interaction of others without interacting. Indeed, my participants also spent a considerable amount of time on Facebook simply looking at other peoples profiles and posts without interacting. This suggests that Facebook is not only a space of social interaction and connectedness but also a space of observation, in which individuals have the ability to observe each other for long periods of time without interacting.

In addition to tracing how social interaction takes place on Facebook, scholars have also begun to research how Facebook is used as a tool for identity construction. Research has noted the effect using such sites for social interaction has on self-esteem. Valkenburg, Peter and Schouten's (2006) study of social interaction on a Dutch social networking website revealed that peer responses to participants' posts had a lasting influence on the participant self-esteem in both positive and a negative ways. Zhao, Grasmuck and Martins' (2008) analysis of 63 Facebook accounts revealed that as well as being a means of communication and social interaction, Facebook puts the user in control of how she chooses to show herself to her Facebook community. Accordingly, participants who belong to social networking websites in which people are anonymous often present an idealised version of themselves by lying about or exaggerating things like their profession, their appearance, and their age. However, in social networking environments such as Facebook, where people are not anonymous, expression and constructions of identity become more complex and limited. This is because the user is interacting with people, with whom they already have relationship, making it more difficult to fabricate their identities on Facebook. Consequently, attempts to display an idealised or exaggerated identity become more subtle, with users tending to implicitly suggest factors about their identities to their Facebook community which is a semi-public space. Such implicit suggestions often take place in the form of images, such as personal photos, quotations as images. Zhao et al., (2008) state

“there were great variations in the kinds of self-images produced on Facebook: some were carefully choreographed and well-polished, others were simple and rough. However, regardless of the levels of sophistication, Facebook users in our sample all attempted to project a self that is socially desirable. ‘Being popular among friends’ was a claim that seems to have underlined many identities on Facebook” (p.1826).

Grasmuck, Martin & Zhao (2009) also recognise the complexity of identity expression in a study of ethno-racial displays on Facebook. They highlight how personal identity is not a solo project. Identities are fluid and form and adjust as a result of social interaction with others, real or imagined. As Facebook is a social networking site that is anchored within offline, already existing, real world relationships it is not anonymous. Consequently the average Facebook user does not use the site to meet new people but to connect with already existing relationships. This makes Facebook an interesting space to explore in terms of identity expression in online communities. Grasmuck et al (2009) explored a continuum of various forms of identity expression on Facebook ranging from implicit forms to more forthright narratives. Their findings revealed that different ethnic groups used different methods of identity expression on Facebook, “Yet, identity construction on the internet is influenced by not only the characteristics of the online environment but also the characteristics of its users social positions including race, gender, sexual orientation are often context specific, mobilized depending on the circumstances” (p.159). This highlights that although Facebook offers a space for people choose how they express their identity. This means, forms of identity expression share different meanings among different groups. Identity expression on Facebook is, therefore, context specific and culturally constructed. Thus, to fully understand identity expressions on Facebook we must view them within the context of the individual’s specific Facebook community and offline life.

Youth and Identity in New Zealand

In the early stages of my fieldwork I was invited to church with my participants. By attending their church services, I began to see how, by converting to Christianity, the family formed valuable social bonds that have assisted them in adopting New Zealand ‘ways of being’. Kanya (2009) highlights how exploring the relationship between religion and resettlement is one avenue

in which social scientists can further their understanding of how acculturation and resettlement affect identity issues. Kanya (2009) maintains that religious participation provides a space for members to make sense of the acculturation process. Westermeyer and Uecker's (1997) study of Christianity and Hmong refugees highlights how church services became an avenue for social networking in which resources and understandings were shared. Through the church, Hmong refugees were also able to form connections with the wider Minnesota society. This is also true of my participants, as the more involved with the church community they have become, the greater access they have gained to New Zealand society and New Zealand ways of being. Joining Christian youth groups, in particular, has provided the sisters with social connections to New Zealand born adolescents and assisted their experience of resettlement. Nairn, Higgins and Sligo (2012) researched the identity work of young New Zealanders. Focusing on young people born after 1984, their research focuses on young people who are of the same generation as my participants. They explore the impacts a neoliberal⁷ New Zealand has had on the identity work of adolescents. Their research highlights how, for young New Zealanders, crafting identity involves the enactment of various "meritocratic discourses of neoliberalism" (p. 174), they state:

"the enactment of identities is not solely within an individual's control; it also depends on how identities are read by others, and by structural constraints that limit the possibilities of enactment... The groups for whom these constraints matter most – young Pacifica and Māori, those excluded from school, young working class women and men – instead find themselves the subjects of deficit discourses that hold them responsible as individuals for the barriers that stand in their way" (Nairn et al, 2012, p. 174)

Their study has been particularly useful to this research as they offer an exploration of adolescent identity that is New Zealand specific. Nairn et al's (2012) maintain that for young New Zealanders in minority groups the process of crafting identity is marked by social barriers. This means that young people who are members of minority ethnic groups have a limited repertoire of Western norms available to them. Consequently, their identity work must become more

⁷ Neoliberalism is a term used to explain an economic system based on global free trade, privatisation and deregulation. This can be problematic as social resources are sucked into the private sector. The neoliberal ideology places responsibility of health and wellbeing, economic, social and educational success on the individual instead of society at large.

particular, as they draw from specific and carefully chosen discourses to enact subversive and resistant identities. Nairn et al's (2012) research has been particularly useful, as the girls spoke openly about their struggles to perform Western femininity as non-white teenage girls. Zemke (2000) also explores the identity among of Pasifika youth in New Zealand. She exposes how popular American rap music has developed specific meanings within Pacific Island communities about black identity. Of the limited repertoire of Western norms available to Pacific Island youth, African American rap culture offers a way of being masculine and Western without being white. She highlights how these norms are often taken up by Pacific Island youth as a form of ethnic resistance. She states "in Aotearoa, it is the Polynesian youth who have embraced rap music...and discover that in Aotearoa rap is used to assert and construct local identities exploring race, culture, and history" (p. 4).

Similarly, Zemke, Palmer and Masters (2010) research on Māori women's experiences of sport leadership highlights the many strategies that Māori women develop for overcoming social and racialised barriers that stereotype them:

"It appears that the intersecting gendered and indigenous identities for Māori women, became a barrier when their credibility was questioned in Pakeha masculine contexts, and when the participants felt pressure to resort to cultural expectations as Māori women in the presence of older Māori males or in traditional Māori contexts...the impacts of these intersecting identities were most obvious to participants in these circumstances, but it seems that these Māori women were successful in their roles because they negotiated the conflict they experienced by utilising networking strategies, their reputation (especially in sport) and their ability to build relationships" (p. 341).

A range of research has been conducted on the experience of identity among Pasifika and Māori groups in New Zealand. What we have seen so far is that subversive resistance, and identity experimentation and strategy have emerged as ongoing trends which underpin the identities of minority New Zealanders. These studies illustrate how Western identity norms are a white domain.

Discussion

One of the common themes occurring within the reviewed literature was the tendency for researchers to acknowledge that quantitative studies about refugees fail to focus on individual and gendered experiences. In addition to this, Lenette (2011); Harrell-Bond and Voutira (1992); and Terheggen, Strobe and Kleber (2001) highlight that the ‘refugee experience’ is often understood by academia and wider social institutions to be a linear process. In this sense they fail to allow for varieties of individual experience. Lenette (2011), Kumsa (2002), and Sayigh (2002) have each focused on women, and stress that the experiences of displacement and resettlement are indeed gendered. A range of factors, such as traditional and cultural gender roles, lack of education and opportunity, institutional sexism at a global level, and corruption and fear all silence the voices of refugee women. This means that refugee stories and experiences are often told from a male perspective. Lenette (2011), Kumsa (2001), and Sayigh (2002) all found that refugee women are regularly stereotyped as ‘passive victims’, yet their research illustrates the complex and multi-layered nature of refugee women’s experiences. I also found that my participants’ experiences regularly challenged these stereotypes. This suggests that listening to refugee women’s experiences, as told in their own voices, offers rich ethnographic insight into the gendered experience of being a refugee.

Similarly, literature that focused on refugee experiences of resettlement often describes a process of assimilation in which refugees were assumed to be passive victims of overwhelming Westernising forces. For instance, Mosselson’s (2009) and Oikonomidoy’s (2009) studies highlighted how Western school systems can be a site of ‘institutional normalising’ of refugee students. The literature indicates that students who struggle to speak English experience school as an isolating place. Oikonomidoy (2009) maintains that, for refugee students, school becomes a place of negotiation where students are institutionally encouraged to abandon cultural traditions and adopt Western ideology. Research in this field did not discuss how much of this negotiation was the student’s choice. Okionomidyo’s (2009) and Mosselson’s (2009) research often described students as ‘passive victims’ of acculturation processes that occur within Western school systems. Thus, it was assumed that the student did not willingly subscribe to Western structures. In many ways my participants actively adopted Western lifestyles, participating in Western fashion, music, and trends. This suggests that refugee women are not necessarily

passive victims of assimilation; in chapter six I draw from Judith Butler's theory of to show that my participants are not victims of assimilation. Instead, they are engaging in a performative process, as they willingly experiment with new gender norms that were not previously available to them.

Early on in my fieldwork I came to see that Facebook was particularly important to my participants. They spent much of their leisure time on Facebook interacting with others and viewing their friends' profiles. During our conversations about their lives, they frequently referred to their activities on Facebook. Much of the research about Facebook traces and maps the social interaction that takes place among particular groups of Facebook users. I struggled to find research focused on the importance of Facebook for refugee youth. As we have seen from Miller's (2011) work, Facebook is a culturally specific space, this means that different communities will use Facebook differently. Zhao, Grasmuck and Martins' (2008) study highlighted that Facebook is not only a space of social networking, but also a space of performativity, in which the user has primary control over what he or she reveals to their individual Facebook communities. Here, links can be made between the importance of achieving a sense of belonging for refugee youth, and the active participation of Bhutanese youth on Facebook. There is room for further research that focuses on how refugee youth utilise Facebook as a potential space for exploring identity and achieving a sense of belonging in their new countries.

One of the early difficulties in my fieldwork was that my participants did not seem to fit with any of the literature I was reading about refugees. They did not seem particularly traumatised and they were not passively assimilating with Western ways of being. It is important to note that they are also no longer classified as refugees⁸, although being a refugee is a part of their story this is a title they no longer identify with. Instead they actively choose to be Western: they perform Western norms in a forthright and confident way. The literature exploring identity and adolescents in New Zealand illustrates how young people belonging to ethnic minority groups have a smaller repertoire of Western norms available to them in their identity work. This

⁸ Refugees are given permanent residence on their arrival to New Zealand, after five years they may apply for New Zealand citizenship. My participants gained New Zealand citizenship in 2013.

suggests that being Western for non-white adolescents requires strategy and resistance against ethnic stereotypes. Consequently, I found this literature more easily applied to my participants' experiences of resettlement in New Zealand. Research exploring the experiences of young refugees outside of the fields of education and health is minimal. Thus, further research regarding how young refugees navigate their identity in migrant communities and wider society and how they imagine their futures within their host country is required to further understand refugee experience. The qualitative studies explored in this literature review illustrate how the refugee experience is a multi-layered, dynamic, and complex process. Consequently, it is important to consider how life histories intertwine with the experience of growing up in a new country to make new ways of being possible, and how these ways of being influence and complicate the identity work of refugee youth.

Theorising Judith Butler and Performativity

Sifting through the stories, images and experiences I had collected during my fieldwork period allowed me to see that for these young women, identity is an embodied process. For them, identity emerges as they draw from makeup and fashion trends to stylise their bodies. This is a playful process and often a group activity. To make sense of this process, I draw from Judith Butler's theory of performativity. In this chapter I outline Butler's theory of performativity and provide an analysis of her understanding of identity. I will highlight how her theoretical concepts are useful for making sense of these young women and the photos they take.

Social theories provide frameworks for understanding human identity and behaviour within the constructs of culture. Judith Butler's theory of performativity was first proposed in her book *Gender Trouble* which was published in the 1990, a period in which gender studies was in its prime as academia continued to evaluate the aftermath of the 1970s feminist movement. Butler's theory has grown from her personal life experiences of being a lesbian and growing up in a migrant Jewish community in the United States. Her theory is also her response to feminism. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler suggests feminism made a mistake in its attempt to unify women as a group embodying common understandings and characteristics. She argues that by making this claim, feminism has unintentionally reinforced a binary view of the masculine man and the feminine woman. Here, Butler takes issue with the assumption that human beings are divided into two ways of being, two simple genders. *Gender Trouble* is her critique of this binary perspective. Her theory of performativity is her answer to this problem and challenges the ways we should think about gender and identity.

Butler's theory of performativity stems from her on-going belief that human identity is not fixed. Gender should not be thought of as a fixed attribute of identity, but as a set of relations among culturally constituted bodies that are performed in particular social contexts. Butler maintains gender is fluid and variable within different social contexts and life stages; she is arguing against gender essentialism. By taking a non-essentialist stance, Butler argues that sex is a series of designations that occur within culture rather than a pre-cultural biological reality. Although, she does not dispute the biological differences between the male and female body, she maintains that

these differences have a socio-cultural history (Butler, 1993). The body is continually constructed by this history from the time of birth. Here, her theory builds on Foucault's suggestion that sex and sexuality is an ongoing historical concept (Butler, 1993). As we move through the social world, our body is constructed by this history and, as a result, we learn to perform it. In doing so, we also actively participate in the creation this history.

Butler's description of the body as performative opens up a series of ongoing debates within social theory, regarding the roles individual agency and social structure play in the formation of identity. These debates began to emerge in the late 20th century among identity theorists in response to theories of identity that focused largely on the determining influence of social structure. Critics argued that such theories were not able to explore the human subject fully as they provided little room for human agency (Prus, 1996). Therefore, identity theorists like Butler attempt to resurrect the role of human agency and choice in the formation of identity. To do this, Butler draws from both Derrida's notions of performativity and de Beauvoir's analysis of gender to construct her theory of performativity and provide a theory of identity formation that considers both agency and social construction. Of Butler's theory Loxley (2007) states:

“Our identities are not given by nature nor simply expressed in culture: instead culture is the process of identity formation, the way in which bodies and selves in all their differences are produced. So culture is a process, a kind of making, and we are what is made and remade through this process. Our activities are not expressions of some prior identity, but the very means by which we come to be what we are” (p. 118).

Accordingly, Butler's theory refutes essentialist notions of identity; instead she offers a more capacious understanding of gender and what it means to be human.

Butler's theory emerged as a response to feminism and as a result of her personal experiences with gender and difference. In the following story, Butler tells how her life experiences provoked her curiosity about gender and identity:

“My mother's family owned movie theatres in the city of Cleveland, and like many Jews they entered into a new industry that started in the 20th century. I think I grew up with a generation of American Jews who understood that ‘assimilation’ meant conforming to

certain gender norms that were presented in the Hollywood movies. So my grandmother slowly but surely became Helen Hayes, and my mother slowly but surely became Joan Crawford, and my grandfather, I think, maybe, he was Clark Gable or Omar Sharif or something like this. So I grew up with these people, they were Jews, they belonged to a Jewish community, but they were also Americans and they were both leading their community lives and very much wanting entrance into American society. So I think that by the time I grew up, in the late sixties early seventies, looking around me trying to make sense of gender, I saw these extremely exaggerated notions of what gender was. But I think that these were notions of Hollywood gender that came through as assimilation, and maybe *Gender Trouble* is actually a theory that emerges from my effort to make sense of how my family embodied those norms. And also how they didn't! They tried to embody them, and then there was some way in which they couldn't possibly. And maybe my conclusion was that anyone who strives to embody them, also, perhaps fails in some ways that are more interesting than, perhaps, their successes" (Butler in Zadjermann, 2006).

This story was particularly interesting as it bears many similarities to my own fieldwork experiences. Indeed, as I observed my participants, I noticed how they seemed to copy celebrities. This would manifest in the way they dressed, the way they spoke, the way they moved their bodies, and the photos they took. Slowly, I began to see that subscribing to exaggerated Hollywood codes of femininity was particularly important to them. As I sifted through my field notes and interview transcripts, I began to wonder what my participants found so attractive in the Hollywood code of femininity, and why they so persistently attempted to recreate a standard of beauty that is constraining and unattainable. As I considered what I had seen so far, I found that Judith Butler's theory of performativity provided an answer to my questions.

The identity work of my participants has been influenced by both socio-cultural and political forces beyond their control. As refugee women, their lives have been shaped by the political decisions of others. Their early experiences of resettlement in Palmerston North and of social exclusion from the Bhutanese community stimulated and enabled their exploration of identity. This manifests as an embodied practice: as my participants negotiate the complicated process of

growing up as a teenage girls in New Zealand, they work on body appearance. This work comprises ever changing ways of styling their bodies. The more time I spent with my participants, the more I came to see that the stylisation of their bodies has become a way for them to explore Western codes of femininity as well as practising resistance against Hindu patriarchy. To make sense of my participants' lives I needed to source a theoretical framework that began with the body. Furthermore, I needed a theoretical approach that allowed a balance between structure and agency. Butler offers this balance with her claim that social construction is the enabling condition of individual agency and embodied behaviour (Butler, 1999, p. 187).

What is the Performative?

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1999) begins by deconstructing the ongoing assumption that the sexed body is the primary foundation for identity. She does this by asserting that there is no sex that is not already and always a gendered reality. For Butler there is no existence that is not a social/cultural reality, which means that there is no 'natural body' that pre-exists socio-cultural inscription:

“... gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. This formulation moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of a constituted social temporality. Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audiences, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief” (Butler, 2008, p. 519-20).

Using the concept of the performative as the basis for her theoretical framework, Butler proposes a fluid view of identity and gender: she challenges frameworks that are structurally determinist and essentialising. Drawing from Simone de Beauvoir's claim that 'one is not born a women, but rather becomes one', Butler highlights that to 'become a women' is to be shaped by socio-historical constructions and everyday language. Consequently, gender is a 'doing' rather than a

'being'. Becoming gendered is a process, "a set of repeated acts within a highly regulatory frame" (Butler, 1999, p. 43).

For Butler, gender is nothing more than a series of acts that adhere to normative or subversive gender constructions. There is no inner or core identity behind these acts; gender is a surface phenomenon. Butler explains "there is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that said to be its results" (Butler, 1999, p. 25). Thus it is important to note that when Butler refers to 'gender' she is describing a performative phenomenon, a series of cultural fictions.

On the other hand our 'expressions' of identity are by no means randomised choices and are not freely chosen. The ways in which we 'choose' to 'do' our gender is shaped by our socio-cultural positions and the particular gender constructions available to us. For instance, a working class African American man will have different codes of masculinity available to him than a white middle class man. Age, ethnicity and social class are all factors that influence the gender norms available.

For Butler, gender constructions are shaped and formed within language: to be performative is to be embodied through language. From the moment the doctor announces the gender of the baby we begin the ongoing journey of being constituted through language. In stating "it's a girl", the baby is changed from an 'it' to a 'girl' and, in this way, begins the life journey of being 'girl' through language. As Salih (2002) explains "it is not that identity 'does' discourse or language, but the other way around. Language and discourse 'do' gender. There is no 'I' outside of language since identity is a signifying practice" (p. 64). Here Salih describes how our identity is constructed by language. As we engage with the social world, we form our identities and become constituted by language that surrounds us. Consequently, it is through language that we make meaning out of our bodies and this forms the basis for our embodied expression within the world. The more skilled we become at negotiating the social world, so do our bodies become a crucial part of our signifying identity practices. It is in this way that to be embodied is to be performative.

Embodiment

The Body is Historically and Linguistically Formed

To explain her theory of embodiment Butler begins by tracing the history of the body. In *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory*, Butler (1988) draws from phenomenology's understandings of the human body. In particular, she considers Merleau-Ponty's discussions in *The Phenomenology of Perception*. Both Merleau-Ponty and Butler claim that the body is a historical construct. By making this claim, Merleau-Ponty and Butler are not denying the body's biological materiality. They are suggesting the process by which we make sense of the body is rooted in ongoing historical discourses. When discussing Merleau-Ponty's work, Butler (1988) states:

“he takes issue with such accounts of bodily experience and claims that the body is an ‘historical idea’ rather than a ‘natural species’. Significantly it is this claim that Simone de Beauvoir cites in *The Second Sex* when she sets that stage for her claim that ‘woman’ and by extension any gender, is a historical situation rather than a natural fact. In both contexts the existence and facility of the material or natural dimensions of the body are not denied, but reconceived as distinct from the process by which the body comes to bear cultural meanings” (p. 520)

The historical discourses that define the body manifest through language both spoken and embodied. Butler's theory provides no room for the body to exist outside of the bounds of language. Accordingly, the body is both birthed through language and continually moulded by the language surrounding it. Yet the process of being constituted by language, although a compulsory process, is not without strategy. Indeed, people have the ability to choose particular codes of femininity to practice from the available repertoire. In this way Butler's theory of performativity does not preclude some choice by the individual and makes room for strategy, change, and resistance.

The Body is a Series of Strategies

For Butler, the body is an ongoing process of appropriating and embodying various socio-cultural and historical possibilities through language. To understand the gendered body further, we need to unpack this process. For Butler the term ‘act’ is also performative: it refers to both

the process of appropriating historical/social meanings and the process of performing these meanings. She states “acts to mean both that which constitutes meaning and that through which meaning is performed or enacted. In other words, the acts by which gender is constituted bears similarities to performative acts within theatrical contexts” (Butler, 1988, p. 521).

The body is a set of ongoing possibilities rather than something fixed once and for all. It accumulates and forms its meaning through a process of mediating the historical possibilities; its physical expression in the world must be understood as the negotiation and performance of certain acts that are socio-culturally and historically available to it. Thus, we can choose to perform the various acts available to our individual circumstances (Butler, 1988). Although this is not always a conscious process, a form of agency appears through this process. She states:

“That the body is a set of possibilities signifies (a) that its appearance in the world, for perception, is not predetermined by some manner of interior essence and (b) that its concrete expression in the world must be understood as the taking up and rendering of a set of historical possibilities. Hence, there is an agency which is understood as the process of rendering such possibilities determinate” (Butler, 1988, p. 521).

This process of “rendering such possibilities determinate” is what Butler describes as performativity. It is in this way that to be embodied is to be gendered, and, for Butler, gender is always performative. Consequently, to be embodied is to be performative.

To be Embodied is to be Performative

“One is not simply a body, but in some very key sense, one does one’s body and, indeed, one does one’s body different from one’s contemporaries and from one’s embodied predecessors and successors as well” (Butler, 1988, p. 521).

Although the above quotation is from Butler, she muses that it is unfortunate grammar to have to claim that there is a ‘one’ or an ‘I’ that does its body. She refines the above statement to: “the ‘I’ that is its body is, of necessity, a mode of embodying, and the ‘what’ that it embodies is possibilities” (Butler, 1988, p. 521). This ‘doing of the body’ can be understood as embodiment, which is the result of both agency and historically available discourse and where strategy emerges. She states:

“Embodiment clearly manifests a set of strategies, or what Sarte would perhaps have called a ‘style of being’, or Foucault ‘stylistics of existence’. This style is never fully self-styled for living styles have a history, and that history conditions and limits possibilities” (Butler, 1988, p. 521).

Through the ongoing process of ‘doing the body’, agency emerges as people seek to perform culturally viable gendered identities. Accordingly, by ‘doing the body’, a strategy of gender identity emerges because the body is obligated to conform to a historical idea of a ‘women’ or ‘man’. Consequently, identity is inevitably a gendered phenomenon. Developing a strategy of gender identity performance (both unconscious and conscious) is necessary because having a clear and culturally recognisable gender is a crucial part of functioning socially within the world. In this sense gender is both culturally formed and also a sphere of agency.

Voluntarism vs. Determinism

“I’m lesbian, I’m gay. Yes I’m lesbian, and I’m gay. But do I subscribe to everything the lesbian and gay movement says? Do I always come out as a lesbian and gay person first, before, say, I am a woman, before I am a Jew, before I am an American, or a citizen, or philosopher? No! It is not the only identity. These are communities where one belongs and does not belong, but it seems to me we travel, I travel” (Butler in Zadgermann, 2006).

Reflecting on her own experience of identity, Butler describes life as fluid and complicated as she occupies multiple sites of belonging, each requiring their own set of gender norms and cultural conventions. Consequently, Butler uses her version of the performative to propose a theory of identity in which there is space for movement and change. Through her concept of voluntarism, Butler proposes a fluid view of identity.

In *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Butler explains her version of voluntarism is by no means a process of free choice: identity is an inevitably gendered and compulsory process. Butler explores this process further through the concept of voluntarism, the conditions under which gender is assumed. This means that we are only able to volunteer/subscribe to gender norms that are available from within our particular socio-cultural positions, although there are choices at a conscious and unconscious level. Voluntarism is always a compulsory part of being recognised human and engaging in the social world; therefore, we all must volunteer. It is in this way that

social construction is the ground of individual agency. Butler (1993) explains how this is a crucial part of the performative process:

“Performativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation, nor can it be simply equated with performance. Moreover, constraint is not necessarily that which sets a limit to performativity; constraint is, rather, that which impels and sustains performativity.” (p. 59-60)

To understand what Butler means when she says “constraint impels and sustains performativity” we need to consider the ways in which subversive identity strategies are enabled by social construction. The primary way this occurs is when gender is enforced by regulatory gender norms, which are neither rules nor laws, yet they govern social intelligibility. Regulatory gender norms should be understood as the “apparatus by which the production and normalization of masculine and feminine take place” (Butler, 2004, p. 42). Voluntarism occurs as the subject learns how to perform both subversive and conventional gender norms. This means that we do not always adhere to conventional gender codes; we can volunteer ourselves to perform alternative codes of femininity and masculinity if they are available. Voluntarism is about learning which particular ways of being feminine or masculine more easily accessible to us. Consequently, we volunteer ourselves to particular ways of performing gender, to particular codes of femininity or masculinity. Such codes of femininity and masculinity are what Butler describes as gender norms.

Gender Norms

“Performativity is thus not a singular ‘act’, for it is always a reiteration of a norm or a set of norms, and to the extent that it requires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which is a repetition.” (Butler, 1993, p. xxi)

Here Butler highlights how a crucial part of the performative process is the citation and recitation of gender norms. As we have already explored, agency and strategy emerges within Butler’s theory as a result of the regulatory social order. Furthermore, being gendered involves the embodiment of gender norms, the regulatory discourses which demonstrate and symbolise idealised and normative constructions of gender. The performative subject cites the various gender norms available from their individual socio-cultural position. The act of ‘citing’ a gender

norm is an embodied response, as the body is styled in particular ways to bear a resemblance to the chosen norm. Recitation (what Butler calls repetition) is a key part of this process as it is through recitation that the body becomes more skilled and comfortable at resembling the chosen gender norms. As a result, gender appears 'internalised' and 'natural'. Consequently, the process of citation is all about repetition: we must repeatedly mime/embody particular gender norms in our attempt to contrive identity and participate in the social world.

The citational nature of norms is key to their conventionality within society. The more a norm is cited by different individuals, the more culturally conventional it becomes. Citations occur as gender norms are embodied within the performative process; recitation occurs as these norms are repeatedly performed to the extent that they appear naturalised. According to Butler, norms can become regulatory in their conventionality. The more conventional a norm is, the more likely it will become a regulatory way of being. That is, it becomes a standardised means of highlighting difference. Those who do not comply with powerful gender norms are socially marginalised and policed. Yet, norms are also made vulnerable by their own citational nature. Norms that are no longer cited lose their regulatory power. It is here that Butler allows room for social change within her theory.

In her writing about the citational process of norms, Butler does little to distinguish between conventional and subversive gender norms because it is difficult to make judgments about norms out of social context and the conventionality of norms changes through time. As Butler and Salih (2004) state:

“Just as metaphors lose their metaphoricity as they congeal throughout time into concepts, so subversive performatives always run the risk of becoming deadening clichés through their repetition” (p. 99).

This means discerning whether or not a particular performative is the citation of a conventional or subversive norm is difficult outside of social context. For instance, the act of wearing high heels and an apron could be interpreted as both the citation of a conventional norm and the citation of a subversive norm depending on the social context. Moreover, conventional norms are often cited as point of irony by minority groups and subcultures in particular social contexts.

Failure is Always Possible

To construct her concept of citation, Butler drew originally from Derrida's discussions of "the essential iterability of a sign". For Derrida 'signs' (by which he means norms) can be uprooted into different contexts and cited in unanticipated ways. He refers to this phenomenon as "citational grafting" (Salih, 2006, p. 63). According to Derrida all 'signs' have the ability to be grafted and recited in ways that do not comply with their initial reference and purpose. As a result, citational failure is a common and necessary aspect of the citation process. Derrida highlights that the possibility of failure exists within all attempts at citation. Consequently failure underpins Butler's concept of citation. To some extent we all fail to fully embody the gender norms we attempt to cite. In the documentary, *Judith Butler: Philosophical Encounters of a Third Kind* Butler explains:

"I must say that in my view gender is always a failure. Everyone fails, and it's a very good thing that we fail. Because I think that stereotypes are not just images we have of gender. But they are, you might say, an accumulative fact of social relations that have become 'naturalized' over time" (Butler in Zadjermann, 2006).

Agency

As we have seen, strategy is an integral aspect of embodiment for Butler. Her analysis of embodiment provides a space for the performative subject to acquire agency by attempting to perform culturally formed gender norms. Theories of identity acquisition have long been caught within a binary debate about agency versus social construction. Butler asserts that this is an unnecessary distinction, as social construction is inevitably the ground of agency. She states "construction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency, the very terms in which agency is articulated and becomes culturally intelligible" (Butler, 1999, p. 187).

Many have interpreted Butler's concepts of gender acts to be a suggestion that there is total freedom within this process. Consequently, Butler's theory has been misinterpreted as a suggestion that individuals can style themselves differently and perform different acts every day. Butler has been quick to dispute this as a misinterpretation, for although individuals may style themselves and perform gender differently in different contexts, having a culturally viable gender is a necessary and inevitable part of our participation in the social world. As such,

performing a gendered identity is a compulsory social reality, but our individual socio-cultural positions structure the gender norms that are available to us. In this sense, there is little freedom involved. Individuals in minority positions, in particular, experience fewer options in terms of the norms available to them.

Furthermore, performing one's gender 'wrong' has significant and daily social consequences. In *Big Think* (2012), Butler explores the social consequences of performing gender 'incorrectly' she states:

“Think about how difficult it is for ‘sissy boys’ or how difficult it is for ‘tomboys’ to function socially without being bullied, or without being teased, or without sometimes suffering threats of violence. Or without their parents intervening to say ‘maybe you need a psychiatrist?’ or ‘why can’t you be normal?’ So there are institutional powers, like psychiatric normalization and there are informal kinds of practices like bullying, which try to keep us in our gendered place” (Big Think, 2012).

Here, Butler highlights the various social consequences of not performing gender correctly. The compulsory nature of gender also invokes strategy, as some are able to style their bodies and perform various gender norms more convincingly than others, although we are all only able to perform what is available to us within the confines of our socio-cultural and historical positions. In this sense, performing gender norms is a compulsory process but there is space for agency and choice. As we perform our gender norms within the social world, we both reinforce and resist cultural conventions. We are not simply blank spaces awaiting culture to shape us; we become a part of the production of culture as our particular gender performatives can perpetuate and change cultural norms. One way in which change occurs is through subversive resistance. Butler explores the idea of resistance through her concept of resignification.

Resistance and Resignification

“Identity is asserted through a process of signification... and yet continues to signify as it circles within a process of interlocking discourses” (Butler, 1999, p. 182.).

Within the above quotation, Butler highlights the process of identity acquisition. For her, identity develops as we ‘signify’ the gender norms available to us from within our individual socio-

cultural/political positions. For people belonging to minority groups within society, the norms available to them can be burdensome and oppressive in nature as they can embody vicious and repressive stereotypes (Butler, 1993). Furthermore, as norms are made conventional by the dominant social groups of society, fewer gender norms are available to minorities. Accordingly, it is through her concept of resignification that Butler provides a space for resistance against oppressive gender norms.

Resignification as a form of resistance occurs when attempts are made to resignify the historical/political/socio-cultural meanings of an oppressive norm. Resignification occurs when a norm acquires new meanings that dissipate and shatter its oppressive effects. A clear example of resistance through resignification among minority groups is the resignification of the term 'queer'. As Butler explains, "The public assertion of 'queerness' enacts performativity as citationality for the purposes of resignifying the abjection of homosexuality into defiance and legitimacy" (1993, p. xxviii). Consequently, by appropriating the term 'queer', the gay community resignified the term and it has become a form of resistance against oppressive norms.

As regulatory gender norms are made conventional in their recitations, minority groups often experience fewer options in terms of the norms with which they can identify because conventionality is determined by the majority. For instance, the advertising of beauty products mainly displays white faces and bodies; as a result, non-white ethnic groups often find these gender norms unattainable. Moreover, the norms available to minority social groups often stem from stereotypes as in Butlers example of the 'masculine lesbian'. Consequently, the practice of resignification involves a reordering of power within the norm: the subject identifies with the norm in an ironic way, revealing its marginalising and stereotyping nature. The more this practice occurs the more the meaning of the norm changes to represent a space of freedom and resistance for minority groups.

The Gender Order is Made by Practice

For Butler our understandings of gender are historically, socio-culturally and linguistically formed. There is no natural gender. We are not born already gendered and gender is not a stable foundation of identity. Gender is instead performative, occurring through the citation and recitation of powerful and conventional, but also subversive, gender norms. This is always an

embodied process: the body is written and shaped linguistically by norms surrounding it. To be embodied is to be performative. Agency is enabled through social structure, emerging from our encounters with regulatory gender norms. Consequently, there is always room for change, which can occur both in the form of resistance based resignification, and the recitation of subversive gender norms. Moreover, subversive norms can grow in their own repetition to become conventional and powerful gender norms. It is in this way that the gender order is made and remade through practice. As Butler explains:

“It’s one thing to say that gender is performed, and that’s a little different from saying gender is performative. When we say gender is performed we usually mean that we have taken on a role, we are acting in some way, and that our acting or our role playing is crucial to the gender that we, the gender that we present to the world. To say that gender is performative is a little different because, for something to be performative, it means that it produces a series of effects. We act and walk and speak and talk in ways that consolidate an impression of being a man or being a woman... We act as if being of a man or being of a woman is actually an internal reality or something that’s simply true about us, a fact about us. Actually, it’s a phenomenon that’s being produced all the time and reproduced all the time” (Big Think, 2012).

Discussion

A Butlerian analysis of this family’s journey, stories and photos will shed light on the enabling structures that shape the identity work of these young women. Following Butler, I argue that identity for these young women is a performative process marked by the stylisation of their bodies. As I trace the photo’s the girls take, my analyses ventures into the online world of Facebook. Here I will draw on Butler’s concept of embodiment to argue that although Facebook is detached from the physical body, for these young women it is a space of embodied performativity.

In the following chapters we will hear from the girls their own voices and view the photographs that they chose for inclusion in this research. I will draw on Butler’s argument that the ‘body is a series of possibilities’. As I trace socio-cultural structures that surround these young women, we will see the different ways these young women are ‘doing’ their bodies. Selfies and photo taking

are a crucial part of the girls' identity experimentation, as it is through the camera lens that they performatively explore their bodies. Their photos illustrate how repetitive this process is; as the girls repeatedly take photos of themselves they learn what looks 'good' and what looks 'bad'. Just as gender norms through repetition come to appear internal, seamless and naturalised, by repeatedly taking selfie photos, the girls have come to know their bodies well. In this way they are skilled at choreographing their bodies to perform gender norms. I will draw on Butler to examine the different ways the sisters use their bodies to cite particular gender norms through photography. The very best of these photos are shared on Facebook. Hence, the girls are using Facebook as a performative space in which embodied identities are produced through the sharing of photos that have been choreographed.

As the girls reflexively discuss the photos they have taken, our conversations reveal a series of strategies at both conscious and unconscious levels. To unpack these strategies the girls and I discuss the specific gender norms they are citing. Our discussions reveal the challenges of becoming a Western woman in a non-white body, as I explore the blurred lines between the popular and conventional 'ways of being a young woman' and resistant and subversive 'ways of being a young woman'. At a glance modelling themselves on celebrities such as the Kardashian sisters (which the sisters do) may appear to be a conventional act, yet for the girls citing such celebrities is also a way of engaging in resistance against Hindu gender norms.

Many of the girls' friends on Facebook are other Bhutanese youth. In chapter six the girls discuss the importance of Facebook among Bhutanese youth; they will highlight how Facebook is a space free from Hindu caste, gender barriers and adult supervision. The girls describe how many Bhutanese youth use Facebook as space to performatively explore with Western gender norms. Here, the girls' resistance against Hindu caste and patriarchy is shared with and supported by other Bhutanese youth.

In the following chapter I will explore my participants' family history, and the politics that resulted in them becoming refugees and ending up in New Zealand. As my participants share their stories and experiences we will see the impact that local community structures of caste and gender have on refugees during their resettlement process. The girl's mother, Sarah, will share her early experiences of New Zealand and her strategies for raising her daughters in a new

country. Here, we will see how agency within this family has been enabled by structure. As the family has been marginalised by the Hindu caste system, Sarah has encouraged her daughters to take up 'Kiwi ways of being a young woman'. In doing so a family strategy has emerged that is resistant to the Hindu caste system through the citation and recitation of Western gender norms.

Tracing Bhutanese Refugee History, a Family Story

“God has given me many life changes. When I look back, I see my life in Bhutan, and then I can see my life raising my children in Nepal, and now I see my children becoming educated women in New Zealand. We have been through so much changes, Jessica. Our lives are only now becoming still.”

The above quotation highlights how Sarah’s⁹ life has been marked by change, change that has been driven by forces beyond her control. This chapter explores these changes by providing an overview of the history of Bhutanese refugees. I will trace Bhutan’s political history, which resulted in the sudden and forced exile of a group of its citizens. My participants will share their experiences living in a refugee camp in Nepal, and we will see the pervasive nature of Hindu caste system in both Nepal and New Zealand. Refugee resettlement in New Zealand will also be explored by tracing the process refugees go through as they arrive in New Zealand. My participants take the lead in this chapter. As my analysis follows their family journey from Bhutan to New Zealand, they will share their stories, experiences and memories. This chapter will provide a raw and personal account of the realities of being a refugee woman and a single mother both in Nepal and in New Zealand.

Bhutan’s Political Landscape

Bhutan is a small nation situated between China (Tibet) and India in the Himalayan Mountains. Prior to the 1990s Bhutan comprised a multicultural population. According to Hutt (1996) “the Bhutanese can be divided into three broad ethno-linguistic groups: the Ngalong (or Ngalop) of the west; the Sharchhop of the east; and the Lhotshampa (or ‘Nepali Bhutanese’) of the extreme south” (p. 398). The Lhotshampa have remained a marginalised and isolated group in Bhutan since their migration in the 1880s. One of the reasons for this is that the Bhutanese government promotes Buddhism as the national religion. The Ngalongs and the Sharchhops predominately practice Tibetan Buddhism and also speak Dzongkha (the national language of Bhutan). The

⁹ Sarah is the girl’s mother; her name has been changed to protect her anonymity.

Lhotshampa, by comparison, practiced Hinduism and largely spoke Nepali, these language and religious barriers made it difficult for Lhotshampa to integrate with wider Bhutan.

Prior to 1990, when the forced exile of Lhotshampa communities from Bhutan began, the national population consisted of 650,000 people (Hutt, 1996), with the Lhotshampa accounting for 28 percent. Regardless of their growing population, Lhotshampa communities were not represented in the Bhutanese government, which was made up of Ngalong and Sharchhop (Hutt, 1996). The Lhotshampa population remained in the southern rural outskirts of Bhutan. The southern and northern districts had very little to do with each other, as the Lhotshampa communities lived in remote and rural locations, away from Bhutan's cities. Due to geographical barriers, and cultural, social and linguistic differences, the Lhotshampa lived separately from the rest of Bhutan. They had their own social rules and community leaders. They were the poorest socio-economic group of Bhutan, with many were unable to afford education. For these reasons the Lhotshampa population remained under resourced and was thus unable to mobilise a political voice.

Historically, the Lhotshampa population migrated to Bhutan from Nepal. In the 1800s, the British began establishing tea plantations throughout West Bengal, and recruited people from Nepal to work the tea leaf plantations (Hutt, 1996). By 1835 the economy of West Bengal began to grow, as the tea plantations were incorporated into international trade systems. Inspired by West Bengal's growing prosperity, the Kingdom of Bhutan decided to encourage Nepali farmers into southern Bhutan "to bring the land under cultivation" (Hutt, 1996, p. 401). Thus, after the 1880s many Nepali communities migrated to Bhutan (Hutt, 1996). However, the history of the southern outskirts of Bhutan is under researched, and as a result scholars remain unsure about just how many Lhotshampa people migrated to Bhutan.

Even though the Lhotshampa worked and paid taxes in Bhutan, they were not considered official Bhutanese citizens until 1958. They were considered tenants by the Bhutanese government and required to pay rent for the land they farmed (Hutt, 1996). They were granted citizenship and given tenure of their lands in 1958. At this time the Bhutanese government promoted integration between the Lhotshampa communities and wider Bhutan. Marriages between the Lhotshampa and the Ngalong and Sharchhop were encouraged by the state as part of a nationwide

modernisation scheme to unite the country as ‘one’. The Bhutanese government also began to see the economic value of investing in southern Bhutan and established hydroelectric power projects in the southern districts.

In the late 1980s the Bhutanese government began to fear the growing Lhotshampa population. They were concerned that, if left unmanaged, the Lhotshampa population would continue to grow and eventually have the power to overthrow the Buddhist Bhutanese government. The government began conducting annual censuses as a method of detecting illegal immigrants. Individuals were required to produce documentation that proved their citizenship. Hutt states “the 1988 census led to unease because, according those who have since become refugees, excessively strict standards were set for documentation” (p. 403). In the 1990s, the Bhutanese ceased promoting any other languages in Bhutan other than Dzongkha, which became the national language. As a consequence, Nepali was no longer taught in schools, and school materials used for teaching Nepali were removed. All students, local community leaders and school teachers were now required to attend Dzongkha classes and teach Dzongkha.

Unhappy with the government’s restrictions various community groups including The Peoples’ Forum for Human Rights, The Bhutan Peoples’ Party and the Student Union of Bhutan, organised mass public demonstrations against the government’s new regulations. Hutt (1996) maintains that during this period many Bhutanese citizens were influenced by democracy movements occurring throughout Eastern Europe, and the arrival of democracy in Nepal. However, those involved in such protests were branded “anti-nationals” by the government. The government responded to the protests with force and people who were involved or associated with those involved in the protests were hunted down by government officials. Many were arrested, held in jail for months without trial and physically tortured. During this time an increasing number of Lhotshampa fled to Nepal for refuge. Batches of prisoners were released by the Bhutanese government and, fearing for their lives, most of these people escaped Bhutan to Nepal where relatives were already living in refugee camps. The annual census commenced once more and people with relatives in jail or in refugee camps were evicted from Bhutan. This included anybody who opposed the government’s new policy or supported those who opposed the government. Hutt (1996) highlights how this eviction was “carefully choreographed” (p. 407) as most people during this round of evictions were forced to sign documents or state on camera

that they were leaving Bhutan of their own free will. Consequently, during 1991, Nepal was flooded with Bhutanese refugees who had been forced into exile. By 1992, up to 600 Bhutanese refugees were entering Nepal per day. Between 1990 and 1993, the Bhutanese government forced 108,000 Lhotshampa into exile.

Sarah was 19 when she left Bhutan. She had only recently married and had just had her first child. When I asked her what it was like to live in Bhutan during this period, she became very quiet and seemed reluctant to go into much detail. The following is a transcript of our conversation:

Sarah: "Umm... Bhutan... Not so good, because there was a lot of fighting everywhere..."

Jess: "Okay."

Sarah: "Bhutanese government was not so good."

Jess: "I have read that the Bhutanese government was very unkind?"

Sarah: "Yes, Jessica, it was a not a very nice time for anyone. I get very sad to think about it. It was very very bad time. We walked a long way to get the bus. We walked five hours and then to get the bus."

Jess: "Was it scary?"

Sarah: "Yes! Very, very scary! Walking through the jungle to get the bus. Very scary!"

Jess: "Wow, you would have been really young, too. How old were you?"

Sarah: "19 years old"

Jess: "That's young!"

Sarah: "Yes, I was very young"

During our conversation Sarah was quiet and solemn when talking about her experience of leaving Bhutan. I did not want to push the conversation further and make her feel uncomfortable.

Consequently I directed my questions toward her experiences of living in the Nepalese refugee camps.

Refugee Camps in Nepal

Sarah spent nineteen years living in the refugee camp, during this time she had five children. She describes her life in the refugee camps as challenging. NGOs supporting Bhutanese refugees had limited funding which only supplied households with essential items (Hutt, 2005). Nepal's Red Cross society provided a food ration basket once a fortnight to every house consisting of sugar, salt, rice, lentils, oil and vegetables. Families were housed in temporary shelters built from low cost and local materials such as bamboo. They had regular access to water, which was pumped through pipes to various tap stands throughout the camps (Hutt, 2005).

Sarah recalled her experiences living and working in the refugee camp in detail. After the birth of her youngest child, she divorced her husband and became a single mother, responsible for the wellbeing of six children. She described this stage of her life as tiresome and difficult, as she struggled financially to support her family:

“Very, very difficult! I don't want to tell you about it, Jessica. Oh my heart hurts to remember it. Very, very hard life to be a woman like me in Nepal. To look after six small children, to have to make some money to feed us, they [Red Cross] give only rice and some dhal and some salt, sugar and a little bit of oil. They give 5 kilos rice for 15 days!”

“Very hard! Then they give only that much, the other thing is young girls need a lot. I'm not talking about makeup and things. But just clothing, they need more than boys in Nepal. Oh so many things shoes, school uniform and things. But there was no help. They not give us any money. Oh, it was very very hard. I had to go work in the morning everyday 7 to 8 just to make money to look after children. It was very hard.”

Lhosthampa communities predominately practice Hinduism. As a result, most of those forced into exile by the Bhutanese government were Hindus, and consequently Hinduism became the dominant religion within Nepal's refugee camps. Sixty percent of those living in Nepal's refugee camps were practicing Hindus (Hutt, 2005). Sarah was born into a Hindu family and she practiced Hinduism until she moved to New Zealand and converted to Christianity. As the

majority of Bhutanese refugees living in Nepal's refugee camps were Hindus, the Hindu caste system pervaded everyday life. Sarah describes her family as being low caste. Her stories reveal the difficulty of being a low caste single mother living in a society organised by Hinduism.

"I had friends and family, but many people are not nice to us. They think we are lower than them because we are a family of women, and we are low caste. Many Hindu's in Nepal who don't like me and there was nothing I can do. I can't change caste. I can't change that I am a woman. So there's nothing I can do. So I just look after myself and my family and not worry about them. I can't change the Hindu's minds no matter what."

In 2001, the Bhutanese government agreed to reassess the national identity of the refugees in Nepal. They initiated an interview screening process in only one of the refugee camps. This was a slow process and as a result many Bhutanese refugees lived in Nepal's refugee camps for eighteen years before being resettled in foreign countries. Aside from her eldest daughter all of Sarah's children were born in Nepal. As a result, my participants have little connection to Bhutan other than the stories that have been passed down to them by family members. In conversation they often refer to Nepal as 'my home country'. They explain:

"Sometimes it feels really kind of annoying to be constantly called Bhutanese. It's like that's some country where my mum and grandparents were born, but it's not where we're from. I think we all feel more Nepali than Bhutanese. So when I talk about 'my home country' I always mean Nepal not Bhutan."

Nepal's refugee camps were considered international examples of well organised refugee camps. This is because the Bhutanese refugees adopted senior managerial roles in the day to day running of camp life. Elections were held annually to decide who would be involved in camp management. In addition to this, community groups were established early on within the camps to support women and children (Hinton, 1996). Schools were established and Bhutanese refugees were able to learn English to prepare themselves for resettlement (Hinton, 1996). My participants have bittersweet memories of Nepal. As children they have fond memories of growing up in Nepal amongst a close community, yet they also acknowledge how difficult life was for their mother.

Sister A: "As a child, it's pretty fun living in Nepal. You can just play all the time with friends and your friends live so close to you. You can see them every day. Not like here where it's a big effort to see them."

Sister B: "Yeah that's true. In Nepal everyone lives so closely together and because of that you don't have to worry about bad things happening because you have so many neighbours and their houses are all really close. Not like here."

Sister C: But Nepal was hard for our mum. It's hard if you're a girl, and it was really hard for our mum. She had to do so much working. She could never stop, and people weren't always nice to her. I think Nepal is a really fun place as a child because everyone is kind to you when you're a child, but it would have been hard to be a teenage girl there because of the caste thing. And it was especially hard if you're an adult like my mum, like with no husband."

Sister A: "Yeah when you're a child it is so much fun. We used to play all day. There are so many animals and so much stuff to do. We were allowed to play with fire and things; you can't do that stuff here. It was so cool we used to play out every night with our friends until really late."

Sister D: "Well... you got to play out. Me and Sister X didn't. We had to do lots of work around the home, cooking, cleaning, giving you two a bath (points to younger sisters). Because in our culture the oldest children have to do like work around the house and stuff, and when our sister got married, it was really hard because then we had a lot more to do."

A considerable amount of anthropological research has been conducted on the lives of Bhutanese children and youth in Nepal's refugee camps. Hinton (1996) focused on the many ways children play an active role in maintaining camp life and social cohesion through domestic and childcare duties. She noted that children living in Nepal's refugee camps learnt to be industrious and productive as they carried out important household duties, and they were high achievers at school. According to Hinton (1996) the capability of children within the camp to manage domestic and community responsibilities regularly defied Western NGO worker's perceptions

about refugee children and the vulnerable positions they were presumed to occupy. Although structures were in place to ensure children received an education, Evans' (2007) research also noted that rebelliousness and social disobedience was common among young adult refugees. Young people often struggled to find fulfilment once they had completed school, as they were prohibited from working legally within Nepal and were unable to afford higher education. She noted that as many young refugees remained frustrated, rebellious behaviour was common. "Young refugees expressed unhappiness and there was a perceived 'increase in social evils', including young people abusing alcohol, smoking, taking drugs and dropping out of school" (Evans, 2007, p. 183). My participants' stories also reveal that Nepal was a difficult place for teenagers, they state;

Sister B: "Oh my gosh! We had so much to do when she [our sister] got married, but we didn't really mind because it meant that we were helping our mum. I think as we got older we could see more and more what life would be like for us there as teenage girls... like I don't think we would have had much, what's the word?. Opportunity! I don't think we would have had much opportunity if we had stayed there, because it was really hard for low caste women there."

Sister C: "Yeah, there were a lot of teenagers that were sad in Nepal; they didn't know what to do with themselves and most of them would have been low caste."

According to Evans (2007), the lack of opportunity available to young Bhutanese post-school stems from a variety of sources. Restrictions were placed on Bhutanese refugees that prevented them from gaining legal employment in Nepal and they had limited opportunities to make money in the camps. As a result, families had very few savings, which limited their children's opportunities to receive higher education. Although the Nepalese government offered the safety of seven refugee camps for Bhutanese refugees they also denied citizenship or integration into wider Nepali society. During this time exiled Bhutanese citizens remained stateless.

A Stateless People

The sudden forced exile of tens of thousands of southern Bhutanese citizens into Nepal began to take its toll on the government of Nepal. Many Bhutanese sought refuge in India; however, as they arrived in India, they were moved by Indian officials into trucks and released at Nepal's

borders. In 1992, the Nepalese government made a formal request to the UNHCR for support. The UNHCR responded by establishing seven refugee camps throughout Nepal, and giving the exiled Bhutanese official refugee status (Hutt, 1996). After negotiations with the Bhutanese government resulted in a mere 2.5 percent of Bhutanese refugees repatriated back into Bhutan, the UNHCR began considering third country resettlement in 2006. Resettlement was offered to Bhutanese refugees by eight countries: Australia, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America (Hutt, 1996). In 2007, the New Zealand government became the first country to accept Bhutanese refugees by announcing that it would include Bhutanese refugees in its annual refugee quota (Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment. n.d.). According to the UNHCR more than 69,000 of the total 108,000 Bhutanese refugees have been resettled in third countries. Sarah and her daughters were among some of the first Bhutanese refugees to arrive in New Zealand. In my interview with Sarah she recalled the moment she found out she was moving to New Zealand with her daughters.

Sarah: "I was very happy, because my life was very hard in Nepal and we never had enough money. I had to work very hard for my children. I'm thinking I'm very happy to go to a Christian country. They are not like Hindu people. They are very good people; who is Christian is very good person. It's better for us to go there. I heard in New Zealand people are even kind to animals, so then this country will love us. Otherwise why would they accept us to go? They are a country who will love us."

Jess: "So you were excited to go to New Zealand?"

Sarah: "I was a low caste woman with six children; I had to make my heart and my mind very strong to live in Nepal. I had to be strong always around my children. I could not be crying. Even though I am not educated, I am intelligent; I see what happens in Nepal to women. I knew New Zealand would be better for my children and better for me. I am not wanting my children to have anything bad happen to them. If we stay in Nepal bad things could happen. So even though I'm not educated I was intelligent enough to protect my children in Nepal and to move to New Zealand. I told my children I am your mother,

always trust me. I was very happy to go to New Zealand; New Zealand people will welcome us.”

Jess: “How did you tell your children that you were moving?”

Sarah: “When I found out I told my children that night. I told them to come and sit with me. Don’t cry. Don’t get upset. I know which choice will be bad and which choice will be good; trust me about moving to New Zealand. I will not leave you; I will not marry anybody else. I was worried my children would think ‘mummy she’s young, if she takes us to New Zealand she will find a rich man and leave us’. In Nepal they had grandparents, uncles and aunties. If something happen to me they would still have family. If we moved to New Zealand and I go away they have nobody. I don’t want them to be scared of that. Even though they didn’t tell me that they were, I could tell they were scared of something happening to me and then being on their own in New Zealand. So I told them I’m not moving to New Zealand to run away from my life. You are my children. I won’t leave you ever. Even though I’m not educated I can tell New Zealand will be better for my daughters.”

Resettlement in New Zealand

Since 2007 New Zealand has continued to accept Bhutanese refugees and, as a result, Palmerston North has seen the resettlement of 476 Bhutanese Refugees. Bhutanese families arrive in New Zealand every six months. On arrival in New Zealand, all United Nations quota refugees are taken to the Auckland Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre, where they receive any necessary medical treatment and partake in a six week programme aimed at educating them about New Zealand society (Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment. n.d.). Refugees at Mangere also received English language lessons; however, many Bhutanese refugees have learnt to speak English while living in Nepal’s refugee camps which helps them during their time in Mangere as they have an easier time communicating with staff (Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment. n.d.). During my fieldwork, my participants invited me on a trip to Mangere with them to greet their brother and his family who had just arrived in New Zealand. The following is an excerpt from my field diary detailing my experience with the family in Mangere:

“Today was a very emotional day, as the girls were reunited with their brother after 10 years. I felt privileged to be invited along to share this family moment. I was also able to look around the refugee centre in Mangere. The girls were very excited to give me a tour. They showed me their old room, which was a small space crammed full of bunk beds. They also showed me their school, the playground they enjoyed, and the dining hall. I was surprised to see that Sarah came with bags and bags of homemade cooking for her son and his family. When I asked her why she was bringing so much food when Mangere was self-catered, she explained to me that it’s very hard to get used to New Zealand food because it is so plain and tasteless. Most people crave their cultural food during the six weeks that they stay at Mangere.”

Academic literature about refugee communities continues to highlight the importance of resettling people close to other people from their community of origin. In their study of Vietnamese refugee communities, Zhou and Bankston (1998) point out that refugee families resettled away from their community recovered more slowly from trauma and were more likely to experience culture shock and feelings of isolation than those who were resettled as neighbours. Refugee community members form close bonds with each other quickly, because there is a mutual need among members to band together for support (Zhou & Bankston, 1998). Although Sarah and her daughters were excited to move to New Zealand they found the early stages of their resettlement in Palmerston North immensely stressful. In her story, she recalls a sense of longing for her old community and sudden feelings of isolation and loneliness, as she describes her experiences on the family’s first day in their Housing New Zealand home.

“It is horrible, Jessica. Oh, I tell how what it has been like for me. I was crying lots when I first moved here because of it. There was a family that lived next door before we moved in here. In the camp where we lived, everyone was close. There were always people walking past our home. We had many people very close by. We had a habit of living close to others, all together. Then when I first came here, I feel so alone! Because there was no people walking by our house, nobody close nearby us. People got to places by car or bicycle. Nobody walked into my house and everybody talk a different language. It was very hard on my children and me: we had no English, no education, no body! My children were very small! [Sister X] was 15 at the time! She’s 20 now! [Sister X] was 8

years old, [Sister X] was 10 years old and [Sister X] was 12 years old. They were very small young girls; I had to look after them all. Then my volunteer¹⁰ she got the key to my home, and she took us inside. Then after one hour she's gone, no Nepali people, nobody comes for three days! When she closed the door we all started crying. "

The Bhutanese community comprises of 114 family households. Refugee families are typically resettled in government housing, in close proximity to other refugee families and this is the case for my participants. More recently, however, Bhutanese families that have been in Palmerston North over four years are beginning to move out of the housing New Zealand homes to buy their own homes, or rent in different locations. As the Bhutanese population in Palmerston North continues to grow, and more families continue to move into housing of their own choice, the community is becoming more fragmented. However, when my participants first resettled in Palmerston North in 2007, the Bhutanese population in Palmerston North was still relatively small. Most families were housed in the same neighbourhoods; as a result, families were in close proximity of each other, as Sarah explains:

"Everyone know who everyone else is, their families and where they all come from, everyone lives right next door to each other, they are all friendly to each other, except with us, they don't like us."

The Bhutanese community in Palmerston North is made up of a diverse range of religious affiliations. According to Refugee Services Palmerston North, the community comprises a mixture of Hindus, Buddhist, Christians and Kirant¹¹. The Hindu population makes up 80% of the Bhutanese community. Hinduism was the most dominant religion within Nepal's refugee camps and remains so within the Palmerston North community, with the majority of Bhutanese refugees identifying as practicing Hindus. As a result, the Hindu caste system has reformed within the Palmerston North Bhutanese community.

¹⁰ Refugee services is a volunteer organisation, although Sarah had difficult experience resettling, her experience is not typical of all refugee families.

¹¹ Kirant is a religion that comprises of a mixture of Hinduism and Buddhism, it originated within indigenous Nepali communities.

The Impact of Caste

Hindu societies are organised by caste structure, which is a system of social and economic hierarchy that distinguishes certain groups from others, based on occupational divisions. The caste system is organised by hierarchical ideologies of purity and pollution, which results in the maintenance of social and physical boundaries between castes. This amounts to a wide range of social inequalities. *The International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* describes caste as:

“The term *caste* refers, paradigmatically, to a social institution in India and elsewhere in South Asia in which endogamous descent groups, known as *castes* or *subcastes* are hierarchically ranked” (Anthropology Of Caste, 2012, p. 461).

As a result, it is near impossible for a person to change or escape the caste he or she has been born into. This is particularly difficult for individuals like my participants who are born into a low caste position. As Howard (1995) explains; “dishonoured groups - such as women, low caste, and outcasts in Hindu society - have restricted roles, privileges, and obligations. Such social categorization underpins social cohesion, while a form of unequal membership in society guarantees privileges, but not human rights, for those insiders who obey the rules” (p. 2).

One of the reasons that Sarah was so willing move to New Zealand is because New Zealand is not a Hindu nation. Sarah assumed that moving to New Zealand would offer the family an escape from their low caste status. She explains:

“New Zealand will be good for us because it is not a Hindu country. This means that my daughters will be treated with fairly and not judged by Brahmin people for being low caste. In my mind I am thinking ‘there is no caste system in New Zealand, so we all have a better chance. We should take this chance’”.

Caste Order

In both India and Nepal caste is a complex system of social stratification which separated individuals through social, physical and economic boundaries. Caste law produces social boundaries that prevent lower caste groups from touching, sharing food, or using the same washing spaces as upper caste members. These boundaries are known as rituals of purity and pollution: as lower caste members are understood as being impure, higher caste members avoid

sharing meals and physical contact with lower caste members. In this sense the caste system perpetuates social segregation and oppression as lower caste groups are excluded from entering particular spaces such as higher caste members' homes. In this way lower caste groups are excluded and marginalised in a direct and daily manner. Caste order can also dictate marriage arrangements as families arrange marriages within their caste group. Caste status cannot be changed through marriage or economic status. In this sense individuals are born into a particular caste group, just as they are born into a particular gender. Caste remains a fixed phenomenon just as gender does. Changing caste is difficult, socially deviant and often an impossibility. In this sense caste membership is hereditary and permanent.

As explained earlier, the Lhotshampa population of Bhutan came from Nepal, where they were a Hindu society with a caste system. When they migrated to Bhutan in the 1880s, they took the caste system with them. After their exclusion from Bhutan, this caste system again reformed in Nepal's refugee camps. As Nepal society is already organised by the Hindu caste system, Lhotshampa Hindus were able to practise caste and Hinduism easily in refugee camps.

Sarah's stories show the caste system has reformed within the Palmerston North Bhutanese community. The following sections will explain how, although caste law is unable to reform with the same distinct social boundaries in Western societies, caste is still practised in subtle ways and this has a deep impact on the lives of lower caste people.

Sarah assumed other Bhutanese refugee families in Palmerston North would also abandon the caste system as a result of moving to New Zealand. This was not the case. Many Bhutanese refugee families continue to practice Hinduism, and the community is still shaped around the structures of the Hindu caste system. According to Grieco (1998), the reformation of caste systems among migrant communities is often determined by the reasons for migration. In the case of refugees, feelings of isolation and uncertainty are common within the first year of resettlement. Consequently, community members cling to familiar social systems, such as the caste system. Grieco (1998) explains:

“Because the caste system is a socioeconomic system based on the relationship of interdependent, integral caste groups, much of what can be considered caste-related behaviour derives its structural basis from these groups. Thus, it is the auspices of

migration that enables or prevents these social groups from reforming overseas and therefore determines the level of caste-related characteristics in any overseas Indian community” (p. 710).

Sarah revealed her experience of isolation during the family’s first day in their new home. It was during this time they longed for the company of other Bhutanese people. Consequently, Sarah and her daughters made attempts to connect with Bhutanese neighbours. Unfortunately, they were not welcomed by many of the already settled Bhutanese due their low caste status. She states:

“The children were saying to me, ‘Here is a different place. Nobody comes to us here. No friends here.’ We were very scared of being alone. So I told my children, ‘There are some Nepali next door. Go to their house.’ When my children heard that there were other Nepali people close, they were happy. So I sent them over there. I said, ‘Go and talk to them nicely. I will cook some food to share and you can make some friends.’ So my children knock on the door and he asks, ‘Who are you?’ They say, ‘We are Nepali people.’ But he say, ‘No, no, no! You are not coming in. You are low caste!’ He asks, ‘What is your last name?’ And my children told the last name. He said ‘No, no, no! You are not coming in. Get outside!’

Having a community and pre-existing social networks is understood to be key in the mental health and wellbeing of refugees resettling (McMichael & Manderson, 2004). Silveria and Allebeck’s (2001) study of life satisfaction amongst Somali men living in London revealed loneliness and the loss of social networks as a key cause of depression; and Hardwick’s (2003) study of refugees living on the Pacific Coast of the United States highlighted that having a community to belong to helped to cushion the impact of adjusting to life in a foreign country. As well making the resettlement processes easier, belonging to a community reduces the negative effects of traumatic life experiences. Kia-Keating and Ellis (2007) demonstrate that PTSD is less common among refugee migrants who move and resettle within solid migrant communities and achieve a sense of belonging. Although much of the literature surrounding refugee resettlement suggests housing refugee communities close to each other makes the resettlement process less stressful for all, my research suggests that this is not always the case. For Sarah and her

daughters the process of resettlement in Palmerston North was made more difficult by the presence other Bhutanese refugee families. During the early stages of resettlement, Sarah made continued efforts to connect with Bhutanese neighbours, but she continued to experience discrimination and rejection because she was single mother of low caste status. Feeling rejected by the Bhutanese community and not yet having connections to other New Zealanders. Sarah reveals the family's feelings of anxiety and isolation during their first months in Palmerston North.

“It was a very sad time for me, Jessica. Our family knew nobody. Nobody wants to be our friends, to help us. The Nepali people here are very unkind to me and I didn't know what to do in New Zealand. What are the rules? I don't know! It will be different for my son and my new daughter because I have been talking to them for a long time now about what it is like to live in New Zealand¹². They will be okay because they have us and they know more about New Zealand than we did, so they will be okay.”

Caste Reformation

The structure of Western institutions undermines the purity practices that maintain caste as a law. As a result, the Hindu caste system is often unable to reform as a social law. Instead the caste system continues to exist as a measure of social prestige within migrant communities. The literature on caste reformation within Western societies suggests that the more assimilated a migrant community becomes, the less important caste status becomes.

Much of literature surrounding caste reformation focuses on migrant Indian communities rather than refugee communities. Unlike refugee communities, in this case migration has been a choice for such community members. Most of these studies explore the many instances in which the caste system fails to reform within migrant communities. As Jayawardena (1968) highlights, this is common among migrant Indian communities, particularly those that have migrated in search of higher wages, career opportunities and improved working conditions. She states:

¹² Sarah's son, daughter in law and grandson, arrived in New Zealand early last year, five years after Sarah and her daughters migrated to New Zealand. Consequently, Sarah and her daughters understand what it is like to live in New Zealand and are able to support their family members during their resettlement.

“One of the striking paradoxes in the study of overseas Indians is the fact that the set of institutions regarded as the most deeply rooted and the most distinctive in Indian culture has undergone the most radical change. In none of the countries except Ceylon, and perhaps Malaya, is there a caste system within the Indian sector - that is, a set of interrelated groups ‘which are at once specialised, hierarchies and separated (in matters of marriage, food, physical contact) in relation to each other’. Virtually all the writers in ‘Caste in Overseas Indian Communities,’ reporting on conditions in Guyana, Mauritius, Trinidad, Surinam, Fiji, and South Africa, state that social relations among Indians, and even among Hindus, are not structured along caste lines” (p. 441).

Jayawardena (1968) goes on to outline that one of the primary reasons caste fails to reform in other countries is the working conditions and occupational routines undermine caste hierarchy and boundaries. Hollup (1994) also explores the reformation of the Hindu caste system within immigrant Indian communities, and shares a similar perspective to Jayawardena, noting that the Hindu caste system is readily undermined by the democratising nature of Western social institutions.

However, Hollup (1994) also argues that although the Hindu caste system within migrant communities is not supported by the ideology of purity that occurs so organically in India, this does not mean that the caste system breaks down completely. Rather the caste system changes from an enforcing social law to a matter of social prestige among urban migrant communities. He explains:

“If someone marries a person from a low caste, he attempts to hide this fact, but when the opposite occurs he is proud of it. In this respect, there is still a feeling of inferiority about belonging to lower castes, and the opposition of high (grand nasyon) and low caste (ti nasyon) still prevails. But family wealth, occupational status, and educational qualifications now transcend caste boundaries... One may think that class or ethnic identity overrides caste identity; actually these divergent identities sometimes are combined to increase one’s prestige” (p. 304).

Within many overseas Indian communities, the caste system has become less important. Attaining high levels of education and respectable careers have become more important to most

people, but it continues to be an important point of prestige for those occupying high caste positions. Hollup (1994) states:

“Although caste differences were disregarded and did not constitute important units among the Hindus in Mauritius, the high castes were interested in maintaining caste differences and used their influence as Brahmin priests, sirdars in the estates, and as small planters, to keep alive status distinctions between high and low castes” (p. 314).

This literature suggests the more integrated into the host society a migrant community becomes, the less important caste becomes in community organisation. The following sections trace the impact of the Hindu caste system on the lives of my participants. Through their stories I will show how, during the early stages of their resettlement in Palmerston North, caste was particularly important in the early organisation of this community and, as a result, because of their caste status, the family was excluded from Bhutanese social circles.

The Palmerston North Bhutanese Community

As discussed earlier, I gained entrée into the Bhutanese community through my supervisor, Dr Sita Venkateswar. To assess the feasibility of my research, I began meeting various Bhutanese families with her. I was invited into family homes, where I discussed the aims of my research with potential participants. During this stage I was unfamiliar with the Hindu caste system. However, as I asked families about their lives in Palmerston North and their experiences of resettlement, it surprised me how quickly caste was brought up in our conversations. It was through these early conversations that I began to get a sense of the segregating effect the caste system had within the community. A theme began to emerge as the Hindu Brahmin families were often described by non-Brahmin community members as particularly intolerant enforcers of caste law. This chapter provides an overview of the Bhutanese community and trace the ways in which the caste system reforms in Hindu migrant communities. Sarah’s stories are interwoven within this analysis and, as a result, we will see how her early experiences of resettlement have shaped her parenting style, in which she encourages her daughters to experiment with ‘new’ and ‘Kiwi’ ways of being a young woman.

When I first met the young women who became my participants in this project, I was taken aback by how different they were compared to other Bhutanese girls I had met. The other

Bhutanese girls I had met had appeared shy and reserved and, as a result, my supervisor and I directed the conversation. My first conversation with my participants took place in their bedroom, with walls papered with pictures of Justin Bieber and other celebrities. Our conversation seemed to flow easily, as they confidently asked me questions about my research. It was during our first conversation that one of the sisters explained to me that she found it difficult to be a young Bhutanese woman in Palmerston North. I was startled by her abruptness and asked her to expand on this. She explained that as a family of low caste women without a father figure, they were often excluded from the community and treated as social deviants.

As I went about developing my research I remained curious about this family of women. Fortunately, a few days after our first meeting I was contacted by the girls and I was invited back to their home. They were now requesting to be participants in my research. As I began spending more time with the family, I began to see how little they had to do with other Bhutanese families and community members, and I began to suspect that caste was a significant barrier in this relationship. One day I was in the kitchen with Sarah learning to make chai tea. I talked to her about my early experiences meeting other Bhutanese families. The following is a transcript from my field notes:

“Today I was helping Sarah in the kitchen make tea. As she was teaching me how to make chai, I thought it might be a good time to ask her about my experiences meeting other Bhutanese families and how caste began to emerge as a significant division. So I explained to her how some of the Bhutanese families I meet had described Brahmin families as particularly intolerant and strict with caste law. She began to speak quite passionately as she said, ‘Yes, Jessica, Brahmin people are not good people. I know in the bible it says do not hate, but it is hard for me not to hate them. My whole life they have been hateful to me, and it is worse here because we had nobody else at first to be friends with.’”

From this and other conversations I began to get a sense of the many ways this family was marginalised on the basis of caste and gender. This on-going marginalisation has been the primary factor in the family’s decision to withdraw from the Palmerston North Bhutanese community. My suspicions were confirmed when I attended World Refugee Day celebrations

with the family, where my participants were performing a dance they had choreographed. As I sat in the audience next to Sarah I noticed that we were sitting on our own, away from other Bhutanese families. I became aware of just how much the Bhutanese community dominated the celebrations. It seemed every second performance was a Bhutanese cultural dance. However, when my participants emerged on stage to perform their dance, Bollywood music mixed with American rap music began to play. Their self-choreographed dance was a mixture between both Bollywood dance moves and American hip-hop. Their performance was strikingly different, and stuck out against the backdrop of the previous cultural dances we had seen. After the dance Sarah asked me if we could leave straight away, as she did not feel comfortable staying on and talking with other Bhutanese families. In later interviews she explained this situation further to me:

“I am raising my daughters differently from them. I don’t want them talking bad about me because we are low caste and we don’t do old culture dances. Not everyone is talking bad, but I know some people will, so that’s why we go.”

Here Sarah reveals that we left early because she wanted to avoid judgment from the community. Her statement reveals that she still experiences the social burden of caste. This suggests that in many ways the caste system is present in the Bhutanese community.

Sarah’s Experiences

Sarah revealed to me that one of the many reasons she looked forward to resettling in New Zealand was that New Zealand society was not organised by Hinduism. Consequently, she assumed that the caste system would be unsustainable in New Zealand and that she would be able to form connections to other Bhutanese families without the boundaries of caste law preventing this. She explains:

“I didn’t think it would be like this. I thought that all the Nepali families here would have to give up their caste thinkings when they started living in New Zealand, and everyone would be treated as friends and equals.”

The more time I spent with the family, the more I learned about their early resettlement experiences. Often during conversations the participants made references back to the memories

of arriving in Palmerston North. The following story describes Sarah's experience of caste based discrimination and her feelings of isolation as she learns caste is still barrier for her in New Zealand:

“They are mean people to us, Jessica. My children come home crying that day. Then another day, a Nepali lady from my class¹³ said I am doing a Hindu function at my house. Everyone is coming, and do you want to come? I wasn't baptised then. I was just going to church. So I came from school to her house. I got ready in the morning and put some clothing in my school bag to take to her house to get changed. So I arrived same time as her to her house, then the eldest sister came later with my children. Then this man [a neighbour who had previously shouted at her children, and forbidden them from entering his home due to their caste] arrived there. I did not ask him anything about what he said to my children that day. I was willing to let it go and move on. But then this man he saw me sitting in the lounge and he leave. Then he started saying to this lady, ‘Why have you invited there people? They are low caste. I don't want to eat anything from here because of this.’ I felt so sick, because I was the only low caste person there other than my daughters. It was a long time. I stood there for twenty minutes and I was very embarrassed and they were saying very, very bad things about me. I was trying to make some friends here because I didn't know anyone, but they already hated me. I thought how can I live here!?! I started to cry to myself. Then I wanted to go back to my house straight away. I told my class friend, ‘I'm going home because I feel unwell.’ I didn't want to tell her the real reason why, because she was happy with her function. She said, ‘No, no, no. Stay and have some food and then go home.’ I said, ‘No. No, I don't want any food. I'm feeling very sick.’ When I came home I started to cry because I was so sad. I don't know anyone here. I have no friends, and the Nepali people won't accept me.”

In this story Sarah recalls her early attempts to form friendships with other Bhutanese refugee families. She describes the painful experience of being thwarted in this process. In later conversations Sarah told me more about her interactions with the Bhutanese community; she revealed to me that she is further discriminated against because she is a single mother:

¹³ Sarah attended English language classes during the first two years of her resettlement in Palmerston North.

“Other people of my caste can get along okay with most of them. But nobody wants to talk to me because I am single woman with four daughters. Because of this nobody likes me. Hindus think that a man is ruler and so woman are low. Because of that they think, ‘She is low caste, low woman!’ So nobody in the community wants to be friends with us. Some of the women are nice to us, but they don’t invite us to join in with them. We were left out.”

Here Sarah reveals how she has been treated differently compared to other families who are of the same caste as her because of the patriarchal structures of Hinduism. As a low caste single mother, her family has been rejected by other community members.

“I am trying and trying to make some friends. I’m thinking, ‘I don’t want to keep being gossiped about.’ So I stopped trying to make friends here. We were very alone and our volunteer only is coming one day a week. I don’t know anyone. I don’t know how to shop, how to buy children’s clothings, I don’t have a car. I am so grateful to God that I have found my Christian friends. They have helped us so much. They are so kind to us.”

After this, Sarah decided to withdraw from the community all together. During this time the family was very isolated. Their volunteer from refugee services visited them once a week and because they had difficulty speaking English, they felt unable to communicate their feelings of isolation to their volunteer. In their refugee camp, the family was living in close proximity with other families and people. Consequently, the girls struggled to deal with their sudden privacy and isolation from other Bhutanese families. They remained unconfident speaking English and were reluctant to venture outside of their home. However, Sarah had always been interested in Christianity and in Nepal; she shared close friendships with many Christian families. She wanted to convert to Christianity in Nepal, and one of the reasons for this, was that the Hindu caste system was not practiced in Christian churches in Nepal. She explains:

“But I always liked Christians (in Nepal), but my parents, they don’t like Christians. They are old people. They do not understand me. And my father was not happy with me. He says ‘We born Hindu we die for Hindu.’ I knew if I became a Christian my father would be upset. He would not be happy. I don’t want to make him upset. Then, after I was in New Zealand for three months, I got a vision. Then I totally changed my mind

from the vision and in the morning I had a strong feeling wishing to go to church. But I was not good at English at that time. I didn't know how to tell my volunteer. So I told my children. They speak better English than me, and they tell to her. 'Okay. Okay,' she says, 'I will take you to church.'"

After attending church a few times, the family began to form connections to other families to develop social networks outside of the Bhutanese community. In particular, the family has formed close connections with a small Christian community of migrant Indian families. As Nepali and Hindi languages share linguistic similarities, the family was able to communicate more easily with this group. Sarah encouraged her daughters to attend youth group events and, as result, the sisters began to form friendships with a wider range of New Zealand youth and their English began to improve.

"Becoming Christian is so good for us. Christian people don't care about caste. Everyone can be equal. We have met so many Kiwi people, much more than other Nepali people; we know lots of families now. My daughters are friends with Kiwi girls now, and lots of families at our church have helped us when we needed it."

Here Sarah shows how converting to Christianity has offered her family an escape from the Hindu caste system, and has also given her family access to parts of New Zealand society in a way that is not available to other Bhutanese community members. This occurred as they formed friendships with other families in the church, they started being invited to church barbeques and other social events. The girls also joined the church youth group and forged friendships with other young people. Through the Christian community, the family had more exposure to New Zealand ways of being, which has also become a form of resistance against patriarchy and Hinduism within the Bhutanese community. In the following section I will explore Sarah's parenting strategies for encouraging this resistance.

Strategies of Resettlement and Resistance

"I take as my focus the diverse forms of identity and agency constituted through subaltern political activity. This position refuses to view 'resistance' politics as the mirror of domination. It foregrounds the dynamic trajectories of resistance politics, while not

evading the forms of contested geographies of power that are constructed through resistance politics” (Featherstone, 2008, p. 5).

Here Featherstone (2008) highlights how for subaltern, by whom she means lower caste groups, resistance does not occur as a direct and forceful resistance to caste order. Instead, lower caste group members develop strategies of resistance that are subversive in their trajectory.

For Sarah and her daughters the process of resettlement in Palmerston North was immensely stressful; however, once they began to form connections and friendships within the Christian community, they began to feel more hopeful about their futures. As Sarah reveals:

“After that day I got a vision. God helped me because I was so unhappy. My mind changed. I really wanted to go to church and become a Christian. After going to church my English got better and better. Now I speak very good English. Sometimes I speak a little bit upside down (laughs)! And sometimes I can’t say big words (laughs)! Now I can use the English. I know to make people understand me, even if I can’t say the right words.”

Here Sarah illustrates how going to church has helped her English. She goes on to explain how her family have become more skilled at speaking English compared to other Bhutanese community members.

“Because we were going to church and we were making friends with other Christian families, I am becoming clear with my English. Kiwi people can understand me. I can understand them! This was very important for me because before this, I am mute here! I can’t speak to anyone except Nepali people and they don’t like me! Now I am thinking, ‘I can speak my mind in English better than them (Bhutanese community). My daughter can speak English properly. We don’t need these Nepali people anymore, we can be Kiwis!’”

Consequently, Sarah began to distance herself the Bhutanese community, encouraging her daughters to speak English, and form friendships with Pakeha girls at school. Her strategy for raising her daughters was to encourage them to take up New Zealand ways of being. In doing so, she believes they will acquire the skills to successfully negotiate New Zealand’s many social institutions, such as the education system, as our conversation below illustrates:

Sarah: "I want them to have their own lives. They have to learn about New Zealand and how to do well here. I want them to make friends here with Kiwi girls. I let my daughters go to friend houses, go out shopping, wear Western clothing because in the future I want them to be at the top, and at the front of our family. I never got to have an education. In Bhutan schools were very far away from my family home. I want my daughters to have a education here and to speak good English and have Kiwi friends."

Jess: "So you give them more freedom because you want them to learn how to do well here?"

Sarah: "Yes! I'm older woman now, with no education. It is better for them to do well here than me. It will be easier for them to get on top than for me now. So if my daughters want nice dresses ok I will buy them. We are not going back to Nepal or Bhutan. Our futures are here. I want my daughters to fit in with the Kiwi way. So I give them more freedom than other people do to their children, because it is waste of time to force Nepali rules on them that are not happening here in New Zealand. They are better off to be like Kiwi, not forget about Nepal or speaking Nepali, but if they want to dress and have Kiwi friends, I am happy for them. Also I think that my daughters are smart girls and they deserve just as much freedoms as boys get."

Here Sarah explains how she gives her daughters lots of freedom to experiment with identity as they grow up. This is because she wants them to learn 'fit in with the Kiwi way'. One of the ways she does this is by giving them the freedom and the funds to dress how they like. She does not impose Nepali gender norms on them as she deems these to be irrelevant now that their family is living in New Zealand. In this way, she hopes her daughters will learn how to be successful in New Zealand. Underlying these parenting strategies is her ongoing belief in equality, as she states, "Also I think that my daughters are smart girls and they deserve just as much freedoms as boys get". It is common in the Bhutanese community for adolescent boys to be granted more independence than girls. This is something Sarah rejects. She moved on to explain how her parenting methods are a form of subversive resistance against the patriarchal structures of the Bhutanese community.

Jess: “Right, so what do you think people in the Bhutanese community think about your girls? Because the girls have said to me, ‘they think were bad because we don’t have a father’”

Sarah: “Yes, men are always in charge of the money in Nepali families. And most of the men are very stingy people. They don’t like to spend money on their daughters. If they go out they make their daughters walk; they not drive them. Their daughters wear not very nice dress because fathers don’t want to buy for their daughter. My daughters have lots of nice, new clothing. If they want to go out, they take my car or I drive them. If they want to go shopping, I give them money. I don’t tell them what to wear. My daughters dress like young Kiwi girls and they look beautiful. My daughters they wear short dress and tops, because there is nothing wrong with that. That’s just men trying to tell women what to do. So my daughters they wear these things and Bhutanese people say, ‘Look they have no father and look how they dress!’ So they think my daughters are like how do you say? Bitches! That is what they say about us. But do you think I care what those men say? They are my children and I trust them. They are smart girls, smarter than those men’s daughters, and I know my children better than anybody else. They are smart women. So now I don’t care whatever they say about us to anybody else. We have our own life, our own house, our own money. We don’t need them for anything.”

Jess: “So do you think your daughters will do better because of your parenting style than other stricter parents?”

Sarah: “I will tell you, other Nepali girls come to my house to stay overnight with my daughters. All of them like to dress up in my daughters clothes; they wear my daughter’s dresses all night! Even sleep in them, because they like it. Every child is the same, they like dress up and they like to feel beautiful and there is nothing wrong with that. But Nepali people don’t let their children have these freedoms. It is very sad to see their young daughters live such strict lives. If they want to go a friend’s house, their fathers will say, ‘No.’ If they want to buy some clothes or makeup, their fathers will say, ‘No.’ They control their daughters and their daughters find it harder to live in New Zealand. I

give my daughters the freedom to learn about New Zealand and how they want to be here.”

Jess: “What do you mean by that?”

Sarah: “The young Bhutanese girls here I think will go mad, because their fathers don’t let them do anything. All they can do is watch Bollywood movies. My daughters have learnt about Palmerston North. They are clever and know about New Zealand. So now my children speak better English than their children, and they get better school grades because I give to them freedom.”

Here Sarah illustrates how she resists Hindu patriarchy through her liberal parenting style. She explains a key strategy in her resistance is education. She hopes that by giving her daughters the freedom to explore New Zealand ways of being, they will do better in the New Zealand education system. In my conversations with the girls they highlighted how their mother’s parenting methods have helped them to adjust to school in New Zealand. Sister A stated:

“It’s really hard to be a teenager. Everyone wants to fit in, but it’s even harder to fit in if you’re not born here [in New Zealand]. So I think that we are lucky that our mum lets us be normal Kiwi girls, because other Nepali girls don’t get that chance and school is easier for us than those girls because we can fit in.”

In her previous statement Sarah reveals how her parenting methods have been a source of gossip within the community. She highlights that her daughter have freedom, such as choice of clothes, make up, money and independence on their weekends. As a result, Western gender norms are more available to them than other young Bhutanese women. As Sister A revealed, school is easier for them because they can ‘fit in’. In this sense they have become more capable and resourceful at performing Western gender norms. In doing so, they have learnt how to engage successfully with social institutions such as the education system. Sarah also explains how her strategy is beginning to work, as her daughters speak better English and get higher school grades than other young Bhutanese girls.

Discussion

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the political history that led to the Bhutanese refugee crisis, the establishment of refugee camps in Nepal, and the process by which Bhutanese refugees resettle in New Zealand. In conjunction with my analyses, Sarah and the girls have also shared their family stories, providing glimpses into their lives in Nepal's refugee camps. Sarah's stories have discussed the challenges she faced being a low caste, single mother in Nepal. She has touched on the difficulty she experienced resettling in Palmerston North, revealing that refugee communities are not always inclusive and supportive community spheres that provide comfort and relief from resettlement stress as previous literature suggests. Her stories have highlighted the perpetuation of the Hindu caste structures within the Palmerston North Bhutanese community.

Sarah's story reveals the many ways her life has been shaped by forces beyond her control. She did not choose to become a refugee, her refugee status was a result of other people's decisions, and it was forced upon her. Nor did she choose to be born a low caste woman. On moving to New Zealand she was surprised to experience the restoration of caste within the local Bhutanese community. Consequently, her stories illuminate the social and political structures that have shaped her life. Yet this does not mean that Sarah is a submissive victim of the process. Rather, it through these experiences that Sarah has developed a strategy for her family. Butler (1990) maintains that structure is the enabling condition of agency. This means that as we are confronted by social structures, we develop skills and strategies for negotiating our place within the world. Sarah's life stories illustrate this process, as she is unable to escape caste both in Nepal and New Zealand, she has developed a new parenting method which encourages her daughters to negate Hindu norms and take up New Zealand ways of being. She describes how most young women in the Bhutanese community are not given the same freedom and independence that her daughter's have. In this way, family strategies have emerged as her daughters dress and behave in a way that separates them from the Bhutanese community.

By allowing her daughters to experiment with Western gender norms, Sarah's family is subversively resisting the caste order and Hindu patriarchal structures. Consequently, the family's resettlement in Palmerston North and Sarah's parenting strategies have made a new series of gender norms more available to the girls. This is a conscious strategy on Sarah's part, as

she hopes the more competent her daughters become with New Zealand culture, the more likely they are to be successful here.

As I have highlighted in chapter four, for Butler (1990), identity is a fluid process marked by voluntarism, which is the condition under which gendered identities are assumed. Sarah's stories paint a picture of the social conditions that surround the girls. Through her stories we can come closer to understanding why the girls are so persistent in the photos they take and the way they style their bodies. As their family was marginalised by the Bhutanese community, it becomes clear that the girls are unable to escape their low caste status; consequently, they had little choice but to learn how to be 'Kiwi girls'.

As I discussed in chapter four, voluntarism is a compulsory act, yet we can choose which gender norms we volunteer/subscribe to. In the following chapters I explore this process of voluntarism and we will hear from the girls, in their own voices as they reveal the photos they have chosen for this research. These photos are interwoven around our conversations about their lives, which highlight the particular gender norms my participants are citing. As my participants post images of themselves to Facebook, they negotiate and experiment with the subjective and complicated process of 'growing up'. I will argue that, for my participants, Facebook is a crucial space of performativity.

As Butler maintains, our performative identity work congeals over time to give the appearance of a 'naturalised' behaviour. The following chapter traces this process of 'congealing' as my participants become skilled at using their bodies to cite and recite new ways of being young women through image producing technologies. Their photos illustrate the complicated experience of 'growing up' and 'fitting in', to explore this experience I consider Butler's analysis of subversive and conventional gender norms.

Growing up in a new country, the importance of Facebook and Taking Selfies

Adolescent Bhutanese living in New Zealand experience a world shaped and forged by liminality. They are marked by their refugee status, language barriers, and skin colour. They are not fully New Zealanders, but starting a new life in New Zealand means they are unable to be fully Nepalese. They are also no longer children, yet not fully adults. As a result, growing up is often an exhausting and confusing process, marked by ambiguity and self-consciousness. As Camino (1994) explains:

“Refugee adolescents comprise of a particular interesting group among whom to investigate the construction and negotiation of ethnic identity due to their double liminal status. Liminality (taken from the word *limen*, meaning threshold), as conceptualized by Turner (1967, 1969, 1974) represents a state where an individual moving from one fixed, known status or circumstance into a new one ‘becomes ambiguous, neither here nor there, betwixt and between all fixed points of clarification; he passes through a symbolic domain that has few or none of the attributes of his past coming state’ (Turner 1974: 232). Applied to refugees, liminality signifies being caught between old and new surroundings. Applied to adolescents, liminality denotes a state between childhood and adulthood” (p. 30).

As seen in previous chapters, this family has been marginalised by the Bhutanese community, resulting in a conscious effort to distance themselves from it. Doing so has made a new series of gender norms available for them. This chapter explores the role of Facebook among Bhutanese youth as a space for identity experimentation: it has become a space to explore new ways of being a young person.

In social networking environments such as Facebook where participants are not anonymous, expressions and constructions of identity are complicated. This is because Facebook users tend to implicitly suggest factors about their identities to their Facebook community. Such implicit suggestions often take the form of images, such as personal photos, but also by sharing particular

images that circulate Facebook, such as jokes, pictures of animals, or inspirational quotations. This occurs as users “show rather than tell” (Zhao et al, 2008, p. 1816). A common example of this tendency to show for Zhao et al (2008) was how users implicitly suggested they were popular among friends by posting, and therefore, ‘showing’ specific images of themselves ‘hanging out’ with others. They state:

“There were great variations in the kinds of self-images produced on Facebook: some were carefully choreographed and well-polished, others were simple and rough. However, regardless of the levels of sophistication, Facebook users in our sample all attempted to project a self that is socially desirable. ‘Being popular among friends’ was a claim that seems to have underlined many identities on Facebook” (p. 1826).

This chapter traces the various ways the girls implicitly suggest factors about their identity. Body appearance work and photography are a crucial part of adhering to the Western gender norms now available to the girls. This chapter reveals the many ways the girls use photography and image producing technologies to capture performative identities and that repetition is a crucial part of this process as photo taking is a part of their everyday lives. Through the ongoing repetition of this practice the girls have become skilled at using their bodies to display a series of ‘naturalized’ looks and poses. By photographing themselves, they are able to recite to certain gender norms in a way that looks natural and indicative of their identities. In this chapter, the girls speak about the role Facebook plays in their lives, and the processes involved in taking photos to perform identity on Facebook. They will also share many of the photos they post on their Facebook accounts, as well as the photos they took for my research. For the girls, performing Western codes of femininity is both a strategy of assimilation and resistance. As Butler maintains, discerning whether or not a particular performative is the citation of a conventional or subversive norm is difficult to do outside of a particular social context. This chapter explores the many ways the girls have taken up Western culture through the recitation of Western gender norms. In doing so they are subversively resisting Hindu patriarchy and making possible new ways of being young Bhutanese women.

Facebook as an Embodied Space

Online social networking technologies present new ways of thinking about the concept of embodiment. My fieldwork revealed Facebook provided an opportunity for the girls to perform reveal their stylised bodies within a technologically mediated space that is disconnected from their tangible physical bodies. As Gooding and Tucker (2013) state, “we do not know online bodies from within, but as a projected body, performed in the technological rather than purely biological realm” (p. 3).

The common way the girls do this is through photography and image producing technologies. Through my fieldwork, I realised that taking photos was a daily practice for the girls. As they pose in front of the camera they become images in the traditional sense, yet these images are not kept in a photo album or hung in a picture frame. Instead they are shared with the girls’ online social networking communities; other users add meaning to these images by adding comments or clicking the ‘like’ button. Consequently, sharing photos online is an intrinsic part of the identity work that takes place on Facebook. This work is a performative process, as the body is both collectively and individually written into being on Facebook.

Sister B: “I hate it when my sisters post a photo of us, and they post it because they look really good. But I look really bad, like it might show my stomach looking fat or something. Even though it’s not on my Facebook because they don’t tag me in it, everyone I know can still see it because all my friends are their friends on Facebook. And everyone looks at everyone’s photos on Facebook, so you only ever want there to be photos of you looking cool on there.”

Sister B’s statement highlights that performing your body in the right way on Facebook is important to her because it is a necessary part of ‘looking cool’. She also points out that although she may not post certain photos of herself on Facebook, she has little control over the photos other people choose to post that she appears in. As the body is both collectively and individual written on Facebook, a ‘bad photo’ can disrupt the performance of ‘looking cool’. Thus she reveals the stress and ambiguity of performing embodied identity on Facebook.

Indeed, posting photos of the body is a crucial part of ‘showing’ their Facebook communities who they are. As Sister A states:

“We post so many selfie photos because that’s the closest thing you can get to hanging out face-to-face. It’s the best way for people to understand you on Facebook.”

As Facebook is a social realm removed from the physical body, Sister A reveals how photographs of the body help to ease disparity between the online and real world, and thus provide a means of interpreting and reading social cues through body images. Sister A’s observation is similar to Van Doorn’s (2010) discussions of Facebook interaction. Van Doorn states “Instead of deriving social norms from other people’s embodied presence, users have to create and interpret the semiotic resources (i.e. text, images, videos) that make up their profiles which effectively constitute a digital infrastructure” (p. 585). Both Van Doorn and Sister A are suggesting that users are able to navigate social norms on Facebook through the images shared within their Facebook communities. Sister A also states:

“Young people post pictures of themselves doing a slightly sexual action, because they want to show another side of themselves to their friends. No girl wants to be called a slut, so it’s easier for girls to just post a slightly sexual photo and just have fun with it. You don’t get called a slut for doing that because you’re not actually being slutty. Instead you just get heaps of likes and everyone says that you’re pretty. You can pretty much experiment with whoever you want to be on Facebook as long as you don’t act like a weirdo.”

Again, Sister A reveals how performing the body in the ‘right way’ is a crucial part of crafting an identity for herself within her Facebook community. Sister A’s statement that “no girl wants to be called a slut” reveals how local discourse and gender norms inform and shape embodied identity performatives on Facebook.

The literature review chapter highlighted Facebook has come to be understood as a space in which identity is both individually and collectively written by intersubjective interaction with one’s Facebook community. When the girls post photos of their bodies onto Facebook, these photos accumulate meaning from the social interaction and responses of other Facebook users in their community. Furthermore, the cultural norms and discourses that regulate this community within everyday life also manifest and regulate behaviour on Facebook. In this way bodies are

produced on Facebook through the stylisation of the body (for the taking photographs), social interaction and the manifestation of cultural norms.

Sister B's comment "you only ever want there to be photos of you looking cool" reveals that there are certain gender norms that impact and regulate the Facebook behaviour of young women. Performing the body in the right way is crucial. Facebook is an embodied space that both reproduces and supports existing gender norms that regulate the body appearance work of young people. This is made clear in Sister A's comment "You can pretty much experiment with whoever you want to be on Facebook as long as you don't act like a weirdo." Here, she highlights that there are particular rules regarding the way the body is performed and represented on Facebook and that 'looking cool' is important. In the following sections I break down the various gender norms my participants cite and recite in order to 'look cool' on Facebook.

Selfies

In the early stages of my fieldwork I encouraged the girls to use their cameras to be self-reflexive about their lives. When I viewed the photos they had chosen to take for my project, I was surprised at the number of photos they had taken of themselves, because I had expected them to take photos of places and things. These photos are what the girls call 'selfies'. The Oxford Dictionary (2013) defines a selfie as "a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website".

Shortly after I collected the cameras back from the girls I began to notice the same selfie photos appearing on their Facebook pages. As Larsen's (2008) study revealed, there is a new era in photographic practice, where digital photography has become interwoven with online computer based instant messaging technologies. He states:

"Digital photography converges with computer networks: personal computers, laptops, colour printers, editing software, email accounts, the internet, web blogs/homepages and so on. Computer networks delete, display, improve, circulate and print photographs. The internet is routinely integrated into the everyday lives of most people in the developed world...Digital photography is a complex technological network in the making rather than a single fixed technology" (p. 142).

I realised these photos had not been arbitrarily taken by the girls; the intention was to share them on a social network. To understand the role of these photos, I needed to explore them within the context of their intended social network. Thus, my fieldwork moved into the online world of Facebook. I found that as we talked about these photos, my discussions with the girls often circulated around Facebook and its place in their lives.

Jess: “So what is a selfie?”

Sister A: “A selfie is a photo like... Let me see our photos. Ooh, like these ones!”



Figure 1



Figure 2

Sister B: “Yeah, that’s a real pretty one (Figure 2). I like it cause you’re showing your nails.”

Sister C: “And me, too! This one is such a pretty one (Figure 3).”

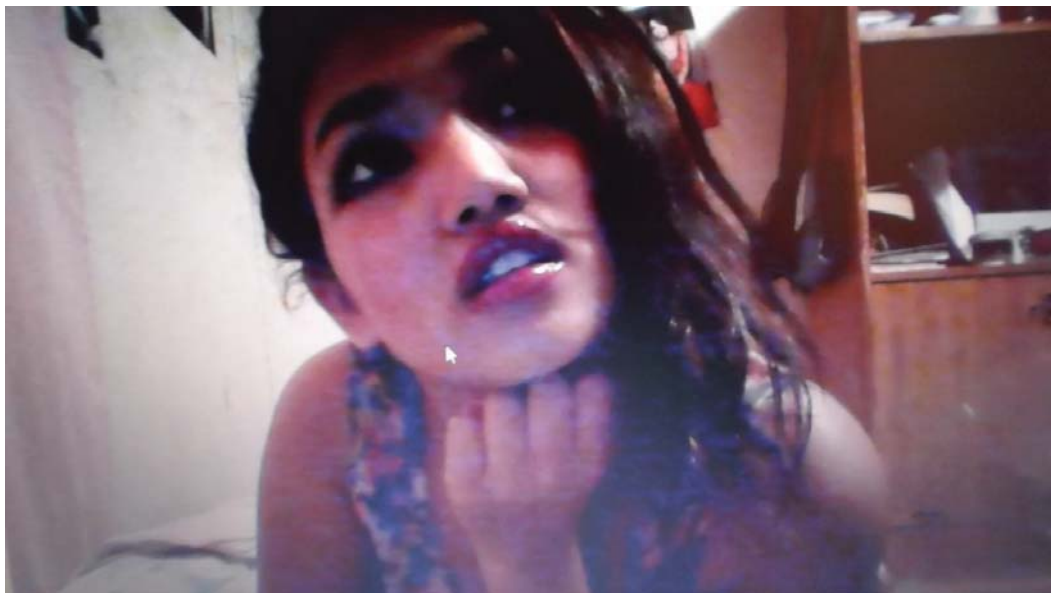


Figure 3

Sister A: “Ah well, with a selfie you are in full control. You can take the picture when you want and do whatever face you want. You try to get the best looking photo and then post it to Facebook so that your friends can see it.”

Jess: “Oh, so nobody would ever post a bad selfie then?”

All sisters: “No, no, no!”

Sister A: “What would be the point in that? Nobody wants to look bad on Facebook and the whole point in selfies is to try and get a good looking photo.”

In this discussion the sisters reveal that they take selfies photos to capture attractive photographs of themselves. Iqani (2013) also highlights how the selfie is an attempt to capture a socially and physically attractive image of the photographer. She states “the selfie is a very interesting type of snapshot. In it, individuals often represent themselves as at the peak of their own attractiveness.” Iqani goes onto inform us that selfies are a process of “crafting the self as an object in a very particular way” (p. 7). This is an embodied process. As the above discussions with the girls highlight, selfies have come to assume a particular meaning within their Facebook community: they are about shaping the body to appear physically attractive.

Looking closely at the selfies the girls had taken, I realised each that each picture followed a similar format: the participant was holding the camera and capturing a picture of herself in a way that highlights her ability to look physically attractive. Yet there was a great deal of variation in terms of the way each of the girls styled and used her body within each picture. From this perspective not all selfies are the same. As I looked closely at the different selfies the girls had taken and chosen to share on their Facebook pages, it became clear that they were drawing from a variety of gender norms as they posed in front of the camera lens. My interviews with the girls confirmed this:

Sister C: “The thing about taking selfies is you can kind of experiment with different versions of yourself. You can be tough looking, or you can be really sweet. Nobody is just one person all the time. So it’s a way of playing with different versions of yourself and seeing how you look doing different poses.”

Here, Sister C highlights how selfies can be individualised to represent different aspects of the photographer's personality. What was most striking about the girls' photos was the subtle variation in their facial expressions. For example, a slight raise of an eyebrow may change the facial expression from a smile to a mysterious and sexually alluring one.

Sister A: "It's always a different kind of face, depending on how you want to look and how you want others to see you. The most important thing about taking selfies is you don't need to, like, overact, or over smile or something because then it can look really fake."

Sister B: "Like, it's obvious you're pretending when it's over done."

Sister A: "Yeah!"

Jess: "So you're saying subtlety is really important when taking selfies?"

Sister A: "Yeah, I think so! Like if you look at some of our photos, like these ones, like the difference between looking tough in this one..."



Figure 4

“And looking (laughs) kind of hot and stuff like she does in this one, is just the little way you hold your face.”



Figure 5

Jess: “You guys know how bad I am at taking selfies, right?”

Sister B: “Hahaha! No, you’re not! You’re just new to it! You haven’t really practiced with your face much.”

Jess: “So if you were going to teach me how to take a tough selfie what would you tell me to do? Like, what are the essential subtle things you need to do in order to look tough?”

Sister B: “Ooh, that’s a good question... I think one of the things is that you need to do is stare straight at the camera, with serious eyes, like we are doing in these ones.”



Figure 6

Sister C: “Yeah and you would never smile. Like, in these ones, we are not smiling, but we look really confident, so you have to kind of hold your body confidently.”



Figure 7



Figure 8

Sister D: “But you don’t always have to stare straight at the camera. Like, look at this one of you. I would say you look tough in this one too and you’re not looking at the camera...”



Figure 9

Sister B: “Yeah, that’s true. I don’t know. It’s really hard to say how to look tough then...”

Sister A: “I guess you just have to know what being tough and confident looks like and sort of copy that, but not in a really obvious way, if that makes sense.”

In this conversation the girls struggle to define what the essential elements of a ‘tough’ selfie are. They conclude that there are no essential conditions as such, but rather, their knowledge of what “tough” means and what is not ‘tough’ stems from conceptions of female independence and self-confidence. This is a gender norm that has recently become available to them since their active distancing from the Bhutanese community.

They reveal that subtlety, by which they mean not obviously posed, is an important part of adhering to such norms. It is important to them these photos appear ‘natural’, yet, this is a choreographed process. Sister B’s comment to me “You haven’t really practiced with your face much” reveals that an important part of achieving subtlety within selfie photos is practice and repetition.

Sister B: “It’s always important to keep trying. The good thing about it is you can just delete the ones you don’t like. So you keep trying, basically, until you get the best ones.”

Jess: “Is that what you were doing here?”

Sister B: “Yeah, I was, I was trying to take a good duck face¹⁴ selfie for my profile picture. See I had to take heaps look.”

¹⁴ Duck Face is a popular facial expression to make when taking selfie photos, it involves pouting ones lips in the shape of a ducks bill



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12

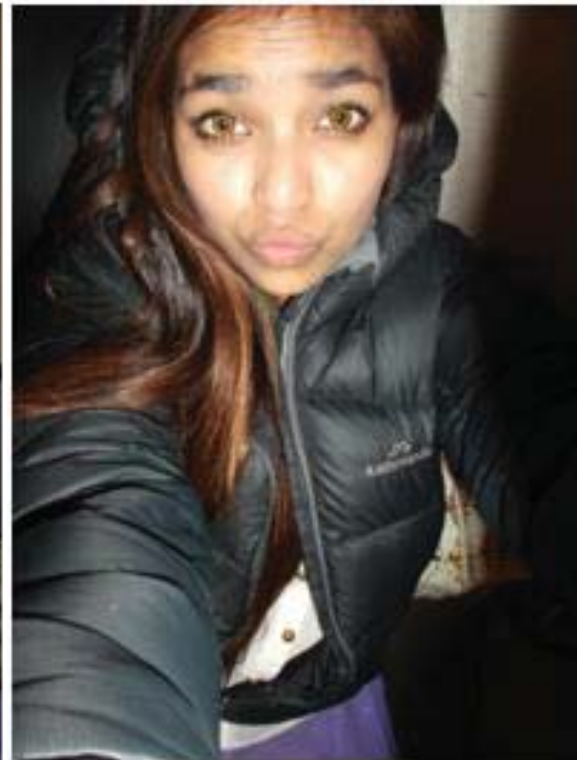


Figure 13

Sister B: “So I think the more selfies you take, the more you get better at it, and you learn the best way to use your face. So if you took more selfies, Jess, you would probably be better at doing other things, instead of just smiling at the camera.”

From these photos it is clear that repetition is a crucial part of learning to perform the body through selfies. The more selfie photos the sisters take, the more they refine their ability to stylistically perform codes of femininity. What this tells us is that this is a learnt practice which the girls do not consider I have achieved.

The more time I spent with the girls, the more I appeared in their photos. As they often wanted to take selfie photos with me, the differences between the way we used our bodies and our faces was intriguing. The sisters had mastered the art of being photogenic; they knew how to angle their faces to get attractive photos. As well as this, they were confident using their bodies to adopt different poses in front of the camera. On the contrary, I often felt clumsy standing next to them in front of the camera. I was unsure how to use my body to pose, and I often resorted to a typical 'say cheese' type smile. The sisters were quick to critique me on this as the following conversation reveals:

Sister B: "I think you would be really good at taking selfies, Jess, if you just practiced it a bit more. Like, sometimes it's ok to do smile, if that's the look you're going for or something. But all of your photos are smiles. It's good to try something else sometimes. That's how you learn what makes you look good and what doesn't".

Sister C: "Yeah like the ones we were taking of you on the swing. Remember...where are they? Here! These ones! Like this photo could have been really sexy if you weren't smiling."



Figure 14

Sister B: “Like, see the differences here, in these ones between us and you?”



Figure 15



Figure 16

Sister B: “You’re smiling, and we’re not. See if you practiced doing selfies you would look so pretty and you would be able to take all different kinds of photos.”

In this conversation the girls reveal that repetition is an important part of the selfie process. The girls have repeated various poses in front to the camera so much they confidently use their bodies to perform different codes of femininity. For instance, figure 6 shows the girls using their bodies and faces to perform what they call a ‘tough’ and ‘confident’ woman. In an earlier conversation with the girls, they had highlighted why the variety of selfie photos they posted on Facebook were so important to them.

“You have to have different selfies on there because you’re not just one type of person. Like I’m a strong person. I don’t like people gossiping about me, and so I show that through my photos. But that’s not the only thing that makes me the person I am. I also like to have fun with my friends and my sisters and stuff. So, like, when you put selfie photos on Facebook they show all different sides of me.”

Jess: *“Could you highlight some different photos for me?”*

“Sure! Like these ones.”



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19

“They all show different versions of who I am.”

In conjunction with the example the girls have provided, Iqani (2013) highlights that selfies are both “‘predictable in content and conservative in style’ but also are ‘capable of inducing a photographic experience that can be intensely individual’” (p. 7). As we can see from the above photos selfies tend to follow the same pattern as the photographer is always the subject of the photo. At the same time, selfies have a way of being distinctly individualised, particularly as they become interwoven within a person’s Facebook profile.

The more time I spent with the girls, the more I became aware of how integrated the camera was in their everyday lives. Taking selfies was a regular activity; it was often described as ‘something

to do when I'm bored' or 'a way to kill time'. Their regular use of cameras has been enabled through the digitalisation of photographic processes. Cameras are built into their mobile phones, which are portable and go everywhere with them. Thus, for the girls the taking of a photograph is a free, instant and endless activity. My discussions with the girls about the process they go through to take photos revealed the repetitive and routine nature of selfies.

Sister B: "You keep taking selfies until you have a lot that you look really good in, and then you choose from that which ones to post onto Facebook."

Sister C: "If I take a bad selfie photo, like if I look fat or if my face looks bad, I delete it straight away. I usually keep taking them until I get some that I look pretty in. You learn to use your body in a different way. Like now I know that if I stand like this (stands up) I look skinnier. It's like acting."

Jess: "So who are selfies for? Are they for you or are they for other people to see?"

Sister C: "Oh, they're for other people to see! To show their beautiness to other people on Facebook! Yeah they want people to think they're pretty."

Sister B: "I think it's also because people like to see how they look when they do many different actions and stuff."

Jess: "Oh, so it's a way for people to test how they look doing different faces you mean?"

Sister B: "Yeah, you know like people do selfies to see how they look doing different actions. Like me making duck face and stuff. I wouldn't know if I looked good doing duck face if I didn't try it out with lots of selfies first."

Consequently, the girls come to embody the particular cultural norms available to them, through routine and repetition. In this way Sister C's comment "If I take a bad selfie photo, like if I look fat or if my face looks bad, I delete it straight away. I usually keep taking them until I get some that I look pretty in" reveals how she repeats the process of taking selfies until she complies with the cultural norms that constitute physical attractiveness.

The girls take selfie photos to look attractive. They share these photos on their Facebook networks. In doing so they are complying with specific gender norms that are mediated by both

Western and Bollywood conceptions of femininity. They are performing their gender in the 'right way' on Facebook. This is important to them, as it is part of maintaining a socially desirable identity. The girls have revealed, the more one repeats the selfie process, the more skilled one becomes at citing certain norms. As Sister C illustrates, selfies are about appearing physically attractive in different contexts. In this way their poses for a 'tough' and 'confident' young woman, will be different from their 'carefree' poses. Yet all of these poses require repetition. In this sense, selfie photos are a choreographed process that is achieved through ongoing repetition, in which the photographer learns how to contrive facial expressions that are marked by subtlety, instead of being overly posed. As these photos are woven into an individual's Facebook community, further meaning is added, as the illusion of congealed and naturalised identity is created.

Friendship Photos

Another type of personal photo shared on Facebook by the girls, is what I will call friendship photos. Friendship photos typically feature the sisters positioned in large groups of friends who all appear to be having a good time and enjoying each other's company¹⁵.

The sisters also take friendship photos together. These photos are different, as the girls pose together in a carefree style in a way that suggests they are enjoying each other's company. This is because the girls share a genuine friendship with each other- not only are they sisters, but they enjoying 'hanging out' with each other in the same way that friends do. These photos are taken with the intention of posting the 'best ones' on Facebook. This section explores what makes a friendship photo and their purpose.

As these photos are posted online, the girls 'show' (Zhao, et al, 2008, p. 1816) their various friendships to their Facebook community. This contributes to a Facebook identity that suggests they are 'popular among friends' Nairn, Higgins and Sligo (2012) shared similar observations regarding the importance of 'being popular among friends' (Zhao, et al, 2008 p. 1827) in shaping identity among youth. Nairn, Higgins & Sligo's (2012) exploration of the identity work of young New Zealanders also illustrates the importance of friends, they state:

¹⁵ While many photos taken for this project captured the sisters with many of their friends, only photos featuring the sisters are published in this thesis

“Recreation of diverse forms provided important opportunities and resources for participants to recreate themselves and connect with others. They did this through diverse means, although everyone rated ‘hanging out’ with friends as one of their main forms of recreation, reminding us of the relational nature of identity” (p. 108).

This section shows how identity on Facebook is an intersubjective project. Here are some examples of friendship photos the girls have taken:



Figure 20



Figure 21



Figure 22



Figure 23

Whenever the girls spent time with their friends, a camera was always on hand. Posing for the camera together was a regular part of spending time together. Often, the reason to get together was to take photos of each other ‘hanging out’ for Facebook. I was allocated the role of photographer among the young women and was responsible for taking photographs of them with their friends as they all posed together. In a process similar to taking selfies, the best of these photos would be shared on Facebook. Each person featured in the photo would then be tagged (identified by name) in the photo on Facebook. Thus the photo would be interwoven within a complicated web of social networks, in which other Facebook users could add meaning to the image by ‘liking’ or posting comments underneath it. Like selfie photos, friendship photos also serve as public identity performatives. They show the friendships of those featured within the photo.

The following conversation illustrates how performing identity on Facebook is not a solo project but requires constant interaction with friends. Sister A reveals:

“Having a lot of friends in real life and online is good for your Facebook profile. Because if you have a lot of friends then you can take group photos and everyone on Facebook will think, ‘Wow! She’s ‘popular’ and everyone will ‘like’ your pictures on Facebook. Then the more people that ‘like’ your Facebook pictures, the more popular you will be on Facebook as well!”

Jess: “So to be popular on Facebook, you have to be popular in real life as well?”

Sister A: “Kind of. It’s your real like friends that help make you popular on Facebook because they post stuff on your account and “like” your posts. And also people like to look at photos of other people they know all hanging out with friends and stuff because that’s a cool thing to do. That’s why we take lots of photos with our friends.”

My discussion with Sister A highlights the role of posting friendship photos on Facebook. Her statement “it’s your real like friends that help make you popular on Facebook because they post stuff on your account and ‘like’ your posts” reveals the intersubjective nature of Facebook identity performatives. Meaning is given to one’s identity performatives in the form of likes,

comments and postings. In this way one's Facebook identity is both self-edited and publically written into being by one's Facebook community.

Sister A's comments also highlight a series of norms that constitute her identity performance on Facebook. In order for her to 'be popular on Facebook' she must comply with certain identity norms which condition and limit what 'being popular' is about. As Sister A reveals, a normative condition required to perform the role of 'being popular among friends' (Zhao et al, 2008 p. 1827) is to have a large social network. One way she complies with this norm and, thus, performs the role of 'being popular among friends' is by repeatedly posting friendship photos on to her Facebook account, displaying this social network and generating further responses from her Facebook community.

During my fieldwork the girls often asked me to take photos of them and other young women who were their friends. What interested me about this process was that taking photos together seemed to be the main activity for the day. This meant that the day was often spent arranging choreography, yet the photos would not represent this. Instead the photos give the illusion of spontaneity, as if the girls were engaged in another activity and by chance the photographer had captured a photo of them having fun. Consequently, taking a photo that looks spontaneous is a carefully choreographed process that is perfected through repetition. In later conversations the girls expanded on this:

Sister A: "To look as though you're popular on Facebook you need to look as like you do a lot of hanging out and stuff with your friends. So when we take photos we make it look like we are all laughing at some really funny joke, or that were all having a really fun day."

Jess: "So looking like you're having fun is important when taking photos with your friends?"

Sister A: "Well, yeah! That's obvious. You don't want to look like you're not enjoying hanging out with friends, do you?"

Jess: "No, but in these photos, all of you guys look so carefree and like you're all having a great time?"



Figure 24



Figure 25



Figure 26



Figure 27

Sister A: “Yeah, I see what you mean”

Jess: “So why do you think posing in this ‘carefree, hanging out with friend’s way’ is so crucial to looking popular?”

Sister A: “Hmmm. That’s a good question...”

Sister B: “I think, Jessica, that it comes from like magazines and TV ads and things. You know, when you see like groups of young girls on TV and in magazine ads their all

laughing together and hanging out, and maybe that's were these poses and things come from. Because, as girls we watch that and think 'Oh! That's what you're supposed to be like with your friends.'"

Jess: "So do you think it is just Bhutanese girls who copy these images?"

Sister C: "No, no. No way! There are so many white girls who do it. All of our Christian friends do the fake laughing poses when they're all taking selfies together and stuff."

Sister B: "Yeah, that's true. But also I think that maybe Bhutanese girls also like to copy like Bollywood kind of images about young girls as friends together. You know, like when they take photos for Facebook. Some of the ones I've seen. It's like so obvious they are copying Bollywood stuff. Like let me show you... Like these ones here..."



Figure 28



Figure 29

Jess: “So maybe, do you think Bhutanese girls can practice both Bollywood images of being a girl, and Western advertising commercial images, for their friendship photos?”

Sister C: “Yeah, I guess we can. I mean we easily couldn’t do Bollywood stuff in photos with our Christian friends because they wouldn’t probably get it.”

The girls reveal the poses they occupy when taking photos with friends stem from both Western and Bollywood style norms about girlhood and female friendship. A key component of both norms of female friendship/girlhood is about being carefree and having fun together. Consequently, these norms emerge in the ways the girls pose with their friends. Furthermore, Sister C’s comment about ‘Bollywood style’ being of particular influence on Bhutanese girls is in keeping with Butler’s analysis of the performative subject. Butler states we can only choose to perform the various norms that are available to us and this depends on socio-cultural position. Thus, while Bollywood norms may be available for the girls to perform, they are not so easily available to their Christian friends of different ethnicity.

Jess: “Is it always important to look like you’re having fun with your friends when you guys take photos together?”

Sister D: “Ummm, I think it’s the main way we do actions and poses in photos.”

Jess: “But if you look at some of these photos.... It doesn’t seem like you’re trying to be fun and carefree in these ones?”



Figure 30



Figure 31



Figure 32

Sister D: “Yeah, that’s true. I think the other type of photo we take with our friends is really based on looks. Like, I mean, girls want to look pretty, and so we do like model type photos with our friends and stuff to look like that.”

Jess: “So in these photos, you are copying a model type way of posing?”

Sister D: “Yeah pretty much, like we buy magazines and we really like celebrities and things so, of course, that influences us.”

The above conversation provides insight into the norms available to them. As they remain on the outside of the Bhutanese community, they are less constrained by the codes of Bhutanese femininity and new ways of being a young woman are available to them. Yet they are not completely removed from ‘being Bhutanese’, as the conventional norms within Hindu culture, such as Bollywood, food, fashion, songs and dancing are still available to them and they continue to take them up. As a result, the girls inhabit an interesting space of liminality, where they have access to both Bollywood and Western codes of femininity. In this sense being on the periphery of being Nepalese and on the periphery of being Kiwi allows them to experiment with both sets of norms.

Identity Performing Images

In addition to posting selfies and friendship photos on Facebook, the girls also regularly post images they do not feature in. These images include pictures of celebrities and musicians, quotations about life and friendship, and images that highlight their commitment to Christianity. They cite particular versions of pop culture, the norms that these images represent have acquired particular meanings for the girls both on and off Facebook. As Nairn et al (2012) states:

“Appearance acts as a form of recreation in terms of the images young people choose to look at, and how they dress to be looked at... Embodied identities were performed and implied in each case, revealing public narratives about racialised identities, young women’s sexuality and what counts as appropriate forms of body appearance in different contexts” (p. 94).

This section traces particular images of pop culture the girls post on their Facebook accounts. As the girls both copy and share these images on Facebook, these images become norms that offer ‘physically attractive’ and ‘Westernised’ ways of being a young person in New Zealand. Below are some examples of the kinds of images the girls regularly post on Facebook:

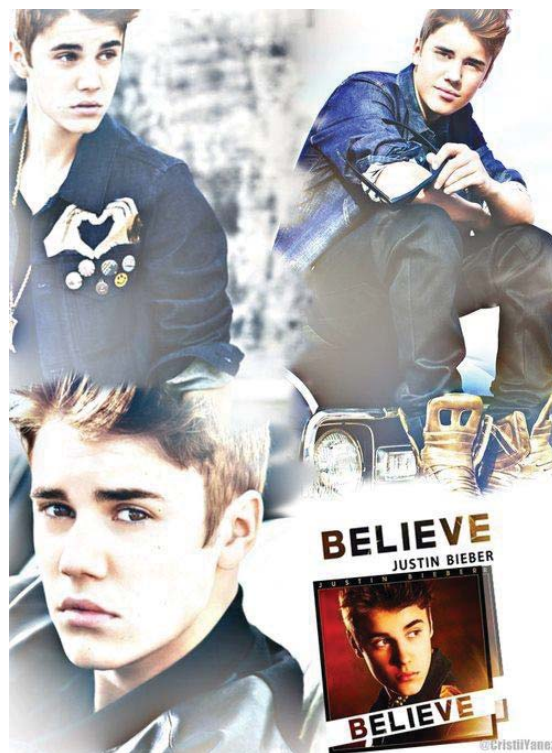


Figure 33



Figure 34

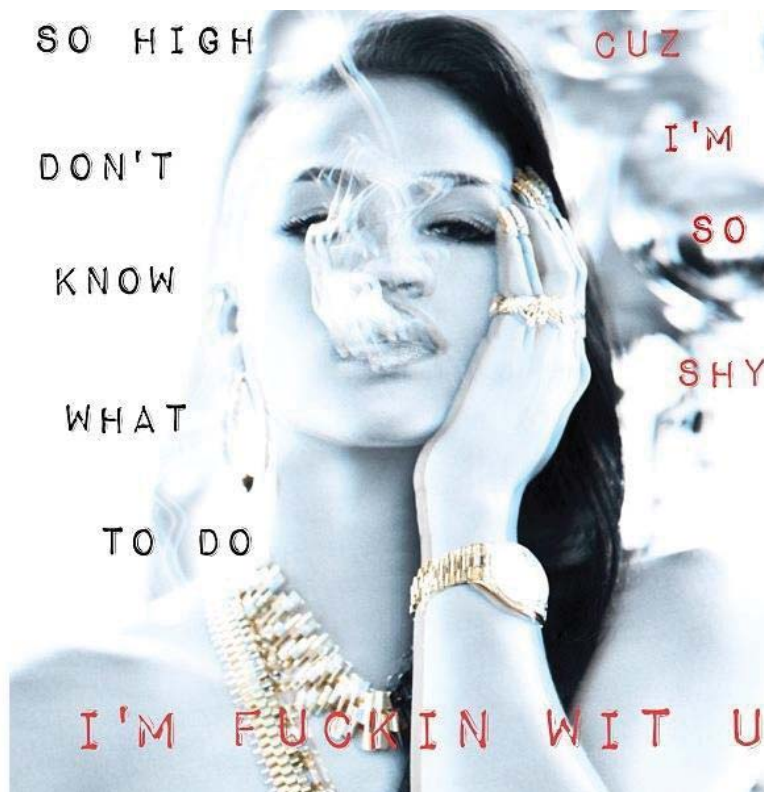


Figure 35

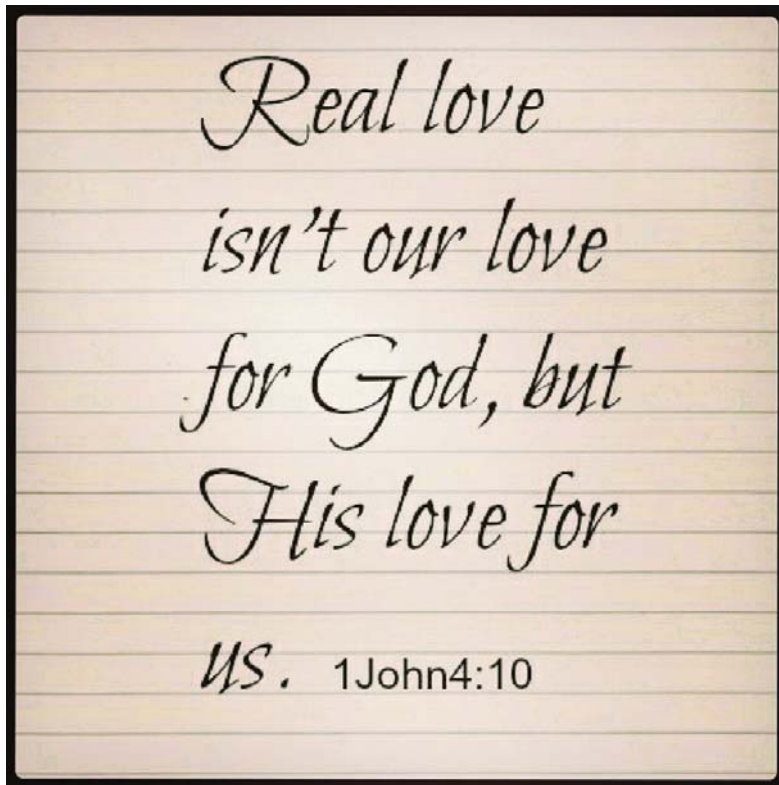


Figure 36

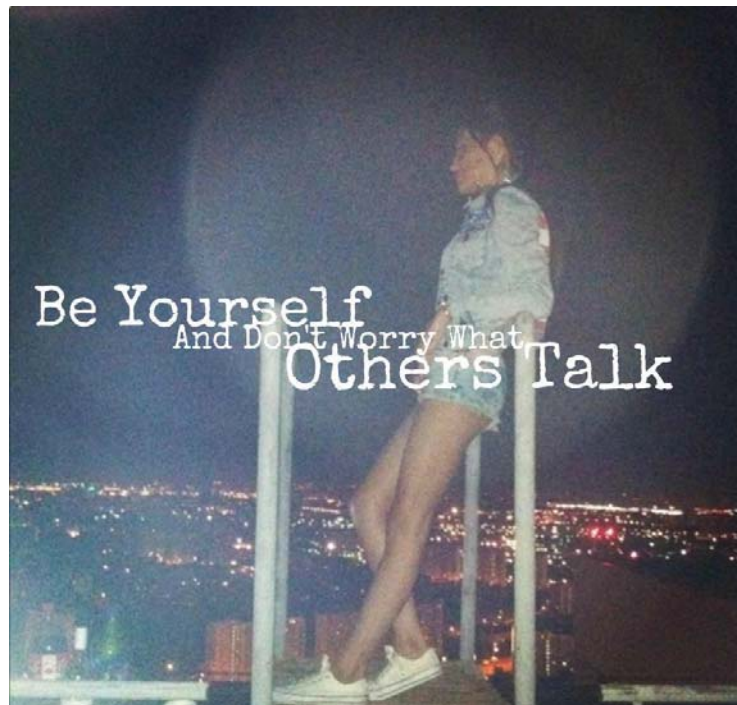


Figure 37

Although such images do not feature ‘the self’ in the same direct manner that selfies and friendship photos do, they should be understood as implicit identity performatives. As they accumulate responses from their Facebook community, they become an integral part of the girls’ identity performance. The fourth image demonstrates the sister’s devotion to Christianity. To share this particular quotation within Facebook network is to make a public identity statement. Just as Iqani (2013) asserts that selfies are a way of publically stating “I am here” (p. 7), the above images are a way of publically stating “this is what I believe” or “this is what I like”. These images contribute to identity performance on Facebook, as the sisters state:

Sister A: “I post pictures of celebrities I like, or of Christian stuff because I want my Facebook friends to know who I am. I love Justin Bieber and I’m a Christian girl. That’s who I am. And that’s why I love this picture.”

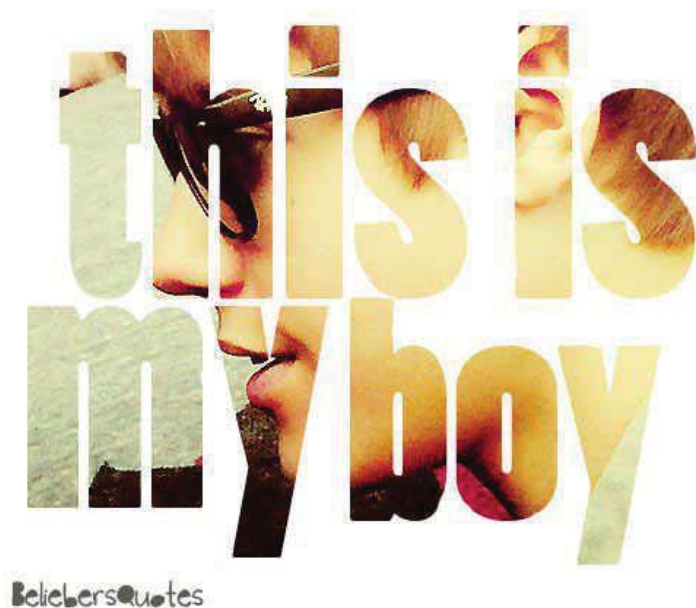


Figure 38

Sister D: “Posting pictures of musicians is cool because people on Facebook can see the music you like and understand you more as a person. That why I post stuff like this: because I like Chris Brown, because I’m like a tomboy. So if I post images of that people can see that I’m like that myself.”



Figure 39

Here the sisters are describing how posting images of celebrities and pop culture trends are a way of citing particular cultural norms. Nairn et al (2012) suggests that New Zealand youth regularly copy the images produced within pop culture. They state “expressions of popular culture also offered recreational moments: Music fashion, bodywork, film, TV, cars, consumption of food and alcohol all acted as resources for performing identities and connecting with others. Popular culture is particularly interesting at the child-adult border, where expressions of identity are so fluid” (pp. 89-90)

These are public images that circulate within Facebook communities. An individual can choose to share them and, in doing so they publically attaching the image to their Facebook profile. Although these particular images can appear to be trite and meaningless, they should not be interpreted as such. The girls choose these specific images from a range of available and attach them to their profiles. As I looked closely at this practice I began to notice trends in the types of images the girls choose to post. One such trend was skin colour. It appeared the girls were more attracted to celebrities and musicians with darker skin colour.

Jess: *“Ooh! It’s your favourite boy. (Laughs).”*



Figure 40

“Oh (laughs)! Yeah, I like Chris Brown.”

Jess: *“Yeah, I’ve seen you post a lot about him on Facebook.”*

“Oh! Because I have seen many boys who are singers, but I like that he is the most popular one.”

Jess: *“Yeah? What do you like about him?”*

“Ummmm... Dress!”

Jess: *“You like the way he dresses?”*

“Yeah yeah! And his skin colour. Like it’s just like our skin colour.”

Jess: *“Yeah I can see that.”*

“Yeah, I especially love his dress sense and what he wears. Because um in Nepal I used to like to dress like a boy”

Sister X likes Chris Brown¹⁶ because she identifies with both his skin colour and the way he dresses. In later conversations she expanded more on this.

“I like him because he looks kind of Nepali, you know? His skin colour is the same skin colour as mine. And also, I have always like dressing kind of gangster style, like, I’m not really a that girly. Well I am, but not as much as my sisters. So that’s why I like him, because I like his clothes and stuff. That’s how I’m also a bit different from my sisters. Because I’m more of a tomboy than them.”

She reveals that she chooses to identify with the various norms that Chris Brown represents such ‘gangster style’. She also highlights that skin colour is important in her ability to identify with him. My discussions with the sisters are similar to the data collected by Nairn et al (2012) in their study of New Zealand adolescents. They state “Wall (2000, p.76) found that ‘music preferences were colour coded’, generally connecting these young people and separating them from their Pakeha peers. Māori and Pasifika young people’s preferences for black America music influence ‘peer groupings, clothing styles, type of slang, nature of recreational pursuits and other behaviour” (p. 97).

While only one of the sisters identifies with Chris Brown, a set of celebrities all four sisters identified strongly with were the Kardashian sisters. In our conversation the girls elaborated on this, emphasising skin colour, a woman centred family, fashion style, and self-confidence.

Sister C: “We like the Kardashian sisters. They are soo cool!”

Jess: “What do you guys like about them?”

Sister B: “I like that they are a large family of mostly girls, because that is like our family.”

¹⁶ Singer Chris Brown was arrested in 2009 for assaulting his girlfriend. Although the girls are aware of this it does not deter them from liking Chris Brown, as they often ignore the adverse events associated with the particular celebrities they are fans of.

Jess: “Do you guys like to watch their shows?”

Sister A: “Yeah we do! They’re so funny, because all the sisters all scream and shout at each other all the time, but they make you see that they’re just human and kind of a normal family too.”

Jess: “So you kind of like them because they’re not all perfect?”

Sister B: “Yeah! That’s it! It’s like in our family we all shout at each other, and there girls are basically in charge in our family, and when you watch the Kardashians you see that that’s what they’re like too. And it’s like it cool to see that we’re kind of like them.”

Sister A: “Also I like their sense of style. Like they dress a lot like us in really bright clothes and they like to wear lots of bling and that’s what we like too! Like look at these photos of them! They’re so pretty and they have the best style! ”



Figure 41

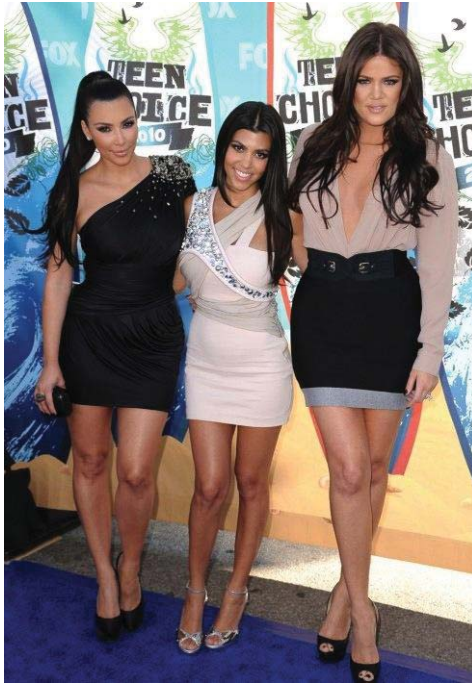


Figure 42

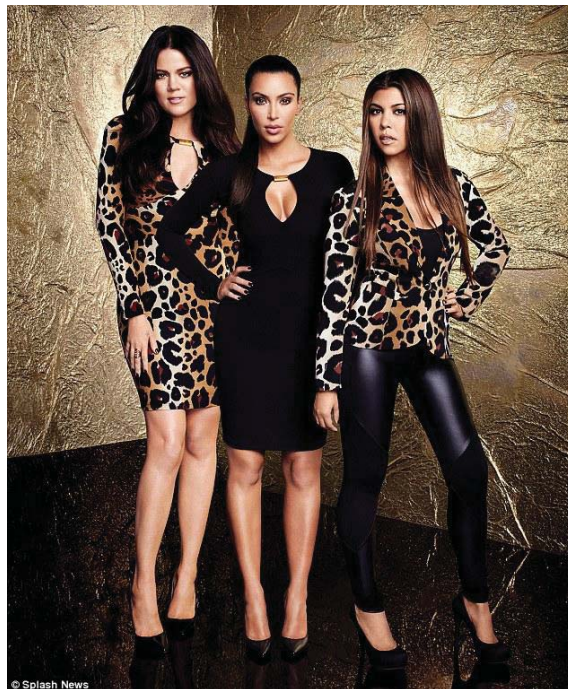


Figure 43

Jess: "So you guys like the way they dress?"

Sister D: "Yeah! Because they wear like bright coloured blazers and skinny jeans and that's the kind of stuff we like. They kind of mix like gangster style with business women, with like girly bling (laughs)! It's a really really good style! We love it!"

Sister A: "Plus they are all strong women. Like they speak their minds about things and I like that because that's like me and that's how we all are."

Jess: "Do you think it would make a difference to you if the Kardashians were white girls with blonde hair?"

Sister B: (Laughs)! I know this sounds bad, but it probably would make a difference to me. It's not that would hate them or anything. I just wouldn't be as much of a fan of them."

Jess: "Why is it that skin colour matters?"

Sister "A: I don't think it's just a skin colour thing. I don't think I would as much of a fan if they were perfectly skinny girls as well. And they also have long dark hair and that's like us too. "

Sister C: "Yeah! I like that they have a curvy shape because we do too. Well that's how most women look actually. They kind of show that you can be a strong and normal looking woman, you know?"

Sister D: "Yeah, like there is soo many girls in magazines who don't look like us, you know? Most of the models and singers, they're white girls and they're really skinny. And yeah, we like their music but they don't look like us. We could never copy that look or be like them, but we can with the Kardashians"

Here the girls explain that the reason why they are all fans of the Kardashian sisters is because they can identify with them. Firstly, the Kardashian sisters are not white and are not overly thin. Secondly, they are large family with a majority of women and the women dominate. Again, this

is similar to the girls. Sister A also revealed that she likes the Kardashians because “they speak their minds”, revealing the Kardashian sisters’ confident and outspoken nature is something else the girls identify with.

Aspects of popular culture such as fashion trends and celebrities can acquire new radicalised meanings in their recitations. In my conversation with the sisters about the Kardashians, Sister D’s comment “*we could never copy that look or be like them*” was perhaps the most revealing. It exposes that many Western norms of beauty and girlhood are unavailable to the girls. In particular, they feel that many of the women within Hollywood culture do not look like them. Consequently, the Kardashians represent a norm available to the girls, a citationally possible way to be beautiful and feminine without being white. In this sense, posting images on Facebook of the Kardashian sisters is one way that the girls cite this gender norm. They also dress and pose like the Kardashian sisters for photos, which are then uploaded onto their Facebook pages:

Jess: “So in the photos you guys take, do you think you are trying to be like the Kardashians when you take photos of each other? Like, if we look at these photos, they’re quite similar”



Figure 44



Figure 45

“Kind of. Like, I don’t always go around saying I want to look and be like Kim Kardashian. So when I took this photo I wasn’t thinking, ‘I’m trying to copy Kim’. It’s just those are the types of celebrities I like, so I just look at the pictures a lot, and eventually you just end up like copying their poses and things. It’s quite weird because I’ve never thought about it like that before.”

Jess: “So is it always a subconscious process or do you sometimes deliberately intend to copy them?”

“It’s not always subconscious like in this photo...”



Figure 46

“I deliberately tried to do my makeup and hair like Kim in that picture”

Here the girls reveal how performing the version of femininity that images of the Kardashian sisters represent is both an intentional and an unintentional practice. This is because the Kardashian sisters embody a series of norms that the girls are attempting to perform: a non-white woman who is ‘attractive’ ‘modern’ and ‘confident’. In their attempts to perform these norms they sometimes copy the Kardashian sisters directly, yet other times they perform general citations of these norms. In the following section I will trace the social implications of adhering to these gender norms and the meanings these images have within the girls’ individual Facebook communities.

Bhutanese Youth: A Facebook Community

For Bhutanese refugee youth Facebook offers an important space of identity experimentation. To explore this, I come back to Camino’s (1994) statement about liminality to show how Facebook offers a culturally neutral space free from adult supervision. Here, the girls expose how active Bhutanese youth are on Facebook. They describe how much of their identity work on Facebook is a form of resistance against Hindu patriarchy, which occurs on Facebook through the sharing photos and images like we have seen so far.

In our group discussions about Facebook, the sisters revealed a vivid sense of self-awareness and cultural knowledge regarding the particular audiences they were performing for.

Sister D: “You always have an idea about which of your friends is looking at your profile. So you post things with your Facebook friends in mind. ”

Jess: “So what are the kinds of things you girls post with your friends in mind?”

Sister B: “Like at my school, it’s cool to look really popular with lots of friends and stuff, so that’s why so many young people take selfies with friends. Because, basically you want to look as cool as possible on Facebook because you can kind of create this image yourself. ”

Sister X: “Also, sometimes you post photos up and they’re directed at certain people. Like for me this photo here... Let me find it... This one! Is for all the girls who were gossiping about me for liking Justin Bieber.”



Figure 47

Our conversation below highlights how this photo was taken as a form of resistance:

Jess: “This is quite a strong image, don’t you think?”

“Yeah it is, it’s meant to be strong.”

Jess: “Why’s that?”

“I guess a lot of Bhutanese people are really gossipy, especially about our family. They don’t like that we are Christian and they don’t like the clothes me and my sisters wear. They think we are lower than them.”

Jess: “When you say we who do you mean? Because in previous conversations you have told me how a lot of Bhutanese girls want to dress like you girls.”

“It’s not really the young people, it’s more the older generations, they think women are like the honour of the family and so you should be all traditional and stuff.”

Jess: “You mentioned before that when you took this picture, it was basically to say ‘stuff you’ to people who were gossiping about you for liking Justin Bieber, can you explain that to me?”

“Umm ok sure! Umm, well in Nepal a girl should never be like obvious that she likes a guy. A girl can never never ever ask a guy out or anything! It might sound weird to you because it’s really different to New Zealand. It’s not like that at all here. So I think there are some Nepali people that think it’s really bad that I’m so obvious about the fact that I love Justin Bieber.”

Jess: “Is that mainly the older people?”

“It’s both the older people and some young people. Even though the younger Nepali teenagers want to be modern and all American-like on Facebook, a lot of them still have really traditional Hindu views. That’s why I wear my cross a lot in the photos. It shows that I’m a Christian girl and I don’t care what they think.”

When I first accepted the girls friend requests on Facebook, I was surprised at how much interaction took place between the sisters and other Bhutanese youth. Until this point my fieldwork consisted of spending time with the girls in their home and in public spaces such as the mall, the local park or cinema. As the girls live in a neighbourhood which is occupied by many other Bhutanese families, I assumed their interaction with other Bhutanese youth largely consisted of home visits from neighbours. In our group discussions I asked the girls about the Bhutanese community they are a part of on Facebook.

Sister A: “Young teenagers in our community like Facebook because they can get away. It’s like an escape from many cultural pressures.”

Sister B: “Yeah, it’s like they don’t have to follow the cultural or Hindu rules on Facebook, so that’s why so many young Bhutanese people are always using it.”

Jess: “Why do you think Facebook is such a freeing space for them?”

Sister C: “I think a lot of the time it’s because there aren’t that many Bhutanese adults on Facebook, so people don’t have to be worried about what they will say or think if they act in certain ways that Bhutanese older people wouldn’t like. So it’s the only space we can all get together away from adults.”

As our discussions indicate, Facebook offers a variety of benefits to Bhutanese youth. As Sister B points out, Facebook is a space largely free from adult observation. Indeed, Bhutanese youth, particularly young women, are kept under close parental supervision. For Bhutanese youth who are not granted the same independence as the sisters, Facebook provides a space in which they can socialise with each other without leaving the home. Facebook is the primary way the girls maintain their friendships with other families who have been resettled in other countries or are still living in Nepal. Furthermore, as I have previously highlighted, Facebook is a social space in which participants are granted more control over their identity performatives. Consequently, this provides Bhutanese youth with a space to play and experiment and perform idealised or fantasised versions of themselves to a peer audience that is free from adult observation.

Sister C: “I think there is a lot of pressure on young girls. It’s like, it’s really stressful deciding who you want to be because you don’t want to disappoint your culture, but it’s like you also want to make friends at school and be like a normal teenager in New Zealand. We feel the pressure, too. But we’re lucky in that sense, because we don’t have too much difficulty; our mum just lets us be who we want. We don’t have to follow our culture if we don’t want to.”

Sister B: “Yeah, we are lucky and I think that for soo many Bhutanese youth Facebook is where they can kind of be a normal teenager.”

Here the girls highlight their own struggles and the struggles of other Bhutanese youth resettling in New Zealand and learning how to be a young person. Camino's research (1994) explores the identity issues refugee youth are confronted with; she focused particularly on role of a youth drop in centre. This youth drop in centre was a culturally neutral space, free from parental supervision, where refugee youth were able to experiment with identity. She states:

“[The drop in centre] made possible a flexible discourse on ethnicity, which enabled youths to try out identities without having to completely divest themselves of elements of older ones. It is this ‘trying out’ of identities which perhaps constitutes a crucial component in the adaptation of refugees to new homelands” (p. 51).

Links can be drawn between Camino's (1994) observation of the youth drop in centre and the girls' discussions about the importance of Facebook for Bhutanese youth. Similar to the youth drop in centre, Facebook is also a space mediated by youth free from adult observation where participants are able to ‘drop in’ whenever they choose. This process of ‘trying out’ different identities also shares similarities to the ways in which identity is self-controlled on Facebook and often reflects an idealised or fantasised version of the self. As Camino (1994) highlights, neutral spaces such as Facebook or the drop in centre are particularly important for refugee youth experiencing a world of liminality as they offer a space of identity exploration and experimentation.

By accepting the girls' ‘friend’ requests I was included in certain parts of the Bhutanese adolescent community on Facebook. I was able to view my participant's interactions with their Facebook friends, and see the comments and images their friends posted on their profiles. I was surprised to see how similar the photos of other young Bhutanese girls were to the photos the girls had taken for my research. Selfie photographs appeared to be a common practice and the images were Westernised. The following is an entry from my field diary.

“As I logged in to my Facebook account I noticed a flood of photos on my news feed. They were the same photos the girls had taken for my research. I began clicking on them and noted that they had received several likes from other Bhutanese youth. As I clicked on the photos, other photos began to appear. They were the same selfie-style photographs featuring the girls and other young Bhutanese girls. All of these photos appear to have

been purposely taken for Facebook, the girls appear to be posing, they are wearing Western clothing, lots of makeup, and they are often not smiling, but making what they call 'duck face' instead. Each girl featured in the picture is tagged in the photo and some of the photos have received up to 350 likes, and have 50 comments underneath. It seems the photos are shared within a specific network/audience and their meaning is publically written by their given Facebook communities."

In our group discussions the girls were able to shed some light on my observations:

Sister B: "The more likes you get on Facebook, it's like the more popular you are."

Jess: "How do you go about getting lots of likes? "

Sister D: "I think a lot of people do it by acting all American on Facebook, like by showing that they like American music and by wearing Western clothes and things because then people think you're really fashionable and pretty. That's why we post pictures like this."

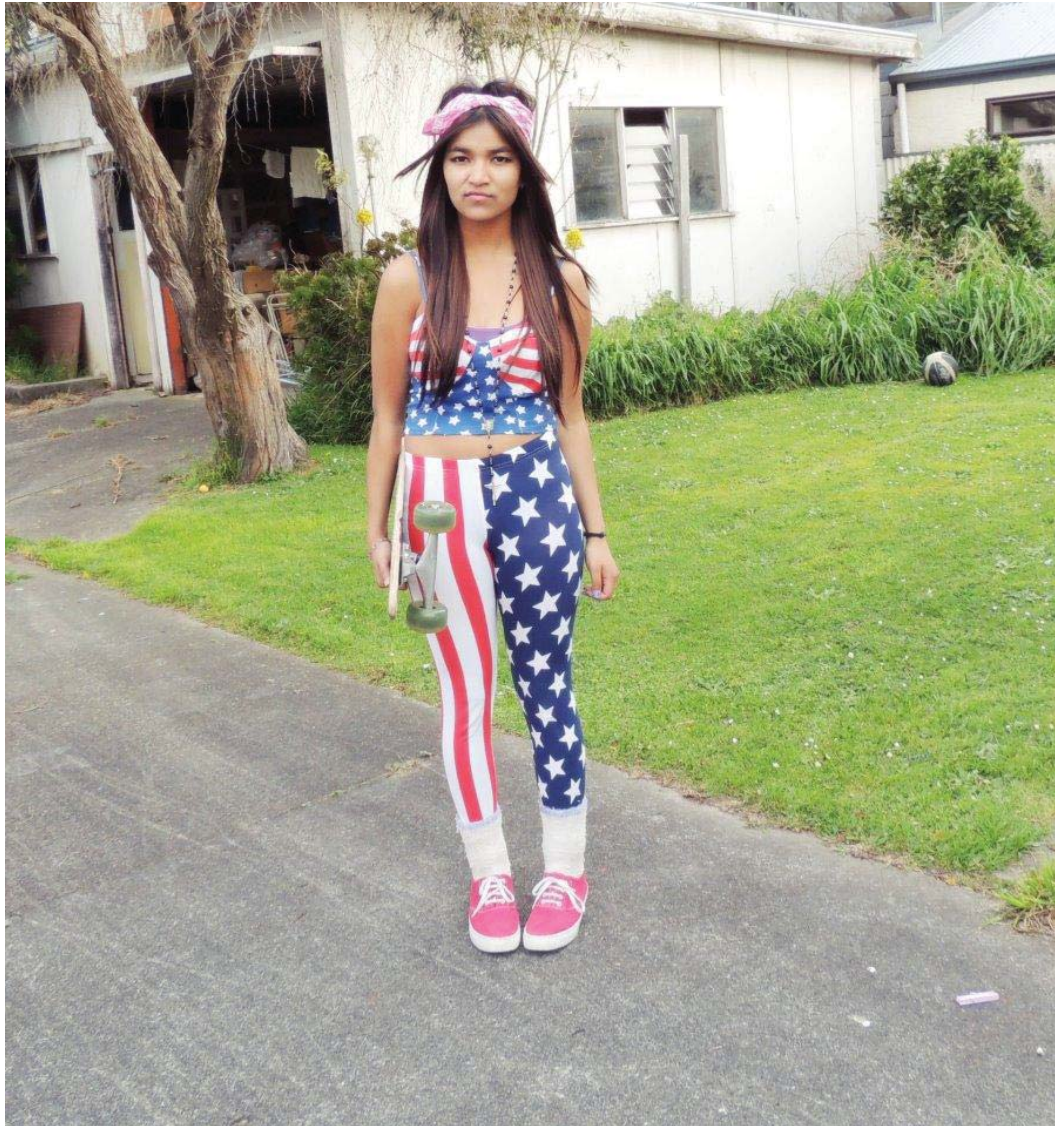


Figure 48

Jess: “So being American on Facebook gets you a lot of likes?”

Sister A: “Kind of. I think it’s more like being modern on Facebook gets you a lot of likes. It’s like everybody wants to be fashionable and up to date with the latest fashions and things and, if you are, people will like your comments and they might think that you’re rich and pretty and things”

Sister C: “Yeah it is about being modern I think. That’s why lots of people only ever post good looking photos on Facebook because they want to look like supermodels or celebrities to be a part of modern ... umm what’s the word...like modern culture or something¹⁷.”

These discussions are particularly interesting because they reveal the discourses and gender norms that shape the bodies of Bhutanese refugee girls living in New Zealand. In particular, Sister D’s comment “I think a lot of people do it by acting all American on Facebook” reveals that ‘being American’ on Facebook is about complying with dominant discourses that inscribe and given meaning to young women’s bodies. Sister A’s statement “I think it’s more like being modern on Facebook gets you a lot of likes” also reveals that being Western on Facebook is about appearing ‘modern’. She goes on to describe how appearing modern is associated with discourses of wealth and success. Lastly, Sister C’s comment highlights that by choreographing one’s body to be ‘good looking’ one is able to conform to the discourses that construct what it means to be ‘physically attractive’. In doing so she is able to present a more socially desirable self to her Facebook community. This is because being physically attractive, modern, wealthy and successful are all important parts of reciting powerful gender norms in Westernised consumerist culture. As Nairn et al. (2012) state:

“appearance acts as a form of recreation in terms of the images young people choose to look at, how they dress to be looked at... global text – music, fashion, images , film – inform the body work appearance of young people in New Zealand in interesting ways. ‘It is *how* these texts are appropriated and negotiated for the reproduction of localized identity groupings such as race (and gender) that makes the popular significant (Wall, 2007, p. 27, our emphasis)’” (pp. 94-95).

Conventional norms can be appropriated and thus acquire particular meanings for minority groups as is evident in my analysis of the girls’ identification with the Kardashian sisters. Moreover, the following conversations reveal that, for the girls, Westernised gender norms of femininity are recited by them as a form of resistance against Hindu patriarchy.

¹⁷ Through this discussion it is clear that although the sister recognises the trends associated with the American flag she does not fully comprehend the socio cultural implications of this symbol in New Zealand.

Jess: "I want to talk about these photos."



Figure 49



Figure 50

Jess: "I mean, to me that just looks exactly like it came out of a magazine, advertising clothes or make up or something."

"Wow! Thanks!"

Jess: "And I see you guys post stuff up like this all the time on Facebook, what's it all about?"

"(Laughs)! I know we do do a lot of these kinds of photos. I don't know. It's cool I guess."

Jess: *“What’s cool about it?”*

“Umm like you said, it looks like I’m a model in a magazine or something.”

Jess: *“Do you get lots of likes for these photos?”*

“Yeah, I get heaps.”

Jess: *“Why do you think that is?”*

“Because it’s really cool to be modern and fashionable and stuff. Other Nepali teenagers will look at these photos and think that we’re really fashionable and popular and stuff.”

Jess: *“Do other Bhutanese girls try to do photos like this on Facebook?”*

“They try to, but they don’t have as many clothes as us. Their parents won’t give them money to go shopping for nice dresses and things like my mum does for us. So we are always better at being modern and fashionable on Facebook than they are.”

Jess: *“Do you think some of the teenagers wish they had the types of freedoms you have?”*

“Oh yes! A lot of girls have said to me that I’m so lucky that my mum is nice to us and gives us money for stuff. It’s like most of the Nepali girls here are in Palmerston North go to our school. They want to be modern and wear modern clothes like white girls do, but they can’t because their parents won’t buy them nice things. It’s a Hindu thing really. They don’t like young women to have freedoms. They don’t trust Western things so they don’t want their daughters to be Western. But really, their daughters want to fit in. You can’t fit in very easily if you’re a Hindu. So when I post pictures like this on my Facebook, it shows my Nepali friends, that I can fit it. I can do it easier than them because I’m not a Hindu girl.”

This sister is performatively complying with Western norms of femininity and beauty, through her ‘model style’ photos. By posting these pictures on her Facebook page, they are then circulated within a large community of other Bhutanese youth, many of whom do not have the same freedoms as the girls and, therefore, are less able to cite these norms as easily as the girls

can. This means that on Facebook the girls not marginalised by the Bhutanese community, instead are able to practice ‘coolness’ more easily than other Bhutanese youth.

Discussion

Although Facebook is an online space detached from the physical body, my research shows that identity occurs in embodied forms on Facebook. As the girls have revealed the primary space for sharing the photos they take is Facebook. The sharing of various images on their profile accumulates responses from their individual Facebook communities. In this sense the identity practices that take place on Facebook are intersubjective: as the girls cite certain gender norms through images, these norms get further reinforced as their Facebook community responds accordingly to them. Butler (1990) believes to be embodied is to be shaped and fashioned through language. This means that body is a ‘series of possibilities’, in this sense, we do our bodies within the context of historical and localised gender norms and discourses. As the girls cite various cultural norms on Facebook, their Facebook identities are collectively written into being by their Facebook communities.

This chapter has also revealed how Facebook is an important space for identity experimentation among Bhutanese youth. Here we can draw links to Miller’s (2011) interpretations of Facebook as culturally specific space. Miller likens this to the internet in general stating;

“The internet was whatever any particular group of users had made it into. No one population was more ‘proper’ or ‘authentic’ than any others. For an anthropologist studying in Trinidad the internet itself was something created by what Trinidadians do online. From which point we then try and understand why each place produces the internet we find there” (Miller, 2011, p. xiii).

In this sense, Facebook is also culturally relative, as different communities use Facebook to produce identities that are culturally appropriate. For Bhutanese youth Facebook is a neutral space for experimenting with Western gender norms. As their daily lives are shaped by liminality, Facebook offers a terrain in which Western gender norms can be explored in a semi-public space.

In this chapter the girls have described how the 'selfie' photo is a means of citing particular gender norms. The taking of a selfie photos is a performative action that is repeated until the photograph comes to stylistically embody the particular gender norm they are citing. Butler would describe this process as the 'ritualised repetition of norms'. On Facebook the girls performatively explore identity through the photos they share. These photos are often the citations of both Western and Bollywood gender norms. Performing Western femininity on Facebook is a form of subversive resistance against the traditional Hindu gender norms and a claim to 'coolness'. This form of resistance is supported by Sarah as she willingly co-operates with her daughters' adoption of Western ways of being by providing them with the resources and freedoms to explore these norms. As a result the girls have access to clothing and make up and have the freedom to explore being feminine in Western ways where sexuality and physical attractiveness are central.

During my fieldwork I became aware that the girls often did not fully comprehend the socio-cultural meanings of the norms they are citing. For instance, Figure 48 depicts one sister wearing clothing which is marked by the American flag. In the discussion below the sister explains that she likes displaying the American flag on Facebook because it is associated with being modern. It is clear that the sister is identifying with the particular norms that the American flag symbolised. Yet in many ways the American flag represents things that contradict the girls' values. For example it is not always associated positively with modernity in New Zealand; many associate it with American imperialism and capitalist ideologies which promote profit and greed. From this example it seems that they do not yet understand the multiple, and negative, implications of this symbol in New Zealand. Here we can make links to Butler's concept of citation failure. For Butler norms can be cited in ways that do not comply with their initial reference and purpose. As the girls post photos on Facebook of the American flag they are demonstrating citational failures because they do not fully understand the cultural implications of these norms. Butler points out that it is through such failures that new ways of being are produced. As the girls negotiate the process of growing up in a new country they are performatively producing new ways of being.

The girls have revealed that many of the photos they share on Facebook are directed at the Bhutanese community. In this sense the girls practice a subversive resistance against Hindu

patriarchy, being 'modern' is an important part of this resistance. The girls have become experts at taking selfies that comply with specific Western gender norms about being 'tough' and 'self-confident' young women. Their stories detail the complicated nature of their identity as non-white teenagers. They describe how being 'Western' and 'modern' is a difficult process as non-white girls, as they are continuously confronted with social structures that claim modernity and beauty as a white domain. The girls have developed a sense of agency through their strategies for navigating this process. They draw from celebrities such as the Kardashian sisters, who have become examples of how to be a 'self-confident' and 'modern women' without being white. It is through this practice that the girls are unintentionally challenging the assumption that Western beauty is a white domain.

Indeed the girls' stories, photos and images illustrate the important role Facebook and the taking of selfies photos play in the identity work of adolescent refugees. It is through using Facebook and the camera that the girls can simultaneously perform conventional citations and engage in subversive resistance. Butler writes that it is often difficult to discern whether the performance of a particular gender norm is a conventional citation or an act of subversive resistance. Yet it is through this resistance that the girls are simultaneously engaging in resignification. As Butler states "for something to be performative means that it produces a series of effects" (Big Think, 2012). Hence, as the girls continue to perform 'Kiwi ways of being' they make Western gender norms more available to other young Bhutanese youth and in this way they are rewriting what it means to be a young Bhutanese women.

Conclusion

The stories conversations and photos provided by this family make it possible to answer the ethnographic questions that framed this research, and to consider what their stories tell us about young Bhutanese women.

Barriers and Opportunities

My initial interests in women's stories lead me into this research project and through correspondence with the Palmerston North Multi-Cultural Centre; I became curious about the experiences of Bhutanese women living in Palmerston North. One of the original questions that structured this project was "what are Bhutanese women's experiences of resettlement in Palmerston North?" Sarah's stories illustrate how her life has been marked by political change and transition beyond her control. She experienced both barriers and opportunities during her resettlement and this shows how the experience of resettlement is complex and individual. When her early attempts to form connections to the Bhutanese community were thwarted, Sarah and her daughters began to distance themselves. Her stories detail the discriminating nature of Hindu caste structures. At the time, this was an isolating experience, but it has also presented the family with new opportunities that, perhaps, would have been unavailable to them had they remained closely integrated into the Bhutanese community. As, Butler (1990) maintains structure is the enabling force of agency, and realising that she would never escape her low caste status, Sarah began to volunteer herself to new opportunities. A key opportunity has been the freedom to choose the family's religious affiliation. Converting to Christianity gave them more access to 'New Zealand ways of being' and more opportunity to speak and read English. As a result, this family has become very skilled at navigating the many social institutions in Palmerston North. Sarah's stories are revealing of the socio-cultural conditions that have enabled her parenting strategies and her sense of agency. It was as a result of these experiences that Sarah began actively encouraging her daughters to explore New Zealand and to experiment with various ways of being 'Kiwi girls' with the belief that they will be more 'successful' in their educational, professional and social lives if they take on New Zealand ways of being. Focusing on the real life experiences of refugee women as spoken in their own words offers rich anthropological insight into their strategies for survival and success in a new country.

Previous literature about resettlement suggests that refugees ‘do better’ if they are resettled among their community members in close housing situations. Yet Sarah’s experiences indicate not all individuals ‘do better’ in this situation. Rather, in the stress of resettlement, socio-cultural structures that oppress certain individuals (such as the Hindu caste system) can reform and thus marginalise particular people. Consequently for Sarah, the Bhutanese community did not offer a close knit haven providing relief from the stresses of resettling in a foreign country. Instead, the reformation of caste order has promoted purity rituals and boundaries that excluded Sarah and her family. Literature about refugee and migrant communities suggests that in their resettlement these communities develop social and economic systems that support each other as they participate on the peripheries of Western society. Yet this research suggests that beneath the surface of the Palmerston North Bhutanese community there are strict social politics and structures at play that makes it possible for some people to ‘do well’ in this community, whilst other individuals are regularly marginalised.

On first meeting this family I was startled by how different they were from previous families I had meet. This framed the second question of this research ‘what makes this family so different?’ Sarah’s decision to distance herself from the Bhutanese community initiated a new parenting strategy, which encouraged her daughters to adopt Kiwi ways of being.

Sarah’s parenting strategy has given the girls the freedom and resources to go out and about in Palmerston North and build social relationships with other young people. This means that the girls have access to money, their mother’s car, the freedom to come and go as they wish, and the freedom to wear what they like. They have wide social circles, and they are proficient in English and attain high school grades. These resources have enabled them to practice ‘coolness’ in ways that are unavailable to other Bhutanese teenagers. Though the family continues to experience scrutiny and marginalisation from the Bhutanese community, the sisters view this community as upholding a series of increasingly redundant attitudes, and holding little social power in New Zealand.

Using Visual Methodologies

Reflecting on the many pathways this research took, I can see that the course of my analyses was organised by the visual methodologies I used. Providing the girls with cameras gave them

primary control over the direction this research took. Photographing themselves is a daily practice, as these girls negotiate their experiences of liminality by stylising and choreographing their bodies to pose in front of the camera lens. The repertoire of photos the girls have shared shows how different looks and poses mean different things, as they draw from a variety of Western and Bollywood gender norms. The selfie photos underline the importance of ‘looking good’ for these young women, as they dress their bodies to be seen both on Facebook and in their offline worlds. As we have seen their friendship photos appear spontaneous and natural, as if by chance the photographer snapped an image of the young women having fun together. In reality these photos have been choreographed specifically to give this illusion. The friendship photos highlight the relational nature of identity for adolescents, as being popular among friends is important to these young women. Consequently, the photos the girls have shared provide illustrations of their experiences learning to be ‘Kiwi girls’ - for them photo taking is a performative process.

The Importance of Facebook

This visual methodology led my research serendipitously into the online world of Facebook. As a result, a third question emerged in this research project: ‘what is the importance of Facebook for these young women?’ Butler’s theory of performativity has been pivotal in making sense of the images the girls have provided and answering this question. This research complies with previous research that suggests young people that belong to minority ethnic groups experience more challenges conforming to Western gender norms because they are a largely white domain. Indeed, my participants’ stories highlight the need to strategically select specific Western gender norms which they can perform. For the girls, the Kardashian sisters are a key example of this as they offer a way of being Western women, without being white.

Among Bhutanese youth, Facebook remains a crucial space of embodied identity practice and this is because performing Western norms becomes easier on Facebook. Through smart phone technology, photo taking is now mobile, instantaneous and easily linked to Facebook. Facebook puts the user in control: the user can choose what they want to ‘show’ about themselves to their Facebook communities. In this sense, Bhutanese refugees are not marked by their ‘refugeeness’

or their cultural background on Facebook. Furthermore, it is difficult to maintain caste structures on Facebook, this is because social network modes of communication breakdown rituals of purity. Performing Western gender norms is an easy and instantaneous process on Facebook. As the user simply needs to upload the right type of selfie or select from a repertoire of already circulating images to post on their Facebook wall. The girls' photos and conversations describe this process. As they take 'tough selfies' or 'sexy selfies', they are engaging in performative identity construction on Facebook, which is a new space to build performative identity that wasn't available to previous generations. It is through these practices they build an idealised identity online, easily and instantly. As a result, Facebook has become an important space for experimenting with Western identity norms and negotiating the experience of liminality.

At a glance, the selfie photo may seem a superficial display of vanity. Yet this research suggests that selfie photos expose the identity work the photographer is currently undergoing. For the girls, the taking of selfies and friendship photos is a performative process. By taking these photos they are learning how to use their bodies in a way that adheres to specific codes of Western and Bollywood femininity. They learn what looks 'good' and what looks 'bad', and they gain more self-confidence through this work.

Many of our conversations about their photos revealed the particular gender norms that the girls were citing. Yet whilst they are able to identify the codes of femininity that these norms represent they often did not fully comprehend the subtleties of the meanings of these norms in New Zealand. As I discussed in Chapter Six, one sister discussed how she liked a particular photo of herself wearing clothing that depicted the American flag. Although she recognised particular trends associated with the American flag such as modernity, she does not fully comprehend the meanings this symbol might also have within New Zealand, such as its association with Americanisation and negative aspects of capitalism. In this instance, their new settler status becomes visible as the sisters make citational failures that New Zealand born girls their age would be unlikely to make

As Butler (1990) maintains, resistance and conformity are not opposing actions, rather they can occur simultaneously through performativity. My research provides evidence of this process. It would be possible to interpret the girls' photos as evidence that they are simply being duped into

an assimilation process that compels them to adhere to Western gender norms. Yet the photos they have shared are also a process of resistance against Hindu caste and patriarchy. For them Facebook is not only a space for identity experimentation, but also a space for subversive resistance. As they photograph themselves ‘being a Kiwi girls’ they are resisting Hindu gender norms about young low caste women and their place in society. It could be argued that through this resistance the girls are effectively moving from one series of restricting norms and entering another, more powerful and even more restricting set, in this sense they are moving out of the frying pan and into the fire. Abu-Lughod (1990) saw similar trends in the way young Bedouin women resisted traditional gender norms by adopting more Westernised Egyptian norms, which involved buying lingerie and cosmetics, listening to Egyptian music and watching Egyptian television. Abu-Lughod states:

“Ironically, in taking up these Egyptian forms and deploying them against their elders, these young Bedouins are also beginning to get caught up in the new forms of subjection such discourses imply. These new forms are part of a world in which kinship ties are attenuated while companionate marriage, marital love based on choice, and romantic love are idealized, making central women’s attractiveness and individuality as enhanced and perhaps necessarily marked by differences in adornment (hence the importance of cosmetics, lingerie and differentiation in styles and fabrics of clothing)” (p.50).

As these girls become more familiar with ‘Kiwi ways of being’, they are entering a world in which beauty is a commodity to be bought and sold, and women’s bodies are increasingly regulated by the capitalist beauty industry which promotes unattainable ‘norms’ of beauty.

Yet although they may be engaging with Western ideals of beauty in the photos they take of themselves every day, what they are seeing are images of *themselves* performing these norms, not only models and celebrities who do not look like them. Furthermore, their own images are regularly shared on Facebook, a semi-public space. In this way the girls disrupt Western gender norms that suggest that beauty and style are exclusive spaces for white, wealthy and thin women. These findings suggest that the proliferation of the ‘selfie’ is a form of democratisation of dominant gender norms. With the invention of smart phones, photo taking is instant; photos can easily be edited, and shared instantly and publically in the online world. As the selfie photo

becomes more common perhaps the gender norms that regulate beauty are becoming less exclusive, there is room for further research that explores this phenomenon. Consequently as the girls take selfie photos and share them on Facebook they disrupt the ‘exclusivity’ of these norms and simultaneously engage in the resignification of regulations of beauty.

In multi-cultural New Zealand, these young women are not easily marked by their ethnicity. They are often mistaken for Indian, Polynesian, Māori, or Mexican. In this sense their stories and photos illustrate the struggle to establish a Western identity as a non-white teenager. As they take photos of themselves ‘being Kiwi girls’ they are also resignifying Western gender norms that suggest female beauty, modernity and femininity is an exclusively white domain. As they style their bodies to dress and pose like the Kardashian sisters, they are promoting a way of being a young women that is Western, beautiful, modern and not white. In this sense they are being produced by the new gender norms available to them, yet they are also simultaneously producers of the world around them. As they produce new ways of being young Bhutanese women by posting these images of Facebook, they also unknowingly challenge Western gender norms that dictate standards of beauty to be a predominantly white domain. They are, in this sense, performatively changing the world around them.

In many ways this thesis shares similarities to the selfie. It is a snap shot of the identity work that is important to these young women at this time in their lives. Yet, as we know, identity is a life long journey. As Simone de Beauviour states “one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one” (Butler 1990, p. 1) and this thesis should be read as a snapshot of this process of learning to be a woman. In this sense this research is incomplete as the young women will continue to grow and change beyond my fieldwork. This research promotes new ways of thinking about refugee women and their stories. These young women are not victims of their refugee circumstances as alternative literature on young refugee women would suggest. Rather they are subversive and strategic in the many ways they stylise and photograph their bodies, this is a performative process and by engaging in this process socially on Facebook, the girls are learning how to become ‘Kiwi’ woman successfully in New Zealand.

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