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**BOUNDED BODIES: THE EVERYDAY CLOTHING
PRACTICES OF LARGER WOMEN**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

in

Sociology

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Abstract

The field of dress studies currently emphasises dress as an embodied practice, but surprisingly scant attention has been awarded to the fat fleshy clothed body. This thesis addresses this lacuna, and is concerned with the everyday clothing practices of larger women. Theoretically, I draw on and integrate literature from material culture studies, as well as from the politics of fatness, the latter serving as the socio-cultural foundation for the research. In doing so, my research contributes to and extends the current body of literature that considers dress as material culture.

This thesis offers further extension of the field through the methodological focus of the research. Employing multiple inter-related methods allows the complex social processes of larger women's clothing practices to be revealed. Often these processes are embedded within the seemingly habitual, mundane, everyday things that people do while operating within a particular social milieu. With this in mind, I employ an ethnographically-inspired, multiple-method research methodology to explore the everyday clothing practices of ten self-identified larger women in Auckland, New Zealand. The five research methods involve asking the participants to: keep a clothing journal; rummage through their wardrobe with me; go shopping for clothes with me; take photographs of their 'clothed worlds'; and take part in a group discussion with other participants.

Employing an integrative analytic process, I reveal the numerous ways that larger women enact their agency at the same time as being bound within structures of socio-cultural corporeal and clothing norms. My research shows that the boundaries between fleshy fat bodies, clothing and culturally-bound geographical spaces are experienced by my participants as tension-filled and ambiguous. Ultimately, they are perpetually provisional; the boundaries fixed yet potentially permeable. Using space as an organisational and analytic framework, my research explores the boundaries of four distinct spaces: spaces of consumption; public spaces beyond consumption; private spaces; and the spaces *between* fat bodies and clothes. I argue that, despite structural barriers that create 'fat' bodies as 'matter out of place' and, as such, beyond

the bounds of possibility, larger women enact agency in creative and resourceful ways. In doing so, they challenge the boundaries of dominant Western constructions of fatness and ultimately, transform places of exclusion into spaces of inclusion.

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I would like to thank the ten women who participated in this research. There is no doubt the research was enriched by their knowledge, their enthusiasm and their stories. Although I fear not, I hope this thesis does some justice to those stories.

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Corpulent Beauty

Naked she stands

Before the mirror

The Other woman glares back

The roll of flesh around her waist

Slicing her body – north, south

Hips, thighs

Studded in dark and light

She sees a glimmer of beauty

But a thousand men remind her

Renaissance woman is history

Dressed she straps her body

In binding cloth

That wraps around her

Like a vine on a tree

But her body fights back

Tired of hiding in blackened

Fields of wall flowers

Thirsting for light

Her body spills its excess

Flesh pouring through the fissure

Of unsuspecting material

Cloth rides, slides away

Revealing a fragment of corpulent beauty

Chapter One

Fashioning the Fat Self

When Frida Kahlo died on July 13th, 1954, her lover Diego Rivera instructed that her wardrobe remain unopened for the next fifty years. So, in 2004, Kahlo's personal dressing room was unsealed revealing a wonderful array of "vibrant clothing, jewelry, shoes and headdresses" (Olmedo, Rosenzweig, Rosenzweig, del Conde, & Turok, 2007, p. 3). Textile restorers, art historians and curators have worked with the pieces, culminating in a book that "contextualizes the clothing in terms of Kahlo's life, her art, her persona, her body, and her appreciation for Mexican folk art and crafts" (Olmedo, et al., 2007, front sleeve). *Self Portrait in a Velvet Dress: Frida's Wardrobe* does indeed offer the reader an intriguing insight into the world of the artist. It marries together images of her clothes, photographs of her wearing the clothes, and reproduces images of the art in which the garments appear. Throughout the book, the presence of Kahlo is keenly felt. However, the front cover of the book tells a different story.

The cover image shows two pieces: a skirt and blouse. They are placed for the photograph as though thrown carelessly onto a bed, the slight crumpling of the golden fabric of the skirt suggestive of the texture of the cloth and the movement of the wearer in the clothing. That the highly detailed blouse does not sit vertically but instead twists slightly to one side, gestures towards the way in which Kahlo lived her

life as a disabled woman. Clearly, the title of the book is a reference to one of Kahlo's most recognisable artworks, *Self Portrait in a Velvet Dress*, in which she appears. However, Kahlo herself does not appear on the front page of the book at all. It is a 'self-portrait' without a self, the clothes lying naked as it were. While the authors wish to contextualise the clothes with Kahlo's life, the artist herself is absent. It is as though the clothes alone are able to 'stand in' for Kahlo; they are in a sense analogous to the artist. Unfortunately, I was denied permission to use the image of the book cover in my thesis. However, the image below captures beautifully the intimate reciprocity of bodies and clothing.

Figure 1.1 Reclining Dress Impression with Drapery¹.



The photograph in Figure 1.1 depicts the exquisite work of glass artist, Karen LaMonte. Created from cast glass, the life-size sculpture captures the fluidity of fabric as it drapes around the female form. The gathered folds hint at the body beneath, and yet the body is absent. Just as the book cover is a self-portrait without a self, the sculpture is a dress without a body.

The inference that clothing possesses the capacity to represent the self *sans* wearer is intriguing. It suggests that clothing is a powerful marker of identity, capable of

¹ Reproduced with permission from the artist: Karen LaMonte (2007); Photographer: Martin Polak.

articulating the truth of a person. However, to what extent this is possible is questionable. Certainly, some scholars of dress and clothing may emphasise its communicative capacity, even making reference to clothing as a linguistic system (see, Davis, 1992; Lurie, 1981). Yet others challenge this assumption as specious, pointing to the embodied nature of wearing clothing and the reciprocal relationship between clothing and wearers (Banim & Guy, 2001). It is here, within these debates, that the present research is situated.

Clothing the Larger Self

Bodies are, for the most part, clothed (Longhurst, 2005a). Despite increased sociological interest in the body and the elevation of the body as central to a person's identity (Shilling, 1993), less attention has been paid to this social fact. Yet most people, including the dispossessed, still possess at the very least, the clothes on their backs (Ash, 1999). Given this, it is surprising that dress and clothing have not been the recipients of more scholarly attention. Some explain this lacuna on the grounds that it is the *interior*, that which resides beneath the surface of the self, that is most important about a person (Miller, 2005a; Soper, 2001; Woodward, 2005a). As such, matters of clothing are deemed somewhat frivolous (and feminised) and therefore unworthy of serious academic attention (Niessen & Brydon, 1998), unless encapsulated within the orthodox directive of establishing the rules of production or consumption and the relations of power operating therein (Miller, 1987). Yet if clothing is little more than a superficial covering for the 'true essence' of an individual, why do so many people invest so much energy, time and money choosing the clothes they wear? It seems that while philosophically clothing may be assumed somewhat frivolous, irrelevant and external to the self, experientially it is understood to be crucial.

The Language of Clothes

Scholarly discussions of clothes often emphasise their communicative capacity (Eicher & Roach-Higgins, 1997; Lurie, 1981; Rucker, Anderson, & Kangas, 1999). In particular, the emphasis often lies with how clothing conveys meaning about the garment, the wearer, and the social milieu in which the clothing occurs. For example,

dress and textile historians often develop rich descriptive analyses of cloth and textiles as they are represented in various historical moments which are assumed to impart knowledge of a particular time (Arnold, 1999; Taylor, 1999). Similarly, anthropological approaches to the field of dress often frame clothing as a material object which informs of the cultural and social rituals of a given society (Küchler & Were, 2005a). Kellner (1994) underlines further the thesis that clothing is communicative, arguing that it offers the “models and material for constructing identity” (p. 160), while Lurie (1981) argues that clothing is a simple extension of an individual’s personality. To modify an old maxim - we are what we wear. In these contexts, clothing becomes a powerful means by which the human body can be made “culturally visible” (Wilson & de la Haye, 1999, p. 2).

Such explanations appeal to common-sense understandings. We can go shopping and identify clothes we feel ‘capture’ us in some way. Even the most resistant to the field of clothing and fashion can identify clothes they might or might not wear. In a Saussurean sense, clothing is a sign, embedded with meaning that comes to stand in for something other than itself as a material object, such as social status, religion or gender (I. Woodward, 2007). Garments become threaded through with a network of connected signs, the meaning of which is understood in accordance with the garments’ relation to other signs, in particular their antonym. It is not difficult to identify this process in the field of clothing. For example, a police uniform encapsulates the influence of the policing system, denoting the power and authority of the wearer and the institution of which he or she is a member. Applied to the field of fashion, particular ‘styles’ or ‘looks’, such as ‘bohemian chic’, ‘punk’ or ‘grunge’, rise and fall in popularity. Through repeated use, these looks “materialise questions of identity” (S. Woodward, 2007, p. 3) and become readily recognisable to not only the astute observer. Viewed this way, through the “aestheticisation of everyday life” (Featherstone, 2007, p. 64), the communicative capacity of clothing is emphasised, allowing for rapid communication between individuals when nothing else is available.

However, the understanding that clothing is a simple representation of the self is, if not problematic, certainly limited as it implies that clothing possesses the capacity to

historically and culturally represent an individual in some fixed and immutable way (Wilson & de la Haye, 1999). Moreover, it implies that clothing possesses meaning in and of itself, outside of the social processes and conditions in which it was created or worn. Such an implication elevates the status of clothing while simultaneously shifting focus away from the wearer or simply reducing the role of the wearer to a mere hanger or clotheshorse. That said, clothing does remain an important aspect of how one may be *perceived* (Kellner, 1994). As the materiality that rests outside the body, clothing is the means by which we find a ‘way in’ to the individual, transforming biological matter into social matter (Entwistle, 1997). When nothing else is available to an observer, the clothing a person wears and the way in which it is assembled and ‘carried’, all combine to shape perceptions about a person. Sociologist Bourdieu (1984; 1985), suggests that artefacts (such as clothing), serve as consumer aids, the collection and arrangement of which, assist in the social positioning of people, influencing perceptions of social class. Consequently, how items of clothing are put together, or the degree to which “clothing competence” (Hansen, 2005, p.108) is demonstrated, become indicators of cultural and social *capital*. *Accordingly, whether accurate or not, clothing serves as a conduit between the self and others and provides a means by which others might construct a narrative around us.*

However, there are no guarantees that the wearer’s intended meaning will be received as clothing can readily transmit the ‘wrong’ message. When it comes to interpreting any material object there is no universal reading that exists, as meaning is always context dependent (I. Woodward, 2007). Applied to the field of clothing, observers may not possess the cultural capital required to ‘read’ a garment correctly, they may jump toward stereotyped constructions of dressed identity not appreciating the intentions of the wearer, or they may not fully grasp the temporal and / or spatial context for reading the garments (Davis, 2007). Thus, if clothing possesses the capacity to *represent* the self, clothing also possesses the capacity to *misrepresent* the self. Adopting a biographical narrative approach to an empirical investigation of women’s relationships with their clothing, Woodward (2005b) found that the way in which collections of clothing were put together can belie the intentions of the wearer, creating, in effect, an “aesthetic disjuncture” (p. 24) between how individuals feel,

how they seek to represent themselves, and how they appear. These findings highlight that clothes are not entirely passive items to be used by intentional actors. Rather, they possess the capacity to challenge the authority of the wearer by constructing subjectivities beyond the wearer's intentions. Derrida (1998) argues that language is slippery, forever moving beyond the grasp of the speaker. It seems understandings of clothing are equally slippery.

Embodied Clothing

Clearly, clothing alone cannot carry the meaning intended by the wearer. Yet neither can the wearer represent the self as intended without clothing. More recently, understandings of clothing as semiotic code or sign have become increasingly problematised as the field of clothing studies has extended beyond the communicative aspects of clothing toward consideration of the reciprocal relationship *between* clothing and wearers. I suggest that the wearer and clothing work together in a given spatial and temporal context to construct the self. Central to this idea is that the dressed self is embodied (Entwistle, 2000). Although clothing may offer individuals the materials with which to 'try on' identity for size (Kellner, 1994; Sweetman, 2001), clothing is not simply an adjunct to the body. Rather, clothing becomes *embodied* within a given situated and bodily practice.

Central to the argument presented in this thesis is that clothing becomes storied and this storying is intimately intertwined with the wearer. The weaving together of clothes and wearers is demonstrated through empirical research that found women keep clothing they no longer wear because particular garments continue to connect them with their past selves (Banim & Guy, 2001). Yet academic understandings of the space between clothing and wearers has been hindered due to the development of two dominant threads of analysis: the study and analysis of cloth and textiles, and more sociological approaches that emphasise processes of production or mapping social and cultural difference onto clothing, for example (Miller, 2005a). The construction of these two broad and antagonistic boundaries within the field has arguably served to develop a gulf which obscures the relationships *between* clothing and wearers. Instead, Miller argues that clothing must be looked at not simply as a material object but as a lived garment in possession of its own interconnected

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narrative. In later collaborative work, Banerjee and Miller (2003) posit that a story and a history is woven into fabric (in their case, the sari), which connects the garment with particular times, places, feelings and practices of wearers. These stories are brought into being through the articulations of the wearer. The clothing connects and reconnects an individual to the past creating multiple opportunities to construct and reconstruct understandings of self. Thus, the meanings of clothing are not fixed. Rather they are multiple, renegotiated at the moment of each articulation, moment of remembrance or moment of dressing. With this in mind, we can think of clothing as embodied, mediating the way in which we experience the self. Similarly, our bodily practices and clothing practices are intertwined, together shaping the construction of the self.

A Matter of Size

The embodied nature of the dressed self is important for this thesis because the clothed body resides at the centre of inquiry. However, this thesis is not about just any woman, but more specifically, is about the *fat* woman². This makes a significant difference. New Zealand is now reportedly the “third fattest nation in the developed world” (Eriksen, 2009). The Ministry of Health (2008b) indicates that 36 percent of adults in New Zealand are categorised as overweight while 26 percent are categorised as obese. In 2004, the direct health care costs associated with these levels were estimated to be \$460 million (Ministry of Health, 2008a). While bandying statistics around, it seems appropriate to also consider the seeming ubiquity of the dieting woman in the western world. In an American context, 67 percent of women

² Throughout this thesis, I refer to *fat* women and *larger* women, a distinction that requires explanation. From an academic standpoint, I support Longhurst’s (2005b) claim that employing euphemisms for fat, such as ‘larger’, inadvertently suggests that fat is so repugnant that it is undesirable to speak of it. However, this empirical research resides within the data generated from women who identified as larger but did not necessarily identify as fat. In fact, most (but not all) of these women found the word ‘fat’ objectionable. Consequently, my academic stance was problematised and I decided to use both fat and larger throughout the thesis. Typically, I refer to fat when speaking of fat as an abstract concept and use larger when addressing my participants’ practices.

between the ages of 25 and 45 were reported as trying to lose weight at any given time, despite 53 percent of these dieters already being a healthy weight (Jaster, 2009). Undoubtedly, for larger women there is a great deal of social pressure to lose weight and keep it off. As a consequence, regulation of dietary intake and obsession with exercise can become the norm for many women who are ensnared within the “tyranny of slenderness” (Chernin, 1981, book title).

For many, to be fat is a fate worse than death. In an online quantitative study of women, 46 percent of the respondents (who came primarily from the United States, Britain, Canada and Australia), reported they would be willing to give up at least a year of life rather than be obese, while 15 percent reported they would be prepared to give up 10 years (Schwartz, Vartanian, Nosek, & Brownell, 2006). In the same study, five percent stated they would prefer to lose a limb than be fat, a figure claimed to be low by the authors of the article. The paradox of these statistics is flagrant: as obesity continues to rise, women continue to diet, obsessively. It is beyond the parameters of this thesis to consider this paradox. However, suffice to say that women learn from an early age that their bodies are “fundamentally flawed” (Hartley, 2001, p. 60).

This is not a difficult lesson to internalise. Given the “social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived” (Douglas, 1996, p. 65), the dominant discourses available for speaking of fatness construct the fat individual as problematic and intrinsically objectionable. The medicalisation of fatness frames fat as both a disease (Jutel, 2006; Wray & Deery, 2008) and a morally based social problem affecting the individual and society (Jutel, 2005). In addition, the suggestion that fat bodies are “site[s] of undisciplined flesh and unmanaged desires ... unhealthy, deviant, and defiant” (Murray, 2005, pp. 265-266) becomes accepted over time as the truth of the fat individual. Deeply embedded within the contemporary western psyche, it has even been suggested that prejudice against fat women is the last existing *socially sanctioned* prejudice (Breseman, Lennon, & Schulz, 1999; LeBesco & Braziel, 2001; Longhurst, 2005b). There is little to suggest otherwise and it could be argued that women themselves are implicitly involved in constructing that prejudice through their own self-hatred (Germov & Williams, 1999).

The growing body of literature that considers clothing as a situated embodied practice emphasises the importance of the body when considering matters of dress (Wilson & de la Haye, 2000; Entwistle, 2001; Entwistle & Wilson, 2001; Wilson & de la Haye, 1999). Given the close proximity between the body and clothing, this is undoubtedly crucial. The body ‘fleshes out’ clothing and provides its shape by ‘bringing it to life’. However, it is not unreasonable to suspect the body and clothing interact in different ways, depending on the body and clothing in question. The purpose of this thesis is to consider the relationship between fat, fleshy women’s bodies and clothing.

Interestingly, there is a noteworthy silence in the academic literature on clothing and fat women. Given the way fatness is constructed in contemporary western society, this is possibly unsurprising. Fat women are often assumed to be uninterested in clothing, fashion and design (Breseman, et al., 1999). Additionally, the influence of celebrities and fashion models cannot be overstated. Among United States clothing and fashion-conscious female celebrities in particular, there is a current trend toward reducing the body to size zero, the equivalent of size four in New Zealand. Despite a backlash from health authorities concerning the propensity toward excessive reduction dieting, and cries of horror from populist magazines at the sight of female celebrities fading away, these images remain influential. Although a size zero is elusive and beyond the reality (and possibly the desire) of most women, this trend has placed a small clothing size firmly in the centre of beauty and fashion discourse.

However, to speak of size alone is not enough when considering the larger woman’s clothed body. Numerical sizing fails to capture the fleshy, yielding, folds and rolls of fatness. Given that the present research places fat women’s bodies at the centre of inquiry it is critical to consider these factors because it is nearly impossible to speak of fat bodies without also speaking of their “fleshy materiality” (Longhurst, 2005b, p. 256). It is the relationship between the fleshy materiality of the larger woman’s body and the materiality of clothing that is of concern throughout this thesis.

Formulating the Research Question

This research begins from the premise that the fat body is a political issue (LeBesco & Braziel, 2001; Tong, 1998). Indeed, the politics of fatness, the negative way in which fat is constructed and framed in contemporary society, is central to the research and provides the broader context in which to understand larger women's engagement with the social world as clothed. However, my interest lies not with the discursive construction of fatness alone, as this is a matter that has already received considerable scholarly investigation. My interest concerns how larger women operate within such negative, restricting and limiting discourses and, in particular, how they do so in a clothed fashion. In this research, I shed light on the everyday clothing practices of larger women; those seemingly habitual, apparently mundane things that larger women do with clothing, while operating within a particular social milieu.

Given 'everyday practice' is such an important concept underpinning this thesis it is worth taking some time to unpick the seams of it here. Everyday clothing practices of larger women mean, quite simply, the ordinary normal things larger women do in and around their clothing as they navigate their everyday worlds at home, at work, and at leisure. In considering the everyday, I take seriously Highmore's (2002) claim that the "exceptional is there to be found in the heart of the everyday" (p. 3). These seemingly innocuous moments allow me to consider how fatness and clothing come together, each mediated by the other, in both private and public spheres. In doing so, the embodied (and enclothed) experience of being a larger woman is captured.

With the above in mind, this study explores the interconnection of larger women and their clothes as they come together in various sites. In doing so, I aim to address a lacuna in the academic clothing literature, namely, the everyday practices and experiences of fat women. Given the larger body is a socially problematised body, this necessarily heightens awareness of the body in my investigation, ensuring the body remains at the centre of analysis throughout. Doing so allows me to extend the current literature that considers the embodied nature of the dressed self (Banim, Green, & Guy, 2001; Entwistle, 2000), by considering more explicitly, the relationship between the larger-sized body and clothing.

I extend the current literature on clothing in three ways. First, I extend the debate on the clothed body through the use of empirical data, situating my research in the experiences of fat women. Related to this was a decision to extend the current literature by focusing on everyday practices. In order to speak of their bodies, larger women must employ the very words that cast their bodies as problematic; they are bound within the linguistic system that constructs them as anomaly. However, by focusing on the everyday clothing practices they employ, I aim to move beyond discourse in order to find out how they navigate their way in, through, and around those discourses. A further reason for emphasising the everyday was the tendency for academic research to take special occasions as its focus. A number of empirical studies explore ‘special’ moments, such as wearing one’s wedding dress (Basaran & Gürcüm, 2007), dressing for a job interview (Turner-Bowker, 2001) or donning the little black dress (Miller, 2004). While these occasions are certainly legitimate and important aspects of a person’s life, by their very nature, they are often special and occasional. However, I argue that what people do as a matter of course in their everyday lives can illuminate social processes in ways that the occasional may not. Therefore, the everyday provides the fulcrum for this research.

The second extension was to place my empirical data firmly within the theoretical field of the ‘politics of fatness’ and the relationship between structure and agency. At the outset, I sought to create positive space for talking about fatness and fat women. In doing so I hoped to provide a countering discourse that allowed for the multiplicity of larger women’s ‘ways of being’, including the emotional, the intellectual, the practical and the broadly experiential. This necessarily opened up space for revisiting the longstanding sociological debate between structure and agency, and in particular, the extent to which larger women are caught within linguistic and material structures that define them. In this thesis, I move beyond the dualism of structure and agency by considering the relationship of intimate reciprocity that exists between clothing and wearers. This theoretical engagement necessarily involved tearing open the seams of self / other, private / public, and body / mind, tears that are woven throughout the thesis.

The third extension was to consider the role that place and space have on larger women's engagement with clothing. A long line of geographers have argued that places are gendered (Laurie et al., 1997; McDowell, 1999; Nast & Pile, 1998), a social truth that has a potentially critical effect on people's well-being (Cattell, Dines, Gesler, & Curtis, 2008). However, I argue that places are also *sized*. This argument contributes to the existing literature that suggests places are systematic sites of inclusion and exclusion (McDowell, 1999), and allows me to consider how exclusionary processes are played out in an everyday fashion. Thus, in carrying out this research, I was concerned with how larger (clothed) women engage with social sites, incorporating existing meanings of 'place' into their own practices, or alternatively, extending and challenging those meanings.

These broad elements, extending theoretical understandings of clothing and dress to include fat identity, developing understandings of the politics of fatness through the introduction of empirical data centred on the everyday and clothing, and a concern with the politics of place / space mediated by issues of structure and agency, provide the starting point for the present research. Specifically, the components of the research question are: how larger women use clothing as a tool for self-construction; how public and private spaces, including the marketplace, shape the clothing experiences of larger women; and how the permeable boundaries of the fleshy body interact with the semi-fluid boundaries of clothing.

Cutting the Cloth: The Structure of the Thesis

The structure of this thesis is as follows. Chapter two provides the template, the pattern if you will, for understanding the remainder of the thesis, and is split into three broad parts. The first explores the multiple, and yet paradoxically singular ways in which fatness is discursively constructed in contemporary western society. I draw attention to two dominant discourses of fatness: fat as abject; and the medicalisation of fatness. I argue that these linguistic structures construct the fat woman's body as an illegitimate corporeal form. In the second part of the chapter, I investigate the place of clothing as a special kind of material object that is implicated in the construction of selfhood. In the third section, I bring bodies and clothing together by considering dress as an embodied and situated practice (Entwistle &

Wilson, 2001). In particular, I emphasise the interconnection between the boundaries of place, the boundaries of discourse, the boundaries of larger women's bodies, and the boundaries of clothes.

Together, chapters three and four constitute the methodological framework for this thesis. Chapter three discusses my broad methodological approach to 'doing' social science research. The key word throughout this chapter is multiple - drawing on multiple disciplines, using multiple methods occurring in multiple venues that result in multiple types of data. I begin by espousing the usefulness of exploring 'the everyday', paying particular attention to how doing so can illuminate aspects of social life that may otherwise remain in shadows. Throughout, I argue that using multiple methods in qualitative research that edge into everyday practices in different ways, bring numerous benefits, working together to generate data that is broader and deeper than individual methods alone. Moreover, I suggest that by engaging in complex (and creative) methodologies, complex social processes may be revealed in ways beyond the reach of orthodox research techniques.

In chapter four, I move beyond a discussion of methodological approach toward a largely descriptive explication of the research methods. First, I introduce the ten (self-identified) larger women who took part in the research and explain how their participation came about. Second, I focus on my five research methods: keeping a clothing journal; rummaging through wardrobes; going clothes shopping; taking photographs; and group discussions. Third, I discuss the analytic process of interpreting the complex, multi-faceted and nuanced data. In the final section, I consider the key ethical issues that arose as a result of the intertwined multiplicity of the research design as it was practised in the research field.

Chapters five through eight comprise the analytic chapters of the thesis. Space provides the over-arching organisational framework for these chapters. Consequently, each chapter focuses on a distinct site, and comments on the everyday clothed practices of larger women within it. Together, the chapters consider the difficulties larger women face as they attempt to clothe their bodies while being cognisant of the problematic discursive construction of their bodies.

Before wearing a piece of clothing for the first time, it must first be purchased. For this reason, the first of the analytic chapters begins by exploring how larger women navigate their way through the publicly situated clothing market. Underpinning this chapter is de Certeau's (1984) contention that people engage in "innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of the dominant economy and cultural order in order to make it work for them and serve their own interests" (p. xiii). With this in mind, the chapter is split in two. The first considers how larger women are marginalised in sites of consumption. The second examines how they manage their marginalisation in respect to clothing. In sum, the chapter explores how larger women's practices challenge the dominant order of consumption and reposition them within its borders. In doing so, they transform sites of exclusion into sites of (partial) inclusion.

Chapter six remains in the public world but shifts focus away from processes of consumption toward larger women's general clothing practices in, and experiences of, *sized* public spheres. Beginning from the standpoint that the fat body is discursively constructed as the problematic body that is subject to the perpetual gaze of others, I argue that larger women use clothing to mediate the gaze - with varying results. In particular, I consider the complex process of revealing and concealing the body that arose as my participants attempted to negotiate judgment of their clothed bodies. To anchor the discussion in concrete examples of the participants' practices, I use the beach as a case study to consider more closely their negotiation of spatial contingency. Despite their misplacement, larger women engage in a variety of clothing practices that challenge the restrictive social boundaries of the beach and actively reposition their bodies within.

While the demonstration of agency in publicly situated sites is a recurring theme throughout chapters five and six, chapter seven turns toward the private domestic space of the home. In this chapter, I argue the home is an ambivalent space in which larger women can feel more comfortable within their bodies while, simultaneously, having to 'face the self' in numerous ways. However, this degree of comfort is always under threat as the home is perpetually a site of potential corporeal disruption. The public world can traverse the home's borders, bringing reminders of the larger body's social failure. In addition, internal disruptions from within the home itself

also challenge larger women's self-understandings. These external and internal disruptions ensure larger women remain corporeally present; the larger woman's body can never be fully forgotten.

In chapter eight, the final analytic chapter, I move closer still toward the space of the body itself and crucially, the space *between* the body and clothing. Here, I explore the ambiguous boundaries of the larger woman's body as it rubs up against the equally ambiguous boundaries of clothing. Throughout, I explore the tensions that arise within this space, as well as considering how larger women use clothing to mediate the tension arising within their socially situated and problematic bodies. Specifically, I argue that clothing can be used to challenge the boundaries of the body which, in turn, allows the wearer to challenge normative constructions of femininity. As such, on-going tensions between structure and agency (of both larger women and clothing itself) reside at the centre of this chapter.

In the final chapter, I do a number of things. First, I reflect on the methodological approach employed in this research. Revisiting de Certeau (1984), I consider the benefit of focusing on the everyday accompanied by an emphasis on multiplicities to illuminate complex social processes. Second, I step back from the minutiae of the analytic and empirical chapters and comment on the broader theoretical debates that circulate within and around this thesis, such as dichotomies of structure/agency, self/other, and private/public, and the tensions within. In particular, I argue that despite dominant constructions of fatness that position larger women beyond the boundaries of normative femininity, larger women are also cartographers of the 'map' of fatness. While difficult to attain and maintain, larger women can and do use clothing to challenge negative constructions of their bodies and open spaces of possibilities; they craft itineraries that allow them to successfully navigate and challenge the contemporary map of fatness.

Chapter Two

Embodying the Material

In his discussion on the order of society in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau (1984) distinguishes between maps and itineraries. Maps, he claims, are the result of strategic manoeuvring by governments, corporations, and other institutional bodies who produce what may be referred to as a map of the city, capable of describing the city as a unified whole. Thus, the map is a totalising and reductionist force, encapsulating the structural and structuring elements of society, including the linguistic system. Not unlike the disciplinary nets of power suggested by Foucault (1979, 1990), maps are the social system in which subjects are positioned. In contrast, itineraries are the paths that agentic citizens carve out for themselves irrespective of the boundaries and structural limitations that are produced through the map. de Certeau's analogy provides a useful framework for this thesis in its entirety. While the later empirical chapters will consider the itineraries larger women create, this chapter focuses attention on the social construction of the 'map' that potentially shapes the everyday realities of larger women. In this chapter, I am concerned with two quite different aspects of the structural map. The first is the linguistic system and the discursive construction of fatness and, by implication, the experience of fatness in contemporary society. The second structure of interest is the potentiality of clothing as a *material* structure, equally capable of positioning larger women in society. These two structures provide the platform from which to consider the

materiality of larger women's bodies and their relationship to, and with, the materiality of clothes. With these structures in mind, this chapter explores the interconnectedness between larger women's bodies and clothes as they come together in a given social milieu.

In the first part of the chapter, I discuss the discursive construction of fat women, highlighting the extent to which discourses of beauty and medical discourses have limited the possibilities of existence for fat women. I draw particular attention to the way the fat body is materialised through multiple, and yet paradoxically singular, discursive repertoires. The second section of the chapter introduces the field of material culture studies which allows me to consider the role of material objects in providing the tools for the construction of identity. In this section, I draw attention to the special role that clothing has to play in the construction of identity through its social, and more importantly, relational capacity. The final section of this chapter introduces the notion of embodiment as a conceptual tool to stitch together the discursive construction of larger bodies and clothes in a given space. Doing so allows me to consider how structure and agency (or maps and itineraries) are played out in everyday material worlds.

Talking Matters of Fa(c)t

Recent years have seen a veritable explosion of scholarly work that takes the body as its point of interest. Responding perhaps to the claim that the body has been somewhat of an absent presence in sociology (Shilling, 1993), scholars from a range of disciplinary fields have explored how bodies are gendered (Brook, 1999), commodified (Scheper-Hughes, 2002), politicised (Brown, 2003), regulated and disciplined (Foucault, 1979; Turner, 1992), 'worked on' as a project (Shilling, 1993), and inscribed with the social norms of society (Grosz, 1994; Hartley, 2001; Masquelier, 2005). It seems attending to the body is valuable for illuminating social processes. A common element in much work on the body is the examination of how society *constructs* bodies through social, cultural and political means and, in particular, how *talk* about bodies produces bodies in material ways (Shilling, 1993; Synnott, 1992). Through repetition, dominant discourses become embedded within the social arena, determining what can be said and ultimately what will be said of a

given physicality (Said, 2000). Crucially, this process shapes how people *experience* their bodies, as discourses effectively turn the flesh into a particular type of body (Grosz, 1994).

Taking the interconnection between discourses and bodily experience as a starting point, discourses of the body are clearly saturated with power, inscribing the surface of bodies with “cultural and personal values, norms and commitments according to the morphology and categorization of the body into socially significant groups” (Grosz, 1994, pp. 141-142), such as the category, fat fleshy woman. Indeed, “there is no law that is not inscribed on bodies” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 139). This process is not a natural process. Rather, it is a political process whereby both boundaries and surfaces of bodies are constructed in ways to signify particular bodily categories (Kuhlmann & Babitsch, 2002). The idea that discourses produce particular bodily categories is important. While there are multiple discourses available for speaking of fatness, these are surprisingly singular in voice. In contemporary western society at least, the fat woman’s body is discursively constructed as problematic for both the individual and society, limiting the possibilities of existence for fat women. In the following sections, I turn my attention to two dominant ways of talking about fatness: beauty and the abject other; and the medicalisation of fatness. In particular, I focus on how these ways of talking about fatness, ‘speak fatness’ into a devalued corporeality.

Beauty and the Abject Other

Historically, the Cartesian dualism of mind and body aligns men with the former while women are “cast in the role of the body, “weighed down” ... by everything peculiar to it” (Bordo, 2003, p. 5). Aligning women with the body has arguably resulted in women’s greater interest in matters of the body, thus ensuring the body is a powerful means through which the feminine self is constructed. Attention to the physical also extends to matters of beauty. However, ‘beauty’ is not a predetermined and fixed category that can be universally and unquestioningly understood. Dominant ideas of beauty are culturally and socially constructed across geographical

and temporal borders. Thus, what is considered beautiful in some parts of the world is not in others³. Similarly, ideas of beauty alter over time, in accordance with the dominant values of a given society. In western constructions of feminine beauty, these ideas may change swiftly. In as little as two decades, the ideal feminine body shifted from a thin body marked by lack of bodily movement and denial of adequate sustenance (Bordo, 1992), to more recently, a lean yet toned body marked by athleticism. It seems it is no longer enough to be thin, one must also actively work on the body, shaping it into a desired form (Schulze, 1990). This aesthetic corporeal shift is perhaps reflective of a neo-liberal society where responsibility for all matters, including health and appearance, lies with the individual. Irrespective of the reason, the result is the construction of a relatively homogenous female form that stands in as the heteronormative ideal of feminine beauty to which all women are expected to aspire, despite very few women being able to attain, maintain and retain such a body. The seemingly ubiquitous nature of the slim, toned, athletic ideal serves as a normalising agent that acts as a potential prison house (Bordo, 2003), ensuring the regulation of women's dietary practices (Germov & Williams, 1999), thoughts and bodily behaviours (Bordo, 2003).

The image of the ideal feminine body is so commonplace that few, if any, among us could claim not to recognise it (Carryer, 1998). Yet the heteronormative ideal cannot exist without an *abject Other* to which it may be compared (Kristeva, 1982). In other words, we recognise a particular form of beauty because it stands in contrast to its Other. Longhurst (2008) uses the notion of abjection to consider the ambiguous borders of the pregnant body when occupying public spaces. She defines abjection as:

The affect or feeling of anxiety, loathing and disgust that the subject has in encountering certain matter, images and fantasies - the horrible - to which it can respond only with aversion, nausea and distraction. Kristeva argues that the abject provokes fear and disgust because it exposes the border between self and other. (p. 70)

³ For example, see Popenoe (2005) for alternative constructions of beauty in Niger.

In the context of this research, the fat woman's body stands in as the abject Other to the heteronormative ideal of feminine beauty. Using abjection as a framework, one of the reasons this occurs is because the margins of the fat woman's body have been breached, the world excessively entering, as it were, the corpulent body (Huff, 2001). In this way, fat is constructed as an impurity or pollution that is inherently threatening to the internal machinations of the body. However, fat also settles *on* the body, appearing on the body like "barnacles on a ship" (Huff, 2001, p. 44). The way in which fat resides, at once, within the body while also visible on the surface of the body, complicates further the fluid and indeterminable boundaries of the larger fleshy body.

Boundaries (as a conceptual tool) provide a foundational framework for understanding abjection. Boundaries provide a clear demarcation between objects, people and space. In doing so, they provide a degree of comfort and security in the knowledge that whatever is held within, is contained. However, the abject, above all, occupies the "in-between, the ambiguous, [and] the composite" space (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4), meaning that the (breached) boundaries of the fat woman's body are encapsulated by uncertainty and ambiguity. The lack of solidity to material fatness (Longhurst, 2005b), gives rise to perceptions of fat as not only beyond control but capable of spilling its excess beyond its borders. While the slim, toned body is a body under control, the fat body is an unruly body that is seen as beyond the control of either society or the individual.

Crucially, the uncontrolled (and uncontrollable) body is perceived as dangerous given it defies social order. Butler (1990) contends that "all social systems are vulnerable at their margins, and ... all margins are accordingly considered dangerous" (p. 168). The foundation of Butler's comment, and indeed underpinning the notion of corporeal boundaries and abjection more generally, is Mary Douglas' (1966) work on boundaries and dirt in *Purity and Danger*. In this seminal text, Douglas argues similarly that margins are dangerous and that what is regarded as dirt in any given society is what may be considered "matter out of place" (p. 35). Douglas posits that dirt is:

never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt, there is a system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements. (p. 35)

The relevance of Douglas' work for this chapter is clear. The materiality of the fat body stands in as the abject, 'dirty' body; it is a symbolically polluted corporeality that defies social order. Societies possess "external boundaries, margins, [and] internal structure" (Douglas, 1966, p. 114). The operational boundaries of society mark one group from another and potentially carve society into discrete categories of definition, effectively defining a person's social position as either inside or outside a bounded social group (Douglas, 1996). Furthermore, as groups on the boundaries or margins of society, such as larger women, are considered risky by those in the centre, they are further constructed as Other (Tulloch & Lupton, 2003), and their polluting potential is exacerbated further still. The conceptualisation of fat as analogous to dirt and pollution serves as another form of social control (Huff, 2001), the result of which is the reification of hegemonic discourses which position fat women on the margins (or the boundaries) of society. Thinking through the fat woman's body in this way constructs the fat body as intrinsically problematic and potentially threatening.

One might expect that the threat of contamination may lead to an absolute disavowal of the fat woman. However, the abject simultaneously repels and attracts, it seductively draws in the observer while at the same time, making the observer turn away in disgust. It is perhaps for this reason that the fat woman's body is the recipient of so much perverse interest. The fat woman is reviled at the same time as she is the seemingly unending object of media attention, the target of a preponderance of fat jokes (Himes & Thompson, 2007), the endless object of public policy, and a target of ironic sexualisation in the fat porn industry (Bunzl, 2005). It seems society is at once disgusted by fat, while concurrently awash with a perverse pleasure in the horror of the fat, fleshy, female form.

Significantly, and perhaps also ironically, one of the most effective ways of constructing the fat body as abject is through the erasure of fatness. In a "fat
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abhorring world of images” (Kent, 2001, p. 130), the fat woman is largely absent from popular culture including positive depictions of fatness in magazines (Whitehead & Kurz, 2008), advertising (LeBesco, 2004), and television (Brazier, 2001). Where fat women do appear in the latter, they are cast primarily in supporting roles (Solovay & Rothblum, 2009), or alternatively, as the comedic focus (Stukator, 2001). In print media that speaks directly to fatness, images of the fat body are also curiously absent. Where fat women do appear, they are often sliced into fragments of body; a sliver of flesh as it were (Kent, 2001). It is as though the boundaries of the fat woman’s body may not appear as a totality but must instead appear fragmented in order that the fat body is made more palatable. It seems in the very moment the fat woman appears, she is simultaneously removed.

The construction of fat women as abject is crucial for the present research. The abject body is a troubled body, produced in and through hegemonic discourses of exclusion, deviance and pollution. By failing to adhere to normative constructs of feminine corporeality, the larger woman’s body is firmly Othered and marked as an anomaly that is beyond the accepted bounds of society. The Othering of the larger woman’s body raises important questions for this research. Given the construction of fatness as beyond the bounds of intelligibility, how do larger women negotiate their everyday worlds? And, in respect to dress, to what extent does clothing exacerbate the abjection of their bodies, or alternatively, provide a tool to challenge and subvert the negative construction of their bodies?

Governing the Medicalised Fat Body

If fat women appear little in depictions of popular culture, the same cannot be said of the field of health and illness. Medicalisation is a process whereby non-medical problems or behavioural health issues, come to be defined and treated as medical issues requiring medical intervention (Lupton, 1997). Fatness has long been considered a moral failing of the individual. However, more recently, fatness has also come to be viewed as a form of sickness; a medical condition or disease (Sobal, 1995; Wray & Deery, 2008). The medicalisation of fat has occurred in a number of ways. First, the construction of medical categories such as obesity, and the increased use of adjectives such as ‘adipose’ to describe fat people demonstrate a shift in

values from a morally laden discourse to one that encapsulates the seemingly value-neutral language of medicine (Sobal, 1995). Second, the construction of fatness as a disease or disorder firmly places fatness within the realms of health and illness. For example, Jutel (2006) cites the authoritative Centre for Disease Control listing ‘overweight’ as a disease or condition. Similarly, the increased use of terms such as epidemic, treatment and prevention, demonstrate that fatness is actively constructed as a “pseudo-disease” (p. 4), which then becomes the object of epidemiological study.

The repositioning of fatness in the centre of health and well-being ensures fat remains a hot topic in the political arena. It seems every level of governance is involved in “fight[ing] fat” (Diabetes New Zealand, 2004), the “war against obesity” (Herndon, 2005), and the battle against a “global epidemic” (World Health Organization, 1998). Governing bodies, such as Departments of Health, deploy a range of “specific rationalities, truths and techniques ... to shape the desires, actions and beliefs of individuals and populations” (Fullagar, 2003, p. 48). A powerful way this has occurred is through the widespread use of Body Mass Index (BMI) tables, a mathematical ratio of weight and height (weight in kilos / height in metres squared)⁴. Since the 1970s, BMI is increasingly used by health professionals as a readily available tool to garner information about an individual’s health. However, as a diagnostic tool, BMI is highly contentious with a number of scholars debating categorical boundaries (Henderson, 2005), as well as demonstrating BMI to be unreliable in detecting obesity (Frankenfield, Rowe, Cooney, Smith, & Becker, 2001). Most importantly, BMI as a categorical tool is not harmless. In fact, it is highly problematic, reducing bodies to a number that is assumed to reflect health and well-being in a concrete fashion. Underpinning its use lies the assumption that weight alone can be a reliable predictor of health, a position that is largely overstated

⁴ Results are tabulated into categories of underweight (BMI <20), normal weight (BMI 21 to 25), over-weight (BMI between 25 and 29), and obese (BMI >30). In the local context, the categorical limits are adjusted up for Maori and Pacific Island Peoples., and adjusted down for those of Indian or Asian descent.

(Jutel, 2005)⁵. However, despite evidence to the contrary, the assumption that weight and health are unproblematically correlated continues unabated, for the BMI serves its purpose as a normative mechanism of “surveillance, monitoring, observation and measurement” (Lupton, 1999, p. 87). As such, it simultaneously contributes to the construction of the fat body as a medical category that requires controlling, regulating and ultimately managing by health authorities.

Techniques of definition and measurement are not the only way in which the fat body is constructed by health authorities as problematic. Rhetoric is also used widely to construct a particular view of, and attitude toward, fatness. Often, this rhetoric draws on discourses of risk and danger to construct a body that is potentially threatening to both the private body and the public body, respectively captured in the following:

Too many of us are living dangerously - whether we are aware of that or not ... either because [we have] little choice or because [we are] making the wrong choices about consumption and activity. (World Health Organization, 2002, p.3-4)

America's obesity epidemic will dwarf the threat of terrorism if the nation does not reduce the number of people who are severely overweight Obesity is the terror within. Unless we do something about it, the magnitude of the dilemma will dwarf 9-11 or any other terrorist attempt. (Pace, 2006, quoting United States Surgeon General, Richard Carmona)

⁵ In a longitudinal study of two million Americans, Campos (2004) found that being underweight resulted in a lower life expectancy than someone who was obese according to BMI tables. In addition, he demonstrated that it was better to be slightly overweight given the protective effects of being moderately overweight in respect to prevention of osteoporosis, mortality, lung disease and some cancers.

Through the employment of linguistic devices, the World Health Organization (WHO) constructs fatness as dangerous to the self. In contrast, United States Surgeon General, Richard Carmona emphasises the risks fatness poses for the *social* body. Carmona draws a dangerous analogy between American citizens who are obese and those who commit terrorist attacks against the United States. Drawing intentionally on highly emotive language, while simultaneously using clear references to the language of size such as “dwarf”, “reduce”, and “magnitude”, he actively constructs the fat body as threatening to the social order. In doing so, Carmona legitimates judgment of, and discrimination against, fat people. Given his influential position within the politics of healthcare in the United States, his ideological position holds considerable sway. It seems the war on terror is nothing compared with the war against the real threat to social order: fat.

The words of the WHO and Carmona highlight the moral foundation to much of the rhetoric of fatness. In a neo-liberal society that emphasises individual responsibility, the fault of ‘excessive’ fat is thought to fall firmly at the feet of the individual. Excess weight is assumed to result quite simply from excessive consumption combined with inadequate exercise. Despite numerous challenges to this specious assumption, including statistical evidence (see, Campos, 2006; Gard & Wright, 2005), it is an idea that continues to gain traction and influence the way in which fatness is perceived. That the origin of these discourses lies in such authoritative bodies and individuals lends considerable weight to the position that fatness is problematic and dangerous, for both individual and society.

Kuhlman and Babitsch (2002) suggest that when health researchers fail to acknowledge the materiality of the body in which health and illness occurs, they inadvertently run the risk of promoting a “latent biologism” (p. 434). This refers to an increased emphasis on empirically based accounts of gender and health with little or no attention paid to the socio-cultural construction of the gendered body in the first instance. However, rather than latent, I argue that the medicalisation of *fatness* and the reductionism therein results in an *overt* biologism. That is, fat women are unequivocally reduced to biology and no account is made for the multi-faceted experience of actually living as an embodied fat woman. Reductionist explanations

such as these have implications for the individual and society. First, the fat body is constructed as an instrumental *object* to be controlled, reigned in and regulated (Germov & Williams, 1999; Lupton, 1995; Nettleton & Bunton, 1995; Turner, 1992). Second, the reductionist lens fails to account for the dominant discourses of fatness that shape experience.

The biological reductionism of fat women's bodies is important when considering their everyday clothing practices. Primarily, it is important because these dominant discourses serve as foundational texts that colour how larger women are perceived by others, and also, how larger women understand and make sense of their bodies. In addition, given the close proximity of clothing to the body, and its social relevance, it is not unreasonable to expect that the negative construction of fatness as problematic and potentially illegitimate will impact on the everyday clothed experiences of larger women.

Illegitimate Fat Bodies

Why do the same words come back time and time again, with their images and symbols, and how do they make themselves understood? What is it that allows us to use the word 'love' in varying situations and conversations, and still be understood by the different people we are talking to? What is it that creates a certain alignment between the emotion expressed by one speaker and the emotion aroused in another, just by the use of one word? (Lefebvre, 2002, p. 341)

So questions Lefebvre. But for a moment, let us transpose the word 'love' with the word 'fat'. Why does 'fat' conjure up such powerful imagery? Why is 'fat' such an evocative symbol in contemporary western society? Why does the use of the word 'fat' presuppose a particular discursive construction that can be understood without question? What is it about fat that allows the word to be used by one and immediately understood by another?

Bodies, fat or otherwise, do not exist in and of themselves. Rather, they are socially, culturally, politically and ultimately, discursively constructed. The dominant

discourses of fatness discussed above actively construct the fat body as a deviant body (Murray, 2005, 2007). However, in a world in which ‘anything goes’, deviance has begun to lose its authority as a disruptive social force and subversive practices have now all but disappeared as they are swallowed by mainstream practices (Wilson & de la Haye, 1999). As the clothing label of iconic New Zealand designer *World* states: “alternative is the new ordinary”. Yet, while tattooing and piercing the body have become mainstream, fatness remains as one of the truly disruptive, disorderly and unruly corporeal forms.

The fat woman may not be at ease in her body. Instead, she must perpetually attempt to lose weight in order to align her body more closely with heteronormative ideals of feminine beauty and reconcile her body with social conceptions of what constitutes health and well-being. Those who fail and remain fat are assumed to be “slothful, lazy, weak-willed, unreliable, unclean, unhealthy, deviant, and defiant” (Murray, 2005, p. 266), as well as “undisciplined, self-indulgent ... untrustworthy, unwilling and non-conforming” (Bell & Valentine, 1997, p. 36). The popular magazine, *North and South*, published a story on attitudes toward fatness in New Zealand, reporting that “fat fascism is being called the new, society-sanctioned racism where size comes loaded with moral judgment” (Wane, 2009, p. 32). The social judgment of others cannot be overstated. In the academic realm too, prejudice against fat women has been noted, with a number of authors claiming that prejudice against fat women is the last *socially sanctioned* prejudice that exists in western society (LeBesco & Braziel, 2001; Longhurst, 2005b). Breseman, Lennon and Schulz (1999) suggest that:

[T]he fear and hatred of fat people, particularly fat women and the concomitant presence of oppressive and discriminatory practices aimed toward fat people, has become one of the few ‘acceptable’ prejudices still held by otherwise progressive and aware persons. (p. 185)

A position supported by empirical evidence (Latner, O'Brien, Durso, Brinkman, & MacDonald, 2008), a growing body of research demonstrates discrimination toward fat people in a range of areas including education (Myers & Rothblum, 2010), the workplace (Fisanick, 2007), and interpersonal situations (Miller, Rothblum, Barbour, Brand, & Felicio, 1990). Ironically, discriminatory practices are also identified in

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healthcare delivery as fat people, and women in particular, face prejudice from their doctors (Breseman, et al., 1999), their nurses (Carryer, 1998; Peternelj-Taylor, 1989; Poon & Tarrant, 2009), and even their nutritionists and dieticians (Parham, 1999). These discriminatory practices highlight the extent to which fatness in today's society is viewed as fundamentally problematic. However, the fat body is not only a deviant body. It is also an illegitimate body in mainstream discourse that fails to comply with basic standards of socio-cultural citizenship and belonging. Popular culture reinforces the idea that fat people do not occupy the same legitimate status as social citizens as other people. For example, the aforementioned magazine quoted a number of blog entries where individuals expressed their thoughts on fat:

Figure 2.1 Blog excerpts demonstrating attitudes toward fat people.

<p>Pedrovsky: fatsos should have to pay for the real costs of their overindulgence in glutton food and lazy couch lifestyle. Maybe a fat tax on stupid food or user pays for self-inflicted bad health</p> <p>Robert: we MUST stop pandering or mollycoddle these very irresponsible, unashamed people</p> <p>Dazedandconfused: I hope ALL fat people feel like outcasts – that may encourage them to stop overeating</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Wane, 2009, pp. 33-35)</p>
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According to the populist vote, it seems fat people should pay more taxes than others, they should be ashamed of themselves, and they should feel like social outcasts. In sum, fat people should not be treated and respected as legitimate members of society with the same rights of citizenship as others.

The construction of fatness as fundamentally problematic and potentially illegitimate ensures fat women are perpetually reminded of their bodies' failure to fit. As a fat woman, it is difficult, if not impossible, to avoid negative representations and the concomitant social judgment of fatness in popular culture. The on-going judgment potentially leads to an on-going awareness of the body and its problematic place in

the social world. This increased awareness raises interesting questions for my research. Given clothing transforms biological matter into social matter (Entwistle, 1997), it seems consideration of the relationship between larger women's bodies and clothing is important. In particular, to what extent does clothing mediate, or amplify the problematic construction of the fat woman's body? In the next section, I turn to the place of clothing as it relates to the body. In particular, I consider clothing's capacity as a particular kind of material object that is able to bridge the gap between the private and the personal, between self and other, and between object and subject. In other words, I consider clothing as embodied.

Materialising the Material

In 2006, I visited an exhibition held at the Hawke's Bay Museum and Gallery titled *Black Dress, White Vase: A Surrealist Tableau*. The exhibition, described as an "accidental meeting of black dresses and white vases" by the curator of the museum, Douglas Lloyd Jenkins (personal communication, April 7, 2009), challenged the way I thought about material objects. As I walked through the exhibition, the juxtaposition of these contradictory objects was unsettling. The solidity of the white vases contrasted sharply with the fluidity of the fabrics. Temporally, they belonged in vastly different historical moments and yet here they were, strangely united in a particular place and moment in time. The story of each - the white vase and the black dress - was rewritten or recast in the present. However, while brought together in a single space, the relationship to, or relationship with, the humanity they represented was qualitatively different. I could see that taken individually, the white vases on display had their own social life (see, Appadurai, 1986), their place as a commodity was perceptible (see, Kopytoff, 1986; Miller, 1987), they were embedded in gendered relations (see, Hurdley, 2007), and they were temporally and spatially contextualised as representative of a specific aesthetic moment (see, McLaren, 2003). There was an aesthetic purity within the white vases that was retained when considering the function and usage of the vessel. However, the black dresses captured my imagination in a way that the vases did not, and perhaps could not. The ghostly hanging of some of the dresses still bore the shape of their former wearers. The social life of the dresses was evident in, or perhaps tainted, the folds of the

fabric. Traces of sweat, blood and dirt, no doubt, remained embedded within the fibres. The dresses hung simply, and yet it was as though the fabric itself was embodied by the former wearer. In contrast to the apparently untouched purity of the white vases, the clothes displayed their wearers even in their absence. This gallery visit highlighted for me the extent to which clothing is a special material object that connects with the body and social life in ways other objects cannot. The intimacy of the relationship (both physical and symbolic) between clothes and the wearer places clothing apart as a particular kind of material object that can speak to the realities of the lived life. It is this relationship between clothes and wearers that I now turn.

A Body of Clothing

When we are born our bodies are wrapped in cloth to keep us warm, and throughout our lives we cover ourselves with various forms of clothing; before, finally at the time of death, our bodies are again wrapped in cloth or dressed for the occasion. (Küchler & Were, 2005b, p. x)

It seems clothing is a human constant. Although clothing choices are undoubtedly influenced by gender (Wilson, 1987), ethnicity (Küchler & Were, 2005a; Sandikci & Ger, 2005), age (Gibson, 2000), professional position (Entwistle, 2007; Frank, 2005), class (Partington, 2007), geographical location (Roach & Eicher, 1973), the fashion industry or system (Barthes, 1985; Wilson, 1987), and innumerable other factors, clothing is an important part of *everyone's* everyday lives. Indeed, clothes, Ash (1999) argues, “speak a universal sentient language since they are both for, and of us, as human beings across class, gender, racial and national boundaries” (p. 131).

While the claim that clothing possesses a universal quality is fitting, Ash's suggestion that clothes speak a universal *language* is questionable, and somewhat problematic, despite this claim being supported by numerous scholars. For example, in a book tellingly entitled, *The Language of Clothes*, psychologist Lurie (1981), suggests that clothes speak a language that can be clearly understood by an observer. She posits that donning plaid or checks communicates that the wearer works hard and takes life seriously. For Ash and Lurie, clothes speak an immediate language,

laying claim to our identity before we have a chance to speak otherwise. As such, clothes are assumed to be a direct and accurate reflection of the self, encapsulating identity and faultlessly presenting the self to the outside world; they are, in effect, an extension of the self.

Teasing out such assertions further, suggests that clothing possesses a prior materiality which exists outside of the social processes and conditions in which it was created or worn (Campbell, 1996). In other words, it is assumed that clothing possesses an immutable and irrefutable truth, capable of imparting knowledge of people in a particular time (Wilson & de la Haye, 1999). For example, historians and textile curators develop rich, descriptive analyses of cloth and textiles as they are represented in various historical moments. Arnold's (1999) description of women's riding dress from 1500-1900 is a case in point. Arnold is highly elaborative with her descriptions, painstakingly cross-referencing her observations with paintings and books from the period and drawing comparisons with other countries. She carefully examines alterations to fabric and outfits, deducing shifts in gendered clothing practices in the process, and consequently, is able to place her observations within dominant understandings of society of the period and speculate as to the purpose of various hoops, straps and bustles. She also 'plays' with language, exploring the origins of phrases such as 'riding habit', again carefully cross-referencing her deductions with empirical evidence such as diaries, books and paintings. Certainly, the historical analysis of cloth and textiles is rich for mapping clothing as it was worn in history. However, historical analyses say little about what it may have been like to live in those particular clothes in a particular time.

While interesting, these observations of clothing and dress and their capacity to articulate the self are limited. In the case of historians and cloth / textile curators, the emphasis lies with the study and analysis of cloth, textiles and dress, with little concern for the wearer. These scholars' interest lies in the *textural*. However, in this thesis, I am more concerned with the *textual* and an emphasis on the accumulated social meanings of clothing, as well as the relationship between clothes and (larger women) wearers. The semiotic tradition argues that the universe consists of signs, the meaning of which must be established by the observer. From a semiotic

perspective “nothing has meaning in itself; an object’s meaning always derives from the network of relations in which it is embedded” (Berger, 2009, p. 45). Returning to matters of dress, clothes are signifiers that are part of an infinite system of signs, meaning that a garment will always be comprehended through its relation to other garments in an “unending process of signification” (Keane, 2005, p. 186).

Considering clothing as text emphasises that the meaning of clothes is socially constructed. Where scholarly attention has been paid to dress and clothing, sociologists in particular have often concerned themselves with the larger and broader social systems of production and consumption (Miller, 1987). Certainly, the ‘fashion system’ (Barthes, 1985) shapes the construction of meanings around clothing. The fashion industry, embedded within capitalist machinations of production and consumption, inscribe meaning into clothing, based on such things as colour, cloth, cut, style and label, which are then passed on to the consumer (Banim, Green, & Guy, 2001). Given women are each positioned within the fashion system in different ways, this opens a multiplicity of potential understandings, ensuring the fashion system is influential in shaping the performance of gender (and other social classifications) through clothes.

Accordingly, the meaning of clothing is neither fixed nor singular. Slippage of meanings may always occur between the intentions of the wearer and the perceptions of others. This slippery space highlights the relational meaning of clothes, as well as the extent to which clothes perform *social* work. The meanings people attribute to clothing is a thoroughly social endeavour taking place between the wearer and the observer, as well as occurring within the broader social systems of fashion production and consumption. Although Eicher and Roach-Higgins (1997) argue dress is a *repository* for social meanings including gender roles, which potentially offer a vehicle for perpetuating those roles, the meaning of dress does not exist within the fibres of the cloth itself. Rather, the meanings of dress lies in the socio-cultural space between the wearer and those they encounter, and are negotiated and renegotiated across time and space.

The site in which clothing makes its appearance is crucial to how clothing will be read, and equally, how the wearer will be read. Certainly, there are numerous

normative rules of dress. However, they must be understood together with the normative rules of the body. These rules are particularly important when considering the larger woman's body. For clothing to 'fit', it must fit the body, as well as fit within the normative modes of dress for a particular social location. Thus, the act of wearing clothing is temporally and spatially ordered; matters of dress are a situated, bodily practice (Entwistle, 2000; Gregson, Crewe, & Brooks, 2002). In the following section, I move away from discussions of the body and clothing as though discrete categorical units and instead, bring bodies and clothing together in the same space. To do so, I consider the larger clothed body as embodied.

Stitching Together Fat Bodies and Clothes

The remainder of this chapter explores the space between the body and clothes more closely, examining how they are interconnected and mutually constitutive. In particular, embodiment, boundaries, and dress as a situated practice, are considered as useful conceptual tools to make sense of the space between them. Drawing on these concepts allows me to consider clothing not only as a material object that resides against the skin, but also as a "lived garment" (Banerjee & Miller, 2003, p.1), that possesses its own narrative in relation to the wearer. More than this, these concepts provide the hanger on which the broad themes of clothing, the body, and the politics of fatness may be placed. It is to these conceptual tools that I now turn.

Embodied (Clothed) Practice

The concept of embodiment is important for understanding the clothing practices of larger women. Embodiment refers to the subjective experience of one's own material body and it provides a way of understanding the body as simultaneously both subject and object. The body is an object that may be looked upon, not only by others but also by the self; it has a physical materiality that cannot be denied. This objective understanding of the body may be captured by the German concept *körper* to denote the "structural objectified aspects of physical being" (Shilling, 1993, p.129). Yet the body is also subject, or *lieb*, which refers to the "living, feeling, sensing and emotional aspects of bodily experience" (Shilling, 1993, p. 129). This is a useful linguistic distinction for understanding the processes of embodiment as it captures

the reciprocal duality of actually living in a body; the body as an object cannot be divorced from the body as a subject, as one effectively emerges from the other (Waskul & Vannini, 2006). It is also helpful for cutting through dichotomous understandings of the self that privilege mind / body, or, subject / object. Instead, the experience of living in a body is brought to the fore and space is created for the multi-dimensional and multi-sensorial aspects of everyday life.

However, the attention of this thesis does not lie with the body alone, but considers the clothed body, adding another dimension to the notion of embodiment. The embodiment of clothing is a multi-sensory experience. In defining dress and clothing, Eicher and Roach-Higgins (1997) argue that clothing need not be reduced to observable categorical systems. Instead, they suggest that other senses are equally important. Sound, touch and odour each contribute to the tactile and embodied experience of the clothed body: the rustle of multiple folds of silk as the wearer moves; the sensuous feel of satin against the skin; or the earthy, animal smell of leather or suede. Even taste, with its close ties to the olfactory system, may contribute at a sensory level to the embodied experience of wearing clothes, a factor the Coca-Cola group of companies sought to capitalise on when introducing their range of soda scented t-shirts. While undoubtedly the observable is crucial, other senses are, it seems, also important in marketing, making and moulding the experiences of the clothed body.

The embodied experience of wearing clothes, and the reciprocal relationship between clothing and the wearer, is exemplified in the most horrific way through the experiences of Chilean torture victim, Luis Munos. Munos reports that throughout the period of his torture, his captors removed his clothing, donning the garments themselves. In doing so, according to the victim, it was “as though they want you to feel you are torturing yourself ... they have completely removed your personality, and it reverses everything” (Soper, 2001, p.21). In this admittedly extreme example, clothing becomes much more than an adjunct to the body. Instead, the clothing becomes him.

The example of Luis Munos makes it clear that a body does not have to be *in* a garment for its presence to be felt. Clothes also take on almost human form,

possessing ghostly and poignant flickers of previous inhabitants, a point captured by Holocaust artist, Christian Boltanski. His art installation invited people to walk into and through a large warehouse filled with used clothing. These clothes were designed to ‘stand in for’ the mountainous piles of clothing confiscated during the Nazi regime; clothing that ultimately represented the number of murdered Jews during this time. Viewers of the installation were encouraged to interact with the clothes, moving them around, creating piles and shapes while taking in the smell and history of the “clothing that ha[s] somehow survived its wearers” (Kaplan, 2007, p. 144). While some people did wander through the installation, many preferred not to, the reason captured simply enough by one visitor to the gallery: “it would be like walking on people” (Ash, 1999, p. 135). It is as though the clothes were intimately bound to their former wearers. Their ethereal presence resided still within the used fabric and filled the art space. The stories of former wearers, both joyful and sad, were represented there, the lifeless, faceless, and body-less clothes representing a haunting image.

These two examples demonstrate in poignant ways the intimate connection between clothing and the body. It is as though the body becomes the clothes and the clothes become the body, as the boundaries of each become blurred. Clearly, clothing is not simply worn on the body. Rather, it becomes intimately connected to, and with, the body. Although interesting for considering the relationship between clothing and the body generally, these insights are especially pertinent for considering the larger clothed body as the synchronicity between clothing and the body is potentially more troublesome for large women for two reasons. First, the social constraints associated with fatness, as previously discussed, serve to construct a particular reality for fat women that ensure they are persistently reminded of their problematic physicality (Murray, 2007). Second, the physical or material boundaries between the larger body and clothing are potentially more troublesome than the boundaries of others. In the next section, I turn my attention to the latter, emphasising the fluid boundaries of soft fleshy bodies, the semi-fixed boundaries of clothes and the problematic space between.

Corporeal and Sartorial Edges

Clothing “lies at the margins of the body and marks the boundary between self and other, individual and society” (Entwistle, 2001, p. 37). Clothing is at once intimate, residing against the surface of the individual body, and social, indicative of social categories. Clothing has individual functions such as keeping the body warm and preserving modesty, but also serves a social function such as marking an individual as a member of a given social environment or group. Thus, clothing is the matter that transforms the private and individual body into a socio-cultural entity to be recognised by others; clothing inscribes meaning upon the body (Grosz, 1994). Importantly, even those for whom clothing offers no interest must concern themselves with matters of dress.

However, it is not easy to clearly mark the boundaries between clothing and the body. The edges of the clothed body are troublesome. At what point does the body finish and clothes begin? At the moment of dressing, the two, body and clothes, converge on the same space, bringing the other into being in intimate ways. When dressed, clothing rests around the body, following its contours and simultaneously concealing and revealing the body. The body can no longer move without being shadowed by the clothes. This shadow self is both self and not self; the space between representing the most intimate of relationships. There is, it seems, a corporeal and sartorial synchronicity within the clothed body.

Equally, the textural porosity of fabric also confounds the boundaries of bodies and clothing. The body is not wholly contained within its boundaries. Rather, it seeps and leaks out, fabric providing a ready net. The body’s secretions, sweat, blood, and tears for example, defy the boundaries of the body, marking clothes with the body’s interior. In this way, it is as though clothes serve as the final frontier between the body and the outside world as what was once the body, becomes part of the cloth.

Unpicking the seams of this complex relationship between clothing and bodies, Cavallaro and Warwick (1998) suggest that the body is both a boundary and not a boundary. As outlined above, the distinction between internal and external elements of the body are blurred. Crucially, the ambiguity of those corporeal boundaries is

unsettling because they lack safeguarding; they might leak and pollute the social order, mirroring the reference to Douglas' (1966) work made earlier. However, the boundaries of clothing are equally ambiguous. Although clothing may be considered an adjunct to the body, and as such worn on the surface of the body, prior discussions lend support to an understanding of clothing as also *of* the body. In addition, in a social sense, at the same time as clothing frames the body, separating it out from others, it also connects the self with others in a multiplicity of ways. Consequently, it is a boundary that separates the wearer from others by residing in the space between the self and others (Entwistle, 2000). Again, the ambiguity of clothing's boundaries is equally unsettling. As Wilson (1987) explains:

Clothing marks an unclear boundary ambiguously, and unclear boundaries disturb us. Symbolic systems and rituals have been created in many different cultures in order to strengthen and reinforce boundaries, since these safeguard purity. It is at the margins between one thing and another that pollution may leak out. Dress is the final frontier between the self and the non-self. (pp. 2-3)

Wilson's comments echo the earlier comments of Douglas (1966) in respect to the polluting potential of insecure boundaries. The multiply ambiguous relationship between clothing and the body is further emphasised when considering the larger fleshy woman's body and her clothing practices. The boundaries of the fleshy fat body are not as clearly delineated as smaller, firmer bodies. Fat flesh gives under pressure and yields to physical constraints and their "folds of soft flesh disrupt the solidity of things ... [thus] fat bodies can be seen to occupy a borderline state that disturbs order by not respecting 'proper' boundaries" (Longhurst, 2005b, p. 256). Fat bodies take up more space than they are allocated, and their 'excess' flesh spills, for example, beyond the confines of a chair, and importantly, for the purposes of this thesis, their flesh spills beyond the confines of clothing.

The way the larger fleshier body moves accentuates or confounds the problematic boundary of the larger body further. While the slim, toned, athletic body is firm, the fat, fleshy body jiggles and wobbles. Not only does this excessive movement challenge, once more, heteronormative ideals of feminine corporeality and a body

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under control, it alters the way the body rubs up against clothing. When worn, clothing does not always stay in place as expected; clothes slide and ride into the body's crevices, chafing the skin's surface, and cutting into soft flesh. Similarly, the fleshy body spills out beyond the confines of cloth. The fluidity or viscosity of flesh, accompanied by the malleability of cloth, further confound the boundaries of each as flesh and clothing intrude on the space of the other. This problematic relationship between clothing and the body ensures a greater corporeal consciousness for larger women, or borrowing the terminology of Entwistle (2000), a greater "epidermic self-awareness" (p. 334). The physical materiality of the (clothed) larger body refuses to be ignored.

As the hanger on which clothing is placed, the larger woman's body reminds both the self and others of its potentially problematic, polluting presence. Clearly, the fluidity of the body and the textural porosity of clothing are crucial for understanding the relationship between clothing and the bodies of larger women. However, it is not only the permeable boundaries of the fleshy bodies and clothing that create a more problematic space for larger women. The necessarily *situated* nature of the dressed body is also important for understanding the experience of the clothed body (Entwistle, 2000; Entwistle, 2001), and in particular, the experience of the clothed larger woman.

Clothing as a Situated Practice

In 2007, British tourist to New Zealand 33-year-old Helen Simpson (see Figure 2.2) visited the Christchurch casino with friends. Simpson, who is reportedly a "size 14 on the bottom" while a "size 20 on the top", dressed up for the occasion in a low-cut fitted top. While at the casino, management asked Simpson to cover up her "ample breasts" (NZ Herald, 2007) or leave, claiming that other patrons had complained. Simpson subsequently reported the incident to the media, stating she felt "highly embarrassed" and "absolutely humiliated" by the event. The story created quite a furore and was picked up by both national and international media. Typically, the story was framed around the discriminatory practices of the casino toward not only large-breasted women, but larger women generally. Commenting on the story, local celebrity model Nikki Watson (see Figure 2.3), the proud carrier of ample, if

surgically enhanced breasts claimed the casino would not have had the same reaction had she worn the same outfit.

Figure 2.2 Helen Simpson.⁶



Figure 2.3 Nikki Watson.⁷



Clearly, this story was not simply about breasts and cleavage in public places. This story was about the fat body and the overt sexualisation of the fat body. It seems Simpson broke a cardinal rule for larger women. By wearing clothes that sexualised her body she defied dominant understandings of fatness as asexual. Simpson was expelled from the casino because of her size. This position is reflected in many of the public opinion blogs that responded to the story, a small sample of which follows in Figure 2.4:

⁶ Reprinted with permission. Source: Carys Monteath, The Press.

⁷ Reprinted with permission. Source: John Selkirk, Fairfax Media.

Figure 2.4. A sample of public opinion blogs on the Helen Simpson story.

Kimi: Nah!!!...Way too much!!!...Don't wana be looking at those if I were opposite her sorry!!!... whole lotta BLUBBER if you ask me!!!

David: I'm going to be brutally honest here... For one thing, she's rather unattractive, and she's also on the big side. Big is not beautiful. When people say that beauty comes from within, that's only to make ugly people feel better about themselves. I don't think obesity should be glorified at all. It's unhealthy and preventable for the most part.

Pete: Why do overweight women have to show so much cleavage in the first place... I think they look disgusting,and would run a mile.Put them away.She is obese and most men dont want to see them... For the record:Big is not beautifull,its an excuse to not eat well and excersise.

Brett: ... Put the dogs in the cage and let everyone enjoy the night.

Aileen: ... Cows can have their throats cut for saggy udders! ...

The first three comments indicate a clear relationship between Simpson being asked to leave the casino and her size. Her weight is the issue here, not her breasts. If in any doubt of general public opinion regarding fatness, the final two comments demonstrate the absolute abhorrence of the fat, female body. These two comments in particular strike at the heart of the issue, placing the fat woman even beyond the realm of human, categorising her as animal.

Clearly, bodies are not created equally. Just as material objects are assigned cultural values which allow them to be ordered into hierarchical systems (I. Woodward, 2007), so too are bodies. Although the value awarded to bodies may alter around the world (see, Popenoe, 2005), in contemporary western society, the slim woman is valued *over* the fat woman. Normative rules of dress operate to reinforce these hierarchical systems and the fat woman is constrained by them. Although not bound by law, these rules may at times feel as though they possess the authority of law, acting as tacit rules that confine and limit clothing possibilities. Thus, challenges to

the hierarchical order through the deliberate flouting of these rules are considered both threatening and dangerous. By dressing provocatively and drawing attention to her breasts, Simpson challenges the dominant corporeal value-system, insisting her body be considered as potentially sexy. That Simpson did so in such a public space is crucial.

Once more, the concept of boundaries is raised. First, the actions of Simpson challenge the social norms as they occur within a given geographical, bounded location. Second, Simpson challenges clothing boundaries in respect to the functionality of clothing and the normative role it plays in covering (socially determined) parts of the body. Third, Simpson challenges social boundaries by insisting that her body be constructed as legitimate when wearing provocative clothing. Returning to the work of de Certeau (1984) and the geographically inspired metaphor of maps and itineraries, Simpson's actions create an alternative itinerary that challenges the (geographical, corporeal and clothing) boundaries of the map of fatness. While not entirely successful as a cartographer, Simpson nonetheless successfully places the politics of (clothed) fatness in the social arena, which raises the potential for the boundaries of understandings of fatness to shift.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I addressed a number of crucial issues that provide the foundation for the remainder of this thesis. First, I discussed how fatness is discursively constructed in contemporary society. I argued that multiple and yet paradoxically singular constructions of fatness problematise the fat woman's body which, in turn, limits the possibilities for larger women. In particular, I suggested these multiply problematic discourses construct the larger woman's body as illegitimate. Second, I considered the role of clothing for the construction of selfhood, placing greatest emphasis on the multiple meanings of clothing constructed within spatio-temporal borders. In the final section of this chapter, I brought the (larger woman's) body and clothing together. I argued that wearing clothes is an embodied and situated practice (Entwistle, 2000), and the meaning of both clothes and wearers is closely tied to the social (bounded) norms of a given society. Importantly when considering clothed fat bodies, the politics of fatness and the fleshy materiality of the larger woman's body

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confound the relationship between bodies and clothes. Thus, the fluid boundaries of fat fleshy bodies, the semi-permeable boundaries of clothing, the bound social norms of society, and the geographical boundaries (or site) in which experience occurs, each come together to shape the everyday clothing practices of larger women.

While laying the foundations of the research throughout this chapter, I have engaged with a range of disciplines including sociology, human geography, social psychology, gender studies, anthropology, history and textile studies. To some extent this empirical and theoretical engagement reflects the broad reach of those studying within the diverse field of material culture studies with a particular emphasis on clothing and dress studies (S. Woodward, 2007). However, it also reflects the emphasis of this thesis on the body and its relationship to, and with, clothing. Given this thesis focuses on the problematic fleshy body, this has necessarily involved placing the 'politics of fatness' centre stage (LeBesco, 2004; LeBesco & Braziel, 2001). Moreover, it also reflects the actualities of everyday life for larger women as they choose clothing to wear. The act of choosing involves a complex process of negotiating, constructing, and representing identities such as ethnicity (Wilbekin, 2007), sexuality (Holliday, 2007), gender (Barnes & Eicher, 1997a), the fashion system (Barthes, 1985), and the body itself (Entwistle & Wilson, 2001). It is this concern with the everyday that I turn to next as I consider the methodological framework of this thesis and my preferred emphasis on everyday clothing practices.

Chapter Three

Investigating the (Extra)Ordinary

I walk in the door. It could be any of these houses. They are all the same, gaining their validity through their reference to Europe – their Mediterranean-ness making them count as important in the Antipodes. And yet I know I'm home because as I walk in the door the smell of my new rug hits me. The smell of wool – imported from North Iran, purchased on the North Shore. I walk around the corner and place my bag on the bench (identical to next door). I open the fridge. The light, as I know, fails to come on (not identical to next door). I gently press the butter conditioner and behold, the light comes on. No, not God. Just home. *My habits inhabit me as I inhabit them.*

(Research Journal Excerpt)

Although somewhat unorthodox, and not especially relevant to this research, I begin this methodology chapter with an extract from my research journal, kept throughout the course of this study, because it captures the importance of the everyday and the extent to which the mundane may, at times, reveal broader social processes. In the extract above, the seemingly innocuous everyday activity of arriving home after

work and walking in the door is shown to be embedded within broader processes of globalisation, practices of consumption, and national identity. Crucially, it also makes evident the extent to which everyday life is a multi-sensorial, embodied experience that is embedded within aspects of the habitual and the everyday. So, on the one hand, the journal excerpt has little to do with the present study; clothing plays no part in it. However, on the other hand, the excerpt lies at the heart of the matter. The simple everyday practices that individuals engage in are capable of revealing complex social processes that speak to broader matters at hand; the everyday is far from mundane.

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First and foremost, it stresses the importance, as demonstrated above, of capturing the everyday in sociological inquiry. In this section, I argue that the seemingly mundane, everyday activities that individuals engage in can reveal important and complex social processes. Drawing largely on the work of de Certeau (1984), I argue that research endeavours should bridge the space between the dualism of structure and agency, and move beyond language and discourse by considering equally, the practices and agency of people. The second purpose of this chapter is to champion a multiplicity of approaches to *doing* social science research. Indeed, the key word throughout this second section is multiple: multiple disciplines; multiple methods; multiple venues; multiple data; multiple storytelling; and multiple layers of reflexivity. However, these research multiplicities do not sit in isolation from one another. Rather, they weave together, sometimes in accordance with my intentions as a researcher, but often of their own volition, creating a uniquely specific research space. By drawing on multiple ways of doing research that build on an ethnographic encounter, I argue that complex social processes may be illuminated that might otherwise be cast in shadows. Woven throughout this section, is a consideration of ethics as both a methodological and epistemological foundation to research practice that holds the potential for transformation, for both the individual and society.

Exploring the Everyday

It is not new to place the everyday at the centre of social scientific investigation. Participant observation, often considered the gold standard of ethnographic inquiry,

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is concerned with the everyday lives of people as they occur in natural settings (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; Bernard, 2005). Indeed, in sociological inquiry the “study of social interaction has always been a central concern of the sociological enterprise” (Karp, Yoels, & Vann, 2004, p. ix). Contemporary ethnographers have concerned themselves with such things as everyday emotions (Scherer, Wranik, Sangsue, Tran, & Scherer, 2004), the everyday banality of the classroom environment (MacLure, Holmes, MacRae, & Jones, 2010), the transformation of everyday life through migration (Wilding, 2007), and even analytic frameworks such as conversation analysis reside in matters of the everyday (Have, 2007). Although recent years may have seen a shift away from investigations of the everyday toward an increased emphasis on macro-sociological, institutional issues (Karp, et al., 2004), or language and discourse, the everyday remains an important focus of attention in social scientific inquiry as the “the exceptional is there to be found in the heart of the everyday” (Highmore, 2002, p. 3).

My approach to ‘doing’ sociology begins from the perspective of the everyday, with a particular interest in how larger women negotiate the space of their bodies and clothes, within the context of their everyday lives. But what exactly is meant by the ‘everyday’? Despite its ordinariness, apparent accessibility and the simple fact that the everyday is everywhere, it remains somewhat elusive. Paradoxically, the everyday is so everyday that it is difficult to capture. Lefebvre (1991) defines the everyday as follows:

Everyday life [is] in a sense residual, defined by ‘what is left over’ after all distinct, superior, specialized, structured activities have been singled out by analysis Everyday life is profoundly related to *all* activities, and encompasses them with all their differences and their conflicts; it is their meeting place, their bond, their common ground. (p. 97)

Interestingly, everyday life, as outlined above, is framed as a lack; that which remains once all of the more important, special things have been accounted for. Put another way, the everyday is defined by what it is *not* rather than what it *is*. Yet the definition provided by Lefebvre also points out that the everyday is the meeting place of *all* activities, including official, codified and normalised practices, as well as

the experiential (Burkitt, 2004). The everyday is the “site where experience circulates and transforms [and it is the] medium through which experience gets under the skin and materialises, affecting selves, others and situation” (Stephenson & Papadopoulos, 2006, p. xii). At one and the same time, the everyday is both immaterial (somewhat marginal, unimportant and irrelevant), while also central.

The centrality of the everyday makes it useful for exploring complex social phenomena. In particular, the utility of a research focus on the everyday is the extent to which it can not only reveal, but also bridge the space between structure and agency. My emphasis in this research is on illuminating the ordinary, alternative ‘edges’ of my participants’ lives that might otherwise be cast in structural shadows. In chapter two, I discussed at length how dominant discourses of (gendered) fatness construct larger women’s bodies as problematic and illegitimate. The emphasis firmly resided with the way these discursive structures positioned larger women in society. However, I argue that focusing on the everyday clothing practices of larger women can potentially clarify how they negotiate (both consciously and unconsciously) their way in, through or around those discourses. Doing so can shed light on alternate ways of thinking about fatness, perhaps laying bare subversive or transformatory practices. Thus, my emphasis lies not with the structuring forces of language, but with the agency of my participants as they enact their own lives while residing within those structures.

de Certeau’s (1984) work is useful as a meta-methodological framework on which to hang my assertion that researching the everyday is important. He argues that distance permits an observer (perhaps a sociologist like myself), to “see the whole” (p. 93) and, in turn, construct totalising theories about the social world. However, he also claims that the appearance of order and acquiescence, manifest in the routine following of social structures, is simply a fiction. On closer inspection, everyday practices can be revealed that “escap[e] the imaginary totalizations produced by the eye” (p. 93), and instead, reveal the agency of individuals as they create alternative pathways of existence. By shifting attention away from the material and linguistic structures that construct fatness negatively and moving towards the everyday (clothing) practices they enact, I aimed in this research, to make visible a

“strangeness that does not [ordinarily] surface” (p. 93)⁸. In other words, I aimed to reveal how larger women appropriate/reappropriate linguistic structures, transform the dominant economy, and subvert the cultural order, in order to make it serve their own interests.

Investigating the everyday also highlights the importance of place and space. Although dominant structuring discourses construct places in ways that often serve particular interests, the tactics (or practices) that individuals engage in do not always obey the laws of place (de Certeau, 1984). Instead, people enact their agency, using places in ways that serve their own interests, and in doing so, “metaphorize[d] the dominant order [and make it] function in another register” (p. 32). Transformatory practices such as these highlight the agency of the individual as cartographers of *place*, drawing alternate social maps that potentially foster positive *spaces* for the construction of identity; space may be considered as place transformed through human [inter]action. Thus, a focus on the everyday was important in this research for revealing alternate ‘ways of operating’ such as walking, reading, producing, speaking, and of course, shopping and dressing, that potentially challenged oppressive social structures.

The capacity to make something function in another register, more than hints at the alternate forms of power that are embedded within everyday practices as they occur in spatial sites. Rose (1993) writes:

[T]he everyday routines traced by women are never unimportant, because the seemingly banal and trivial events of the everyday are bound into the power structures which limit and confine women. The limits on women’s everyday activities are structured by what society expects women to be and therefore to do. The everyday is the arena through which patriarchy is (re)created - and contested. In the words of

⁸ de Certeau introduces the word ‘tactics’ to denote the practices in which people engage as they navigate their way through structural operations. Although suggestive of intentional conscious practices, he makes clear that tactics are often unintentional and unconscious.

Teresa de Lauretis, feminism ‘remains very much a politics of everyday life. The edge is there: the sense of struggle, the weight of oppression and contradiction’. (p. 17)

Although Rose speaks particularly of feminist research, the connection to my research is clear. Despite the negative way fatness is constructed in society, it is possible to actively create more positive constructions of fatness and larger women. By honing in on the everyday things larger women do in and around their clothing, the dialectical relationship *between* structure and agency can be revealed. In addition, the subjectivity of the individual is also illuminated as the clothed (fat) body is neither the passive subject of dominant discourses nor the absolute agentic individual who acts outside the constraints of the society of which she is a part. As Douglas (1996) argues:

The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society. There is a continual exchange of meanings between the two kinds of bodily experience so that each reinforces the categories of the other. (p. 69)

The structural forces operating in society, such as sociological categories of gender, class and sexuality, as well as other cultural constructions such as the fashion system (Barthes, 1985) and size, each contribute to the context for making sense of the dressed self as a situated, bodily practice (Entwistle, 2000). Accordingly, the act of dressing is a social and cultural activity that binds together the intentions of the wearer and broader understandings of society; social structures provide the fabric for patterning understandings of the self on a daily basis.

Capturing everyday (clothing) practice is not easy. Indeed, Barthes (1985) intentionally focused on fashion as a social / discursive structure rather than the everyday lived practice of dress in his influential text *The Fashion System* because he appreciated the “methodological purity” of fashion writing over the “heterogeneity of everyday dress practice” (Entwistle & Wilson, 2001, p. 3). To

capture the ‘everyday’ demands a truly “ethnographic encounter” that necessarily intrudes on the private spaces of others (Miller, 2001, p. 1). Miller continues:

anthropology that is too sensitive about being intrusive so remains outside is a dead anthropology, losing its humanity at the moment it claims sensitivity. (p.15)

Although speaking of anthropology, the same can be said of the research encounter within sociology. Investigating the everyday is necessarily a personal, intimate, and potentially intrusive enterprise that draws together researchers and participants in intimate spaces. In order to capture the complex, multi-faceted relationship between large women and their clothes, their bodies, and the spaces they inhabit on an everyday basis, I employed a multi-faceted approach to doing research.

Championing the Multiple

Given this research aims to explore the everyday relationship between large women and their clothing as it occurs within a given social milieu, it was crucial that I engage in research practices that reflected the complexity of that which I sought to uncover. As a result, the concept and practice of *multiple* underpinned much of my research endeavour. First, academic disciplinary boundaries have been deliberately breached as I have integrated literature, both empirical and theoretical into the research. While I am concerned with sociological themes as they relate to the dressed large woman’s body, other disciplines have contributed greatly such as anthropology, human geography and the broader field of material culture studies, shaping the approach and outcome of the research. Indeed, the more specific field of fat studies, and literature pertaining to the politics of fatness have served as the fulcrum of the research. Disciplinary diversity provided the starting point for my approach. In the following section, I explain the benefits of working within a framework of multiplicity, focusing in particular, on multiple methods as they take place in multiple venues, producing multiple types of data, multiple layers of reflexivity, and multiple methods of storytelling.

Multiple Research Methods

Each of the multiple methods I employed in this research, were designed to edge into the everyday clothing practices of my participants in different ways. The commonality of these methods was that they were all qualitative, ethnographically inspired and informed by an inductive research approach. Carried out in the order noted below, these methods involved asking participants to:

- keep a clothing journal for a week and talk with me about some of the entries made;
- rummage through their wardrobes with me and tell me stories about the clothing they owned;
- let me ‘hang out’ or ‘go-along’ with them while they went shopping for clothing;
- take photographs of their ‘clothed worlds’ and show me, and talk with me at a later date, about the images they had captured; and
- take part in a group discussion to talk about a clothing story from their past.

While the details of each of these methods will be discussed more closely in the next chapter, for the moment it is important to note that each of these methods was intended to shine a spotlight on a different facet of the participants’ everyday experience of clothing their bodies. In particular, the clothing journal was an internal, reflexive activity that involved the participants identifying and reflecting on their experiences of their clothed bodies. The wardrobe rummage was to capture how clothing connects with varying aspects of biography. I imagined it would highlight the relationship between memory, material objects, the body, and the self. The shopping trip explored what it was like for large women to look for, try on, and purchase clothes in a clothing market that (I suspected) largely ignored them. Taking photographs of one’s clothed world was a reflexive project that requires the photographer to look at their world askew, and in this sense, could prove a useful methodological tool for uncovering alternate constructions of the truth of the participants’ lives. The final stage was a group discussion that was designed to allow the participants and I to collectively explore the points of commonality and departure

between their clothing stories, as well as the social and cultural processes underpinning them.

In sum, given that I wanted to find out about everyday clothing practice, it made sense to ask my participants to *do* things such as reflect, write and take photographs, but perhaps even more importantly to ask them to do things *with me*, such as talk, rummage and shop. The assumption sitting behind my research methods is that what we do influences how we are and who we are. By engaging in multiple methods that occurred across time and different spatial sites, I wanted to extend the possibilities of research practice and move beyond the open-ended qualitative interview. Doing so allowed me to perform a methodological sleight of hand that edged closer to the source of experience and practice. In effect, the various foci of the research methods asked the participants to look inward, look outward, look backward, look forward, and look askew. Through the *fusion* of these methods (Chamberlain, Cain, Sheridan, & Dupuis, in press), the “multisensoriality of experience, perception, knowing and practice” (Pink, 2009, p. 1), could be articulated. An unexpected benefit of working in this way was the additional temporal data the multiple methods introduced to the research. This allowed the research to be taken to “unexpected places” (Taber, 2010, p. 17), as the agency of the participants was made materially visible as they negotiated their way through dominant structural forces.

Multiple Layers of Reflexivity

In addition to drawing on multiple disciplines and using multiple methods that took place in multiple locations and produced multiple types of data, the research was also encapsulated by a commitment to multiple layers of reflexivity. There has been substantial discussion in the academic literature around the benefits of researcher reflexivity (see, Davies et al., 2004; del Busso, 2007; Finlay, 2002a, 2002b; Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). In particular, by adopting a reflexive stance, researchers are able to generate knowledge beyond the realms of the researcher’s imagination, enriching the research by “turning language back on itself to see the work it does in constituting the world” (Davies, et al., 2004, p. 360). A reflexive stance creates opportunities for discovery (Finlay, 2002b), as researchers “forfeit[s] their authority” (Denzin, 2003, p. 269), hover on the boundary of their knowledge, and challenge and

question their epistemological certainties and *a priori* theoretical assumptions (Highmore, 2006).

However, while a good deal has been written about researcher reflexivity, far less has been written on *participant* reflexivity. Research participants also engage in a reflexive process while taking part in research. This is especially the case when the research occurs across time and in different locations, which provide participants with opportunities to reflect on their lives, as well as their participation in the research. During these temporally and spatially located moments, participants reside at the edge of what they know and understand about themselves, effectively becoming “researchers of their own lives” (Chamberlain, et al., in press). Methodologies that create room for participant reflexivity is important for social research practice as it has been demonstrated to contribute to an increased sense of ownership of the project (Smith, 1994), an increased sense of control over their own lives, and the emergence of greater awareness of themselves and their communities (Foster-Fishman, Nowell, Deacon, Nievar, & McCann, 2005). Participant reflexivity results in positive outcomes for participants, researchers and society.

In addition to researcher reflexivity and participant reflexivity, in my research a reflexive space was also generated *between* the participants and me as we engaged in a dialectical exchange throughout the course of the research. In the research encounter, I found it was possible to “enter the conversation as one person and emerge as another” as we each sought to understand the other (Butler, 2003, p. 82). Importantly, through doing things together, the research encounter became a kinetic, embodied exchange as the materiality of our bodies became central aspects of the research relationship (see, Burns, 2003; del Busso, 2007).

The reflexive space between the participants and me was also enhanced by others who were peripherally involved in the research. The involvement of my participants spilt over into other areas of their lives as their thinking about their bodies and their clothing, as well as their experiences of taking part in the research, was shared with family, friends and work colleagues. These reflexive encounters shifted the boundaries of the research into their everyday lives. Yet these moments beyond the research often found their way back into the research as the participants reported on

the conversations they shared with others. Rather than researcher reflexivity, or even participant reflexivity, I suggest there is a network of reflexive relations, working together to shape the course of the research. Moreover, it is in the concatenations of this reflexive network that opportunities for social transformation reside.

With this in mind, developing research designs that allow for a reflexive space between researchers, participants and those they encounter, creates a space for the multiple subject positions that participants occupy and the way in which they shift across time and space. My participants are not the same women they were when they began the research. But a multi-method research design that builds on itself, generating a complex view of the everyday lived life, provides opportunities to tap into those shifts and changes. In retaining a reflexive stance as a researcher and fostering a reflexive space between all those involved in the project, both directly and indirectly, the research process becomes organic, building on a relational reflexive network.

Multiple Storying

Knowledge of the self and society is actively constructed through the process of taking part in research. Therefore, it is important that researchers provide a means through which the accounts of participants can be captured. Although the open-ended interview appears to be securely established as the default position of qualitative inquiry, not all people are comfortable talking about themselves at length. By introducing creative ways for participants to tell their stories, they can engage with the research, and tell their stories on their own terms (Pink, 2001). In doing so, they are able to shape not only the direction but the outcome of the research. Working pluralistically in these ways offers an exciting and creative way of working *alongside* research participants, providing alternate ways for people to engage in the telling of their stories. Moreover, doing so potentially breaks down the hierarchical power structures that may be in operation.

When speaking of multiple storytelling, I not only refer to different ways of collecting stories. I also refer to different ways of telling or presenting the (story of the) research findings. From Agee and Evans (2001):

If I could do it, I'd do no writing at all here. It would be photographs; the rest would be fragments of cloth, bits of cotton, lumps of earth, records of speech, pieces of wood and iron, phials of odors, plates of food and of excrement A piece of the body torn out by the roots might be more to the point. (p. 10)

First published in 1941, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, was the literary result of what could be called (but was not) an ethnographic encounter that set out to explore the daily lives of sharecroppers in the post-depression American South. In the quote, Agee, for it is Agee's words, not Evans, despairs of his capacity to capture the story in language. Although he proceeds to "do what little [he] can in writing" (p. 10), his desire to tell the story of the workers in the *material*, rather than text, is intriguing.

Certainly, orthodox ways of (re)presenting the findings of research, such as journal articles, book chapters and theses, are important. However, alternate ways of presenting the findings of research that reside more closely with the inclination of Agee, are also emerging. Feminism, cultural studies, constructivism, and other interpretive approaches to doing research have all impacted on the way research is written (Bruce, 1998). In particular, the narrative turn has inspired numerous scholars to consider the multiplicity of possibilities when representing ethnographic research in ways that are often contrary to orthodox academic practice (see, Denzin (2003), Ellis (2008), and Richardson (1990, 2000b), for example). Indeed, Gergen and Gergen (2002), argue that:

there is little reason that ethnographic representation should not become as rich in its forms of expression as the arts, with painting, music, dance, poetry, multimedia, and performance all serving as potential sources of communication. (p. 18)

Rich forms of expression take numerous forms and include writing short stories (Bruce, 2000), poetry (Richardson, 1993), plays (Hatcher, in press), and email narratives (Nate & Synthia, 2006). Alternatives to writing include performing ethnography through dance (Pirkko, 2006), performance art (Carl, 2008), short film and video (MacLure, et al., 2010), and art installations (Pedro Mateu-Gelabert's

(2010). Not only do these alternate representations of research broaden the potential audience, the outcomes of such research practices also bring “researchers and their audiences closer to other people’s multi-sensory experiences, knowing, practice, memories and imaginations” (Pink, 2009, p. 132). Although logocentric privilege remains intact, new and creative forms of academic storytelling that embrace the arts and humanities are gaining traction, challenging academic orthodoxy and transgressing the boundaries of academic knowledge in the process.

In this research, I participate in what Richardson (2000a) has referred to as Creative Analytic Practice (CAP), by engaging with alternate, creative ways of carrying out the research, as well as alternative, creative ways of *telling* the research. In the first instance, this thesis stands as the primary means through which I represent the findings of the project and contextualise it within the broader field of inquiry. However, I am currently designing an entry for the *World of Wearable Arts*⁹ that combines tent materials and text generated throughout the research to challenge the specious assumption that large women want to, or more importantly should, wear ‘tent dresses’. Additionally, I have written poetry and short stories (see Appendix A) in order to move beyond unitary notions of the research findings towards an alternative subjective space that allows for the rhythm, repetition and cadence of the spoken word. Although these pieces are purely fictionalised, the ideas residing within them are born from the research findings.

There are a number of benefits of working in this way. First, it challenges the ways in which knowledge is constructed. Second, it provides an alternative voice in which to articulate the story of the research which necessarily subverts the hegemony of academic knowledge. Third, in its ambiguity, it makes room to expose the disorder of carrying out ethnographic research, something that Clark and Sharf (2007) argue social scientists must pursue. Fourth, it broadens the potential audience for the research beyond the academic which, in turn, creates the potential for social

⁹ WOW is described as an event that encourages designers to “take art off the wall and out of static display & adorn the body in wildly wonderful ways” (World of Wearable Art, 2010).

transformation. By engaging in such practices, the research endeavour as a whole is broadened, allowing for an alternative research landscape to emerge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Most importantly, however, given the subversive capacity of creative expression, it creates multiple possibilities for new insights (Bruce, 1998), for both the participants, the researcher, and the audience.

Conclusion: Foregrounding the Ethics of Otherness

Perhaps it is somewhat of a stretch to suggest that ethical practice can be considered methodology. However, unspoken and yet threaded throughout this chapter was the argument that ethics, or more specifically ethicality (the way ethical practice is carried out and embodied by the researcher), has provided the framework for carrying out the present research. I do not mean a micro-level of ethical conduct, what Guillemin and Gillam (2004) refer to as “procedural ethics” (p. 261), as required by authoritative governing bodies. Although an important consideration in ethnographic inquiry that will be discussed in the next chapter, I refer here to an approach to doing research that “foregrounds the ethics of otherness” (Gabon, 2008, p. 166). The Othering of various marginalised groups within society has received considerable scholarly attention (Garland & Chakraborti, 2006). In this project, I sought to develop a research approach that would allow the practices of large women to be revealed in ways that might otherwise be concealed. In this respect, I considered the research as a political project that could potentially generate a positive space for talking about fatness, although I had little idea of how that might look when I began. What I failed to anticipate, however, was the extent to which my research methodology, and in particular an emphasis on the everyday, accompanied by a multi-faceted research design, was in itself transformative.

The first transformative effect was within the research space generated between the participants and me. Although there were multiple research methods, these worked together, generating energy beyond the effects of the individual methods. The interactive and dynamic nature of the research, reframed the researcher / participant relationship so that the participants were able to play a more active role in the construction of knowledge about themselves and large women more generally. The presence of power within the qualitative research relationship has been discussed at

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length in the academic literature (Cadman et al., 2007; Knight, Bentley, Norton, & Dixon, 2004; Thapar-Bjorkert & Henry, 2004). By doing things together in different places at different times, a dialogical space between the participants and I emerged. In the process, the participants were able to take a more active role in the research relationship and control the way in which the research unfolded. Doing so reframed the research itself as the co-constituted product of them as agentic participants, myself as the researcher, and the relationship between us.

The second way the research project demonstrated transformative tendencies was on an individual level for some of the participants. In this research, I found that it was not only *talk* that produced the capacity for individual transformation but also *practice*. The temporal and spatial elements of the research as well as the multi-sensorial nature of the design promoted a research space of *dynamic reflexivity* which some of my participants experienced as personally transformative. For example, one of my participants, Annette, who I will introduce more formally in the following chapter, described taking part in the project as a time that “changed [her] life”. Conversations with Annette suggest that the opportunity to reflect on her self-perceptions, behaviours, practices and thoughts, created space to challenge negative thinking about herself.

Finally, the research methodology and its emphasis on the everyday and multiplicity also presents possibilities for social transformation. In particular, emphasising multiplicity allows the researcher to move beyond a unitary subject toward a more complex, nuanced, and multi-dimensional subject. Doing so allows the researcher to bridge the space between structure and agency by understanding one through an understanding of the other. Put another way, practice may be understood as occurring within a particular set of social circumstances in a given time. Equally, however, social structures, as they relate to the *politics* of fatness, are influenced by the practices of inhabitants. A research emphasis on the everyday and multiplicity allows for understandings of context / circumstance and practice as reciprocal and co-constituted. Doing so transforms the research endeavour into a political project, capable of bridging the space between structure and agency, the two pillars of

sociology, the net result of which may be the active construction of alternative ways of 'thinking and speaking fatness'.

Chapter Four

(Ad)dressing the Research

This chapter shifts attention away from the methodological focus of the thesis toward a more mechanical explication of the research as it was carried out. In particular, I do four things. First, I introduce the reader to the research participants. Second, I describe the five research stages as they were intended to be carried out, while drawing attention, where appropriate, to the way they eventuated. Third, I discuss the analytic strategy of the research, highlighting the multi-level and iterative process of making sense of the data. Finally, I discuss how I managed, from an ethical standpoint, the numerous types of data that emerged from the research.

The Research Participants

Given the intensive and qualitative nature of the research design, it was important to work closely with just a small number of larger women. A total of ten women participated ranging in New Zealand clothing size 18 through to 26¹⁰. In this section,

¹⁰ A New Zealand size 18 is the equivalent of size 14 and 16 in America and Britain respectively.

I describe how I located the participants, discuss the criteria for inclusion in the research, and introduce the reader to the ten women who took part.

I recruited the participants for this research from two different sources. Two participants made contact with me through a mutual acquaintance. The remaining participants responded to a human-interest story about the research that appeared in a local newspaper. The newspaper article generated a great deal of interest in the research and a number of women made contact with me. I spoke at length with each prospective participant on the telephone, talking generally about the research and their potential role in it, highlighting in particular the level of commitment the research required. Given that safety of participants was paramount, I was insistent in my conversations that the research did not have a therapeutic component and I have no counselling qualifications. Doing so resulted in four respondents who appeared to construct the research as a therapeutic tool, choosing not to proceed.

In order to meet the requirements for inclusion in the research, a number of criteria had to be met. First and foremost, prospective participants needed to be a New Zealand clothing size 18 or larger. This size was deemed appropriate because in New Zealand, the clothing sizes in most stores stop at size 16. Therefore, I considered it not unreasonable to assume that at size 18, women face clear hurdles finding suitable clothes that are not so apparent for smaller women. Despite feminist research that promotes the self-identification of research participants (see, Morris & Symonds, 2004), in this case, allowing prospective participants to decide if they were large enough was inappropriate, given the boundaries of fatness as a cultural category in western society are so ambiguous. In particular, I was concerned that while some women may *feel* they are 'overweight', they might in reality be much smaller and readily fit 'regular' size clothing. Given these highly subjective elements of body image it was essential that I establish clear criteria for inclusion that related equally to clothing and body size.

As I am based in Auckland, and the research design required on-going contact between the participants and me, it was important that prospective participants reside in Auckland. It was also crucial that the participants could speak conversationally in English as the complex and demanding nature of the research meant that the women

taking part needed to be able to converse freely with me. There were no upper age limits established, although all participants were required to be over the age of 18. It was not necessary for prospective participants to have an interest in fashion or clothing as I was interested, quite simply, in everyday clothing.

Of 16 women who contacted me, ten met the research criteria and chose to proceed with the research. They came from diverse backgrounds and also represented a range of familial statuses. Three were single, while seven were either married or had permanent partners. Eight of the ten women had children, and two also had grandchildren. All the participants worked in some capacity: one worked part-time while also caring for her three children; one worked as a volunteer in the community; and three were self-employed. The remaining five participants were employed in a variety of professional roles. The women ranged in age from mid 20s to early 60s. As a result of the distribution of the newspaper article, all the participants lived in residential areas north of Auckland. Seven were located in North Shore City while the remaining three resided further north on the Whangaparaoa Peninsula. Of the ten participants, only six expressed an appreciation, and enjoyment of, clothing and fashion. A brief description of each of the women taking part follows.

Georgie¹¹ is in her early fifties and works in hospitality. She is married with two adult children. Throughout the research she refers to herself as size 18 to 20 and feels satisfied overall with her size. Charlotte is the smallest of the women taking part and is a size 18 who can “occasionally get away with a 16”. Aged 32, she is a self-employed graphic designer and artist and has been married for three years. Charlotte would ideally like to lose some weight. Ann wears clothing size 18 to 20. She is in her early 50s and has her own clothing alterations business. She is married with two adult children and describes finding clothes to wear a “permanent frustration”. At 26, Laura is the youngest participant. At the time of interviewing, she was living with her partner and her three young children. Although Laura works part-time, her primary role is caregiver to her children. She wears clothes ranging from 18 through

¹¹ Participants each chose a pseudonym in order to maintain their confidentiality.

to 26, reportedly due to sizing disparities in clothes as well as her preference for both tight and loose clothing. Laura would like to lose some weight and has even taken part in a reality television show in order to do so. Rose's wardrobe indicates she wears anything from a size 20 through to 26. Rose is a nurse in her early 50s who secured a new job working with older adults in the community while carrying out the research. She has an adult daughter who lives overseas. Rose describes herself as a "radical feminist from the 70s" and continues to politicise fatness. Annette is in her early 60s and lives with her husband. She has two adult children and a young grandson. She works in a clinic for diabetes. Annette describes herself on average as size 22 but would like to lose some weight "for health reasons". She had a stomach staple many years ago. Lynn is in her mid-50s. She runs her own house sitting business from home but also works part-time elsewhere. Lynn states that her "size does not bother [her]". Janie works primarily from home for a government agency. She is 45 and has three children, two of whom are teenagers living at home. Janie says she is a "size 18 on the bottom and a 20 on the top". As a result of taking part in the research and finding the experience "inspiring" she would like to lose some weight. Jen usually wears a size 18 to 20 on the bottom and a 20 to 22 on the top. She is currently an active member of her local gym and is enjoying the muscle definition this is providing. She is in her 40s and is an active volunteer in the community. Jen cares permanently for her five year old grandson. Beth is in her late 40s. She has three teenage children who live at home. She works in a professional capacity for a research group. Beth wears varying sizes, ranging from 20 through to 26.

The Research Method

As outlined earlier, my research was designed to uncover and explore everyday clothing practices. By developing a range of interconnected qualitative research methods, I aimed, following Denzin and Lincoln's (2003) approach, to make the participants' everyday clothing practices "visible in a different way" (p. 5). These methods were designed to work together, each method complementing and reinforcing the other in order to illuminate different aspects of the participants' lives. The research design comprised five research stages: clothing journal and interview;

wardrobe rummage and interview; shopping trip; photographing the clothed world; and a group discussion. In the following, I describe these creative qualitative methods, also discussing where necessary, the ways in which the methods did not always eventuate as planned.

Pre-research

After the initial telephone conversations and prior to beginning the research, I met with each prospective participant individually. Typically, before discussing the research, we spent some time chatting about general things such as children, pets, travel and work. This was, quite simply, a time of getting to know each other, but also a time of building trust, a process often defined in the social research literature as “building rapport” (King, 2009, p. 48). During this time I also shared some of my own stories and experiences around bodies and clothing as I support Oakley’s (1981) claim that reciprocity is important for developing a positive research relationship.

At what felt like an appropriate time, I introduced the research. Together, we worked through the information sheet (see Appendix B) and spoke at length about the research and the participant’s potential involvement. I explained that if she decided to participate, she would receive a hand-out at each stage of the research outlining in greater detail what the stage entailed. I chose not to make all this information available at the beginning of the research, as I felt it could be overwhelming and would make the research appear more complicated than it was. Prospective participants were generally very interested in the research and excited about the prospect of taking part. Few concerns were raised at this point, although there was some hesitation regarding the photography stage. On explaining that signing up in principle to complete the research did not indicate an obligation to complete all the research stages, all the prospective participants were happy to continue and sign the consent form.

Stage One: Clothing Journal and Interview

Keeping diaries has a long history in qualitative research methods. While the benefits of *unsolicited* diaries have been acknowledged in the field of health and

illness (Jones, 2000), it is more common in qualitative research practice to utilise *solicited* diaries or journals. Solicited diaries have been used as a research method in such fields as health and illness (Niere & Jerak, 2004; Stensland & Malterud, 1999), education (Hall, 2008; Sa, 2002), health and well-being of older adults (Milligan, Bingley, & Gatrell, 2005), time-use (Bonke, 2005; Fisher, Egerton, Gershuny, & Robinson, 2007; Man, 2008), and investigating marital and familial processes (Laurenceau & Bolger, 2005). Asking participants to keep a diary is a useful way for researchers to tap into the relationship between the private and public worlds of women (Morrison & Galloway, 1996), as seemingly insignificant moments that occur throughout the day provide a wealth of information about habitual practices and the thought processes behind them.

With this in mind, the first stage of the research asked the participants to keep a clothing journal for one week and talk with me later about the entries they made. I provided a small journal and asked the participants to record “each time that clothing, or the body as it relates to clothing, intrudes upon your thoughts, actions or consciousness” (see Appendix C). I asked them to jot things down as soon as possible, so they would not forget flickering thoughts or moments that might seem unimportant later. At the end of each day, the participants were asked to choose just one of their entries and reflect on it, recording those reflections in the journal. I encouraged them to write as freely as possible, not concerning themselves with grammar and whether they felt they were “making sense”. I chose not to provide an exemplar as I did not wish to inadvertently frame the way in which the participants completed the exercise.

After collecting and reading through the journal, I arranged to meet with each participant for an interview to follow up potential threads of sociological interest. This did not follow a predetermined format. Instead, each participant was provided, by email, with a *personalised* interview guide, based on my preliminary reading of their clothing journal. An excerpt from one of the interview guides is contained in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 Excerpt from interview guide, Ann.

...

Your “imaginary world” when you were younger

“those days”: changing lots as nothing feels right

“Blending in” versus “standing out”

Different clothes for different occasions e.g. exercise clothes making you “feel fatter”

People, especially clients judging you [e.g. planning ahead, being in public, vulnerable if not dressed nicely, “people thinking of me as big before anything else”, the 80s party,

Clothes and hair being “like my armour”

The good days when you “feel good about” yourself

...

In keeping with the recommendations of Firkin (2004), each personalised interview guide intentionally drew on precise words and phrases each woman had used in her journal. Doing so ensured the thoughts of the women were placed at the centre of the subsequent research interview. I wanted to provide an opportunity for the participants to speak around the journal entries further, creating possibilities for the multiple (and often contradictory) meanings women generate ‘behind the moment’ to become apparent. These interviews were audio-recorded which allowed me to concentrate my full attention on the interview. The audio-recordings also assisted the process of analysis.

As is often the case with qualitative inquiry, the research did not always go according to plan or schedule (Alasuutari, 1995). Although I supplied a very detailed information sheet and talked through the information sheet together with the

participants, they did not always follow the instructions. In fact, none of the women completed the clothing journal in the way outlined in the hand-out, preferring instead to carry out the exercise according to their own understandings of what was required. It seemed each participant brought with her a preconception of what a journal *should* look like, resulting in a wide variety of participant responses.

For example, Janie simply recorded in the journal what she had worn each day with the occasional addition of the activity performed. Later conversations with Janie suggest this reflects her personal and professional use of diaries generally - as a tool for managing her time rather than a tool for self-discovery. In contrast, Georgie writes in a journal all the time for personal pleasure and self-development. Consequently, she treated this research stage as an extension of this. She began with a fifteen page reflexive account of her life so that I could better understand the context in which her observations and thoughts occurred. She then completed the research exercise for the week, before filling nearly all the remaining pages with photographs from her life, encouraging me to use the images in my thesis. In the few remaining pages, she created a mind-map of her relationship with clothing, which included all the influences of which she was aware.

Given this was the first stage of the research, I was initially troubled by the gap between what I had requested and what the participants did. I was also concerned that the differences in how they completed the exercise would result in data that could not be easily integrated. However, on reflection, it became clear that how each participant completed the exercise provided much more than what I initially requested. Importantly, the deviations from the guidelines and the differences between their responses became a further source of data which provided valuable and exciting insights into the diverse group of women taking part.

The follow up interviews lasted between one and two hours. The interview was held in the participant's home, usually in the main living area, with the exception of Georgie who chose to combine the first two stages of the research, meaning her interview was held in her bedroom, next to her wardrobe. The interview typically began with me asking participants "what it was like" to complete the clothing journal. This provided a useful 'way in' to the research interview more generally and provided

some broad insights into the way each participant thought about clothing and her body. Although the emailed interview guide served as an occasional prompt, the interviews were unstructured and required little direction from me. Throughout the interviews, participants often wanted to clarify points they had made in their journals or, conversely, wanted to discuss how their thinking about clothing and their bodies had shifted since carrying out the clothing journal exercise.

On completing the interview, I provided an instructive hand-out for the second stage of the research; the wardrobe rummage (see Appendix D). Together, the participant and I discussed their potential involvement and what it might entail. Once I was confident the participant fully understood what was involved, we made an appointment to carry it out.

Stage Two: Wardrobe Rummage and Interview

The ‘wardrobe rummage’ involved getting together in each of the participants’ homes to look through their wardrobes at the clothes they owned. This stage of the research builds on the theoretical assumption that the things we own are closely connected with constructions of individual and socio-cultural identities (Berger, 2009; Miller, 1987; I. Woodward, 2007). Applied more specifically to the field of clothing and identity, garments that hang in the wardrobe are able to convey stories of their wearer’s past, present and future selves (Banim & Guy, 2001; Guy & Banim, 2000); clothing can say something about the life of a person. It is this connection between the participants, the clothing they owned and the stories they told about those garments that I hoped to capture.

Meeting at the scheduled time, most of the participants were very comfortable inviting me into their bedrooms to rummage through their wardrobes. The exception was Laura who declared her bedroom “too messy”, preferring to bring selected clothes out to the living area to show me. Regardless of the location, the clothing provided the catalyst for discussion. Each of the participants controlled the way the ‘interview’ unfolded as I stood back, allowing them to show me and talk with me about the clothes they wanted to share. With this in mind, the descriptor ‘wardrobe

rummage' is a misnomer. The women taking part were extremely generous with their clothing stories and a number of them were happy to extend the focus of inquiry beyond the wardrobe to underwear drawers, boxes or suitcases of clothes stored under the bed or in other rooms, and shelves and cupboards of clothing no longer worn. I chose not to generate a comprehensive interview schedule for this stage. Instead, I was guided almost entirely by the actions and comments of the participants as they pulled garments from their closets and drawers. That said, I did have a key idea I was interested in pursuing: to discover the stories woven into garments over time and in different spatial locations. Also, given the extent to which size offers women a way to quantify and potentially regulate their bodies (Colls, 2004), I was also interested in any garments the participants had retained but no longer wore because they did not fit.

The wardrobe rummages took between one and a half and two and a half hours. Generally, it was extremely relaxed and informal, and often a lot of fun as the participants joked about some of the clothing they owned, tried clothes on, or shared funny stories. Although the interviews were mostly held in the bedroom and in that respect challenged the boundaries of the researcher/participant relationship, the positioning of the clothing at the centre of the discussion detracted from the intimacy and strangeness of conducting an interview in such a private space. However, one of the greatest difficulties was paying equal attention to the body and the clothes. I found it was very easy for both the participants and me to privilege the stories of clothing while forgetting to consider the place of the wearer's *body* in the clothing. Although dress is an embodied practice (Entwistle, 2000), and as such, the body is an intrinsic aspect of the clothing stories, my participants did not always think of themselves as clothed women; they were simply women. As a result, it was, at times, a struggle to bring the body back into the research space. This was often resolved with a simple question such as: do you think your experience of the garment would be different if you were a different size?

Just as participants framed the clothing journal exercise in ways that fitted prior understandings, this research stage was also treated by some participants in quite particular ways. For example, Ann and Jen used this stage to "have a sort out" of their wardrobes. Ann sorted through her wardrobe before I arrived but saved the garments

she was “getting rid of” to show me. Jen, on the other hand, waited until our time together to sort through her clothes. Talking with me about her clothes as she worked systematically through her wardrobe, Jen threw unwanted items onto a pile in the doorway. As we talked, she also rearranged the things she wanted to keep, moving some items further to the back of the wardrobe while others such as a beloved shirt she had made herself many years ago, was moved to the front of the wardrobe, claiming “I’m going to perhaps not put it so far away, just to have a little remembrance with it”. Again, the authority of research participants to engage with the research on their own terms was brought to the fore. As Ann and Jen demonstrated, they were able to use their involvement in the research in very practical ways that served their own needs.

I audio-recorded the wardrobe rummages and also took occasional notes. The audio recording device was placed discreetly so that the participants and I were able to forget about its necessary intrusion. The notes I made largely described garments that were being discussed so that I could later reconcile the participant’s talk with particular items of clothing. I also crudely sketched clothing if I felt it would be helpful later to match dialogue with a garment.

On completion of the wardrobe rummage, I talked with each participant about the next stage of the research, the shopping trip. I provided a hand-out (see Appendix E), that explained what their potential involvement would be. Together, we talked through what the shopping trip might consist of and discussed the available options for transport and any associated costs. We scheduled a time to meet and go shopping for clothes once they were fully aware of their involvement.

Stage Three: Shopping Trip

The clothes shopping trip, was designed to explore the ways in which large women interact with the commercial world. Given this research explores the symbiotic relationship between clothing and the self, it seemed the origin of that relationship, the moment of purchase, would be vital to consider. Larger women face many more structural limitations when shopping for clothes than smaller women. The number of

stores available to women size 18 and over is limited (Adam, 2001; Breseman, Lennon, & Schulz, 1999), particularly in New Zealand. Also, given the negative discourses of fatness it is not unreasonable to expect that the emotional experience of going shopping might also be qualitatively different from the experiences of smaller sized women (Colls, 2006). With this in mind, in the broadest sense, this stage of the research was designed to find out ‘what it is like’ to shop for clothes as a large woman. More specifically, the shopping trip was designed to explore how larger women navigate their way through, or around, the structural limitations that are in place in the clothing market.

The shopping trips took between one and a half and three and a half hours, including travel time. The intention was that I accompany each participant on a shopping trip to the clothing stores and malls they usually frequent. This method draws on the ‘go-along’ as an ethnographic tool (Carpiano, 2009; Kusenbach, 2003), the principle of which is to capture everyday practices as they occur *in situ*. In doing so, the reflexive aspects of the lived experience are foregrounded and importantly, are considered *in place*. The method involves:

fieldworkers accompany[ing] individual informants on their natural outings, and - through asking questions, listening and observing - to actively explore their subjects’ stream of experiences and practices as they move through, and interact with, their physical and social environment. (Kusenbach, 2003, p. 463)

Nine of the ten participants agreed to go out shopping for clothes with me. Each participant was asked to take me to the clothing stores that she usually visits and makes purchases from. While most of the women did this, others used this time to explore new clothing stores and shopping malls. Two women used the opportunity to visit, for the first time, a newly opened shopping mall in the area. One also took me to “this place that I’ve never explored before”; a factory outlet that stocks clothing “up to size 30”. Although I had deliberately requested the participants take me to their usual stores because I was interested in their *usual* everyday practices, it became

apparent that searching for new stores was simply another aspect of the everyday clothes shopping experience for the participants.

While shopping, the participants were free, and indeed encouraged, to try on clothes. Of the nine women who went on the shopping excursion, seven tried on clothes and three made (considerable) purchases. My impression overall, was that they found this stage of the research fun, apparently enjoying sharing the shopping experience as well as having someone to report to about their frustrations with the clothing market. At times during the shopping trip, I felt that some of the participants were looking to me for guidance and advice regarding their clothing choices, despite me telling them my interest was in their practices and experiences of consumption. What became increasingly apparent was the extent to which the boundaries around the research relationship had 'slipped' as we got to know each other in what was often quite intimate ways. Equally, the everydayness of going shopping, and perhaps the common understanding that shopping for clothes is a gendered practice that women enjoy together (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003; McDowell, 1999), led to an assumption that my interest in their experiences would extend to a desire to help them find clothes to wear.

I audio-recorded our conversation from the moment we met (usually at their home), using a small electronic recording device that was attached to my clothing. I chose not to attach the microphone to the participant's clothing for four reasons. First, I wanted to check from time to time that the device was still fully functioning, but did not want to bother the participant about this as I did not want them to feel responsible for either the quality of the recording or the device itself. Second, if the participants tried clothes on, the recorder would simply get in their way. Third, I hoped each participant would be able to 'forget' to some extent that her words were being recorded, creating space for her to be more comfortable and free with her interactions. Finally, being responsible for the recording device meant I was also able to pause the recording any time I felt it was necessary, such as when our conversation became very personal and not directly relevant to the research topic.

Once again, I did not have a formal scripted interview schedule, preferring instead to be guided by the women taking part and the places they took me. That said, I did have a broad list of topics I was interested in exploring. For example, I wanted to know very generally what it was like for the participants to go shopping for clothes, including the emotions connected with the experience. I was particularly interested in participants' stories of the changing room, their thoughts about purchases once home, as well as wearing new purchases for the first time. These questions were of interest to me because I felt they captured the initial biography of clothing: from finding a garment that appeals, to trying it on, making the purchase in the store, taking the garment home and then wearing it for the first time. In other words, this captured the initial stages of building a relationship with a garment. In addition and perhaps, in retrospect, more importantly, I wanted to explore the extent to which the participants used clothing as a means by which identity could be reinforced, challenged, habitualised or ritualised, and rearticulated. This interest arises from Keane's (2005) suggestion that clothing does not simply express a person's identity in a linear and unitary way. Rather, new clothing "makes possible or inhibits new practices, habits and intentions" (p. 192).

It was rare, however, that I needed to press the participants for any of this material. Rather, experiences were gradually uncovered as we shopped for clothes. While trying on clothes, for example, the participants talked about their experiences of, and thoughts about, the changing room and the practice of undressing in a space that resides on the boundaries of both public and private. Similarly, when the participants found items of clothing they liked or disliked, it seemed they quite naturally began to speak about what it might be like to wear it. As we shopped, I kept field notes, including sketches of particular items of interest. Although it was somewhat cumbersome to do so, the notes proved invaluable once analysis began. Five of the nine participants came with me afterward for coffee to talk further about the research and their clothes shopping experiences.

Of all the research stages, this was the most difficult to envisage prior to the research taking place, given the way in which it made the ordinary (going shopping) quite extraordinary (going shopping as research). It was also the most difficult of the

research stages to control once underway. At times, the edges of the research became blurred as I struggled to keep the talk on track and keep focused on the topic of clothing and the body. As in the previous stage, clothing seemed to commandeer the conversation, always trying to take centre-stage. Conversation readily drifted toward what the participant would or would not wear without any explanation of why this might be the case. Consequently, it required a conscious effort by me to place the participant's body *in* the clothes.

The one participant who did not go out shopping with me, pointed out that she “get[s] depressed going shopping for clothes” so prefers instead to “surf the net” and “check out *Trademe*”¹². Given that is how she shops for clothes, we decided to conduct the interview in her living room using her laptop computer. She showed me the websites she usually visits and purchases from and demonstrated how she navigates her way around such a large, generic trading site. She explained the keywords and phrases she uses to locate suitable clothing and talked with me about both the advantages and disadvantages of internet shopping. A participant's freedom to alter the research design is indicative of the reciprocal nature of the power relationship within qualitative research (Etherington, 2007), and also highlights the dynamic and interactional capacity of the researcher / participant relationship (Smith, 1996). Laura's preference to stay home and carry out this stage of the research contributed a different edge to the research that might not have otherwise been revealed.

My final task, irrespective of whether the research was carried out in the home or in public, was to introduce the hand-out for the next stage of the research, photographing the ‘clothed world’ (see Appendix F). Together, the participant and I worked through the hand-out, discussing what might be involved. Our conversation had two parts. First, we discussed the task itself, focusing on the pictures that I was asking the participants to capture. I spent some time reassuring the participants,

¹² *Trademe* is a New Zealand based internet retail site that is used for the purchase and sale of new and second hand goods. It is used equally by commercial retailers and the private individual looking to sell their unwanted material goods, including clothing.

explaining that the quality of the images were of secondary interest to me. My primary concern was the story they told me about the photograph. The second part of our conversation focused on the ethics of taking photographs for research purposes. The ethical concerns were troublesome and complex because the participants could potentially take photographs of people without their permission. For this reason, we spent some time talking about ethical matters, taking care to differentiate between legal and ethical concerns; what was legally permitted against what might 'feel right'. Once both the participant and I were comfortable that we had exhausted any questions arising from this stage in the research, I provided a disposable camera with 27 exposures and arranged to pick up the camera in two weeks.

Stage Four: Photographing the Clothed World

The photographing of participants' 'clothed worlds' was designed to encourage women to look outward at the world around them. In many ways, this was an odd task. Looking at the world through the eyes of a camera asks that you look at the world askew, scrutinising that which you might ordinarily take for granted. Photo elicitation, however, has been shown to be a powerful methodological tool for the social scientist, particularly for exploring the everyday world and the multiple ways in which people experience (Carlsson, 2001; Lassetter, Mandelco, & Roper, 2007), and interact with the world. Photo elicitation, or the arguably more prescriptive Photovoice have been used in a range of fields including education (Goldston & Nichols, 2009), community development (Foster-Fishman et al., 2005; Wang et al., 2004), experiences of health and illness (Frith & Harcourt, 2007), homelessness (Hodgetts, Radley, Chamberlain, & Hodgetts, 2007a), and Participation Action Research projects working with marginalised groups (Wilson, Dasho, Martin, Wallerstein, Wang, & Minkler, 2007). It is also a methodology that has been used to conduct research with people of all ages, men (Olliffe & Bottorff, 2007), women (McIntyre, 2003), and children (Cappello, 2005).

The visual image serves as an authoritative anchor for exploring the social world. Through taking photographs, research participants can record aspects of their everyday lives from their own unique perspective in very tangible ways (McIntyre,

2003), making social processes visible in ways that other methods do not (Pink, 2001). Visual methods, such as photo elicitation, are especially useful where the research is concerned with a personal narrative embedded within the personal and social context of an individual's life (Hodgetts, Radley, Chamberlain, & Hodgetts, 2007b). It seems that photographs can accomplish something that talk alone cannot. First, it extends the scope of the research design, placing decisions about the parameters of the research into the hands of participants. In doing so, the participants become co-researchers as they engage with the research not simply as storytellers but as story creators (Chamberlain, et al., in press). Second, the collection, arrangement and storytelling of images, provide a powerful springboard for discussion between the researcher and the participant, the presence of the photograph, "enable[ing] a 'showing and telling' that facilitates accounts of experiences as they are located in particular spaces" (Hodgetts, et al., 2007b, p. 712).

I gave very little indication to my participants of what it might mean to take pictures of one's 'clothed world', encouraging them to think instead about their social world and clothing's impact upon it. However, all the participants struggled to complete the exercise within the agreed timeframe, some because of the pressures of Christmas, and others simply found it difficult to think of enough images to capture. The request to take photographs of their 'clothed worlds' was not designed to trick or confuse. It was simply an attempt to explore the ways in which clothing and the body interact in the social worlds of the participants. However, in hindsight, given the participants do not think of themselves or their worlds as 'clothed', this implies a certain level of abstraction. As the time taken to complete the exercise was inconsequential to the outcome of the research, we extended the due date resulting in most participants returning the camera six to eight weeks later. I collected cameras as they became available and arranged processing of the film. I had two copies printed so that participants could keep a copy and I would have a copy for analysis. I also ordered a digital copy to serve as a back-up and to assist in digital reproduction of any photographs for later publications.

Once each film was processed, I arranged to meet with the participant for a follow-up interview. Although the participants and I were far from strangers by this stage of the

research, I appreciate Carlsson's (2001) claim that photographs potentially provide a "communication bridge[s] between strangers" (p. 125), as the images provided a concrete material object on which to focus our conversation. That said, I followed Lasseter, Mandelco and Roper (2007) by beginning with 'grand tour' questions such as 'tell me about this photograph' and 'why did you take this photograph?' I encouraged participants to describe each image, as well as talk with me about why she had captured the image and what it meant to her. Once again, these interviews did not have formal scripted interview guides. Instead, the images served as powerful catalysts for discussion, sharpening the participants' memories and providing an "explicit starting point" for discussion (p. 459). This suggests perhaps that the discussion was an orderly affair, conducted in a linear fashion image by image. However, in reality, the discussion was far more disordered than this implies as participants shuffled photographs around, changed orders of images, and sorted images into groups, connecting them together to better tell their stories.

Each participant spoke of many understandings she held for the pictures taken. Often, the participants had a very clear understanding of the meaning they wished to convey, a meaning that was generated mostly at the time the photograph was taken. However, photographs do not only *convey* meaning. Rather, meanings about the images were also actively constructed at the time of the interview through the act of talking together about the photograph. This supports Hodgetts, Chamberlain and Radley's (2007) claim that "photographs are polysemic and capable of conveying multiple meanings" (p.15). In sum, the combination of the images and the associated talk between the participants and me, created a dynamic and dialogical space to engage in a process of meaning-making which allowed the participants to extend meanings of the images beyond their original intentions. The temporality of this process and the extent to which it creates space beyond a unitary notion of the self is suggestive of the transformative potential of qualitative research inquiry, permitting the participants to create new frames of understanding as our conversation circled around the photograph.

While the photographs taken by the participants are understandably viewed as critical data for the research, Hodgetts et al. (2007) also suggest asking about photographs the

participants would like to have taken but felt unable. In doing so, the authors argue, one accounts for the “leaky” or “fuzzy” frames of photographs and the possibility that “things are not fully evident, lying off to the side, or under the surface, of the description” (p. 3). While visiting a photography exhibition at the Auckland Museum in May, 2007, the significance of this claim was heightened for me. The exhibition, *Lee Miller’s War*, showcased a series of World War II photographs, taken by Miller. In particular, I recall images of angora rabbits being cared for in luxurious cages, taken in Nazi concentration camps. Miller knew that it was the absent presence of starving Jews in those same concentration camps that provided the frame of reference for the image; the collective memory of what happened to people in concentration camps provided the lens through which the image could be viewed or seen. In similar ways, asking the participants about photographs they would like to have taken but felt unable to helped to provide a lens through which the photographs they did take may be viewed, thereby “bringing them into the frame” (Hodgetts, et al., 2007, p. 15). Typically, other larger women were the focus of the images the participants would like to have taken; for example, either “fat women looking good” (Beth), or “larger women who’d stopped bothering” (Jen). Various reasons were cited for not capturing these images, such as concerns over the ethical issues raised or simply that the opportunity did not arise.

The follow-up interviews were audio-taped to assist with analysis. On completion of these, the participants and I worked through the alternate and optional consenting processes in respect to the use of all their raw data (reviewed in detail in the following section), as this was the last time I would see each participant individually. I then provided each participant with a hand-out of the final stage of the research, the group discussion. The hand-out (see Appendix G) requested that each participant bring to the discussion a clothing story they were prepared to share with others in the group. I provided a ‘clothing story’ from my own experience as an exemplar. We read through the hand-out together, discussed their potential involvement, and discussed arrangements for the group discussion.

Stage Five: Group Discussions

Given that “group conversations are a common feature of human interaction” (Parahoo, 2007, p. 4), it seemed appropriate to generate conversational space as another way to explore the sartorial and corporeal experiences of the participants. Group discussions or focus groups have a long history in the social sciences, and have been used as a methodological tool to explore numerous social phenomena such as health and morality (Crossley, 2003), parent and child perceptions toward healthy eating and obesity prevention (Hesketh, Waters, Green, Salmon, & Williams, 2005), meanings of consumption among young people (Griffin, 2007), and perhaps more relevant to the present research, the older adult woman and fashion (Gibson, 2000).

As a methodological tool, focus groups, or perhaps more aptly named group discussions, are particularly useful in feminist research, not only for the production of raw data but also in “addressing feminist research goals” (Pini, 2002, p. 339), and potentially providing “multiple lines of communication” (Madriz, 2003, p. 364). However, more than this, they create a dialogical space in which conversations between research participants emerge, establishing another means by which social scientists can ‘get at’ social phenomena, including social processes and human interactions. Indeed, as Pini (2002) points out:

focus group participation made what is invisible to many women visible; it enable[s] connections to be made between individual and collective experiences; it facilitate[s] challenges to dominant beliefs; and it provide[s] space for discussion and reflexivity about gender issues. (p. 339)

I conducted two group discussions in order to create groups that were small enough that each of the participants would have time to share, and would be comfortable sharing in the conversation. The smaller group size ensured that the quieter, more internally focused of the participants were more at ease engaging in the interactive nature of the group discussion. The first discussion was attended by three participants while the second was attended by five. Two of the participants chose not to take part

in this final stage of the research, the first due to transportation and childcare difficulties, the second choosing not to take part in what she mistakenly assumed would be a “group discussion where people talk about the negative aspects of their lives that they ascribe to weighing more than society says they should” (personal email).

Each discussion was held in a small, comfortable office in the Social and Cultural Studies department of Massey University, Albany, one during the day and the other in the evening. The nature of the research, its intensity, and the time already taken, meant I knew my research participants fairly well by this stage. With this came a keen sense of responsibility and protectiveness for each of the participants. As a researcher, I was obliged to provide a safe environment for the women taking part but I also wanted to provide a comfortable and relaxed environment. In an effort to promote these surroundings, I provided wine and juice, and cheese and crackers, and we spent some time just chatting informally before we began the discussion proper. The participants appeared very much at ease with each other. They talked freely and openly and genuinely seemed very comfortable sharing with each other their experiences of clothing their bodies. To facilitate this openness, and to ensure the group discussions were carried out in accordance with ethical research principles, each participant signed a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix H) prior to beginning, promising not to disclose the identities of other members of the group.

I planned to use the prepared clothing stories as a springboard for the discussion, asking the participants to identify the ways in which others’ stories resonated with their own, as well as the points of departure. I also wanted to talk about why they felt the stories were constructed in the way they were and how they felt the stories could be rewritten, developing alternative ways of thinking about those experiences - if indeed they believed that to be possible. However, as with other stages of the research, the group discussions did not take place entirely as expected. Most participants did not bring a formal ‘clothing story’ with them; one woman declared that “every day is a clothing story”, while another had forgotten the request made in the hand-out. Most, however, simply felt unable to articulate a single story and preferred to speak more generally about their experiences of clothing their bodies. The lack of clothing stories

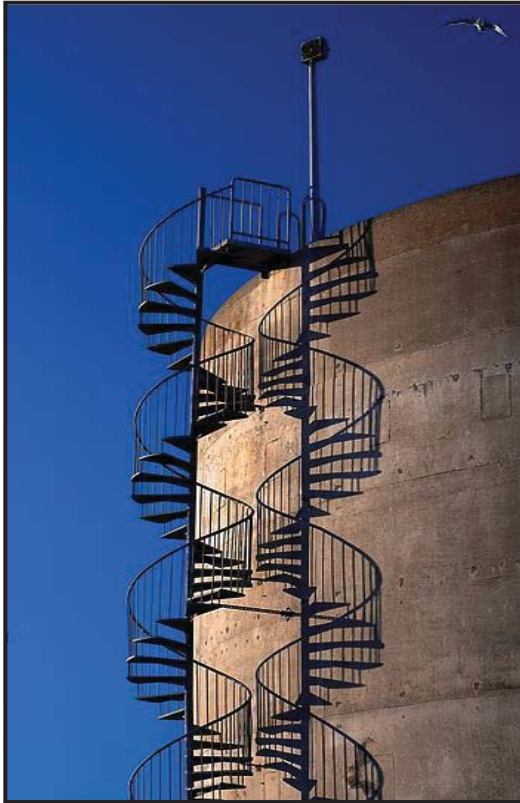
to act as a specific catalyst for our talk meant that my facilitative role shifted. In particular, I had to work harder to ensure that all the participants fully participated, that important threads of conversation were picked up again when discussions went sideways, and that the ‘big ideas’ sitting underneath the detail of participants’ talk was drawn out.

With permission from each participant, I video-recorded and audio-recorded the group discussions. I chose to video-record them for three reasons. First, there is nothing quite like a visual image to capture the dynamic among a group of women getting together and talking about things they are interested in. Second, the video was essential for capturing the multiplicity of ways in which women use their bodies and their clothing in order to tell their stories. Finally, although entirely pragmatic, it can be very difficult to work out ‘who said what’ when you only have an audio-tape of a group discussion.

Analysing the Material

The comment is often made that analysing qualitative research is not a linear process involving a simple step-by-step process, but is, instead, more cyclical (Barbour, 2006; Merriam, 2009). However, although a cyclical process certainly captures the emphasis on ‘the return’ (for example, returning to the data, returning to your original understandings, returning to original sites, returning to audio-recordings), it fails to capture the forward motion of the return. Throughout the analytic process, the researcher engages with the data by moving back and forth between it and the literature, between it and social theory, between it and thinking, between it and talking through ideas with colleagues, between it and writing, and even between it and serendipitous moments, seemingly disconnected from the research proper, that arise, permitting the data to be ‘seen’ in different ways. This is a time not of fixities and rigidity, but a time to hold lightly one’s ideas as researchers work iteratively in order to make sense of the data. Richards (2009) gets a little closer to the circular yet progressive practices of qualitative analysis using the metaphor of a “feedback loop ... [as] the researcher learns from the data, returning to revise or revisit steps taken before that understanding developed” (p. 7).

Figure 4.2 Double helix.¹³



However, the seemingly singular focus of the feedback loop fails to capture the multiple threads caught in motion as the researcher makes sense of the data. In an attempt to account for the multiple, I draw on the metaphor of the double helix coil like that of the DNA molecule. I suggest this for a number of reasons. First, the helix captures the circular process of analysis that is such a strong part of analytic practice. The image of the helix captures the iterative nature of qualitative analysis as the researcher engages with the different elements of the research, including numerous strands of data, literature, and theory. However, helical, as opposed

to circular, also captures the forward momentum that reflexive researchers gain as they bring together these multiple strands in order to generate a dominant narrative.

The image in Figure 7 of the double helix captures a sense of the multiple of which I speak. The multiple steps and railings may be considered analogous to the multiple layers of material the researcher must integrate, while the overall image demonstrates the iterative movement back and forth as analytic ideas are developed, the end point represented here by the meeting of the numerous aspects of the research at the top. However, Dannels' photograph captures yet another important feature of the analytic process. Rather than the expected image of doubly coiled DNA strands, Dannels captures a moment in time, a chance visual encounter involving that which is present in a concrete fashion (a silo with a spiral staircase), and the ephemeral, (the shadow

¹³ Reprinted with permission. Source: Joe Dannels.

of the spiral staircase on the silo). As a metaphor, this is useful for thinking about analysing multiple strands of qualitative data. Throughout this research, I engaged with material data: interviews; audio-recordings; video-recordings; photographs; written journals; and transcriptions of interviews. However, the analytic strategy also involved engaging with the ephemeral, that which is less concrete or fixed, such as ideas, fleeting thoughts and creative imaginings as a researcher ‘plays’ with ideas from empirical research or social theory. The ephemeral nature of this process is a useful analytic strategy as the researcher is left open, unhindered by the materiality of the data, and free to let various data strands move apart and then together, at times brought into sharp relief, while at others, cast in shadows.

Analysing Multiple Types of Data

Above, I outlined my analytic strategy, my *approach* to analysing the data. However, given there were multiple types of data that each required making sense of, I consider it equally important to present an account of how I managed this task. First, let me begin with how the data was *not* analysed. The analysis was not conducted along ‘participant lines’, creating a case study or narrative account. Nor was the analysis conducted by method with each stage of the research being analysed in its entirety and written up accordingly. Although in practice this might have worked, and indeed might have been easier to carry out, the design of the research was intended so that each method worked together, *fusing* to create something greater than the sum of its parts (Chamberlain, et al., in press). In effect, the data did not only reside *within* each research method, but also resided *between* the methods and *across* the methods as they occurred across time and spatial environments.

In an effort to capture the temporality and spatiality of the data, I chose to analyse the data in an on-going fashion. Put another way, the analytic process was not static, beginning once all of the data had been collected and transcribed. Rather, the analysis of the material began at the moment of the data’s inception. Analysis of research is not a neutral process; it is bound up with and reflects the theoretical, epistemological and ontological assumptions of the researcher, each tied together with subjective understandings of how knowledge is constructed (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). By

conducting the analytic process as I worked through the research, I was able to adopt a reflexive stance as I engaged with the material and the literature.

Although the data were analysed in an on-going fashion, given the multi-stage research design, there were also some discrete aspects to the analysis. The first stage of formal analysis began during each encounter. As the participants and I talked, rummaged and shopped, I made notes of anything that captured my sociological imagination (Mills, 1959), accentuating, in particular, any observed connections between the participants' experiences and the broader social issues that relate to gender and size. Although these reflections at times seemed inconsequential, little more than a scribble in the corner of the page, these initial thoughts often provided the seed for later ideas to flourish.

In order to analyse the interviews themselves, the relevant aspects of each interview were fully transcribed. I chose not to transcribe each interview in its entirety as a good deal of time was often spent talking *around* the matter at hand. Instead, I primarily transcribed relevant text. The page was formatted in two columns, the first column recording the text from the interview while the second column was available for analytic comment, identification of emergent themes, reminders to follow up relevant literature, and any other observations or thoughts (see Appendix I). During transcribing, many ideas began to percolate as the data illuminated various themes. On completion of the transcription, I began to cluster the material around these themes, such as 'revealing / concealing', 'sartorial acts of betrayal' and 'discourses of the monstrous', identifying points of departure and commonality both between and within the participants' comments.

Although most of my data were in the form of transcribed interviews, there were numerous other data to consider, such as photographs. As discussed earlier, the image itself was of less importance to me than the story behind it; so rather than viewing the photographs as bound objects that were open for a singular interpretation, the images were better considered as "standing in a dialectical relationship with the persons who produced them". With this in mind, the aim was "not so much an understanding *of* the

pictures, as an understanding *with* the photographs and corresponding accounts about the lives of the respondents concerned” (Hodgetts, et al., 2007b, p. 712).

That said, a preliminary analysis of the pictures themselves still proved useful for providing the broadest understanding of the images. I studied each photograph while reflecting on the accompanying interview, and recorded the key idea the participant conveyed. This was not always a straightforward exercise as there were often multiple meanings behind each photograph. Where this was the case, the photograph was simply attributed with more than one meaning. On doing so, I was able to create a simple matrix that showed the reoccurrence of dominant themes across the participants (see Appendix J). These included ‘sartorial rules’, ‘inclusion / exclusion’, and ‘space between the body and clothing’, among others. While I wanted to move beyond a singular analytic framework in this research, the creation of the matrix proved a useful exercise that provided another ‘way in’ to the data and revealed the strength of developing thematic frameworks in a concrete and tangible way.

Analysing the clothing journals also required a slight shift in approach. Initially, this involved reading the journal and identifying key points of interest that stimulated my sociological imagination. I was interested in, but not limited to, exploring commentary that intersected broadly with dimensions of the personal and the social, the politics of fatness, and spaces of the body. I returned to the journals throughout the analytic phase of the research in order to clarify understandings, seek reinforcement for any generating ideas and further develop the analysis. Together, the analysis of the interview transcriptions, the photographs, and the clothing journals, as well as any preliminary analytic notes taken during or following the research interviews, provided the pattern for the empirical chapters to follow.

Doing Ethics in the Field

In the following, I discuss the ethical considerations encountered as I worked through the research. In many ways, it feels wrong to create a separate section titled ‘ethics’ as though ethics constituted an add-on to the research, somehow beyond the research proper. In practice, although MUHEC, Northern Division, provided permission for

me to enter the research field, the research itself demanded on-going consideration of ethical matters. Indeed, an ethical framework underpinned the entirety of the research project. The research methodology's emphasis on an interactive and dynamic investigation of the everyday, was shaped to allow the participants to mould the way the research unfolded, and thus, participate in the construction of knowledge about them. This edges toward Etherington's (2007) urge for researchers to "let slip the cloak of authority" (p. 600), privileging instead the participants' stocks of experiential knowledge and practice of what it means to live, in this case, as a large woman. However, beyond these meta-methodological ethical issues, there were also a number of more practical, procedural ethical concerns, especially given the complexity of the multi-stage research design and the multiple ways I wanted to be able to use the data. It is to this I turn now.

A Matter of Multiple Consent

Two broad and specific ethical challenges arose as a result of my research design. First, the research generated multiple types of data: written; visual; and audio. Second, I wanted to be able to use the data in multiple ways in multiple venues, including non-academic venues. In order to manage this complexity, I developed a multi-stage ethics process that allowed each participant to maintain authority over the way in which their data from each research stage could be used in different venues.

Prior to beginning the research, and after talking through the participant's potential involvement, each participant signed a consent form (see Appendix K), indicating their willingness *in principle* to complete all five research stages. However, this initial level of consent made it clear that each participant could withdraw from the research following any research stage and also, they were free to choose *not* to take part in any individual stage. This initial, and minimum, indication of consent allowed me to use all the collected data for analytic purposes only, as well as quoting material from any interview transcript for academic purposes.

What the initial consent form did not address was the reproduction of other types of data, such as hand-written extracts from the clothing journal, photographs and video-

recordings, and audio-recordings from each interview. These different types of data raise different ethical concerns and, as such, required careful consideration. These concerns were problematised further because I wanted to use the data in multiple venues, some of which were beyond the realm of the academic. I had four broad venues in mind. First, I wanted permission to use the ‘raw’ data in various academic environments that fall beyond the thesis and subsequent journal articles, such as conference proceedings or as a pedagogical tool in the classroom. Second, I wanted to be able to present the data, in its original form, to marketing companies and clothing stores that might be interested in practices of clothing consumption as it relates to size. While I thought sharing the research findings with such groups could benefit large women generally, I was also mindful that some of my participants could reasonably be unwilling to share their data with self-interested parties concerned with profit margins. Third, given that fatness and clothing are such ‘hot topics’ in the media, I wanted to draw on the data in various media such as print, radio and television. In doing so, I aimed to privilege the voices and experiences of the participants, in keeping with feminist principles of attending to the voices of marginalised groups (see, Sampson, Bloor, & Fincham, 2008). Fourth, responding to the impact of feminism, cultural studies and interpretive understandings of the social world that have given rise to new forms of experimental writing and re-presentation of empirical research (Bruce, 1998), I wanted to ‘play’ with the data and the findings of the research, presenting it in creative ways in more public venues to potentially broader audiences.

However, my desire to use data to these ends was potentially problematic from an ethical standpoint. It was not unreasonable to assume that the participants might think and feel differently about the use of their data (transcribed words, hand-writing, voice, and image) in different venues. The multi-stage consent process, designed to address *data type* rather than the research stage, aimed to accommodate these different understandings. The consent process is outlined below.

The first consent form was the original, signed prior to beginning the research, as outlined above. The second consent form addressed the potential use of the participants’ photographs, which might or might not include images of the

participants themselves, as captured in the photo elicitation stage of the research (see Appendix L). The format allowed the participants to give their permission for their images, either with or without their identity obscured, to be used in a multiplicity of venues, steadily increasing in their potential to be viewed in the public arena. The format also allowed the participants to add specific instructions about any photographs. For example, Jen insisted that two of her images could only appear together, while Charlotte requested the details of a necklace be obscured.

The third consent form (see Appendix M) was an entirely optional ‘non-visual consent form’ that addressed three specific forms of data. The first type was the audio-recordings from each interview (the actual sound of the participants’ voices). Clearly, this raises serious concerns about my ability to guarantee confidentiality. The second type of data this consent form addressed was extracts from clothing journals. Written in the participants’ hand, these were often disclosing, and again, raised concerns around confidentiality. The third data-type the consent form addressed was extracts from each research stage transcript. Ordinarily, this is not a concern, raising no issues of confidentiality where a pseudonym is used and other identifying features are handled carefully. However, given the way I wanted to creatively present the data in ways beyond orthodox understandings of how research gets presented, it was not unreasonable to assume participants might object. In addition, depending on the level of consent participants had offered for other types of data, it might prove difficult to protect their confidentiality, irrespective of whether a pseudonym was used.

The fourth and final consent form (see Appendix N) applied to the group discussion. This followed a similar format, providing the option for participants to allow their images to be used in various venues, either as a video-recording or as a still pulled from the video, either with or without their identity obscured. Given the video footage included more than one participant, it was made clear that, where necessary and appropriate, the ‘lowest’ level of consent would be applied. For example, if just one of the participants chose not to give permission for the video to be used in the classroom for teaching purposes, irrespective of the levels of consent offered from the other participants, the video would not be used.

On-going Matters of Consent

The multi-level consenting process worked well. It provided a way for the participants to clearly outline the way their data could be used. In doing so, it assured each of the participants authority over her voice, in keeping with feminist (and ethical) principles of doing research (see, Borland, 1997). Also, it met the requirements of MUHEC and what Guillemin and Guy (2004) have described as the procedural requirements of such ethics review boards. However, the same authors have also suggested that the ethics of qualitative research lies not in “procedural ethics [but in] ethics in practice ... the day-to-day ethical issues that arise in the *doing* of research” (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 264, my emphasis).

My experience of doing this research supports their claim. Rather than a simple procedural matter involving a series of forms to be ticked and crossed, the process of consent required an on-going negotiation which began before data collection, continued throughout the data collection phase of the research, and in some cases has continued *beyond* data collection, as I begin to use the data creatively. I suggest and promote an on-going negotiation of consent for two main reasons. First, taking part in this research provided an opportunity for positive personal transformation for the participants. As the participants reflected on their bodies, and their experiences of clothing their bodies, as well as the politics of fatness (or as Rose described it, the “fat phobia” of society), they became increasingly more open to their data being used in more public venues and, as a researcher, I became increasingly unsettled by this. While I appreciate that some of the participants were eager for their data to challenge and subvert dominant ways of thinking about fatness, I was, and continue to be concerned that their willingness may shift over time. With this in mind, although the consent forms provide an indication of consent, where necessary, I will return to participants to explain my intended use of their data and seek confirmation of their permission.

The second reason I am engaging in an on-going negotiation of consent is that, as I worked through the research together with participants, I developed a relationship

with them that was founded on trust. Thus, when working through the consent forms, it was not uncommon to hear comments such as the following from Annette:

It's okay Trudie I trust you - you can do what you like with the data. I know you wouldn't do anything to embarrass me.

As the participants privileged the social relationship over, for want of a better word, the contractual, I, as the researcher, was expected to implicitly know the boundaries of consent for each person. Clearly this is problematic, especially given the very public ways I want to use some of the data. In order to work through this concern, I engage, where appropriate, in an on-going dynamic negotiation of consent beyond the completion of data collection. In doing so, I am able to create a reflexive space between the participants and me that helps create transparency and dialogue between us (Etherington, 2007), a practice that I argue generates a more ethical research framework.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was threefold. First, I described the five qualitative, ethnographically-inspired research methods employed throughout the research. Throughout, I emphasised the extent to which the individual methods access aspects of the everyday in different ways, illuminating a different edge of the participants' clothing practices. In particular, although described individually, I aimed to convey the way in which they were designed to work together, performing in effect a methodological sleight of hand that allows both me as the researcher, and the participants, to access data that goes beyond the straightforward, singular interview. Moreover, by asking the participants to do things, and indeed by doing things with me, I aimed to better capture the everyday clothing practices of my participants.

The second purpose of this chapter was a discussion of the analytic framework adopted throughout the research. Here, I placed the greatest emphasis on the analytic strategy and my interest in drawing together multiple aspects of the data, focusing especially on everyday practices as they cut through and cut across social and personal elements, the politics of fatness, and the sociology of place. I also spent

some time talking through the micro-level analytic approach - quite literally, how I managed the data, a broadly thematic analysis that allowed for points of commonality and departure, both within and among the participants to be considered.

The third and final purpose of this chapter was to discuss the ethical considerations of the research. In particular, I discussed the multi-stage consent process I used, designed to allow the participants the greatest degree of autonomy in respect to how their data could be used and in what context. This also necessitated a discussion of the on-going nature of consent for complex research projects that involve a complex range of data.

These ways of working in the research field pronounce my *approach* to doing research, as outlined in chapter three; they capture my assumption that the ordinary, habitual, everyday practices people engage in can inform complex social phenomena. In addition, while this chapter may have provided the mechanics of what occurred in the field, it has been underpinned by an engagement with the multiple. In particular, the notion that employing multiple methods that take place in multiple sites and result in multiple types of data, can edge into the worlds of research participants in ways that illuminate matters beyond the imaginations of researchers.

Chapter Five

Marginal Spaces of Consumption

Things, such as clothing, have a *social life* (Appadurai, 1986). It could no doubt be argued that the social life of clothing begins at the point of production and manufacture, perhaps even the moment of design. However, the *sociality* of this life is primarily marked by the moment of purchase; the act of consumption. Also, typically, in order to wear clothes, one must first purchase clothes. For these reasons, I suggest this foremost moment in the burgeoning relationship between clothing and wearer is a reasonable place to begin the first of my findings chapters. Add to this the shift from a producer society to a consumer society (Stevenson, 2007), it becomes even more pertinent and appropriate that the findings of this research begin with the practices of my participants as they operate within the market place. Thus, this chapter explores how larger women engage with the clothing market as they look for, try on, and purchase clothes.

The act of shopping for clothing may seem somewhat mundane and limited in scope in respect to what it can say about contemporary culture. However, as noted elsewhere, my position is that the everyday and seemingly innocuous things we do

reveal something about the culture of society as “when we are at the everyday, is when we are at our most cultural” (Turner, 2003, p. 2). The everyday acts of cooking dinner, watching television, walking the dog at the beach, and yes, shopping for clothes, reveal much about the social world in which we reside. These everyday acts are the sites where “experience circulates [providing the] medium through which experience gets under the skin and materializes, affecting selves, others and situation” (Stephenson & Papadopoulos, 2006, p. xii). The practice of shopping is pivotal to the construction of everyday life and is indeed a “thoroughly cultural phenomenon” (Miles, 2001, p. 61). It is through our shopping practices that we enact our love for others (Miller, 1998), perform gender (Lunt & Livingstone, 1992), consume ethnicity (Halter, 2000), and mark ourselves as members of a given group through “buying and displaying the tribe-specific paraphernalia” of that group (Bauman, 1990, p. 206). Through shopping we construct identity (Warde, 1994).

As the social shift from production toward consumption occurred, the (post)modern identity became firmly anchored within broader hegemonic processes of consumer capital (Halter, 2000). Thought, philosophy or intellect is no longer the initiator of legislation (Warde, 1994). Instead, consumption has become the primary means through which society is ordered and norms imposed, as individuals become tied to society through their activities as consumers (Bauman, 1987). However, my interest lies not with the processes of social change driving the rise of a consumer society. Rather, I am concerned with the “private world of buying, using and imagining - rather than making - goods” (Zukin, 1990, p. 53). In other words, I am interested in the consumption rather than the production, of clothing. My aim in this chapter is to explore how the practice of shopping: looking for clothes; window shopping; touching clothes in a store; trying clothes on; interacting (or not) with others while clothes shopping; and internet shopping, each shape the practice of consumption in important ways. In particular, how a multiplicity of multi-faceted practices both “limit[ing] and enable[ing] possibilities for particular subjects” (Gregson, Crewe, & Brooks, 2002, p. 615).

Taking everyday shopping practices as my focus, this chapter explores the experiences of larger women as they navigate their way in a consumer driven society.

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The chapter is divided into two sections. The first explores the structural limitations that are in place for larger women, and illuminates the multiple ways in which they are marginalised, illegitimatised and excluded from socio-cultural citizenship within sites of consumption. The second considers how they respond to these structural limitations, unpacking the multiplicity of ways larger women manage the marginality of their bodies at the time of consumption. Throughout, I argue that larger women are caught between the structures that limit their freedom to participate in society as agentic consumers, and their capacity to navigate their way through these obstacles. In this way, my findings lend support to the claim that consumption represents a “key arena of social life in which the tensions of structure and agency are played out on an everyday basis” (Miles, 2001, p. 61). Doing so allows me to show how fat women transform exclusionary sites of consumption into inclusionary sites, legitimising their (large) bodies in the process.

Shopping on the Margins

There are a number of structural limitations in place that prohibit fat women’s active participation in society as consumers. First, there is a general lack of clothing stores available for large women compared to those available to smaller women. Second, of the limited number of stores available, the clothing ranges are spatially marginalised which serves to exclude larger women, or place them, quite literally, on the margins. Third, sales staff and other shoppers directly or indirectly reinforce their exclusion or marginalisation. Finally, the clothing designs available are limited and problematic, inadvertently suggesting that the larger woman’s body has no legitimate place within sites of consumption.

Practices of Exclusion in Spaces of Inclusion

The enclosed shopping mall has experienced a meteoric rise in popularity since first being introduced in Minneapolis in 1956 (Crawford, 1992). Conveniently located in suburban regions, providing cheap if not free customer car parking, the shopping mall provides a large range of stores within a climactically controlled environment. Designed to ensure shoppers are able to complete all their shopping requirements in

one place, they provide the maximum range of products on offer requiring the minimum amount of effort to purchase. At the time I began my PhD dissertation, a new mall opened in the immediate vicinity of most of my participants' homes. Like so many others, this mall offered "the world in a shopping mall" (Crawford, 1992, p. 3); a wide range of products and services including four department stores and countless dedicated clothing shops.

While shopping for clothes with my participants in the fourth stage of the research, a number of them took me to this mall. However, their experience of the mall was underpinned by the exclusionary practices of others that problematised their bodies and placed them on the margins. While shopping with them, it became apparent that large parts of the mall were not as accessible to them as they were to others. Charlotte described her experience of this exclusion as "pressing your nose up against the window of a party you're not invited to". The majority of the clothing stores within the mall were framed as "redundant" in the minds of the participants, as Beth and Jen so clearly elucidate:

There's no point going in there, I've never been in there, there'd be no point, there'd be no point going in there 'cause there'd be absolutely nothing, absolutely nothing ... very frustrating so out of this whole great big mall I can say Farmers, K and K, and Kmart would be the only places I could buy something. The rest from my point of view would be completely redundant.

(Beth, Shopping Trip)

I wouldn't even bother going in to so called ordinary shops 'cause I know that they wouldn't have clothes that would fit me.

(Jen, Shopping Trip)

Although one's perception may be that the shopping mall is a public space, it is in fact a privately owned and enclosed space with clear practices of inclusion and exclusion (McDowell, 1999). Despite the shopping mall's appeal to the mass market,

groups considered undesirable are readily excluded (Watson, 2009). Certainly, the fat woman is not *directly* excluded from the shopping mall; no one bars her entry. However, of the many clothing stores in the mall referred to above, just one is dedicated (although still not exclusively) to women sized 18 or larger. This is a puzzling imbalance given the number of fat people with the disposable income to shop for clothes in New Zealand, and fails to fit the economic model of supply and demand. Yet the lack of available clothing stores suggests that large women are effectively excluded from the sphere of fashion, design and clothing. The reason behind the lack of clothing options may lie with designers and company heads who maintain clothing is at its best when worn by smaller women (The Fashion eZine, 2010). Breseman (1999) argues that designers consider their clothes made in larger sizes could be “fashion poison”, damaging their brand and potentially insulting smaller women who may be “confronted” with a fat person in the same outfit (p. 181). Describing the fat woman as poisonous reminds of Douglas’ (1966) commentary on the polluted, and potentially polluting, body, first introduced in chapter two. Irrespective of the reason behind the substantial lacuna in the industry, the absence of clothing stores to accommodate large women’s bodies, directly exclude them from fully participating in social practices of consumption that mark individuals as active and legitimate members of society. Given practices of consumption are considered a key determinant of social citizenship, this denies larger women full membership as social citizens.

Human geographers propose that people and places are gendered (McDowell, 1999). The dearth of clothing stores available for women larger than a size 18 at a shopping mall suggests that places are not only gendered, they are also sized. The failure of the ubiquitous and seemingly inclusive shopping mall to adequately accommodate the fat woman’s body is not benign. The absence of larger sized clothing stores speaks to the way large women are positioned on the margins of society. While they may enter these places, the doors to these “ordinary shops” (Jen) are metaphorically closed and their bodies marginalised, if not excluded.

Yet shopping malls do carry some clothing lines in large sizes. *Farmers*¹⁴, for example, carry two clothing ranges for larger women representing two distinct styles and reflecting two different price ranges. Outside the shopping mall, there are also occasional boutiques that incorporate a separate clothing line for the larger woman. However, in both the case of the department store and the designer store, these garments are placed quite literally on the margins. In the department store, the two available product lines are situated in the furthest back corner, the sartorial equivalent of a restaurant table by the toilets. Jen was fully aware of where she could locate clothing to fit her:

Usually the large are at the back. They want to get us out of the way [laughs]... you don't even know it's happening and it's just unconsciously you know 'oh yeah my stuff's down the back of the shop'.

(Jen, Shopping Trip)

Although I accompanied Jen on her first visit to the new mall and department store, she intuitively knew she would find the larger clothing “down the back of the shop” well beyond the store frontage where she could be seen by others. Similarly, the larger women’s clothes in the designer store are constructed as a ‘special’ line with a different label, beyond the primary clothing line. They are also positioned apart from the main body of clothing, separated out on a “little rack” in the corner, as Ann describes:

I walk into the shop and the first thing the lady says to me is 'oh the bigger racks are over there' [laughs]... I guess we're quite sensitive as bigger ladies and we want to be like everyone else you know [laughs]. So we don't want to have a little rack over in the corner for us ... why

¹⁴ Currently celebrating 100 years of service to New Zealanders, *Farmers* is New Zealand’s largest fashion department store chain stocking a wide range of goods from clothing and health and beauty products, to beds and bedroom furniture.

can't they put those ones in amongst the others? Why do they have to be separate?

(Ann, Wardrobe Rummage)

It is not only the clothing that is constructed as marginal in these spaces. The women who buy them are similarly constructed. Clothing stores are not only in the business of producing and selling clothes. They are also in the business of constructing normative models of gender. Through the creation of 'special' clothing labels that are *spatially* marginalised, the larger wearer of those clothes is *socially* marginalised. In the process, the larger woman as shopper is simultaneously constructed as "beyond the margins of intelligibility" (Butler, 1990, p. 132), the very margins within which smaller size women find their legibility.

Charlotte suggests that plus-size clothing is located well beyond the store frontage, because, quite simply, the "clothes are ugly, they're horrible looking things, they really look awful". Regardless, the spatial arrangement of clothing in stores and the relegation of larger sizes to the far corners suggest that larger clothes, and by association larger women, are literally *segregated* from both the store proper and other (smaller) shoppers. I do not use the word segregation lightly, given it carries with it the weight of social movements past and present. However, the inverse special treatment the larger women's clothing range receives marks larger women as different, and more importantly, *less than*, and positions her outside the bounds of normality. Furthermore, in order to participate in practices of consumption, larger women must unavoidably participate in the process of marginalisation by making their purchases from the "back corner". The larger wearer inadvertently, yet unavoidably, participates in the very practice of her marginalisation.

If lives on the margins of the mainstream do not appeal, there is a limited range of clothing stores that cater specifically to the larger, fleshier woman's body. For example, in the shopping mall I went to with some of my participants, just one chain store, *K & K*, gears itself toward large women, stocking a range of clothing sizes from 10 to 26. Within this store the fat woman was cast as legitimate as there were clothes

available to both accommodate, and suit, her body. However, the participants had an ambivalent relationship toward such stores. While they were “grateful” (Annette) for the clothing, they were equally mindful of the extent to which a plus-size clothing store simultaneously marked their bodies, once again, as beyond the norm and framed their bodies as fundamentally problematic. By their very nature these stores are specialist, niche, and aimed toward a specific and *marginal* market. From Lynn:

There was a company called ‘super sizes’ which I think is a dreadful name because who the hell wants to go round ... with a shopping bag that says super sizes and there’s a lot of ones that are called plus this and plus that, and you’re thinking ‘no, you don’t understand. People are people and they don’t want to be labelled’. All they want is for the shopping bag to say: ‘this is a great piece of merchandise’. You don’t want it to say ‘look at me, I’m fat’. I mean boy did they get it wrong.

(Lynn, Wardrobe Rummage)

As might be determined from Lynn’s polemical commentary above, the sense of marginalisation is not helped when such stores make reference to size in their name and marketing campaigns. Efforts to set company logos apart from others and identify their brand with the product on offer, plus-size clothing, simultaneously serves to position or frame their customer within the negative category ‘fat’. Even stores such as *Precious Vessels* that try to create a positive shopping experience for large women by framing the name of the store positively, set the larger woman apart as something different and beyond the norm¹⁵. The very language of these stores implies that the fat body is *more than*, or beyond, corporeal norms (Adam, 2001; Colls, 2006), as well as

¹⁵ *Precious Vessels* is an Auckland-based designer clothing store that creates “fashions for the significant woman [in] sizes 14 to 30+ (Precious Vessels, 2010). The name of the store is, however, ambiguous. On the one hand, the larger woman is constructed as precious, perhaps something to be handled with care. On the other hand, a vessel denotes either a container or a boat (an object of significant size). Either way, the name conjures up ambivalent discourses of fatness.

beyond fashion and design. Plus-size stores are also, at times, referred to as ‘outsize’ stores. However, once again, outsize suggests that which is beyond the norm. Not only does it sound audibly similar to ‘outside’ (Adam, 2001), as a spatial metaphor, it clearly positions the shopper who frequents these stores as beyond the margins of normativity, and thus, beyond legitimacy. For larger women there are multiple sites of exclusion within the sphere of consumption that ironically, construct the fat woman as either ‘less than’ other legitimate, smaller women shoppers, or ‘more than’, the corporeal norms. Either way, the larger woman is constructed in these sites as illegitimate and out of place.

Sizing them Up

It is not only the lack of suitable clothing stores and the spatial organisation of shopping malls and shops that exclude and marginalise large women. Individuals also act to reinforce practices of marginalisation through indirectly making larger women feel they fail to fit. In the following, I work through three of the ways in which larger women experienced the expulsion of their bodies from sites in which they may be considered out of place: being ignored; being laughed at; and simply getting a sense of disapproval and consequently misplacement. I then consider the threat the larger woman presents to society at large when out of place.

Each participant had a story, or stories to tell that described shop assistants in clothing stores, or other shoppers in those stores, making them feel they did not belong because of their size. When Laura went shopping for a new bra, she went to a store that, although not exorbitant in terms of price, was beyond what she would ordinarily spend. The store was attractive and had “really nice, pretty stuff” and given it specialised in underwear, she was also certain that it would stock underwear to accommodate her 22E bust-size. Not a person to spend lots of money on lingerie, she was uncertain and hesitant in the environment, lacking the cultural capital to negotiate the space and products on offer with confidence. In particular, she felt unsure about the protocol while using the changing rooms and uneasy asking for assistance when items failed to fit or be to her liking. When Laura needed assistance and guidance from the specialist team of sales staff, she was ignored:

No-one offered to help me and it's like 'right, just take it off and leave'. They only help people that are skinny ... they only help you if you've got money ... They could see that I was struggling walking around wondering 'oh what one to buy?'

(Laura, Shopping Trip)

It is unclear whether Laura was ignored because of her size, because of the sales staff's perception of her and her economic status, or for some other reason. However, Laura's subjective experience is that she was not served because of her apparent lack of money, and her obvious size, a propensity demonstrated in other empirical research (Kim & Lennon, 2005). In the store, Laura felt fraudulent and out of place. To be ignored is to be rendered invisible, unworthy of attention and almost as though one does not exist. If the dressed body is the practical negotiation between structured systems such as the fashion system (Barthes, 1985), and the social conditions of everyday life as suggested by Entwistle (2000), it is problematic that the larger woman may be actively ignored. The practice of ignoring larger women shoppers effectively casts them into the shadows, excluding them from fully participating as consuming social citizens.

It was also not uncommon for my participants to report being the comedic focus during shopping encounters. For example, Jen talks about going to buy a bra and feeling uncomfortable about the young "flat-chested" girl behind the counter. As a large-busted woman, Jen did not want to request her size, knowing from experience that her bust size was potentially an object of derision and humour:

I've had some terrible, terrible bra shopping moments ... being served by ... someone who's probably 18 and incredibly flat chested. I don't want to say 'have you got an 18-20F please?' ... it just made me feel really, really uncomfortable ... they actually had some bras that were just my size and I thought 'yeeha' ... [but] the girl laughed ... she laughed. But that was really humiliating.

(Jen, Clothing Journal Interview)

Laughter can be both social and anti-social; it can include or it can exclude (Billig, 2005). For a sales assistant to laugh at Jen's request lays bare the extent to which the fat body resides beyond the bounds of intelligibility; Jen's body is beyond the bounds of understanding for the smaller sized assistant. However, the girl's laughter also served as a regulatory device, effectively reinforcing the marginality of Jen's body and the extent to which it fell beyond accepted feminine corporeality. Simultaneously, the event also reinforced the corporeal authority of the one who laughed; she who falls *within* the accepted bounds of feminine beauty. In television and film, comedy has been used in an attempt to subvert dominant constructions of fatness (Stukator, 2001). However, intentional productions such as those that appear on television operate quite differently from the practices of everyday life. The 'everyday' captures the *zeitgeist* of a society, with little opportunity for censor. It is at the everyday when the truth of the social is laid bare. Jen's example demonstrates the extent to which even where stores do accommodate the physical materiality of the larger body by stocking items in larger sizes, there is no guarantee this will be accompanied by social acceptance or inclusion. It seems even in these spaces, the legitimacy of the fat, fleshy woman's body is tenuous, at best.

At times, the actions of sales staff made my participants feel they did not belong in a store. Often this simply involved a look, or as Charlotte described it, a "sneer" on entering a store, that informed them they were unwelcome, and not 'of this place':

I'll walk into a thin girls' shop and I just feel like the assistant's going to escort me out of the shop saying 'don't try our stuff on, you'll stretch it'.

(Charlotte, Clothing Journal Interview)

Charlotte's comment captures two 'threats'. First, she feels individually threatened as she internalises her perception that the sales assistant would like to escort her from the store. Doing so positions her perpetually on the edge of shame or humiliation. In the unlikely event that this was to happen, her internal sense of non-belonging would be publicly demonstrated and, in the process, her body would be marked as the abject object, or spectacle (see, Russo, 1997) of public derision and scorn. The visibility of

size ensures that ‘impression management of the stigmatised body’ (Goffman, 1986; 1990), is unfeasible, as the fat body is “always already an “outed” body”: it is always hyper visible, its flabby flesh is always irrevocably seen” (Murray, 2005, p. 273). It is through the body that the social world, including the socio-political ordering of society, is understood. For Charlotte, her body is marked, and experienced, as not of this place as the encounter is inscribed on the surface of her body (see, Grosz, 1994). By “sneering”, “looking down their noses” (Laura), or refusing to assist fat women, sales staff reinforce the construction of the larger woman’s body as out of place and beyond belonging. In turn, Charlotte internalises the social judgment and in doing so, she is metaphorically silenced (see, Taket, Foster, & Cook, 2009), and her authority as a legitimate consumer challenged. Again, these covert exclusionary practices act as social controls that categorise her body negatively and mark her body as out of place, a social process she unavoidably participates in.

Social relations of power, inclusion and exclusion are clearly embedded within these socio-spatial practices (McDowell, 1999), which exclude larger women from properly participating in consumption practices. However, although these practices may begin in a particular locale, they end life *in* the body. Charlotte’s body becomes an object through which she experiences the world and serves, at once, as a reminder of her body’s failure to align with heteronormative constructions of feminine identity. At these times, every interaction is experienced through the body as she becomes acutely corporeally conscious; her “subjectivity ... irrevocably corporeal” (Murray, 2005, p. 272) .

The other ‘threat’ that Charlotte’s comment illuminates, is the extent to which the presence of larger women in so-called ‘normal’ stores is threatening at a broader societal level. Matter, as previously discussed, has its place. When matter (such as large women’s bodies), is ‘in place’ it supports the systematic ordering of society. However, when the larger woman’s body is out of place, or misplaced, it threatens and disrupts the social order. As Douglas (1966) contends, in order to preserve the authority of the social order, and preserve the boundaries of authoritative sites (in this case, the ‘normal’ clothing store and all it implies), it may necessitate the rejection of “inappropriate elements” (p. 35).

The presence of the fat woman's body, in its unruliness and inability to fit, challenges the stability of the social order within normative sites of (clothing) consumption. The presence of the large body confounds the stability of heteronormative femininity through its insistence that an alternative corporeality is possible. If the sales person refused entry to Charlotte, or escorted her out (as Charlotte believed she would like to), the staff member would effectively cast out the misplaced body, and in doing so, add weight to existing socio-normative constructions of feminine beauty. The staff member did not escort Charlotte from the premises. However, she did make Charlotte *feel* as though she would like to, which resulted in Charlotte feeling as though she were beyond the bounds of the store at the very moment she stood within them. Given that the shopping experience for larger women is closely tied to emotion (Colls, 2006), it is not surprising that this creates a sense that they are not 'of this place'. Importantly, by literally or metaphorically casting out that which is misplaced, the authority of that which remains is reinforced. Thus, through exclusionary practices, such as a failure to serve, laughter, or a look that says a person is unwelcome, hegemonic femininity protects the boundaries of its categorisation.

Marginalisation by Design

The third way in which large women are marginalised in sites of consumption is through the lack of suitable clothing available in a range of different designs and price ranges. My participants often spoke of their frustration at clothing that failed to fit their bodies. In particular, a number of women spoke of clothing that began life in the smallest size and was then made progressively larger in order to accommodate progressively larger bodies:

Quite often all they do is enlarge the whole thing which includes the arm holes and hey ... I don't have armholes down to here [indicating breast height].

(Annette, Shopping Trip)

[Designers] think because you're a size 22 ... that your arms are right down here, so you've got gorilla arms which is just ridiculous, or that ...

you're six foot tall, or the tops come right down to your knee, just because you're big in the bust or the hips or the tummy ... that makes it very frustrating for ... buying things.

(Ann, Wardrobe Rummage)

According to my participants, the net result of clothing being made proportionately larger was garments that were too long in the arm, too long in the body, too wide at the armhole and gaped at the neck line. It seems the assumption of designers is that to dress the fat woman's body, one simply has to recreate the same clothing in proportionately larger sizes. What designers fail to understand, or respond to, is that as women get larger they do not increase in size in equal proportions all over their bodies; fat women are not necessarily taller with longer legs than smaller women. Instead, fat is distributed unevenly throughout the body with women typically accumulating greater amounts of fat in the hip and thigh area but not, for example, increasing in the circumference of the underarm 'hole' itself. The absence of careful designs that accurately, or adequately, reflect the bodies of larger women is suggestive of the extent to which larger women's bodies are cast as illegitimate. In the world of consumption, it seems even those designers who target larger women, misunderstand the fat body and fail to acknowledge the specific design needs of the fleshy, soft, fuller figure. The covert message, intentional or otherwise, is that the matter of fat bodies falls beyond the scope of standard design and, as such, is beyond the scope of designers.

The participants also reported that the clothing made available to them lacked originality and fashionable design. Beth captured the following two images to pictorially demonstrate the substantial differences in clothing designs that are made available to smaller and larger women respectively:

Figure 5.1 Window to diversity.



Figure 5.2 Window to homogeneity.



Taken during the photo elicitation stage of the research, these images were intended to highlight the disparity of clothing designs for smaller and larger women. Moreover, they were taken in order for Beth to express her frustration at the design of the clothing available for her:

You know, that's Max (see Figure 5.1). It's got all the lovely ladies in it, all the skinny ladies all in lovely clothes. There's no question that that's not a nice ladies shop ... but then you go to this one (see Figure 5.2) ... the big lady's shop was dull and very uninspiring compared to the kind of shop with all the nice smaller sizes ... everybody has a belt the tops look very similar ... they're not nearly as interesting ... and you know this is the only ... chain of larger size high street clothes.

(Beth, Photo Elicitation)

The first image, window to diversity, depicts a contemporary clothing chain store that stocks a range of sizes from six to 16. The mannequins in the shop window capture a range of personal images. Each sports a different hairstyle: short; long; straight; curly; dark; blonde; and redhead. The mannequins also represent different ethnicities and have markedly different facial features. The clothing they wear does not fit readily into one categorical style; there is a range of trousers, skirts, shorts, tops and dresses. The overall impression when looking at the image is one of diversity and difference. However, this is said with a caveat. All the bodies represented in the shop window are slim; there is no space in this store for the large woman. This clothing store clearly markets itself to the slim, contemporary woman and creates, and indeed promotes, a multiplicity of means through which such women might express themselves through their clothing.

This image of diversity and difference can be contrasted with the second photograph of the plus-sized store, window to homogeneity. In this photograph, the mannequins are bald, lack facial features and do not represent 'real' women. They are porcelain white, failing to reflect the natural skin tone of any ethnic group and, as Beth noted, they each wear variations of the same outfit, centering on a belt and similarly

designed tops. Looking at this image, it seems women shopping in this store are not constructed as individuals and there is little room for the expression of a personal, aesthetic style. Instead, the mannequins reflect an homogenous group with little need or desire to use clothing as a means of self-expression, or mark their bodies positively.

Although a perception may exist that larger women do not care about clothing, fashion or design, empirical studies have shown that larger women are just as interested in the colour, fabric, fashion, fit, and style of clothing as smaller women (Breseman, et al., 1999). However, the images above illustrate that there are limited clothing possibilities for larger women, irrespective of their interest in clothing and fashion. It would seem that the clothing market creates structural limitations that restrict the extent to which large women are able to fully participate in practices of consumption, a key factor of social citizenship.

The homogeneity of large women's clothing and the limitations therein are not the only way the contrasting photographs highlight larger women's marginalisation. The plus-size mannequins also have a distinctly masculine quality. Given the store's "emphasis on fuller figure fashion" (K & K, 2010), it comes as no surprise that the mannequins would be larger than mannequins in other stores. However, these mannequins are not only larger. Critically, the broad muscular shoulders lack a feminine quality that mark the store as a stockist of *women's* clothing, something Beth was acutely aware of:

I went past them and they had on trousers and a vest top and I thought it was men ... there's no hair, they're bigger and they've made them taller and they've made them wider ... and the first time I saw them ... I couldn't work out what they were ... is that a man's shop, is that a woman's shop, are they transvestites, you know, what are they?

(Beth, Photo Elicitation)

Earlier, I suggested that various factors impede large women's engagement with the clothing market and construct the larger woman shopper as beyond the possibilities of intelligibility. Here, the masculinisation of the female mannequins marks the larger

woman's body as outside the possibilities of *femininity*. In doing so, there is an implicit suggestion that larger women's bodies cannot constitute the feminine, irrespective of clothing design. The notion of femininity is a socio-cultural construction that strongly influences the ways in which gender can be performed, including demeanour, values, behaviour, and ultimately, appearance (Bordo, 2003). Although there are many possible expressions of femininity that are perpetually in flux, there is also a privileged, or hegemonic form of femininity that is grounded in heterosexual notions of sex and romance, and that emphasises appearances that align with a thin, toned feminine body (Choi, 2000). Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar and Kauer (2004) have discussed the difficulties that sports women face given they often have a muscular, athletic body that threatens orthodox constructions of femininity. According to their research, female athletes use feminine clothing to assuage the masculinity of their bodies. However, for my participants, the overt masculinisation of their bodies comes not from within, but from an external production of fatness within the sphere of consumption. In turn, the mannequin's construction renders the large woman as beyond the bounds of femininity; they are, quite simply, beyond the feminine.

In addition to the homogenisation of clothing designs and the masculinisation of larger women's bodies via mannequins, larger women's clothing is also, at times, infantilised. While on our shopping trip, Jen was outraged at the "cutesy" clothing available to her, such as cherry patterned fabric, "wee" buttons and bows on tops, and diamante embellishments in the shape of stars and moons on the rear pockets of jeans. From Jen:

This is where I look and I think 'how dare you?' How dare the designers think they can fob off larger people wearing something that looks like a kids? It looks like it should be in kid's fabric ... it's hideous, how dare they? ... Big people should not be cutesy ... this is the type of thing I'm absolutely disgusted with.

(Jen, Shopping Trip)

The childish connotation of the designs construct the fat woman's body as childlike and thus, beyond adulthood. Interestingly, this is also a tendency attributed to disabled women (Begum, 1992). Constructed as children, larger women are not only rendered powerless, but simultaneously devoid of sexuality. Yet one cannot help wonder if this is not to be expected. Popular culture constructs the fat woman as outside the boundaries of sexuality. Despite emphasised curves, fuller breasts, wider hips, and curvier buttocks and thighs which denote the larger woman's body as overtly female and sexual, western society constructs the fat body as *asexual* (Hartley, 2001; Losano & Risch, 2001). Popular culture fails, or perhaps refuses, to represent the fat woman's body as potentially sexual (Ruggerio, 2005), a position inadvertently reinforced by medical research that places the (problematic) sexual function of larger women at the centre of inquiry (see, Esposito et al., 2007).

In an increasingly homogenised society, efforts to individualise or personalise abound. Through the purchase of particular items, we seek "expressive moments" (Miller, 1987, p. 8) that will set us apart from others. However, if one of the ways identity is constructed is through the marketplace (Sweetman, 2001), larger women face clear and considerable limitations as the marketplace itself turns against them. The homogenisation of larger women's bodies and the concomitant homogenisation of clothing designs, as well as the masculinisation of their bodies and the infantilisation of their clothing, serve as structural limitations that impede positive and active participation in the marketplace and the potential for self-expression through clothing. Doing so limits the subject positions available to large women, either through limiting their means for self-expression through clothing (practices), or through the construction of large women as beyond individuality, beyond femininity, and beyond sexuality. The net result of these practices is the positioning of larger women beyond the realms of consumption, a key marker of social inclusion.

Managing Marginalisation

Throughout the previous section, I explored the structural limitations of the clothing market for larger women that either fails to acknowledge their presence or alternatively, 'puts them in their place'. These practices of exclusion and

marginalisation in spaces of consumption seemed, at times, insurmountable for some of my participants. However, I found that despite structural limitations in their path, my participants were often creative and resourceful as they navigated their way around and through those limitations. In the remainder of this chapter, I explore the everyday practices of consumption my participants engaged in as they transformed sites of exclusion and marginalisation into sites of possibility for themselves as legitimate consumers. In doing so, I demonstrate that larger women are not simply at the mercy of a market place that marginalises their bodies, their disposable income and their sense of self. In revealing and unravelling a number of ‘tactics’ employed by my participants, I illuminate how they actively create possibilities for themselves in the clothing market place, making the existing limited order of consumption “function in another register” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 32). Moreover, I show how their practices (partially) subvert the dominant order of consumption by extending its spatial and temporal boundaries, allowing them to reposition themselves within its borders in the process.

Extending Boundaries of Shopping – Shopping as Work

A few years ago, when Lynn was thinner and able to wear smaller, and more readily available clothes, she reports having an “adrenaline rush” when she went clothes shopping, explaining that her “skin went all crinkly” and her “heart beat went up” when she found the perfect item. Clearly, shopping for clothes as a smaller woman was a multi-sensory experience for Lynn that was a fun, and ultimately, pleasurable activity. Lynn’s prior experience reflects empirical research that suggests that women find shopping an enjoyable, pleasurable experience (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003; Fischer & Arnold, 1990). However, now larger in size with more limited clothing choices, the pleasure of shopping for clothes has all but disappeared for Lynn. When once shopping for clothes was recreational, it is now constructed as work. In this, Lynn was not alone:

I don’t do malls as recreation or leisure.

(Jen, Shopping Trip)

No, it's not fun. I don't do it for fun.

(Janie, Shopping Trip)

What became apparent from the practices and language of my participants was that, by and large, shopping for clothing was not considered a pleasurable activity. Instead, it was constructed as work; a job to be performed that often demanded a degree of resourcefulness and creativity on the part of the shopper.

Some of my participants described shopping for clothing as a full time (pre)occupation. It was reported as an on-going activity that, quite simply, seldom ceased. At all times, these participants were vigilant, constantly “keeping an eye out” (Ann) for clothing that might work for them and suit their bodies. Georgie, for example, described an occasion when she noticed a swimming costume in the window of a clothing store. At the time, she was sitting in the passenger seat of her husband’s car, stopped at the traffic lights. Spotting the swimwear, Georgie “hopp[ed] out at the lights” asking her husband to “go around the block” so she could quickly go and try on the swimsuit.

What Georgie describes challenges empirical research that suggests shopping for clothes is a social experience and a positive way to spend time with friends and family members (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003). Instead, the larger woman as shopper must be opportunistic, taking advantage of potential shopping moments, as they arise. I am not suggesting that other smaller-sized women are not equally opportunistic. However, the difference for my participants is the reduced range of clothing available forces their hand. By taking advantage of opportunities as they arise, they effectively broaden the possibilities of successful consumption. Interestingly, the on-going nature of their shopping experiences challenges dominant understandings of ‘the shopping trip’, a finite activity that possesses a clear beginning and end. Instead, the practices of my participants extend the temporal boundaries of the shopping experience, weaving shopping for clothes into *everyday* practice.

A further way that shopping for clothes was constructed as work by my participants, and which challenged the spatial boundaries of consumption practices, was

demonstrated by their willingness to travel long distances in order to find suitable attire. Janie, for example, regularly saves her clothes shopping for her family holiday in Australia, given the broader range of clothing available “across the ditch”. Although Janie travelled the furthest distance on a regular basis, (others spoke of shopping for clothes further afield while on holiday), she incorporated her shopping practices into her vacation, a vacation that would proceed regardless. Others, however, were prepared to go to considerable lengths to shop *specifically* for clothes. Lynn conceded that:

If you're not a standard size 12 you just can't go out and pick up anything you like ... so yes I will, I'll put some effort into seeing if I can track it down.

(Lynn, Wardrobe Rummage)

Lynn thought nothing of ringing around stores throughout Australia and New Zealand if she felt it would lead her to the right garment. Although Lynn’s telephone enquiries cost little, they demanded a good deal of time and energy. Beth, however, also invested considerable financial resources, as well as the time and energy. Capturing the photograph in Figure 5.3 in the photo elicitation stage of the research to visually underline her claim, Beth was prepared to travel the length and breadth of New Zealand if it led her to suitable clothing, as she explains in the following:

Finding clothes is a New Zealand wide occupation. You can't just ... get them in your own back yard. Often, you've got to look further afield ... I can't let an opportunity pass me [and] I would ... do a detour of shops and I would go from ... Whangaparaoa to South Auckland looking for shops that would do larger sizes so that you might get some sort of choice and you might find something.

(Beth, Photo Elicitation)

Figure 5.3 Travelling the length and breadth of New Zealand ... and beyond.



Despite living in a suburban location with a shopping mall and individual clothing stores in close proximity, Beth finds it necessary to look further afield. Her reference to travelling from Whangaparaoa to South Auckland entails a distance of over 60 kilometres each way, taking over two hours in driving time alone. Although Beth haltingly confesses to enjoy clothes shopping (the only participant to do so), her and others' commitment to travelling far and wide to find suitable clothing is directly associated with the failure of the marketplace to cater to their clothing needs. My participants' on-going efforts point to their resilience and resourcefulness as they shop on the margins. Moreover, their resourcefulness challenges the exclusive boundaries of consumption, making it possible for them to participate.

Extending the temporal and spatial boundaries of the shopping experience was not enough for my participants. In addition, successfully finding clothes to purchase was also dependent on being flexible about the garment being sought. In practice, this meant looking for broader *categories* of clothing as opposed to specific items to further increase the possibilities of locating appropriate clothing, as clarified in the following:

I could never go out and shop and think ‘okay, today I’m going to go out and buy a dress and a cardigan’ ... because it would never in a million years happen ... in my mind I might be looking for say casual clothes, or smart clothes for going out, or work clothes, and I’ll have a category in my mind ... I have to have a much broader sort of idea of what I want.

(Beth, Clothing Journal Interview)

Going shopping for clothes was a broad endeavour that depended on my participants’ flexibility. By extending the possibilities for consumption by looking for broader categories of clothing, Beth (and others) effectively reposition themselves more positively within the marketplace. In doing so, they effectively transform the marketplace from a site of exclusion exemplified by limitations, into a site of possibility. In the process, they actively reconstruct themselves within this space as active and authoritative consumers.

In this section, I have identified some of the ways my participants approached shopping for clothes. I focused particular attention on how they constructed clothes shopping as *work*, in order to make it possible for them to successfully participate in consumption practices. By extending the spatial and temporal boundaries of what it means to shop, they were able to reposition themselves in relation to the marketplace. Through thinking about shopping as a task to be completed, being prepared to travel and invest resources, they construct the shopping experience almost as a “laborious task” (Prus & Dawson, 1991, p. 145). This contrasts sharply with empirical research that suggests that shopping in general is a major leisure activity (Gregson, et al., 2002), and that women in particular, love to shop (Fischer & Arnold, 1990). It also challenges research showing that shopping for *clothes* is said to possess a particular allure; an enjoyable task providing “opportunit[ies] for self-expression, fantasy, a break from the normal routine of shopping and perhaps a little self-indulgence” (Dholakia, 1999, p. 156). Instead, I have shown that the practice of clothes shopping for my larger-sized participants was a *determined* and on-going practice. To succeed in locating clothes to wear, they had to be continually alert to the possibilities on offer, challenging the static temporality suggested by the phrase, ‘the shopping trip’. The

success, or otherwise, of shopping depends on regular, routinised practices of consumption (Gregson, et al., 2002). My participants lend support to this claim as they construct the practice of shopping as an *on-going* activity that is incorporated into everyday life. For them, the shopping experience lacks clear distinctions between beginning and end, and fixed locations. Rather, shopping for clothing is flexible, woven into everyday practice as they stretch the boundaries of time and space in matters of consumption. Doing so allows them to engage in the marketplace in an active and positive way, broadening out their possibilities for consumption and constructing themselves as agentic and authoritative consumers in the process.

Renovating Clothes

Reconstructing the spatio-temporal boundaries of shopping for clothes was not the only way in which the participants managed the shopping experience and the limitations the clothing market put in place. In addition, some of the participants became very creative as they worked with the limited clothing on offer, actively transforming garments to better accommodate their bodies. In the first part of this chapter, I discussed some of the concerns my participants raised about the design and fit of the clothing available to them. Often designs failed to flatter the larger figure and the sizing of clothing was inconsistent, often resulting in garments that failed to fit properly. Typically, they were either not proportional to large women's bodies, or they would "bite" and "dig" (Rose) into the flesh. In addition, the available clothing did not always reflect their preferred style. Given that clothing provides a (tentative) means through which the self may be represented to others (Lurie, 1981; Tseëlon, 1995), this lack of appropriate clothing is a limitation to larger women's capacity to represent themselves through clothing. However, rather than being insurmountable, my participants were often creative and resourceful as they responded to these limitations, making use of the clothes available to them. My particular interest in the following is how my participants transformed garments to more adequately accommodate their bodies, or more appropriately represent themselves to others.

A number of the participants altered clothing to better fit their bodies. Beth, for example, removed buttons on sleeves that were too tight, while Charlotte snipped the

elastic from her walking shorts in order to move more freely while wearing them. With excellent dressmaking skills, Ann was more aggressive in her efforts to make ill-fitting clothing accommodate her body:

The sleeves were too tight so I had to cut the sleeves off and just do a different edging on it ... I always have to either shorten things [or] lift them at the shoulders. All my trousers ... I have to take the waist bands off or cut them down and put the waist band back on again... any top that I buy that's sleeveless I have to put darts into it ... another dress, I cut the bottom off and made it into a top ... this one [t-shirt], you can see it does not fit me [laughs] but I bought it because I'm going to cut the bottom off and insert it into the sides or put a mesh bit down the sides.

(Ann, Wardrobe Rummage)

The desire for comfort often drove their decisions to alter clothes. Although clothing may at times be described as a second skin (Banim, Green, & Guy, 2001), when clothes are too tight, biting and digging into the flesh, we become acutely aware of our clothing and the “edges of our bodies” (Entwistle, 2000, p. 334). While this increased awareness may happen to women of all sizes, and men for that matter, the edges of the larger woman’s body are potentially more problematic, given the social judgment that sits alongside the fat body. Although removal of buttons and elastic may seem minor, they speak to the participants’ resistance toward the limited clothing available to them. More importantly, it speaks to the agency of the participants as they negotiate their way through the market place, making the limited clothing available to them serve their needs.

My participants also altered clothing in an attempt to personalise garments in a way more in keeping with their own aesthetic style and in a way that was more flattering for their figures. Ann, for example, purchases clothes that suit her personal style and then “renovates” them. In the following, she describes what she had to do to make her

beloved top work for her. The top she describes is semi-fitted and casual, and has blue and green horizontal stripes that are variable in width:

Oh nearly everything gets renovated ... this top here I had to totally remake this ... I loved it so much that I actually altered it ... [laughs] you probably can't notice but there's actually a seam across there [indicating the bust line] it did fit me but because of the [widest] stripe it made me look huge in the bust, bigger than I already looked. So what I did was cut it here and took that whole middle piece out and so, by doing that it made me look smaller across the bust ... because the lighter colour was a bit more flattering than that big stretchy part across there.

(Ann, Wardrobe Rummage)

Ann's analogy of a "renovation" is apt. If renovating a house makes the house more suitable for its occupants, the same can be said for renovating clothes. In effect, Ann 'deconstructs' the top and then reconstructs it in a new way that better connects with her body and her personal aesthetic style. The social body, as represented by designers and manufacturers, position her body on the margins through their failure to create appropriate clothing for her. In response, Ann effectively challenges the proposition that her body 'does not fit' by metaphorically sewing her body back into the broader fabric of the social world. Through her actions (and others), she *refuses* the clothing currently made available to her, and instead reconstructs an alternative possibility.

The fact that designers fail to create garments to adequately clothe larger women's bodies, breathes life into the theoretical notion that the fat body resides on the boundaries of society, failing to occupy a legitimate space in the contemporary social world. Certainly, the fat woman's body fails to be acknowledged within systems of production and consumption, to the same degree as other women's bodies. By altering clothes to accommodate their bodies, Ann, Beth, Charlotte and others insist their bodies are recognised as legitimate. In doing so, they actively resist the positioning of their bodies on the margins and instead reposition their bodies within

the grounds of possibility. These women are not cultural dupes enacting Foucaultian self-regulatory practices. Rather, they are larger women actively charting an alternate pathway through a map of fatness that serves to limit, define and ironically, reduce the fat body and its capacity to participate in practices of consumption.

Constructing Sociality

For larger women, the demands of shopping for clothes are qualitatively different than for smaller women. A significant reason for this, is the different enactment of social relationships when clothes shopping. Empirical studies (that did not differentiate between different sized women), demonstrated that shopping (and clothes shopping in particular), is a social activity that provides the shopper with opportunities to spend time with friends and family members (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003). However, without exception, all of my participants preferred to shop alone:

I don't usually go shopping with people. I don't look upon it as a social thing.

(Lynn, Shopping Trip)

I like shopping on my own ... shopping's a singular thing.

(Ann, Shopping Trip)

I always shop on my own.

(Beth, Shopping Trip)

I can't stand shopping with somebody else.

(Jen, Clothing Journal Interview)

Shopping for clothes was constructed and practised as a solitary experience that intentionally excluded others. For participants who constructed shopping as work, a

task to be performed, it was a hindrance to have others accompany them. Difficult enough alone, it became “impossible” (Jen) when friends or family members escorted them. In particular, when friends were smaller in size, the issue arose as to where to shop. My participants’ friends and family often failed to understand what it was like to shop for clothes when there were so many structural barriers in place, as captured by Rose:

I never take them [friends] shopping for me, that’s a private thing shopping for me ... ‘cause ... they’re all smaller women so they can go into any shop ... I don’t think they have the angst that I do about going into shops.

(Rose, Wardrobe Rummage)

Rose, for whom shopping with friends was difficult, reported finding herself typically scouring jewellery selections that offer no sense of corporeal discrimination, while her friends tried clothes on, comparing notes with each other and showing each other outfits in the changing room. On such occasions, she embodies her marginality and her sense of exclusion is intensified. Not only does she feel excluded from the store itself, she also feels excluded from her circle of friends. As individuals engage in practices of consumption in a given space, meanings are generated in and around that space that produce “personalised shopping geographies that weave together particular locations” (Gregson, et al., 2002, p. 597). In addition, those practices weave together people. For Rose’s friends, the accumulated (and shared) meaning of those stores, particularly when shopping there together, was about fun, fashion and an opportunity to connect with each other. However, for Rose, such stores encapsulate exclusion, marginalisation and a sense of being ostracised. Here, she feels outside of the group. Thus, it is not only her own sense of exclusion that is problematic for her in this space. Rather, it is the *disparity* between her own subject position and that of her friends that is untenable.

Charlotte acknowledged that, at times, she went “window shopping” with her mother. However, during these times Charlotte establishes clear guidelines for herself around

the shopping experience, refusing to try on clothes in her mother's presence, as the following attests:

If I meet Mum here [at the mall] for coffee ... we'll go around and look at things and I'll just take little mental notes and then I'll say 'oh, I've gotta go back to work', or whatever. Then I'll come back and try them on.

(Charlotte, Shopping Trip)

Throughout the course of this research, Charlotte often spoke of her mother's general disapproval of fat and, throughout much of her life, she has faced her mother's judgment about her size. As a consequence, Charlotte is understandably wary of shopping with her mother, and is anxious not to provide any ammunition for the expression of her mother's displeasure. By window shopping with her mother, but refusing to try clothes on with her, Charlotte successfully negotiates her mother's expectation that they shop together while also establishing clear boundaries. In the process, Charlotte is able to successfully manage the emotional labours associated with shopping.

It could be assumed that the participants were anti-social, preferring to spend time alone generally, but this was not the case. They each have many friends and often spoke of their friendships throughout the course of the research. However, the presence of other women while shopping, whether friends or mothers, served to remind them of the problematic nature of their bodies. When shopping with others, they were forced to enter shops where they felt unwelcome, and they were forced to shop in stores that they (and sometimes their friends) knew were unsuitable. In these spaces, and within these social relationships, their bodies were cast as fundamentally problematic and failing to comply with corporeal norms; in these relational spaces, their bodies are, once again, marked as 'out of place'.

So, in defiance of lay understandings, as well as empirical research of women's shopping practices, my participants shopped alone, carving a personal and private pathway through a problematic and public clothing market. That said, I found that my

participants constructed *alternative* forms of sociality that paradoxically allowed them to transform shopping for clothes into a social experience. First, they established relationships with the staff of favourite stores. Ann, for example, goes to stores where staff know who she is, what size she is, and the sort of clothing she likes. In these shops, Ann is more than a customer as the staff also know personal details about her such as her profession, how she spends her holidays and her marital and familial status. Similarly, when shopping with Annette, I was surprised at the conversations we shared with sales staff at her favourite store. At times, this was about clothing. As Annette tried on garments, she came out to show us how they looked. Together, we assessed the result confirming our approval or disapproval and, in the case of the latter, coming up with alternative ideas that might work better for Annette's size and shape. Certainly, clothing and Annette's subject position as a consumer was one aspect of our talk. However, the three of us, and at times other staff members, also talked and laughed through the changing room curtain about other things, such as the upcoming Tom Jones concert, Annette's grandson, and the wedding of Annette's step-daughter. The staff did not only know Annette, they clearly liked her as the conversations we shared for over an hour attest. For Annette, this was more than a clothing store. It was a place she described as being like "home":

I just went in and went 'I'm home' ... and then when I was in there it was like ... going to a friend's place and looking through their wardrobe ... and trying on all her clothes in her closet.

(Annette, Shopping Trip)

It could be suggested that this was simply a ploy to separate Annette from her disposable income. That is, in order to make a sale, the staff simulate a social engagement and profess interest in the prospective consumer's life. However, it *felt* different from that; it felt as though a genuine emotional connection, and indeed fondness, had evolved between Annette and one staff member in particular. Rothleder (1999) argues that friendship depends on both creation and judgment. In the

relationship between Annette and her ‘friend’ at the store, we see both these elements at work; the active creation of a “new look” for Annette, accompanied by the simultaneous judgment or assessment of Annette in the clothes. Through Annette’s consumption practices, we see the generation, and on-going commitment to, a relationship (of sorts). Importantly, this relationship permits Annette to reconfigure her shopping experience. Through exchanging stories and narratives of the self, Annette’s shopping practices are recast as a social and sociable experience that bring her pleasure and a sense of belonging as she feels she is of this place. Annette’s reference to the store as “home”, as well as constructing her shopping experience there as analogous to “going to a friend’s place”, demonstrates how my participants introduce aspects of sociality into shopping while still accommodating their preference to retain a solitary shopping experience. Although Annette still prefers to shop alone, in effect she is not at all alone; she shops with her “friend” at the store itself. In doing so, she repositions herself within the field of consumption, opening up, once again, the possibilities for the construction of alternate subjectivities as an authoritative consumer.

The idea that a social relationship of sorts might emerge between staff and shoppers was not entirely unexpected, although the *degree* of closeness between some of my participants and staff was. However, what came as an even greater surprise to me was the way in which my participants, at times, humanised clothing stores, attributing them with personal characteristics. For example:

Places like Ezibuy are not judgmental, you know, I don’t get that ‘we don’t cater for people like you’ thing.

(Laura, Clothing Journal Interview)

Among numerous examples, Annette described *K & K* as “kind”, *Jaqui E* was described as “generous” by Janie, and Charlotte spoke of *Max* and *Principles* as “stuck up” and “snooty” respectively. It is not uncommon in everyday parlance to anthropomorphise objects (Miller, 2005b). Personal computers ‘betray’ as they crash and cars are ‘troublesome’ as they fail to perform to capacity. However, for my

participants, employing these descriptors opened up the possibility for them to engage with the stores in a different way. For example, Charlotte's description of stores that failed to stock clothing in her size as somewhat snobbish, allowed her to construct morally based reasons for not shopping there. By doing so, she can legitimately distance herself from the stores for reasons beyond her physicality. In effect, Charlotte can claim not to shop there because they are morally offensive, not because she does not fit the clothing.

The other examples provided above, refer to stores that do stock clothing in larger sizes. These stores are constructed positively, variously described as non-judgmental, generous, and kind. These discursive repertoires permit my participants to construct a positive relationship with (at least a corner of) the clothing market. In doing so, the participants create space for the development of a relationship with the clothing stores themselves, a practice that allows them to extend, and make more pleasurable, the shopping experience. Although the self may be constituted in and through social relations with others (McLaren, 1997), my participants demonstrate that the consuming self is also constituted in and through the relationships that they generate between themselves and clothing stores as a physical site.

Through the construction of social relationships with both the staff of stores and the stores themselves, larger women effectively transform a *place* that sells clothes into a *space* that invites and indeed welcomes them. The distinction between place and space is important here. The clothing store as place is an inanimate object, lacking human interaction and agency. In contrast, space is a place transformed (de Certeau, 1984). The practices of my participants altered fundamentally the inanimate space of the clothing store, first, through developing social relationships with those within it, and second, through imbuing the store with human characteristics. By doing these things, the inanimate store was brought to life as human interaction became its centre point. My participants transformed the solitary shopping experience into a practice that constitutes multiple layers of sociality, each of which contributes to an increased sense of belonging and legitimacy as an active consumer. This fosters an inclusive sociality which allows larger women to reconfigure their sense of place within their

practices of consumption. In the process, their bodies are reconstructed in this space as legitimate; here, they belong.

Virtual(ly) Marginal

Practices of consumption have changed dramatically as a result of technology, and the shopping experience no longer requires traditional bricks and mortar, as the practice of virtual shopping continues to increase unabated (van Staden & Maree, 2005). The general trend toward online shopping was reflected among my participants, all of whom reported purchasing clothes via the internet at some time. For those participants who shopped online more frequently, the clear advantage was the increased array of plus-size clothing available. In the following, I focus my attention on Laura, given she participates in internet shopping almost exclusively.

The fourth stage of the research, the shopping trip, asked the participants to take me shopping for clothes at the usual places they purchased clothing. Despite the rise in virtual shopping (Ward & Lee, 2000), it did not occur to me that any of the participants would choose not to go out shopping. However, rather than go out, Laura chose instead to invite me into her home to sit beside her as she scoured *Trademe* looking “for bargains” that would successfully accommodate her body. Laura was adamant it would be fruitless to take me shopping in the public sphere of consumption. As a woman who wears clothing upward of size 20, she finds it difficult to locate clothing that fits, and more importantly, she struggles with the treatment she receives while shopping for clothes face-to-face. For Laura, the entire experience of shopping is disheartening and leaves her feeling excluded and emotionally disturbed.

Internet shopping has become part of Laura’s everyday practice of consumption. Laura informs me she has purchased, over the course of a year, a number of items online, including a formal dress to wear to a wedding in Australia, casual pants to wear around the home, and a dress for less formal special occasions. Laura takes her internet shopping seriously, ritually checking new entries on the website every day,

regardless of whether she is looking to actually purchase new clothes. This is the virtual equivalent, one might say, of window shopping:

I go on it every day 'cause it's like a ritual and I check my watch list for things about to close so I can bid at the last minute and really tick someone off.

(Laura, Shopping Trip)

In the 'real' world, Laura is a marginal and somewhat alienated shopper who regularly faces exclusionary practices. Shopping in public, she feels disempowered and ultimately unable to readily participate in practices of consumption. In contrast, in the comfort of her own home, sitting in front of her laptop, Laura is able to reconstruct herself as a powerful and authoritative shopper who can engage in practices of consumption without fear of accusation that she fails to belong. Indeed, Laura's reference above to effectively stealing a sale from another by "bidding at the last minute", demonstrates her authority not only over herself, but also over others. In effect, Laura shifts her clothes shopping experience from a public activity that results in a sense of exclusion and powerlessness, to a private activity that permits her to engage in a virtual shopping world that constructs her as legitimate, active and authoritative.

However, there is also another interesting angle to Laura's online consumption practices. Virtual shopping allows Laura to broaden her possibilities of clothing her body, effectively constructing multiple subject positions for herself in the process. During the time Laura and I shopped for clothes online, she searched for more personal clothing items, such as, sexy camisoles and teddies, corsets, stockings and garters, and other lingerie. Laura knew the best retail sites to visit and had a keen sense of what would look good and what would not. The potential for anonymity was an important element in her choice to shop virtually for such items:

If you wanna buy something no-one knows who you are. All they know is ... that you've got an email address and your address or whatever ... so you could be anybody. I mean for all they know you could be a male who

likes dressing up in women's clothing ... See I wouldn't be confident trying any of that kind of stuff on. I'd be really embarrassed. See I'd rather buy it off here and go up an extra size for comfort and get it home and try it ... I just don't feel confident.

(Laura, Shopping Trip)

Laura reported that given her lack of confidence, purchasing these garments in public would be embarrassing as she feels she would be judged by others in the shop. However, in shopping for sexy items online, Laura constructs herself as a sexy and sexual woman. This directly challenges the discursive construction of fat women as asexual, as discussed previously. Although Laura did not feel comfortable talking with me about how she felt *she* looked in the lingerie, she was happy to discuss how her larger friend looked in her sexy, lacy teddy:

She tried it on and showed me what it looked like and I mean, she looked really good, she was all sucked in and she looked really good.

(Laura, Shopping Trip)

By purchasing, and wearing, these undergarments, Laura (and her friend) subvert the dominant order that positions them outside the boundaries of sexy. Instead, Laura reconfigures her possible relationships with her body through her practices of consumption and opens up possible spaces for herself and other larger women to be considered sexy and beautiful.

The number of consumers buying online continues to steadily increase and shows no sign of abating (Ward & Lee, 2000). While men may be more active online shoppers generally (Slyke, Comunale, & Belanger, 2002), when shopping for personal items such as clothing, women are most active (Korgaonkar & Silverblatt, 2003). Although the authors failed to explain why this might be significant, my own research suggests that for large women, shopping from home may provide a degree of freedom, and

inclusion in consumer society, that is otherwise unattainable. Online shopping evades potentially troublesome experiences, such as negotiating notoriously small changing rooms that might remind of the problematic nature of larger bodies. Moreover, it allows large women to challenge dominant negative constructions of fatness, as well as the sizing of sexuality. Most importantly, shopping online transforms the public act of shopping for clothes into a private act performed in the comfort and security of one's own home, permitting larger women to manage their marginalisation from beyond geographically located sites.

Negotiating the Plus-Size Store

The final way my participants invoked their agency and managed the marginalisation of their bodies through their everyday consumption practices was through the way they positioned themselves in relation to specialist plus-size stores. Although such stores are potentially problematic, I found my participants positioned themselves either 'within' or 'without' them. Some of my participants chose to shop within plus-size stores because they offered a sense of belonging. In this space, their bodies fell within the bounds of possibility. Conversely, others rejected these stores, refuting the categorisation of their bodies as "special" (Charlotte) and hence beyond the bounds of normality. Paradoxically, the goal behind these two contradictory positions is the same: to manage the marginality of the larger body through managing the categorisation of their bodies as fat.

Georgie is between a size 18 and 20 and although she is one of the smaller participants, she is one of the larger women within her own social circle. Although in her own words, she is sometimes "able to get away with" regular stores that stock a limited (and smaller) range of sizes, Georgie prefers to shop in stores that cater specifically for large women and therefore stock a range of larger sizes:

I like to be the smaller size in the big girls' shops rather than looking for the largest size in little girls' shops.

(Georgie, Clothing Journal Interview)

Clearly, both physical size and label size matter. However, the size of both bodies and clothes are subjective and open to multiple understandings and interpretations (Colls, 2004). Moreover, the size of bodies and clothing are contextually bound, their meaning shifting in accordance with spatial sites, practices and understandings. In regular stores, Georgie is a marginal shopper residing precariously on the edges of legitimacy. In contrast, visiting, trying on and purchasing clothing in a plus-size store constructs her body as fully legitimate. Not only can she readily fit the clothes on offer, in this space her body is reconfigured as comparatively smaller, resulting in a more positive shopping experience. Certainly, Georgie's choice to shop in plus-size stores does not challenge the negative construction of fatness at a societal level. However, she successfully manages to challenge the negative construction of her own body at an individual level. Effectively, Georgie reframes understandings of her body resulting in a body that 'fits'.

While Georgie (and others) embraced the plus-size store and the sense of inclusion it offered, other participants categorically rejected them in an effort to manage the marginality of their bodies. As discussed at various times throughout this chapter, plus-size stores reside beyond the boundaries and their specialist nature announces the extent to which those who shop there, are also marked as beyond the bounds. Many of my participants did not like the way such stores marked their bodies as fat and consequently, outside the corporeal norms of society. For my participants, the category 'fat' held multiple and nuanced meanings, yet fatness was constructed negatively by all but one participant. To manage this, a number of them attempted to reposition themselves outside the bounds of the category 'fat'. For example, although Charlotte and Ann are relatively small, identifying themselves as a size 18, and size 18 to 20 respectively, both women felt there was an intense stigma attached to shopping in specialist stores:

I'm only early 30. I wanna wear stuff which is still funky and edgy you know I don't wanna be banished to the K and K fashions [laughs] ... I do wander in there every so often horrified and run straight out.

(Charlotte, Wardrobe Rummage)

I don't want to be identified as 'she can only buy her clothes from the big people's shop ... at a special shop'. To me there's a stigma attached to that. If people say 'oh, where did you get that from'? I don't want to have to say 'oh, you know, from the big people's shop'.

(Ann, Clothing Journal Interview)

Borrowing from Charlotte, these stores are constructed by these women as a place one may be “banished” to in one’s darkest hour. Thus, like Gregson, Crewe and Brooks’ (2002) exploration of charity shopping, the practice of shopping in specialist stores presents difficulties, if not impossibilities, of constituting self-worth, given the configuration of negative meanings associated with them. As a result, Charlotte and Ann choose to shop in so-called normal stores, despite the difficulties of finding suitably sized clothing. By doing so, they embody the inclusive and normative associations of accepted feminine corporeality that are represented in such stores and align their bodies with heteronormative standards of feminine beauty. This allows them to subjectively shrug off the cloak of the category fat.

To shop in “normal” clothing stores is to actively resist the category of fatness that purchasing in specialist stores automatically implies. Gregson et al. (2002) suggest that specific acts of shopping are “relational constructions that depend on identification and enactment of other shopping practices in other sorts of shopping spaces” (p. 599). I would suggest equally, that it is through *not* engaging in particular shopping practices in particular shopping spaces that the self is constituted. In other words, what large women do not do, what they *refuse* to do, can reveal the authoritative manner in which they manage the marginalisation of their bodies. Their refusal amounts to a refusal of the category fat. As they refuse the plus-size store they refuse the construction of the stereotype associated with it. Through an “oppositional imaginary” (Gregson, et al., 2002, p. 614), Ann and Charlotte produce alternate possibilities for thinking through their bodies and for thinking through themselves as consumers.

Interestingly, by positioning themselves in different ways, either within or beyond the specialist plus-size clothing store, my participants highlight the ambiguity of the boundaries of fatness. Although doing so in markedly different ways and to different effect, both those who shop in plus-size stores and those who do not, successfully manage the marginalisation of their bodies and actively construct possible sites of consumption for themselves. Ultimately, sites of consumption are ambivalent spaces, the boundaries of which are ambiguous. Yet within their borders, the relationships between shops and consumers are constructed in an on-going fashion, negotiated across time, resulting in multiple possibilities for the construction of subjectivity.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to comment on practices of consumption as performed by the larger women taking part in the research. In particular, it established shopping for clothes as a practice that took place primarily in public sites that either directly or indirectly excluded or marginalised larger women. Bauman (1987) argues that the world of consumption is created as two distinct groups: the seduced and the repressed. For Bauman the former includes those for whom consumption is a primary means through which their needs can be met (and I suggest this includes the need to express oneself through clothing). In contrast, the repressed are not able to participate so freely within the sphere of consumption due, for example, to poverty. This group are effectively “denied the means to develop their human potential” (Warde, 1994, p. 60). Considering their (inadvertent) exclusion from many sites of consumption, my participants could readily be framed as repressed. While they may be free to consume, the not inconsequential limitations in place perpetually position them on the edges of consumer society.

While some may suggest the positioning of subjects within consumer society is gendered (Saltmarsh, 2009), my research demonstrates equally that the positioning of subjects is also sized. However, to stress the limitations that larger women face is to place too much emphasis on structure, and neglect the role of agency within the sphere of consumption. Claiming that the role of agency as enacted in practices of consumption is under theorised, Crewe (2003) argues that there is a tendency to:

overlook the ‘authority of interpretive subjects as well as the significance of the contexts in which interpretations are made ...’ (Jansson, 2002: 23). People rarely consume in a blind, passive and gullible fashion but, rather, they ‘actively perform their presence in specific motile milieus. The parameters of agency have changed’ (Amin and Thrift, 2002: 124, and DeNora, 2000). Actions are intertwined with people’s everyday practices and the structure of cultural communities in complex ways. (p. 354)

As Crewe insists, it is crucial that an understanding of the relationship *between* structure and agency is illuminated in respect to consumer society. This is especially important given the sphere of consumption is “devious, it is dispersed, but it insinuates itself everywhere, silently and almost invisibly” (de Certeau, 1984, p. xii); consumption is so ubiquitous it becomes imperceptible. However, shedding light on practices of consumption can reveal the hidden machinations of society while also illuminating the multiple ways people transform the economic and cultural order, making it serve their own interests.

In my research, I found that *despite* discursive and material limitations in place, my participants were creative and resourceful as they navigated their way in, through and around these structures. They worked hard to challenge the boundaries of shopping spaces that mark the excluded from the included and in the process they were able to reconfigure the meanings of shopping spaces such that the marketplace serve their own “personalised shopping geographies” (Gregson, et al., 2002, p. 597). By adopting fluid understandings of the temporal and spatial shopping boundaries, they enact their autonomy and agency and importantly, reconstruct themselves as legitimate and authoritative consumers.

The practices of my participants did not only challenge the boundaries of temporal and spatial sites of consumption. They also challenged their understandings of their bodies by engaging in practices that created spaces to reposition themselves within the normative models of corporeality. For example, Ann and Charlotte’s shopping in “smaller women’s shops” and Georgie’s preference for shopping in plus-size shops

where she feels comparatively smaller, point to a way the body is constructed and reconstructed more favourably. While clearly in these examples the materiality of the body remains unchanged, the subject position of the wearer in relation to the marketplace is radically altered as, once again, they construct themselves as legitimate consumers. While their hands may be forced, they demonstrate their capacity to challenge the exclusionary practices operating within the clothing market and effectively shop their way out of marginalisation and into the bounds of normality.

However, irrespective of their practices, structural limitations remain in place for large women and manoeuvring around them must be negotiated in an on-going manner. Consequently, larger women occupy an ambivalent subject position within the market place that is characterised by instability. Their practices begin from an understanding that their bodies fail to align with heteronormative femininity, and they must respond to a (clothing) market that confirms it. Additionally, engaging with a market that marginalises one's corporeality, inadvertently serves to reify its oppressive construction; in order to consume, larger women must participate in their own marginalisation. It seems not only the meaning of shopping is unstable (Gregson, et al., 2002), but the meaning of the larger woman is equally unstable while operating on the margins.

Throughout this chapter, the seam that sews together core sociological themes of structure and agency has been split open. Emphasising shopping (for clothes) as a practice (Miller, Jackson, Thrift, Holbrook, & Rowlands 1998) has allowed me to consider larger women's troublesome position within the dualism of structure and agency. On the one hand, larger women are positioned by structures that situate them on the margins of consumption. On the other hand, larger women are agentic, demonstrating in a multiplicity of ways their capacity to challenge and subvert those structures. In practice, their occupation of the space between structure and agency is exemplified by on-going tension that insists on their perpetual negotiation of sites of consumption.

Chapter Six

Bodies Out of (Public) Place

In the previous chapter, I explored the agentic consumption practices of my participants as they engaged with a clothing market that largely ignored them. This chapter moves beyond moments of consumption and instead focuses on my participants' clothing practices as they were carried out in *other* public sites. Given that clothing has a social life produced through its relationship to, and with, people, it seems fitting that this thesis considers the sociality of clothing, and crucially, the public places in which much of this sociality occurs. Recent decades have seen a renewed interest in the role that gender and place have to play in the social construction of reality. No longer are places considered simply sites of geographical location. Rather, they are theorised as “processual, relationally ordered systems” (Löw, 2006, p. 120), the boundaries of which are changeable and dynamic (Stokowski, 2002), and “contested, fluid and uncertain” (McDowell, 1999, p. 4). Places, it is clear, are not innocent. They serve particular interests and, as discussed previously, they include and exclude (McDowell, 1999).

Clothing is important for generating and mediating the meanings of public place. Within public sites, and at any given time, there are clothing rules and regulations of

engagement. At times these are embedded within regulatory frameworks, such as an employer's insistence that a uniform be worn¹⁶. However, more often, clothing rules are not formal, but social and cultural norms that are enforced through socialising techniques that reinforce accepted behaviours and practices. For example, mourners at a funeral usually wear sombre colours, typically black (Bedikian, 2008; Harvey, 1995), and despite a postmodern shift toward diversity and difference, the white wedding gown remains *de rigueur* for reinforcing the ideology of heterosexual romantic love (Ingraham, 2008). While the rigidity of social norms may be shifting (Pringle & Alley, 1995), such clothing practices remain part of social knowledge.

Clothing rules and regulations do not apply to all people in the same way. Unwritten yet codified rules of dress exist for different people in different places. These rules of dress are certainly gendered. However, equally, they are sized, and numerous informal, socially constructed and socially enforced rules of dress apply to larger women alone. These normative rules determine what should and should not be worn. They also serve as a powerful way in which social control and social order is attained and maintained as breaching these rules can potentially result in public censure, as discussed in chapter two¹⁷.

Clothing is useful for mediating publicly situated sites on a daily basis and mediating the wearer's social membership, as clothing is a transitional object that transforms the private body into the public body (Entwistle, 2000; S. Woodward, 2007). Although the act of dressing occurs largely in private spaces, it is an act that invariably demands wearers consider those they might encounter on entering the public realm

¹⁶ Although there are suggestions that a new 'freedom of dress' is required that considers individuals' desire to dress as they choose a fundamental human right (Ramachandran, 2006).

¹⁷ I am not suggesting that all women adhere to these clothing rules. There are numerous examples of women who challenge the negative construction of their bodies through their clothing practices on a daily basis. However, I do argue that these rules exist, and consequently, women who flagrantly defy them, do so in the understanding that they are dressing beyond the bounds of accepted corporeality for larger women.

(Woodward, 2005b), as it is through clothing that we make ourselves socially, publicly, and “culturally visible” (Wilson & de la Haye, 1999, p. 2). Through clothing, we reveal aspects of ourselves to others, such as our ethnic group (Barnes & Eicher, 1997b; Eicher, 1995), religious affiliation (Gies, 2006), sexuality (Clarke & Turner, 2007), moral and political leanings (Parkin, 2002; Wilson & de la Haye, 1999), social status (Barthes, 2006; Bourdieu, 1984), and even our competence within the workplace (Glick, Larsen, Johnson, & Branstiter, 2005). However, for larger women this may be particularly problematic due to the limitations of the marketplace, as discussed in the previous chapter, and the social judgment they face.

This brief introduction to the relationship between clothing, (larger) women, and public sites, provides the platform for the following discussion, which has two parts. The first considers more closely the way normative rules of dress are socially constructed through a variety of mediums. In particular, I discuss the moral underpinnings of socially-sanctioned clothing rules that limit larger women’s clothing options. From the experience of my large-sized participants, I explore their efforts to conceal their bodies in an attempt to attain (corporeal) invisibility. This is underlined by considering the complex process of judgment - both judging and being judged. I argue that although my participants may be subject to ‘the gaze’ of others, they are also agentic, subjecting others to their own gaze, with both negative and positive effects. Equally, I demonstrate the tension that operates within this visual exchange and the extent to which it is a problematic practice that depends on my participants’ subjection to the gaze in the first instance. The second part of the chapter uses the beach as an exemplar of my participants’ negotiation of public places. The beach is a site where my participants felt most ‘out of place’ and consequently, in this site, they experience their bodies as particularly problematic and in need of careful management. I explore how my participants negotiate this thoroughly public site, paying particular attention to the agency they demonstrate as they transform a place of exclusion and impossibility, into a space of (partial) inclusion and possibility.

A Body of Clothing Rules

In a postmodern world in which it seems ‘anything goes’ it is easy to assume there are fewer restrictions around appropriate clothing for public places. Certainly gendered expectations of clothing have come some way since the matching shoes, hats and handbags of the 1950s. In popular understanding, such social norms of dress seem antiquated and irrelevant to the local and current social milieu. In contemporary society, a “supermarket of styles” is available from which consumers may pick and choose (Sweetman, 2001, p. 62), which is suggestive of a more liberal and liberated attitude toward clothing. However, while there might now be greater freedoms, informal codes of dress remain (Hunt & Miller, 1997). These codes structure what should and should not be worn in a given space, and by whom. Certainly, gender and age are key determinants of these codes (Grove-White, 2001). However, the size and shape of the body is also important. In the following, I explore these rules and their moral underpinnings, and consider how my participants made sense of them, incorporating them (or not) into their own clothing practices.

Moral Regulation and Clothing Rules for the Larger Woman

Although no formal code of clothing conduct for larger women exists, my participants seemed to implicitly know what they should and should not wear. One of the most influential ways this knowledge was acquired was through popular cultural mediums. For example, the current raft of reality television programmes that address clothing and the body, such as *Trinny and Susannah* and *Gok*, clearly establish clothing rules and regulations for women generally and larger women especially, as larger women are a consistent feature in these programmes. In particular, exposure of ‘muffin tops’ (fat seen spilling from the top of pants or jeans), second sets of breasts (fat spilling beyond bras), and back cleavage (when excessive fat on the back creates the appearance of cleavage), are highlighted as unforgivable sartorial indiscretions. These programmes were clearly influential as my participants referred to them often. Annette even gave me a video recording of an episode she thought would be of interest to me, given the way it talked about the problem of the fat woman’s body.

However, they were not the only source of knowledge in respect to normative rules or codes of dress. Two of my participants, Georgie and Lynn, sought out the ‘expert’ advice of professional style consultants for two reasons. First, they wished to establish and learn the clearly defined rules of dress they should follow. Second, they wanted to “make the most” of their shape and size. From Lynn:

The image consultant ... says there are certain types and ways you should wear clothes that will not make you look as big as you are ... make the most of from here up and from here down and try and draw the eye away from the middle bit which of course is where the accessories kick into place because if you’ve got rings and bracelets, that’s what people notice, they don’t notice the tummy sticking out or the bum hanging over the end you know.

(Lynn, Clothing Journal Interview)

The rules of dress for larger women were internalised. Lynn, for example, stated that no women, but in particular no *larger* women, should wear cropped pants because, “it just makes them look like little short arses ‘cause their legs aren’t long enough”. More specifically, she stated that larger women should wear “straight leg, fairly wide leg” pants, “preferably [with] side zips”, with “no tucks or pleats” as they “make your tummy bigger”. The specificity of Lynn’s description captures the regulatory influence of clothing rules that are specific to particular bodies. Moreover, her description also captures the *normative* aspects of clothing codes. Lynn continues:

I think the reality is that the bigger you are ... the more conscious you ought to be about what’s appropriate and what’s not appropriate.

(Lynn, Clothing Journal Interview)

Lynn uses interesting and revealing language. First, she uses the word *appropriate* without any explanation of how that might look. The absence of an explanation indicates the normative modes of dress are so understood (and accepted and acceptable) they require no explanation. Second, Lynn’s choice of the word *ought*

suggests larger women *should* follow, what to Lynn, are clearly defined parameters, or boundaries, of dress. Moreover, the bigger a woman is, the more cognisant she should be of those boundaries.

Irrespective of their source, my participants had very clear understandings of the clothing rules that existed for them as larger women and, for the most part, they followed them. These rules permeated many aspects of their talk about clothing as well as their everyday clothing practices. For example, throughout the photography stage of the research, eleven of the photographs Georgie took captured women breaking what she perceived as rules of dress. Also, discussions of women breaking or following the rules figured as a key theme throughout her participation in the research. Clearly, clothing rules captured Georgie's relationship with her body, her clothing, and her personal biographical narrative¹⁸.

The clothing norms to which Lynn, Georgie and others allude are closely connected to broader social ideas of fatness and the moral edge underpinning them is clear. Larger women have a *responsibility* to bring their abject, problematic and unruly bodies under control. Through following the rules, even drawing on 'expert' knowledge, my participants construct themselves as good social citizens who adhere to expected standards of dress. Foucault's (1990) proposal that "power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (p. 93), comes to mind here. Power operates in a multiplicity of ways, including relationally through the body. Foucault (1980) argues:

Power relations can materially penetrate the body in depth, without depending even on the mediation of the subjects own representations. If power takes hold on the body, this isn't through its having first to be interiorized in people's consciousnesses. (p. 186)

¹⁸ Georgie's life story includes roles with clearly defined and codified rules of dress, such as attendance at a boarding school in her youth and time spent as a military wife.

Foucault's contention that power is embedded within all aspects of life, including the body itself, is exemplified by the practices of my participants and their embodiment of sized clothing rules. These rules were readily integrated into their clothing repertoires, and were constructed almost as an irrefutable truth, the authority of which need not be questioned. As such, the rules of dress serve as authoritative and regulatory mechanisms that not only control their clothing choices, but equally control the social construction of size and gender. By watching the television programmes, engaging the services of style and appearance 'experts', and soaking up social norms on a daily basis, my participants learned the definitive clothing codes for public places. Moreover, they inadvertently reinforced the authority of those codes (and the gendered and sized power structures of which they are a part), by quite literally wearing them each day.

Keeping Under Wraps

One of the most important elements of clothing rules for larger women is the complex relationship between revealing and/or concealing the body. Although empirical research has explored how women seek to reveal and conceal aspects of their *identity* through clothing (Guy & Banim, 2000), my participants were positioned within a structural imperative they felt insisted their *physical bodies* remain under wraps. Typically, they were concerned not to reveal too much of the body:

The more there is of you the less you want it to be on show.

(Beth, Shopping Trip)

More specifically, they noted that larger women must not reveal "too much skin" (Annette), the "loin area" (Jen), "lumpy bits" and "muffin tops" (Beth), "jelly bellies" (Laura), "back rolls" and "spare tyres" (Charlotte). My participants did not appear to consider their bodies as a totality. Rather, the body was a series of fragmented parts that were positioned on a continuum of acceptability. One particularly problematic

part of the body was the upper arms, or “wings” as Annette described them¹⁹ (see Figure 6.1):

Figure 6.1 Annette’s ‘wings’.



Annette: I have got some tops that are basically sleeveless ... but then I see my arms and I see the wings, you know, lift up my arms and I wave goodbye to everybody [laughs] so it's like 'can I get away with wearing that?' ... to be presentable in public is important

Trudie: And how do you feel about 'the wings' ?

¹⁹ I appreciate that the ‘wings’ of smaller women, as well as older women, might also be socially constructed as problematic given their deviance from the firm slim feminine ideal.

Annette: Embarrassed. It's like, 'oh god, what are other people thinking?' And also the fact that ... that's how it is and I can't change that, so it's partly a control thing. To be able to control how I look

(Annette, Clothing Journal Interview)

Beth also spoke of her upper arms as a part of her body that she refused to reveal in public. In her clothing journal, Beth described a visit to the pub with friends:

Went to pub with friends. It's cold and wet so need something warm. Wore jeans, animal print top and big woollen cardi. The top has short sleeves so I will not be taking the cardi off however hot the pub gets. Would rather melt than expose upper arms and midriff.

(Beth, Clothing Journal Excerpt)

Talking with Beth about this excerpt later, she explained that she was firmly committed to keeping her “big woollen cardi” on irrespective of the temperatures reached. She was mindful of the way her body appeared in public, and she felt an environment such as the pub exacerbated the social judgment she could potentially face. Given the unavoidable visibility of larger women’s bodies (Murray, 2005), Beth did not wish to draw further unwanted attention by revealing her “fat arms”. It seems wings must remain hidden from view.

A number of important issues are raised in the comments of Annette and Beth. First, Annette points out, and Beth alludes to, the importance of being “presentable” in public. Annette questions whether or not she can “get away with” wearing a garment. Underpinning these comments is the understanding that the larger, fleshy body, with skin that lacks the firmness of youth, is neither desirable nor acceptable; both Annette and Beth demonstrate an implicit knowledge their bodies are not good enough (see, Guy & Banim, 2000). Second, they are both concerned with issues of control. Annette is concerned she has lost control over the movement of her body while both she and Beth are concerned with controlling how much of their body, and what parts of their bodies, are revealed to others.

These examples highlight the fat body's misplacement. Underpinning their concerns around the (lack of) control over the body's movement and others' perceptions is an understanding their bodies are out of control when measured against the social rules of the dressed feminine body. Although scholars have demonstrated that women of all sizes engage in such practices for a variety of reasons (Freitas et al., 1997; Guy & Banim, 2000), I underline here that my larger-sized participants aim to conceal their bodies based on the knowledge their bodies are 'matter out of place' (Douglas, 1966), an awareness of the social judgment of their size, and the normative modes of dress for larger women. Concealing the body allows them to retain a degree of control (over self and other) and also (partially) mediate their body's misplacement. In doing so, they avoid revealing their body's social failure.

The Judgment of Self and Other

I feel like I'm being judged on what I wear because that doesn't suit a bigger person. I mean I always dress how I like to feel but sometimes it is as a bigger woman, why are you wearing that?... I tend to wear something longer so yeah it's what can I get away with and not offend.

(Annette, Clothing Journal Interview)

Attempts by my participants to conceal their bodies with clothing were particularly important to them due to the prospective gaze of others. As people negotiate public places we observe others, as we too are observed. Throughout this exchange, the self is mirrored back in various ways: we might be looked at; judged; admired; or disregarded. In turn, we imagine another's judgment of our appearance which is accompanied by an emotionally bound feeling such as pride or shame (Waskul & Vannini, 2006). At the same time, we perform critiques of others' behaviours and practices, including clothing choices. These Simmelian "mutual glances" (1969, p. 358) do various forms of work on the self, shaping an imagined body built, at least in part, on the imagined perceptions of others. In the following, I tease out how this reciprocal process of observation shaped my participants' navigation of public places. In particular, I consider judgment of the self by others, the judgment of others, and

the judging of the self. Throughout, the tension between these various subject positions is elucidated as I discuss the Othering of my participants within these mutual glances.

Judgment of the Self by Others

Borrowing from Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque, Russo (1997) writes that making a spectacle of oneself is a "specifically feminine danger" (p. 318). This is especially the case when considering the larger-sized woman. Many of my participants were mindful they were the negative object of others' attention, as the following excerpt from Rose's clothing journal attests:

Being judged

Observing what others are wearing, even when I feel OK

My message can quickly turn into, not being "right"

Not good enough, I don't fit in

Being out in the public eye, feeling I'm being watched

Who is the watcher?, what are they looking for?

Back n forth thing, observing others

Being observed, like a game of tennis

Meeting the other, eye to eye

Turning away

It is telling that Rose turns away from the gaze of others. She feels her body is problematised through these mutual glances, and indeed, Rose experiences her body as problematic as she recognises it is observed through the lens of negative fat stereotypes. Women learn very early in their lives that their bodies are flawed (Hartley, 2001). For larger women this is especially so. As Rose's body is caught within this exchange, it is transformed and marked as a problematic anomaly. To meet the other "eye to eye" entails directly facing an image of herself that she is ill-prepared for, while "turning away" ensures she never has to face fully the social construction of her body as problematic and misplaced.

That said, it is not possible to fully escape the gaze of others. Ann argues that it is simply a “human trait” to “judge you on what you look like first”. The discursive construction of fatness as abject ensures social judgment is a constant companion. At times my participants experienced a sense of shame as a result of the negative objectification of the size of their bodies:

I guess there's a kind of ... I don't know, ashamed, not sure shame's the right word, embarrassment or a bit ashamed about you know showing, because that's my flabbiest bits so therefore I don't want people to see them so ... I wouldn't feel comfortable with them being out there 'cause then people could see them and that's um maybe that's a shameful bit of your body that I don't want people to see.

(Beth, Clothing Journal Interview)

My participants experienced their bodies as fundamentally flawed because they failed to reflect contemporary standards of feminine beauty. Their corporeal experience was founded on their bodies' failure to fit within the boundaries of social norms and corporeal expectations. As such, judgment appears to be part of the territory of size as they run the social gauntlet. Rose's journal entry refers explicitly to her failure to “fit in” as other people recognise her clothed body as problematic ‘matter out of place’. At times, the fat body fails to physically fit in spaces (for example, airline seats and changing rooms). However, the fat body also fails to fit the broader social norms of society and it is to this that Rose refers; the deeper fit between her personal body and the social body that informs how bodies should look.

Judging Others

The discursive construction of fatness ensured my participants became accustomed to the social judgment of their bodies. However, the previous discussion might suggest they were always the object of the gaze. However, this was not the case. They also observed (and judged) the success or otherwise of others' clothing choices. Other large women were a particular source of interest as the participants placed these

women, seemingly like themselves, on a continuum of dressed success. At times, these women were a source of encouragement, inspiration and motivation:

I'm particularly drawn to larger ladies ... if there's a larger lady in the horizon I'll scan and I'll think 'ooh large lady' and I'll hone in on her and I'll kind of appraise ... you know, what does she look like?, what's she wearing? ... so not too critical of her just to think hmm you know 'gosh, that looks good, that's a nice outfit, I should try that', or 'that really doesn't look good on her, so I won't be trying that, I'm definitely not wearing that', you know, depending ... what they're wearing [and] how they wear it.

(Beth, Shopping Trip)

Beth used her observations of large women as a source of knowledge. Witnessing well-dressed larger women on the street provided her with alternative images of fatness which broadened and consolidated her clothing possibilities. Sweetman (2001) suggests a “supermarket of style” is available for individuals to take up as their own (p. 61). Style, it seems, is purchased just as readily as purchasing ingredients to create a given dish. However, as discussed, dressing is not easy when your body is considered problematic and the clothing range available is limited. Witnessing other large women (who looked good) in their clothes, gave Beth, and others, the confidence to try out new styles. In this way, larger women are able to pick and mix their style, not from a supermarket as Sweetman suggests, but from the street itself. Seeing larger women dressed nicely and being “well turned out” was a source of inspiration that extended their own clothing repertoire:

She was really well turned out, she had a little child in a buggy and she'd a really quite handsome man with her, and I thought 'yeah, she looks good, she's done alright' kinda thing. You know, 'fat lady done well' ... that's kind of an affirmation that big ladies can do okay actually 'cause we're always told we can't.

(Beth, Clothing Journal Interview)

Beth's final comment indicates the inherent tension therein. Although she gains inspiration from the "fat lady done well" (perhaps even against the odds), she remains mindful of the broader social judgments attached to larger women's bodies.

At other times, my participants subjected other large women to their critical gaze. The photograph in Figure 6.2 was taken by Charlotte during the photo elicitation stage of the research. The image, taken from a distance, shows a casually dressed larger woman shopping in a suburban mall.

Figure 6.2 Other larger women shoppers.



Explaining why she had taken the photograph, Charlotte constructed a narrative of the woman's past, present and future, based on her observation of the woman's size and clothing choices:

This woman here is ... obviously quite large and she's wearing ... just sort of flat shoes and three quarter pants and a big baggy t-shirt and that to me is just like covering up and hiding ... I don't know if she feels particularly fantastic but it's almost like she's wearing on the outside what she feels like on the inside ... it's just an example of something I would never wear but something I fear that I would turn into ... [she] feels like she shouldn't be seen out in public ... it's like she's given up

and I'm sort of afraid of giving up and it is like a constant battle to look nice and feel nice and wear nice clothes and have confidence and it's almost like she's just given up on that ... it's like she just doesn't care about herself or what she looks like ... people are gonna look at her as some woman badly dressed ... she'll be shunned and ridiculed by society.

(Charlotte, Photo Elicitation)

Charlotte's narrative pathologises the woman, claiming her to be emotionally and psychologically damaged. In addition, she declares her a social outcast who will be "shunned and ridiculed" by society. According to Charlotte, the woman is a marginal member of society as a result of her size and the way she dresses. Charlotte's language betrays her fear that her own size will become an identifying feature that comes to stand in for who she is: "an example of something I would never wear but something I fear that I would turn into". Her interest in the woman appears to stem from her own fear she will get larger and "give up" her battle against her physical size. For Charlotte, the woman *is* the clothes she wears, a point reinforced by the suggestion the woman is "wearing on the outside what she feels like on the inside".

Interestingly, Charlotte who is a size 18 simultaneously constructs an opposing self-narrative that distances her from the woman she perceives as overweight and poorly dressed. In doing so, Charlotte's talk becomes embedded within the rhetoric of resistance. Acts of resistance are largely conceptualised as a political and social activity occurring within a particular location or about the construction of new boundaries (Pile, 1997). However, Pile also suggests that resistance can be about relocating oneself in society. By constructing a hierarchy of fatness, Charlotte positions herself in a different (and more positive) physical, emotional and clothed location on the 'map' of fatness, compared with her perception of the woman.

By (positively and negatively) scrutinising other large women, my participants simultaneously (and unintentionally) challenge the negative constructions of fatness, while also reinforcing the objectification and spectacle of larger women. On the one

hand, looking at other larger women as a source of knowledge and inspiration, encapsulates what Barcan calls (in a different context) “counter-hegemonic modes of looking” (Barcan, 2001, p. 308) (see also, Bonner, McKay, & McKee, 2001). By this I mean my participants’ observations challenge the dominant negative construction of fatness that is so engrained in contemporary western thinking by first, recognising, and second, appreciating, a more positive image of fatness.

On the other hand, the social fact remains that larger women are the object of the gaze in the first instance. When Beth identifies a “fat lady done well” she inadvertently objectifies the women and subjects her to on-going attention. Whether it is for the purposes of admiration or condemnation, the woman remains perpetually under the gaze. Similarly, although Charlotte creates an alternative itinerary for *herself* on the map of fatness, she reinforces the dominant discourses that construct the clothed fat woman’s body as problematic and marginalised. It seems large women will always be the object of others’ attention.

Judging the Self

The third dimension of judgment, judging the self, was an on-going process of self-assessment engaged in by all my participants. Sometimes self-scrutiny was conscious and intentional, while dressing in the morning, for example. Other times, it was unintentional, creeping up when least expected and serving as a disruptive force that constructed the self as a problematic object. Mirrors, shop windows and photographs each present possible disruptions. Reflecting on a day at work, Annette recorded the following in her clothing journal about a morning spent at work:

Thurs 7.15 Looks O.K. front on in mirror. Long green skirt a striped shirt

11.45 Glanced in mirror – felt top ½ looked “bulky” esp shoulders – torso /hips.

1.15 Looked side on in mirror again. Oh yes do I look bulky. Yet this a.m. thought I looked good.

Summary: Day started with confidence but “mirror mirror on the wall”

I saw a hunched bulky person, unattractive and old person

Over the course of just six hours, Annette went from feeling she looked “O.K.” to looking like a “hunched bulky person” who was “unattractive and old”. Similarly, shop windows serve as a reminder of the body’s failure to fit. Rose spoke to me about her penchant for wearing black, but also about her favourite orange / red pants that she no longer wears, despite them being a favourite. When I asked why she no longer wears them she explained:

I caught sight of myself in a shop window and I thought ‘oh look at that’, and I thought ‘oh, that’s me’, and ‘oh that’s a bit bright’, you know. It was kind of obviously big and bright and that put me off ... I started off feeling confident and then went into feeling vulnerable and my clothes were making me stick out.

(Rose, Wardrobe Rummage)

Finally, Charlotte told me why she hated having her photograph taken:

I always look awful in family photos ... I hate having my photo taken and seeing how it comes out. When you have your photo taken you’re wearing something that you think you look okay in, you’re feeling pretty good, and then you get this photographic evidence that you were so wrong and that outfit looked terrible on you, and you’ve got rolls and chins, and just looked dreadful. And you’d put your best effort in so why bother ... and yeah, just pore over it [the photograph] and feel miserable.

(Charlotte, Clothing Journal Interview)

Women engage in an on-going process of self-assessment (Spitzack, 1990). My larger-sized participants used mirrors, shop windows and photographs as tools to objectify themselves and provide the ‘evidence’ for such an assessment. Sadly, these

reflections often reinforced negative self-perceptions and forced the failure of the physical self into consciousness. Leder (1990) argues that the body in everyday practice is latent as we are not consciously aware of the body's presence; the body is part of our corporeal background. Although Shilling (1993) acknowledges that women's bodies may be more present than men's, I suggest that the larger woman's body is more so. For my participants the luxury of forgetting the body appeared to be short-lived at best, as their reflection always threatened to make itself known. When it did, it disturbed my participants' self-perceptions including their understanding of how they thought they appeared to others. In the process, their understandings of themselves are rendered unstable as their bodies are objectified. Although these moments are difficult, Rose explains she is better able to resist these glances (both from others and herself) when she is "confident and feeling contained and whole within my edges". However, it remains that these unexpected moments potentially disrupt clothed performance in the public arena. These momentary glances insist the wearer gives pause and necessarily integrate them into prior understandings of self. These multi-layered processes of judgment result in an unstable sense of self that forever mediates between contradictory and ambivalent self-understandings.

Braving the Beach: Bodies Out of Place

The long coast line and temperate climate of northern Auckland, the location of this research, ensure that going to the beach is a frequent part of everyday summer life. Depictions of summer holidays in New Zealand more generally often denote sun, sand and swimming at the beach, an image with a long history that is closely tied to the local and social imaginary. Many adult 'kiwis' recall fondly childhood memories of family holidays by the sea during the seemingly endless summers of their youth. The socially constructed (and romanticised) connection between the beach and everyday life in New Zealand, and Auckland in particular, is reinforced in locally made film and literature that showcase the New Zealand beachscape and identify it as the fulcrum of summer life. Whether an accurate portrayal of most people's lives in New Zealand or not, these portrayals assist in the construction of the beach as part of national identity. Although recent years have witnessed the increasing commodification of many New Zealand beaches and the concomitant construction of

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the beach as a contested site (Collins, 2009), the beach remains part of regional, cultural, familial, and individual identity. Yet for my participants, the beach was the most problematic public site to negotiate. As such, it seems a fitting site to use as a case study, of sorts, permitting me to examine more closely how my participants managed this multiply rule-bound site.

Out of Place at the Beach

The philosophy behind the New Zealand / Australian surf clothing store *Beach Culture*, is “all about the freedom to kick back, have fun, and *live large*” (Beach Culture, 2010, my emphasis). However, living large at the beach is not easy to do when you are large in size. Even in New Zealand where beach attire is just as likely to include a pair of board shorts and a rash top²⁰, as it is a skimpy bikini, there is a general expectation that more of the body is revealed. The beach is closely aligned with the body, offering a site of, and for, bodies. Yet the beach is the domain of a particular kind of body and bodies that fail to fit the criteria are judged harshly. The beach body is slim, athletic and youthful, and as Booth (2001), points out:

Before women can reveal their bodies on the beach they must remove the hair from under their arms, legs and pubic region, and they must firm their legs, thighs and buttocks. (p. 18)

The beach-ready body is disciplined and honed into shape in preparation for its most public performance. There is no place on the beach for fat, female flesh. Furthermore, the intentional displays of flesh ensure the beach serves as a primary site for the reinforcement of heteronormative standards of female bodily beauty. From the 1930s this was formalised through the introduction of annual beach-side beauty

²⁰ Board shorts first rose to the heights of popularity in the 1970s in response to the demand from surfers for appropriate surfing shorts. Rash tops also have their origins in surf culture and were developed to respond to the need for a t-shirt style top that was suitable to wear in the water in order to avoid rashes from skin to surf board friction. Since their introduction, both board shorts and rash tops have increased in popularity and are now worn by women and men alike.

competitions throughout New Zealand (Te Ara, 2010). While the beauty competitions may now have gone, the residue of the beach as a stage for showing off, or performing the ‘body beautiful’ remains.

The fat, fleshy body sits in opposition to imagery of a firm, toned, bronzed, and honed body in a number of ways that encapsulate dichotomous constructions: firm/soft; active/passive; slim/fat; smooth/dimpled; and beautiful/ugly. There is no doubt the ‘beach body’ is represented by the former while the larger woman’s body is represented by the latter. It is especially on the beach that the soft folds and rolls of female flesh fail to comply with normative constructions of feminine corporeality. In this site, perhaps more than any other, the larger woman’s body is out of bounds.

In the current social, cultural and political climate that constructs fatness as inherently objectionable and problematic, fat is not only out of place on the individual body, it is also *made* out of place in the public and social world. As a result, my participants found visiting the beach particularly difficult and it was not uncommon to hear words such as “dread” or “nightmare” when talking about the prospect of doing so:

Going to the beach ... is another nightmare for a big person, you know.

(Beth, Clothing Journal Interview)

Summer at the beach is just awful for me.

(Charlotte, Photo Elicitation)

For many of my participants, their anguish about going to the beach had an historical and temporal element as they drew on past encounters. For example, Rose no longer goes because of “horrible incidences” in the past where she was the victim of vicious verbal assaults:

I don't go swimming at the beach ... I won't go and it's only because I've had some horrible incidences at the beach in my togs²¹ and drunken people yelling out and I don't want to put myself through that again.

(Rose, Wardrobe Rummage)

For Rose and others like her, these past events fold back on themselves, forcing their way into the present, denying her the possibility of enjoying this seemingly innocuous everyday cultural activity. Clearly, places such as the beach, are more than geographical sites with clearly demarcated physical boundaries. Rather, they are permeated by social interactions and memory that challenge their boundaries, emphasising their “fluid, changeable [and] dynamic” nature (Stokowski, 2002, p. 369). Rose’s previous interactions demonstrate Soja’s (1989) claim that “relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparent innocent spatiality of social life” (p. 6). Like the shopping mall in the previous chapter, these interactions construct the beach as a site of exclusion, infiltrated by memories of marginalisation. Through the “socio-spatial stigmatisation” (Smith, 2010, p. 859) of her body, Rose is now constructed as out of bounds and her body firmly Othered.

My participants *felt* out of place at the beach. They were aware of the way bodies on the beach *should* look and they were similarly aware of their own body’s failure to match this construction. Equally, they were mindful their bodies would be judged harshly in this site. However, they were not only subject to the gaze of others. They were also willing to subject others to their gaze, recognising and judging others who failed to fit. Charlotte, for example, captured the following image (see Figure 6.3) in order to demonstrate the extent to which larger women failed to belong in this public, open and seemingly innocent space.

²¹ Specific to New Zealand, togs is a colloquial word that is used to denote swimwear.

Figure 6.3 Sticking out like a sore thumb at the beach.



She was just dressed in normal beach clothes and they just looked awful on her ... this poor lady is really big and she was wearing brightly coloured shorts ... red with big patterns on them and a pink t-shirt ... and a hat and she just stuck out like a sore thumb ... she was really quite big and she was wearing these clothes that were probably very suitable for the occasion but just looked so funny because they were so brightly coloured.

(Charlotte, Photo Elicitation)

Although Charlotte acknowledges that the “poor lady” in the image is dressed appropriately for the environment, she still feels she does not belong. Charlotte describes the clothing she is wearing as “funny” and yet it is clear the clothes are not funny because of their brightness because, as she points out, they are “normal” for the environment. The clothes are “funny” because of the woman’s larger size. She stands out from others and fails to fit the site. Ultimately, it seems no matter what she wore, her body would be inscribed with the weight of social judgment and she will remain out of place. The woman breaches the boundaries of the beach that are constructed of,

and for the body and, as such, she is matter out of place. By singling the woman out, Charlotte reinforces both dominant constructions of fatness and beach culture as it currently stands. In effect, Charlotte is complicit in her own exclusion.

In contrast to Rose's experience of feeling out of place, and Charlotte's judgment of other large women at the beach, Laura's (large in size) friend, though not Laura herself, subverted the exclusion of her body, insisting on its rightful place at the beach. The following conversation is an exchange between Laura and me, held as we surfed the net looking for clothes to buy in the shopping trip stage of the research:

Laura: I've got a girlfriend in Aussie, she's probably the same build as me but taller and she used to go swimming and she'd wear boardies and a bikini top, waltz into the pool and I'm like holy fucking hell, what about in here [indicating stomach area]. She didn't give a fucking toss. She said 'well if they don't like it, they'll just have to look elsewhere. If they make a comment, well I'll just tell them to fuck off'. She didn't give a toss about what any of it looked like. I have a bikini but I wear boardies with it of course ... and at the beach I'd wear a singlet over the top...

Trudie: Would you love to have that freedom like your friend?

Laura: I'm getting better ... like six months ago I wouldn't wear this [top] 'cause I was too paranoid that I'd stick out. I still do a little bit, I'm constantly going like this [pulling up the top]. But it's like any top now is so low cut ... you can't get a top that's high cut, they're all low ... and it's hard when you're big busted because ... you've gotta go up a size so you don't fucking fall out of the top and then it's all baggy here and then you look like you've got wrinkly boobs or bigger boobs [laughs]

(Laura, Shopping Trip)

The reason I include this quite lengthy exchange is that it captures the ambivalent relationship between the larger woman's body and places of inclusion / exclusion, such as the beach. Laura is ambivalent about her friend's attitude to managing her time there. On the one hand, she admires her courage and the way she casts off the potential negative attention of others. On the other hand, she is also shocked that her friend would breach the boundaries of clothing norms by going to the beach and not "giv[ing] a toss about what any of it looked like". Laura's ambivalent stance toward her friend reflects the ambivalent stance she retains toward her own body. By using the pronoun *it* ("if they don't like it", and "she didn't give a toss about what any of it looked like"), Laura objectifies larger women's bodies generally, including her own.

While Rose accepts that her body is cast out from the beach and fails to belong, Laura retains a shred of belief that her body can be of this place. However, the tenuous nature of this belief is evident. My exchange with Laura captures her desire to insist her body belongs and yet when I ask her outright if she would like to have that same sense of freedom about *her* body, she skirts around the question. Rather than answering directly, she suggests she is "getting better" at it, before proceeding to direct the conversation to other matters, namely the failure of the clothing made available to her. It is as though she possesses a knowledge that her body is out of place, while simultaneously desiring the capacity to insist her body be considered in place within socially constructed boundaries. However, the tension between these two positions results in her putting aside her desire to insist on her body's fit, at the same time as she reinforces the spatially situated constructions of fatness. Although Laura recognises that the boundaries of the beach are fictions, she is unable to (fully) breach them.

Making Space at the Beach

My participants were mindful of the problematic materiality of their bodies while at the beach. They were also mindful of the problematic materiality of the beach itself as a physical site. Discussing the spatiality of the beach, Fiske (1989) argued that the social order of the beach is determined around the spatial opposition of sea and land, which is overlaid with the ideological opposition of nature and culture. However, this

dichotomous construction and the emphasis on the nature of the sea and the cultural construction of land, does not sit comfortably alongside the talk and practice of my participants. In order to make the beach an inhabitable site, my participants held far more complex and detailed understandings.

For my beach-going participants, the beach was a complex and fragmented space in which particular spatial areas were considered more out of bounds than others. In fact, just as my participants compartmentalised their bodies into discrete manageable parts, they also compartmentalised the beach into discrete manageable parts. Often, a scoping exercise was carried out on arrival which involved establishing who was there and what they were doing, and importantly, how they felt about their bodies alongside those people. Choosing where to sit was informed by these observations and reflections. The effect of the masculine gaze has been discussed at length in feminist texts for some years. However, it was not only men who exacerbated their discomfort at the beach. It was both a gendered and a sized process:

Nah, I won't go anywhere near the guys eh, they're always looking at you like you're shit, and the young skinny chicks too.

(Laura, Clothing Journal Interview)

Responding to the potential for “socio-spatial stigmatisation” (Smith, 2010, p. 859), my participants eased the tension by carving up the beach into discrete zones that created spaces of possibility. Doing so enabled them to transform the beach as a perceived site of total exclusion, into a site of marginal inclusion. Positioning themselves beyond the gaze of those they considered most threatening allowed them to reconstruct the beach as a site of possibility that diminished, but did not fully eradicate, the extent to which they considered their bodies out of place.

The practices of my participants are in keeping with the empirical findings of Löw (2006), who demonstrated that people claim a “privacy zone” at the beach (p. 122). In my research, participants used a variety of material objects, such as towels, bags and blankets to assist in securing the boundaries of this private space, as described by Jen:

When I was going to the beach with [son], I'd claim a spot with my big blanket and have all our stuff around us ... and then I'd be quite happy.

(Jen, Wardrobe Rummage)

Through positioning belongings such as bags, sandals, bottles of sunscreen and water, sarongs and t-shirts, participants were able to construct vertical walls of invisibility within which they could more ably reside. By marking out this space, they repositioned themselves within the gaze of others. In the process, the marking of a private space within the realm of the public permitted their bodies to be partially legitimised.

These practices illuminate the multiple fluid boundaries of public sites. More importantly, they highlight the multiple and complex layers of exclusion and inclusion. Hidden behind metaphorical walls of invisibility, my participants were included and others were excluded; the space became an exclusive site in which they were repositioned within, rather than beyond, the margins. The sense of freedom this generates cannot be underestimated. While clearly no wall of invisibility exists, they felt more at ease in this space and their usually foregrounded bodies were (partially) repositioned in the background. Through the creation and consequent maintenance of symbolic boundaries that protect them from the gaze of others, my participants exercised their agency, and in doing so, challenged the socio-spatial construction of the beach. Importantly, their practices transformed a site from which they were excluded into a site in which they felt (partially) included.

However, it is not possible to remain in one's 'privacy zone' indefinitely; the beach also requires *movement*. If nothing else, the act of arriving and leaving demands movement, but the beach is also the site of numerous other activities. It is at such times that my participants felt they were at their most vulnerable because the larger woman's body on the move highlights its misplacement. The ideal beach body is the firm body. It is a body that is toned (and bronzed) and moves little when in motion. In contrast, fat flesh wobbles and jiggles; as the larger body moves, so does the flesh. Consequently, moving around the beach was difficult and the required crossing of

land to the sea had to be carefully navigated to avoid undue attention and exposure. Going for a swim was particularly difficult and required careful management and negotiation, with a particular consideration awarded to timing:

I did go swimming but by that time it was dark so it doesn't matter [laughs] ... or I'd just stay in and when no-one was looking I'd just duck out quickly and get my towel.

(Laura, Shopping Trip)

If you really want to swim ... I find a bit where it's not too busy and I'll wrap my sarong or something around myself until I get within an inch of the water and then I'll make a quick dive in you know... none of this tip toeing and paddling for ten minutes to acclimatize. It would be in and under quick and you stay under and then you choose your moment when there's not too many folk around to get out.

(Beth, Clothing Journal Interview)

Activities of leisure, including those carried out at the beach, are shaped by the inter-relationship of various social interests (Booth, 1995). However, the sociality of the beach for my participants was also politicised as their bodies were marked as beyond the bounds of this place. Yet their beach practices demonstrate their agentic potential as they carefully negotiate their bodies in this problematic site in order to attain corporeal invisibility. Doing so allows them, once more, to transform a place of certain exclusion into a space of at least partial inclusion, if only through their own insistence.

Trying to Fit at the Beach

The beach is a primary site for looking, and being looked at, and with this comes judging and being judged. Being looked at (and judged) by another serves to construct the self as an object. In her exploration of topless sunbathers at the beach, Löw (2006), suggests that spaces are inscribed with gender through the organisation

of perceptions, in particular ‘the glance’, coupled with corresponding body technologies. However, it is not a simple exchange of glances. The body is produced in and through these exchanges and, as such, these glances become a “corporeal experience that takes place within a power structure” (Barcan, 2001, p. 307). The political power structure at play in my research is the morally-laden discursive construction of fatness. Given the fat, fleshy body stands in opposition to the social imaginary of the beach-ready body, the fat body is constructed as a failed beach-body. Hence, the beach was experienced as a contentious site for my participants as they found themselves perpetually in the gaze and subsequent judgment of others.

The beach is not only gendered (Löw, 2006), it is also *sized*. At the beach, the fat body stands in as Other to the slim, toned (and bronzed) body. As larger women caught within these mutual exchanges, my participants were fully aware of their bodies’ failure to fit in this space. Moreover, they felt uncomfortable about the degree of attention their bodies were awarded by others. The following captures this in different ways:

I don’t feel comfortable with other people looking at my body [at the beach].

(Rose, Clothing Journal Interview)

There’s always someone who’s going to be thinking ‘oh look at the fat lady on the beach’, but ... I mean really who gives a shit. I mean

you shouldn’t give a shit but if you hear that sort of comment you do sometimes feel a bit blah.

(Jen, Wardrobe Rummage)

Jen captures the ambivalence of her experience of being judged. Her confession that she feels “a bit blah” when the recipient of negative attention due to her size, contradicts her claim that she does not “give a shit”. Jen must occupy the ambivalent

stance of not caring, while caring. Jen was not alone. As the object of other's negative attention, going to the beach was uncomfortable, experienced as sized, and thus, exclusionary; at the beach my participants' bodies were out of place and marked as beyond the bounds of intelligibility.

One of the most difficult aspects of going to the beach was the dilemma of what to wear. The need to keep cool in hot temperatures also needed to be tempered by the desire to keep the body under wraps and protect the self from the gaze of others:

You don't wanna wear lots and lots of clothes 'cause you get too hot but then you don't wanna strip right off so I don't really know what to wear to the beach.

(Charlotte, Clothing Journal Interview)

The on-going tension associated with revealing and concealing the body in such a public site is clear. However, negotiating the temperature was not the only directive surrounding their clothing choices and practices. The most important agenda was to diminish the perceived size of their bodies and hence, reduce the extent to which their bodies were perceived by others as out of place in the first instance. Typically, my beach-going participants desired 'normality':

I just wanna be normal I don't want people to look at me and laugh ... I don't care if people see me as long as they don't have any sort of reaction to me I just wanna be another person on the beach.

(Charlotte, Photo Elicitation)

I don't want to stand out.

(Ann, Clothing Journal Interview)

Efforts to attain normality were achieved by clothing their bodies in invisibility in order to merge their private body with the social body. This was achieved in two

ways. First, some participants chose to wear *more* clothes on the beach in an effort to cover up or conceal their seemingly problematic bodies:

I have a bikini but I wear boardies with it ... at the beach I'd wear a singlet over the top.

(Laura, Shopping Trip)

Oh I wear a swimming costume but I cover it up with a sarong or something.

(Beth, Clothing Journal Interview)

By wearing extra clothes that covered parts of the body they presumed most problematic, my participants hoped to literally cover up their bodies, thus making themselves less visible. However, this was at times problematic. During the research, Charlotte captured a photograph of herself (that she preferred not to appear in this thesis), wearing a pair of jeans and a t-shirt at the beach. Charlotte knew she was literally overdressed for the occasion. Not only was she wearing too many clothes for the weather, but she was wearing too many clothes for the site, given the beach is a place of the (revealed) body:

A beautiful hot sunny day on Takapuna beach. What on earth was I supposed to wear? ... Just ended up wearing jeans and this t-shirt with all the rolls bagging out everywhere. Terrible on the beach ... it's so hard just to go to the beach 'cause ... I was really embarrassed about my arms as well so I didn't even wanna wear a singlet ... I had no choice. I just had to wear jeans and a t-shirt and I was roasting ... I mean summer is just awful for me ... I just felt like a sack of shit that day to be honest.

(Charlotte, Photo Elicitation)

The claim she had “no choice” underlines how Charlotte constructs her body as a misplaced problematic anomaly. To reveal her body, even just her upper arms, was

unfeasible. Charlotte is, in effect, doubly misplaced. Not only is her body out of place, so too are her clothes. Together, these mark her as beyond the bounds of possibility for this site. Worn at the beach, Charlotte's favourite clothing is not experienced as a 'second skin' but rather, as a further layer of misplacement that positions her within the direct gaze of others. As demonstrated empirically by Woodward (2005b), it is not always the aesthetics of an outfit that make it work, but what *feels* right to the wearer. However, for clothing to feel right it must also fit the socio-normative practices of the site in which the clothing is worn. Although the jeans and t-shirt fit Charlotte's personal style, they failed to fit at the beach; effectively there is a *misfit*. As a result, there is not so much an "aesthetic disjuncture" (Woodward, 2005b, p. 25), there is instead a spatio-corporeal disjuncture as the clothed body resides outside of the bounds of spatial norms. This disjuncture contributes further to larger women's spatially-situated experience as matter out of place. Certainly, extra clothing can be worn to attain corporeal invisibility in public sites. However, these must be carefully negotiated in order to ensure the clothed body is not further misplaced as efforts to seek invisibility might have the adverse effect.

The second way my participants sought to merge their private body with the social body avoids Charlotte's mistake, by revealing *more* of the body in order to fit or blend in with others. By wearing similar clothes to others on the beach, they hope to go unnoticed, or at the very least, draw less attention to themselves: Beth explains:

Yeah I don't want to look different. I wanna kind of look the same as everybody else ... if you don't try and just fit in with what the masses are wearing you can draw more attention to yourself. You know, it's like a large person on the beach in a pair of long trousers and a long sleeve top is probably more noticeable than a fat person on the beach in a swimming costume you know what I mean? So I think you've just gotta try and go with what the masses are wearing. You stand out less.

(Beth, Clothing Journal Interview)

Paradoxically, through revealing her body, Beth aligns her individual body more closely with the social body. In doing so, she attempts to normalise her body and approach invisibility. Such practices challenge the claim that people use objects (such as clothing) to separate themselves out from others (Miller, 1987). Instead, my findings show that larger women use clothing to intentionally seek invisibility and position themselves in the shadows, as photographically demonstrated by Rose (see Figure 6.4). Effectively, they use clothing to stop-gap the space between their private corporeal experience and broader social norms of corporeality and clothing. Doing so allows them to fit more closely the material and social landscape, and reposition their bodies beyond the gaze of others.

Figure 6.4 Hiding in shadows.



Harvey (2007) argues that both men and women use clothing to simultaneously show and hide their bodies in ways that are ambiguous. Harvey's work is interesting in its

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exploration of the tension that exists between simultaneously revealing and concealing skin, and the gender disparity in respect to how this manifests. While the revelation and concealment of the body for women may be provocative (for example, a single split in a dress revealing a long expanse of thigh), men typically conceal the body under multiple layers of fabric, resulting in only the hands and the face on show. However, Harvey says nothing of the fat fleshy body. When he discusses the provocative play of simultaneously revealing and concealing the body, or the donning of flesh coloured garments to stand in as a second skin, it is clear that he speaks of a tall, lean, long-legged body (and indeed his descriptions also suggest pale skin) and not a fat, fleshy body.

Harvey discusses the interplay of revealing and concealing the body in order to *provoke*. In contrast, my participants engaged in these practices in order to *diminish*, so they might go unnoticed. Negotiating the beach for my participants involved a complex and dynamic process of making their bodies appear and / or disappear through the use of clothing. Although the practices in which they engaged (wearing *more* clothes to cover the body or wearing *less* clothes to fit with what others were wearing), appear to be polarised, they each reflect efforts to achieve the same result. Underpinning their practices is the desire to ‘fit’ the social landscape and be accepted as normal in this problematic site by clothing their bodies in invisibility. Spatially contingent, the larger woman’s body must be carefully negotiated in order to be corporeally legitimated for this site.

Conclusion

It is clear that I write not only of territorial or geographical spatiality but also of corporeal, and specifically female, spatiality. Moreover, it is the space *between* embodied larger women and distinct geographical sites that is of concern. Although this chapter focuses on public sites, it is underpinned by the private body, and its clothed management within public sites. Echoing Longhurst (2005a), relationships between clothing and the wearer are “intimately bound to spatialities” (p. 434). My participants demonstrated a keen awareness of the corporeal (and sartorial) norms for spatially situated larger bodies. However, they are not ‘cultural dupes’. They

understand how their bodies are constructed and they also understand (and embody) the non-policed yet authoritative clothing rules of fatness. Unprompted, they identified numerous sources of clothing rules that limited their possibilities for clothing their bodies and importantly, they identified the impact of these social constraints that challenged the place of their larger bodies and constructed their bodies as ‘matter out of place’.

Although my participants expressed their frustration that the rules existed, they had little interest in the politics of fatness and were not interested in challenging them. However, through engaging in a variety of tactics aimed at normalising their bodies and seeking invisibility, they constructed their individual bodies as possible. Their practices did not deny the existence of these spatially situated structural obstacles. Instead, in keeping with the claims of de Certeau (1984), they engaged in “innumerable and infinitesimal transformations” (p. xiii) that challenged the cultural order in a way that served their own interests. Doing so allowed them to transform a problematic site of exclusion (such as the beach) into a manageable site of partial inclusion. Importantly, their presence inadvertently challenges the construction of exclusionary sites that are only suited to slim bodies. In effect, their presence becomes a tool of, and for, subversion - of a sort.

There is, however, an inherent tension operating within their practices. They do little to alter or challenge the social and discursive construction of fatness generally; the hegemonic construction of fatness as a problematic Other remains long after they leave the beach. By leaving the hegemony of heteronormativity intact, they leave unchallenged the construction of their own bodies as problematic in the first instance. Although they carve an alternative individual itinerary that creates multiple possibilities, they inadvertently position themselves (and other larger women) perpetually beyond the boundaries. In effect, through their desire to be “normal”, to “fit in”, and be “invisible”, they inadvertently reify the construction of the fat woman’s body as problematic. While their practices make their own beach moments possible, they fail to transform the beach into an inclusionary site for all.

Spatial locations and the subjectivities of dressed larger women are closely tied (Longhurst, 2005a). As my participants operated within a given public location they were mindful of their bodies' failure to fit the dominant mould of the heteronormative feminine ideal. Despite practices that (re)positioned them within rather than beyond potentially exclusionary public sites, their bodies were perpetually present during these times, requiring on-going management and negotiation. In these public sites (and particularly public sites constructed for the body such as the beach), the body is always foregrounded as it becomes an object of control and management.

Chapter Seven

Negotiating Home Comforts?

The previous two chapters explored how larger women experience and use clothing in public places. This chapter changes tack, stepping out of the public world and entering the increasingly privatised space of the home (Punch, 2008). While experientially mundane everyday activities and routines may often be ignored within academic inquiry, they are indeed a “central feature of everyday life” (Highmore, 2004, p. 306). Many of these everyday activities are carried out in the home, making the home an important site of, and for, everyday culture. The meanings of home are many and varied. Formal definitions extend from functionalist accounts of the home as a physical structure located in space (Case, 1996), to home as a social, cultural and potentially familial gendered unit (Rose, 1993), providing the means for the development of self-identity (Case, 1996). Popular culture may romanticise the home (home is where the heart is), but it is also politicised as demonstrated by academic literature considering the role gender (McDowell, 1999), power (Punch, 2008), and national identity (hooks, 1991) play in constructing the home as a potential site of oppression. The home is also intimately tied to practices of consumption, providing the site for the conspicuous display of material goods, purchased and utilised as a tool

for self-representation (Hurdley, 2006; Pink, 2004). In this way, the home performs a key role in indicating the “relationship between material culture and sociality: a concrete marker of social position and status” (McDowell, 1999, p. 92). Taking into account this range of positions, the home can be considered a geographical place, but more importantly it is the site of (albeit dislocated at times) familial relationships (Bordo, Klein, & Silverman, 1998), consumption (Valentine, 1999), everyday routines (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998; Highmore, 2004), and an “active state of being in the world” (Mallett, 2004, p. 62). The private space of the home is a multi-dimensional concept encompassing both objectively and subjectively constructed meanings.

For the purposes of my research, the home is important. Throughout the last two chapters, I have suggested that larger women perform in the public arena, including spaces of consumption, to varying degrees of success. Through managing their clothed bodies in the public sphere, my participants work to limit the extent to which they are subject to the gaze and subsequent judgment of others. In contrast to this public world, the home (potentially) provides a space where larger women are beyond the gaze; at home, these women are ‘backstage’. Paraphrasing Goffman (1990), on walking through the front door, it is possible for them to relax, drop their front, forgo speaking their lines, and step out of character (p. 115). Although Goffman focused little on the role clothing plays in public performances, the metaphor of the theatre lends itself well to considering the place of clothing. The home is the site where preparations are made for the public performance, where costumes may be fitted and theatrical masks applied. Equally, the home is the primary site in which clothing is cared for, washed, ironed, folded, and stored away in dressers, drawers and wardrobes, as Jen describes:

*Monday, Tuesday is washing, finally got folded and put away yesterday,
half of yesterday’s washing is still on the washing line the*

other half in the hot water cupboard it's like I think I'm going to run out of clothes.

(Jen, Clothing Journal Excerpt)

The home is also the site in which many clothing decisions are made. It is here in what could be argued the most private of spaces within the home (for the home also possesses *degrees* of private space), that one stands in front of the wardrobe and decides what to wear (Banim, Green, & Guy, 2001; S. Woodward, 2007); the clothing, or 'costume' chosen becoming a "tool for self-management" (Craik, 1994, p. 46).

Throughout this chapter, I consider the clothing practices my participants engaged in while at home. I argue that the home is experienced as an ambivalent space which, on the one hand, can provide privacy and refuge from the outside world, while on the other hand, can serve as a disruptive force rendering the self unstable. These two positions provide this chapter's framework. The first section considers the home as a place in which my participants were beyond the observations and judgments of others, and subsequently felt more free and comfortable within their bodies. In this section, I consider how my participants altered their clothing practices while at home in ways that afforded them greater freedom, comfort, movement, and ultimately, greater corporeal legitimacy. If the first section goes some way to romanticising notions of the home, the second section goes some way to undoing this. Here, I illuminate the unstable nature of this space and the extent to which it can potentially betray larger women. In particular, I discuss the tenuous boundaries of the home and the perpetual potential for intrusion from beyond its borders. These intrusions materialise as moments of disruption occurring within a private and safe space, which ultimately challenge larger women's sense of self.

Spaces of Respite

The home in popular culture is often constructed as a sanctuary of sorts where the ideology of home life intersects with ideological constructions of gender and the family (Janning, 2008). Notions of individualism, including the individual family unit,

have also shaped constructions of the home and the meanings people attribute to this space. Indeed, as the “ascendancy of privacy has become a dominating value across many cultures” (Gumpert & Drucker, 1998, pp. 429-430), architectural design has reflected the desire for the increased privatisation of homes (Punch, 2008). The distinction between private and public spaces is important for this chapter. Equally important, is the understanding that the home can provide a welcome break from the public sphere. For the larger sized women in my research, the home was at times experienced as a place in which they could evade the gaze and permit the body to settle into the background. In the private space of the home they were able to cast aside the clothing demands of the public sphere and instead, “let it all hang out” (Laura).

Escaping the Other

For my participants, the perceived judgment of others in respect to their physical size and shape while in public, constructed the home in contrast, as a place where they could turn away from the public eye. They thought about the home, and intentionally constructed the home, as a site of refuge where they could seek respite from the gaze of others, and respite from the strictures of clothing itself:

Oh I can't wait to get home take them [jeans] off and put something else easier to wear on.

(Rose, Clothing Journal Interview)

At home, they felt they could ‘be themselves’ in respect to their bodies and, as such, did not have to dress their bodies in ways they felt were appropriate for public and social situations. Laura, for example, did not care at all what others thought of her when she was in the privacy of home. For Laura, the home was constructed in accordance with her own clothing rules and those who visited were expected to respect them, accepting her as they found her. At home, she considered herself beyond the judgment of others:

I don't care what I wear at home ... I just don't give a fuck. I just don't give a shit about anybody.

(Laura, Clothing Journal Interview)

In this private space, Laura is able to establish the rules of dress rather than being positioned within normative clothing rules present in the public sphere. As such, her home is constructed as a private zone in which she not only *refuses* the objective gaze of others, but also refuses to allow its entry.

Charlotte also clothes her body quite differently when staying home, admitting that she “wouldn’t be seen dead in public in what I wear at home”. Working from home, Charlotte need not concern herself with colleagues’ opinions of her larger sized body. So, in this private space where her body is not on public display, she feels able to wear whatever feels most comfortable. Living with her husband of three years, her home is also a site of love and acceptance between them, and she feels no need for “airs or graces”. She makes no effort to clothe herself in ways that fit her body to the accepted mould of feminine desirability as she knows her husband “loves [me] just the way [I am]”. While her mother may warn that her husband is on his way home from work so it is time to “do your hair and brush up your makeup and put something nice on”, Charlotte feels secure in the knowledge that at home with the man she loves, her appearance will not be judged as it is in public; she is beyond the reach of the critical masculine gaze. For both Charlotte and her husband, the home is a place of complete acceptance where no-one else is privy to their private moments of “slobbering ‘round”:

Mum'd be horrified if she saw me slobbering 'round. We have these things called parrot poo shirts ... we just have these nasty old t-shirts on with the parrot droppings on them and it just doesn't matter to us ... I'm amazed at what I can wear around the house and he's still totally into me.

(Charlotte, Clothing Journal Interview)

For both Laura and Charlotte clothing distinguishes between their public and private worlds. In addition, it serves as a transitional material that mediates the emotional shift from the public sphere to the private sphere. Given that dressing is an embodied practice (Entwistle, 2000), embracing the freedom to wear whatever they like permits them to actively embrace their bodies. The act of dressing for the self rather than another, creates space for refiguring understandings of their bodies, enabling them to fashion more positive self-perceptions. This adds support to Entwistle's (2000) claim that dress works on the body, mediating the wearer's sense of self. I would add, however, that *place* is equally important and that private spaces afford larger women the possibility to embrace their bodies in ways not available to them in public.

The Body Forgotten

Through the notion of the 'absent body', Leder (1990) argues that the body remains part of one's corporeal background until such a time as an event causes it to reappear. Building on this, he suggests that women's bodies are more corporeally present than men's, perhaps due to dichotomies of body / mind, and nature / culture, and the concomitant attribution of women with the former and men with the latter (Grosz, 1994). Equally, Shilling (1993) argues the notion of the absent body is less the case for those for whom the body is a critical aspect of identity, such as those with a disability. While the larger woman is not disabled, the larger body nonetheless makes itself known in other ways. First, the larger body is often the object of direct or indirect negative attention from others, as previously discussed. Second, clothing is often experienced as more restrictive for larger women (a point that will be elaborated on in the following chapter). These two factors, the imagined or real judgment of others, and the space between the body and clothing, dovetail, ensuring increased corporeal presence; the larger woman's body may never be fully forgotten.

However, while at home attempts are made by my participants to place the body into the background through their clothing practices, and the choice of clothing worn there was often very different to that worn in public. 'Public' clothing was typically concerned with presenting the body in the best way possible which often involved wearing restrictive and uncomfortable clothing making the wearer mindful of her

body's presence. In contrast, the home was a place where clothing choices were determined by what felt comfortable and permitted a greater freedom of movement:

I go for more looser tops, [they] sometimes make me look bigger but it's comfort really ... I don't care what I wear at home [and] need something comfortable and flexi with my body.

(Laura, Wardrobe Rummage)

[At home] it's just easier to be loose and comfortable and free.

(Janie, Clothing Journal Interview)

Some days I stay in my jammies till after lunch ... 'cause it's comfortable and I can't be fucked getting changed. It's a lot to do with comfort ... and I do my house cleaning you know when I'm in my tracky jammies.

(Laura, Clothing Journal Interview)

The ideal clothing choices for home were typically garments that accommodated comfortably the physical body, and permitted freedom of movement without clinging. Track pants with elasticated waists, lycra sportswear, pyjamas and old favourite items of clothing that had yielded to the shape of the body were all cited as preferred attire in this private space. Indeed, comfort was the primary concern when developing a clothing repertoire for home-wear to the point where some of my participants even chose to remove some clothing, opting for a more scant form of attire:

I haven't got the jeans on if I'm home by myself, just in my knickers and t-shirt [laughs].

(Janie, Clothing Journal Interview)

I go with no bra on. I just stayed home all day ... it's just 'cause it's comfortable sometimes to go au naturel.

(Laura, Clothing Journal Interview)

Comfort was also attained through wearing that which is familiar. For example, many of the women taking part in this research developed collections of the same items of clothing, albeit with subtle variations. It was not uncommon for participants to have the same t-shirt “in about five different colours” (Janie), multiple pairs of jeans “in varying stages of fade” (Jen, see Figure 7.1), or “half a dozen black pants” (Beth, see Figure 7.2)²².

Figure 7.1 Jeans ... in varying stages of fade.



²² It should be noted that some of these garments were not limited to home wear alone but were identified as favourite items of clothing that could be worn anywhere. However, the point I wish to underline is that these garments were acquired in the multiple because they were comfortable to wear.

Figure 7.2 The ubiquitous black pant.



The ubiquity and familiarity of these items creates a clothing ‘uniform’ that eliminates the need to consciously consider clothing choices. Janie’s clothing journal (for a week she spent working primarily from home) was testament to this. Despite being asked to write about every time that clothing intruded on her thoughts or actions, her journal entries followed a simple pattern of recording what she wore each day. For each entry, Janie repeated one of two descriptions: either jeans with a baggy t-shirt, or track pants worn with a baggy t-shirt. The only exception to Janie’s (unintentional) uniform, was when she went out to work as a security guard in the evening. At this time she wore a formal and imposed uniform of black trousers and a white blouse which was worn with some reluctance. She told me she did not like wearing the pants as she found them difficult to fit, confessing to me that her current pair is threadbare in the upper thigh but it is too difficult to replace. Janie also told me she had trouble finding a woman’s shirt that was not too fitting and so she preferred to wear a wider cut man’s shirt. Janie’s clothing preference by far was her own private uniform of jeans or trackies worn with baggy t-shirts. For Janie, getting dressed for time spent at home was an automated response demanding little attention, thought or engagement with clothing. Through establishing a clothing uniform that requires little considered effort on the part of the wearer, as well as removing clothes

to promote personal comfort, my participants could attempt to ‘forget’ their bodies, in keeping with the suggestions of Leder (1990).

The desire for comfort is an important point that requires underlining. The act of “changing into something more comfortable” (Annette) demonstrates the authority of clothing to bridge the space between public and private worlds (Entwistle, 2000). By changing clothes, or indeed removing clothes, the wearer sheds the social demands associated with the public sphere. At the same time, by (re)dressing in other clothes, one signifies that the body and the self has entered another space; a space in which the larger body is acceptable and legitimised. For larger women, this is crucial given the multiply restrictive and negative ways in which the larger body is constructed in the public world. I have argued earlier that larger women’s bodies are potentially problematic in the public world. In contrast, once home, the body is let free.

The Familiar Embodied

In the seminal text, *The Social Life of Things*, Appadurai (1986) suggests that material objects are in possession of their own cyclical and transformative life history. Beginning ‘life’ as a commodity, material objects quickly become decommodified as they are elevated in status to a possession of symbolic significance to individuals. Over time, as the meaning attributed to the object shifts and perhaps wanes, the object may return to its origins as a commodity when on sold and no longer required (Kopytoff, 1986). Applied to clothing, this storyline is engaging. Clothes possess their own narrative; their own story. Clothes begin and possibly end their life journey within the meta-narrative of production and consumption. However, in between these two end points of clothing’s temporal trajectory, the social life of clothing becomes enmeshed with the social life of the individual as each share the world of the other. Particular items of clothing capture the corporeal imagination, becoming over time, quite simply ‘favourites’ that are chosen again and again over other garments.

Although I briefly discussed my participants’ penchant for the familiar in their clothing choices generally, many of them also developed favourite items of clothing that were relegated to the home only. On first meeting Georgie, she was wearing her

favourite dress, a simple, nearly floor length, shift dress made from deep burgundy velvet with a rounded neckline. During our interview, Georgie explained how on arriving home from work, she often “throw[s] on [her] burgundy-velvet-maxi-wear-only-at-home-favourite dress” purchased for “20 bucks in a cheapo sale”. Although not worn out in public, the dress “kind of gets lived in”. As Georgie describes, she will “snuggle into the couch for half an hour” wearing her dress, but she will also wear it while doing the ironing and other housework. If Georgie is at home in her swimwear, she keeps the dress close so that “if there’s a chance that somebody might come ‘round then that’ll go on to answer the door”. Although the dress is not worn in public, it bridges the gap between public and private spaces, being worn in the car to do the school run when the children were younger and now being worn to pick up her adult children from work in the middle of the night. Over time, the burgundy velvet dress has become embedded within Georgie’s everyday practice while at home, becoming as though an extension of Georgie herself as she carries out her daily (and nightly) activities.

Objects extend notions of self (I. Woodward, 2007), meaning what you *have* becomes who you *are*, or applied to the field of clothing and to modify an old maxim, we are what we wear. However, the difference here is that my emphasis is not on what one has or is, but on what one *does* with material objects, such as clothing. ‘Things’, in this case clothing, are part of the routinised lives of people, allowing us to *perform* aspects of selfhood (I. Woodward, 2007). While performing everyday activities in the home, Georgie’s burgundy velvet dress becomes irrevocably connected with her and the multiple facets of selfhood therein. In particular, the dress has become connected with the aspect of Georgie that is concerned with ‘making home’ or ‘doing’ mother; the dress is closely tied to Georgie’s gendered performance of familial relations in the home, embodying her role as mother and wife. In this way, we can think of items of clothing as not only being worn in particular spatial sites but also becoming indicative and representative of spatial sites.

The dress does not only occupy a spatial location. It also occupies a temporal location in Georgie’s mind, connecting her to her past and present practices as a homemaker, wife and mother to two growing children. In this respect, the dress has grown with

her, the meaning of it evolving to parallel her changing role in the home. The relationship between Georgie's dress, and her on-going familial roles supports the empirical work of Banim and Guy (2001), who demonstrated that clothing provides both continuity and discontinuity with the way women view themselves. The authors found that women tended to keep clothing despite no longer wearing it because it provided a means by which they could retain a sense of their past selves through their relationship to, and their relationship with, particular garments. Their research explored clothing retained by women but no longer worn, demonstrating the static role of clothing in contrast to the dynamism of the self over time. However, Georgie retains and continues to *wear* her dress. Thus, my research demonstrates the changing meaning of clothing over time, in accordance with the demands of the wearer. Georgie's everyday clothing practices show how clothing is both temporally and spatially located in reality and memory.

Refusing the gaze of others when in the home, dressing for comfort, and wearing "old favourites" (Charlotte) while in the privacy of home, were just some of the ways in which my participants constructed the home as a site of safety and sanctity away from the demands of the public sphere. The home provided a space in which they could recast their bodies more favourably, or simply allow their bodies greater freedom of movement. Writing on race and politics in the home, hooks (1991) argues that:

black women resisted by making homes where all black people ... could be affirmed in our minds and hearts ... and where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied outside in the public world. (p. 42)

I have argued similarly that the home provides a space in which the fat body can be reconfigured. By engaging in a variety of clothing practices that contrasted sharply with their practices in the public sphere, my participants were able to put aside their problematic bodies, allowing their bodies to become part of their corporeal background. By thinking through the 'backstage' space of the home, I have demonstrated that clothing practices are a powerful means through which the body may be recast and the relationship between the wearer and her body may be transformed. A simple act of changing clothing allows the larger woman to enter

another realm away from public scrutiny and judgment, and think about the body in a different way. In particular, the home potentially provides a private space in which larger women can be at ease, think about their bodies positively, and in doing so deny the discursive construction of fatness as problematic.

Moments of Disruption

To suggest that the home is an entirely private space is somewhat problematic. The secure boundaries of the home that distinguish between private and public are always subject to moments of intrusion. According to Miller (2001):

The home itself has become the site of [people's] relationships and their loneliness: the site of their broadest encounters with the world through television and the Internet, but also the place where they reflect upon and face up to themselves away from others. (p. 1)

In these words, Miller captures the ambivalence of this place called home. On the one hand, home is a site in which it is possible to escape the demands of the external world; where one can seek refuge and engage in one's closest relationships. However, it is also the site in which the outside finds its way in. Indeed, the outside is *invited* in via television and Internet. On arriving home, the larger woman cannot simply shed the mantle of dominant thought about fatness as easily as she sheds her clothing; the sheer weight of this doctrine is such that it cannot be readily ignored. Thus, the home is not a bounded site but consists of fluid, uncertain and ultimately permeable boundaries subject to invasion by technology, people, ideas, and material objects. My research demonstrates that the home as a sanctuary was subject to moments of disruption from a variety of sources originating both from outside and inside the home. Seemingly small, insignificant, and indeed, somewhat innocuous everyday moments created the potential to disrupt their secure sense of self.

External Intrusions

In the first part of this chapter, I established the home as a site of refuge, away from the judgment of others and free from the demands of the public world. However, the

boundaries of the home are not fixed (Laurie, et al., 1997). My participants found their sense of self was challenged from a range of external sources such as magazines, advertising paraphernalia, and people, all of which intruded, often uninvited, into the private space of the home. Magazines were cited as particularly problematic. Although the participants usually (but not always) introduced them into their homes themselves, the magazines served as reminders that their bodies failed to fit the dominant model of feminine beauty. Magazines, in all their ordinariness, serve as an “authoritative text of femininity” offering the promise of a “future self” (Blood, 2005, p. 64) and establishing accepted codes of conduct and appearance for women. Through magazines, women are sold a normative image of femininity to which they must aspire. Unsurprisingly, empirical research shows that reading beauty and fashion magazines increases the reader’s desire to be thin (Park, 2005). Yet for those women whose bodies fail, quite substantially, to align with the accepted code, magazines and the normative images of feminine beauty they contain, remind of their failed corporeality.

This (see Figure 7.3) is what we get hammered with, this is what we’re shown every day in every magazine that we should look like and it just really annoys me.

(Ann, Photography Stage)

Figure 7.3 Hammered by magazines.



The choice of words, such as “hammered with”, that Ann draws on as she describes the magazine’s content highlight the strength and force of the dominant discourses that shape the way in which women’s bodies must conform. In such magazines, there is no space for the fat body which, if acknowledged at all (Kent, 2001), is variously constructed as unhealthy, out of control, or the object of “unrealized femininity” (Whitehead & Kurz, 2008, p. 355). Even in the private space of the home, these magazines serve as a constant reminder of the fat body’s failure to align with heteronormative standards of feminine beauty.

In addition to magazines, advertising material from clothing stores and shopping malls more generally were also experienced by my participants as a tangible reminder of their bodies’ failure to fit the normative feminine ideal. Three participants saved advertising pamphlets for me so they could vocalise their frustration with the clothing available to them in their size (Charlotte), express their disgust at the gendered and

sexualised nature of advertising material (Rose), and convey the sense of exclusion generated through the material, as described in the following by Annette:

This came in the mail ... it was a freebie. That ain't me and I can't wear that and ... I don't wanna look like that ... I mean that's gorgeous on her but that's not me ... who's this aimed at?

(Annette, Clothing Journal Interview)

Arriving uninvited, these brochures were primarily filled with images of slim women dressed in clothing that was not available in sizes to accommodate the larger woman's body. While my participants can look through and covet some of the items advertised, the clothes are unattainable and beyond their reach. As the shopping malls and clothing stores encroach on my participants' private spaces, they are reminded of their failure to fit the mould of the consummate consumer. This is not benign. Such advertising constructs the larger woman's body as illegitimate and failing to fit within broader norms of society. Given the 'good' citizen has become synonymous with the consumer (Edwards, 2000; Stevenson, 2007), this is especially difficult. In effect, the body that fails to fit the available clothing on offer fails to be a fully functioning and participating citizen.

Some of the messages in magazines in particular are so ubiquitous that they have now become "white noise" and "[don't] really matter until it needs to matter" (Lynn). That said, it is clear that the dominant discourses at work within these magazines and brochures (along with a variety of other sources such as reality television programmes, advertising infomercials and the internet), find their way into the home (or are invited into the home), and simultaneously 'under the skin' of my participants. In doing so, they disrupt the participants' construction of home as a site in which they are free from the confining restrictions of ideal models of feminine beauty. Efforts to construct this private space as a site of refuge away from the gaze of others, are challenged as these everyday intrusions from outside arise. Their disruptive nature emphasises the tenuous nature of the home's boundaries and the extent to which such boundaries are readily breached.

It is not only printed materials that challenge the boundaries of private spaces. People also cross, or threaten to cross, the permeable boundary of private and public spaces. As discussed, the home is often a site where my participants felt at ease to wear more comfortable and relaxed clothing. These garments were worn with the intention that no-one else would witness them; they were not intended for others' eyes. However, the permeable boundaries of the home are particularly slippery and ultimately subject to invasion from others. From Lynn:

I got caught out yesterday, didn't I? It was so embarrassing ... when I came back from the office yesterday I changed into my sloppy joes ... my hair's all over the place ... and there's a bang on the door and ... it's these two people come for an interview dressed so smartly. I nearly died. I nearly died.

(Lynn, Wardrobe Rummage)

Surprise visits from friends, colleagues and in Lynn's case above, interviewees, intrude into the backstage of life, bringing the public into the private domain, and serve as a disruptive force that challenge the way in which my participants understood themselves. The care taken in the public world to foster a particular impression of the self may be undone when caught out at home. These (welcome or unwelcome, invited or uninvited) intrusions from others highlight that the private space of the home always teeters on the edge of public space and the boundaries of each are not clearly marked or sustained.

Internal Interruptions

Disruptions of a carefully crafted private self do not only result from external sources forcing their way into the home. Moments of disruptions are also the result of everyday practices carried out in the home that further challenge the tenuous construction of the private self for larger women. Often these everyday practices are seemingly inconsequential yet they can have significant implications. Even the most benign, simple, everyday activities such as hanging the washing out, potentially serve as a disruptive force in respect to one's sense of self. Jen, for example, is particular

about how she hangs her wet clothes on the washing line. Jen's large-sized underwear requires two pegs in order to dry. These larger items are hung by Jen on the "inner rung" of the clothes line in order to be kept beyond the prying eyes of her neighbours:

I hang my undies on the clothes line first so that they're on the inner rung and then sort of filter round [with] the bigger things and I hide them so the neighbours can't see my big undies.

(Jen, Clothing Journal Interview)

In contrast, she hangs her daughter's underwear, "these little G strings", on the outside rows of the washing line having no concern if neighbours see the smaller sized and sexier undergarments. Jen's practice of hanging her washing out is a response to her knowledge that the size of her body is problematic and her awareness of the social stigma of being larger in size. It could be said that Jen has responded to the negative construction of her size in a creative and resourceful manner and ultimately crafted a way of managing her daily practice that places her beyond the potential judgment of others. However, it is less easy for her to avoid her own awareness of the problematics of her body. While putting the washing out, Jen is mindful of her laundry practices. At the moment of carrying out the task, the size of her body, and the way her body is constructed and judged in the social arena, is forced into her consciousness. Hanging out the washing may seem, on the surface, harmless enough. However, the accumulation of everyday practices such as these serves as a way to insist on the corporeal presence of the larger woman's body. There are numerous clothing moments such as these that occur while in the privacy of the home, but I wish to focus my attention on two that occur every day and are perhaps the most problematic: the naked moment; and the wardrobe moment.

Nietzsche (2001) argues that the naked human body is generally considered to be a "shameful sight":

Suppose that owing to some magician's malice, the most cheerful company at table suddenly saw itself disrobed and undressed; I believe that not only their cheerfulness would vanish and the strongest appetite

would be discouraged - it seems that we Europeans simply cannot dispense with that masquerade which one calls clothes. (p.295)

In the words above, Nietzsche speaks of the importance of clothing and the way in which clothing is constructed as a barrier to nakedness. One of the primary roles of clothing is the preservation of modesty (Entwistle, 2001; Wilson & de la Haye, 1999), providing a final defence for the naked body. However, I suggest that Nietzsche's comment is somewhat overstated and the distaste to which he refers may only be attributed to *particular* bodies. For some bodies, nudity, or nakedness, is not at all problematic. A glimpse of popular television, film, magazines or music videos might suggest that everyone is spending time in varying degrees of undress. However, these images bare only a particular *kind* of naked body. The slim, the youthful and the beautiful are typically the source of nakedness in popular culture. In contrast, the fat body is largely absent (Kent, 2001), particularly when unclothed. Indeed, the *fat* female naked body is, according to Gamman (2000), the most reviled of human nakedness due to a "misogynistic revulsion against the fleshy female body" (p. 65). This misogyny toward fat flesh often results in the naked or semi-naked fat woman's body being used as a comedic focus (Stukator, 2001). In sum, contemporary western society permits only a particular kind of body to be undressed and for those who fail to fit this model, the body must remain under wraps.

There are moments that occur throughout each day where people unavoidably find themselves naked. For my participants, the naked moment was typically a moment of discomfort. Clothing goes some way to disguising the shape of the body. For my participants, clothing was used to cover aspects of the body they preferred not to be visible to others (and indeed, themselves). Without clothes, their bodies and all their perceived flaws were laid bare:

That's what clothing does, it hides for me, it hides the lumps and the bumps. The rolls, they're not as apparent as when I'm naked. I mean, if I took my clothes off now I'd go ooh ... you have clothes on and they actually hide some of the physical indiscretions ... warty old lump up there gets hidden ... nobody knows it's up there ... lumpy bumps under

here, under my breasts that get hidden when I've got a long top on, and it's actually smooth you can't actually see that it's there. The darkness of the clothing often hides the hills and the valleys [laughs].

(Rose, Clothing Journal Interview)

Wearing clothes allowed my participants to disguise or conceal aspects of their bodies they would prefer not to be visible, and also allowed them to retain a more positive sense of self. In contrast, having to get undressed served as a disruption that forced them to face their bodies. For example, when Charlotte speaks of undressing to shower, she explains:

In spite of my best efforts to look good in clothes, I still hit rock bottom when I strip for the shower and see myself naked, so basically I fight depression every night.

(Charlotte, Clothing Journal Excerpt)

The mirror does not offer the observer a simple reflection. What is seen is an image that has been filtered through the ideology of a given social milieu. As such, it must be interpreted, and in Charlotte's case, extrapolated and placed into a broader self-narrative that is shaped by the broader social narrative of fatness on which she draws. As a result, Charlotte informs me she views her naked self as a woman with "no prospects [and] no chance of finding true love [with] a life filled with rejection and a life as a woman who was quite simply unlovable".

If nakedness in the private space of the home was experienced as difficult, nakedness in public spaces, such as public communal showers or changing rooms, was intensified. Writing of the communal shower, Cover (2003), suggests that in such spaces, "the naked body is performed and constrained, looked at, spoken about and gazed upon in rigorously coded ways and restrained ways" (p. 57). In the following, Jen lends support to this claim, describing her reluctance to shower at the gym given her larger size:

I always get changed in my shower cubicle. Overweight and scars. Not ready to parade around the dressing room ... I avoid eye contact with the other women ... feelings intensify when you walk into a group in full verbal flight! They seem to be so skinny and wearing crevice hugging lycra! Or God forbid in varying degrees of undress acting as if they are in their own bedrooms or at least with their very best friends or sisters. I much prefer the safety of my own shower cubicle, where there is no chance of eye contact - not even with myself ... Give me the sanctuary of my cubicle every time! If and when my fat miraculously sheds itself from my identity, I would be the first person to ponce and parade around the judging room.

(Jen, Clothing Journal Interview)

Jen demonstrates a critical awareness of how the body is performed in such spaces. Moreover, she is mindful of the extent to which the “judging room” provides a platform, a stage if you will, for demonstrating how the body has been successfully disciplined in accordance with the accepted model of feminine corporeal beauty. This sidestep into Jen’s experience of being naked in *public* communal showers is important for understanding the experience of being naked at home. Jen’s body fails to comply with the accepted code of beauty which transforms a potentially performative site into a site of failure and bodily betrayal. These public moments of failed corporeality bleed their way into private moments, embedding themselves within everyday practices that are carried out in private spaces. It is as though the eyes from the public sphere follow one into the private home and disavow the possibility for a fully private showering moment. Instead, one ‘invites’ others in to stand in as witness and judge, as Laura captures in the following:

I dunno yeah it’s just, you know, when you get out of the shower, it’s not so bad when I’m in the shower ‘cause I can’t see but when I get out of the shower the mirror’s right there so I grab my towel as quick as I can.

I dunno, I just don't wanna see 'cause I can see what they'd see you know.

(Laura, Clothing Journal Interview)

The naked moment was experienced by some of my participants as a moment of shame that thrust their bodies into the foreground and laid their bodies bare. When naked, the body is revealed in its purest sense as it is stripped of cultural artefact in the form of clothing. Instead, the body itself speaks its culture, marking itself as belonging to one cultural category or another. The negative construction of fatness is internalised as my larger-sized participants negotiated their naked self-image:

I stood and cried and cried and cried looking at myself ... I remember looking at myself in the bathroom mirror and just crying my eyes out ... just how big my shoulders and my body was ... my dearest wish was to have a lovely boyfriend ... my interpretation of the world was, 'if you're big, you're not desirable to men'.

(Charlotte, Shopping Trip)

Fatness marks the body in distinct ways that sets the fat body apart from accepted codes of feminine beauty. The fat body is the inherently transgressive body. Thus, the moment of undressing and standing naked, even alone in the privacy of one's own home, serves as a disruptive force that reminds of the body's failure to align with the heteronormative standard of feminine corporeal beauty. While the act of dressing may clothe the body in a more acceptable form the initial state of nakedness potentially remains as a haunting presence. If comfortable clothing makes the body disappear, the naked moment acts as Leder's (1990) dys-appearing body; the naked moment intrudes, making the body reappear in one's consciousness. The body's disappearance and reappearance resides within the moment of disruption that occurs when forced to face the self. By witnessing their own bodies and drawing unavoidably, on the body of constructed knowledge of fatness, their selves are rendered unstable and uncertain.

Showering is an everyday activity that forces the body into the mind. Similarly, the moment of dressing is a daily practice that places the body into the foreground, as Woodward (2005) describes in the following:

Lurking in the shadows behind the clothed people which populate academic writings is the individual's solitary 'wardrobe moment': standing in front of an array of clothing faced with the dilemma of what to wear. This unseen moment is where the anxieties, private insecurities and concerns occur, which do not form part of the self that is presented in public. (p.16)

The daily moment of uncertainty to which Woodward refers is difficult for many women of all shapes and sizes. However, I argue that it is more difficult for larger sized women for two reasons. First, as I explained in chapter five, the choice of clothing made available to larger women is considerably more limited than it is for other women. Second, the visibility of fatness and the concomitant social judgment of fatness of the body ensure that larger women must also bear in mind how society thinks about their bodies. At the moment of dressing, larger women must negotiate the weight of 'fat prejudice' and consider how they might best navigate their way around this.

For my participants the act of standing in front of the wardrobe in preparation for dressing for the day was often experienced as a disruptive moment, occurring in a number of different ways. First, for many of my participants, the spatial organisation of the wardrobe was a tangible reminder that many of their clothes no longer fit:

That's my corner of things that don't fit, that are too small.

(Beth, Wardrobe Rummage)

This is where I keep all the things I used to wear.

(Annette, Wardrobe Rummage)

Most of my participants had sections of their wardrobe, toward the ‘back’, where they kept items of clothing they no longer wore because they were now too small (or their bodies were too large). Indeed, Lynn and Charlotte had separate wardrobes where they kept such clothes. For Charlotte this wardrobe was filled with clothing she referred to as either “baggage” or “banished” clothing that was no longer able to comfortably accommodate her body:

This is pretty tragic, you’re gonna see clothes I’ve never actually worn. Never worn ... In the back of the wardrobe banished you know. Oh forget it. Not until I’m thinner.

(Charlotte, Wardrobe Rummage)

Although my participants were unwilling to part with these items, the presence of these garments served not as a reminder of the clothing’s failure to fit their bodies, but of their body’s failure to fit the clothing. Unattainable clothing hanging in the wardrobe has a taunting presence. The moment of dressing is carried out in the knowledge that much of the wardrobe’s contents are unavailable, due to the body’s failure. While for many women the goal of dressing in the morning is to create a look that ‘is me’ (S. Woodward, 2007), the emphasis for many of my participants was a need to find clothes that fitted. Time and again, they spoke of the need to “make do” when choosing clothes to wear. In fact, the words “it’ll do” or a reference to “mak[ing] do” figured as key phrases throughout the research, and the ideas the words represent were discussed by all of the participants at one time or another:

If you’re a [size] 10, 12 you can be fussy ‘cause you have a lot more choice. [It is] less acceptable to be fussy if you’re larger. [There’s] an element of having to make do.

(Jen, Shopping Trip)

I must have been in a ‘desperate to find something to wear mode’ and I must have tried it on and thought ‘yeah, that’ll do’ but I look like a

wedding cake ... so I have never ever worn this it just sits in the back of the wardrobe really.

(Beth, Wardrobe Rummage)

Clearly, my participants could not always dress in a way they felt best represented them. As a result of not always being able to locate clothing they liked or felt good in, the act of getting dressed centred primarily on what fitted rather than a creative process that conjured up a particular 'look'. Unavoidably, the structural limitations of the market place followed them home and reminded of their body's failure to fit the corporeal norms of society.

The act of dressing the body transforms the private body into the public body. So, while the moment of dressing occurs largely alone, we invite others in by imagining the perceptions of others (Woodward, 2005). Woodward's insight was reflected in conversations with my participants:

I always feel slightly anxious when I get dressed ... I often change several times before I'm happy. I also get anxious because I might see people I know.

(Ann, Excerpt from Clothing Journal)

I wouldn't care about any of this if it wasn't the other women of the world judging me.

(Charlotte, Excerpt from Clothing Journal)

My participants often spoke of the dilemma of dressing for the day in the knowledge that others might judge them; their imagined perception of others' judgment standing as a threat to their well-being and emotional stability. Although they often successfully negotiated this dilemma, by choosing something they were satisfied with or would at least suffice, they experienced this awareness as a disruptive force that challenged the ease with which they could dress each day. More importantly, the disruptive moment of standing before the wardrobe challenged their sense of self and

ultimately rendered the self unstable. The gaze is not only external to the self. Rather, my participants *became* the gaze of others, constructing their bodies as objects to be judged and critiqued. So, while standing in front of the wardrobe deciding what to wear, they were implicated in a decision making process that encapsulated the marketplace, public / private distinctions, and individual practices of self-representation. For the larger, clothed, female body, the personal continues to be thoroughly political.

Conclusion: The Dis/appearing Body

The purpose of this chapter has been to comment on larger women's clothing practices in the private space of the home. In particular I challenged unitary notions of the home as either a site of refuge away from the public eye, or a site in which larger women must face the self. My research has shown that on the one hand, the home provides respite from the gaze of others where larger women feel free to wear comfortable clothing that allows their bodies freedom of movement. However, the home is also the site in which we must "face up to [our]selves away from others" (Miller, 2001, p. 1), and various clothing moments of disruption ensure this is unavoidable. External intrusions along with seemingly innocuous everyday moments of disruption occurring from within the home itself have illustrated how these events challenge the construction of private space as truly private. Indeed, the home may be considered an extension of the public world in which the gaze of others follows larger women in through the cracks in the door.

The permeable nature of the boundaries of private and public spaces challenges Cahill's (2006) distinction between the body as both private and public, the former kept for oneself while the latter performs the self on a public stage. While I agree that the body may be considered both private and public, the boundaries between the two are far more obscure than Cahill suggests. It seems rather that it is the space *between* the private and public self, and private and public sites that is of greatest interest given that this is where the doubt and uncertainty may reside and where the cracks and fissures within re/presentations of the self may appear or be articulated. The 'space between' is perpetually a space of disruption and is potentially an ambiguous

and unsettling space. For the larger women taking part in this research, this space was difficult at times and required negotiating in an on-going manner. Given this, the home becomes a political site where private and public matters come together, the body made political at each moment of dressing or undressing, emphasising the extent to which clothing the body is a lived experience (Lunt & Livingstone, 1992; Tseëlon, 1995).

The concept of biographical disruption has been used in the field of health and illness to denote the effects of chronic illness on one's biography. The onset of chronic illness represents a "major kind of disruptive experience" in people's lives which causes them to rethink their biography and self-concept (Bury, 1982, p. 169). While this proposition has been challenged (see, Carricaburu & Pierret, 1995; Faircloth, Boylstein, Rittman, Young, & Gubrium, 2004), the notion of disruption is intriguing and is particularly pertinent to the present research. While Bury was concerned with major biographical ruptures related to health and illness, my research shows that seemingly innocuous everyday life events have the potential to serve as a disruptive force, insisting larger women's bodies are thrust into the foreground. My participants sought to position the body while at home in the background. They wore comfortable clothing that permitted freedom of movement that allowed their bodies to (metaphorically) disappear. However, intrusions into the home from outside, or moments of disruption occurring from within the home, *insist* the body is foregrounded. Such disruptive moments negate their attempts to 'forget' the body, and instead, remind of their failure to conform to the heteronormative standard of feminine corporeal beauty.

While Leder (1990) argues that people are not fully conscious of their bodies as they carry out daily activities, my research suggests otherwise. As my larger sized participants endured the ever present observation and judgment of others in public, and also engaged in their own practices of self-judgment, they found their bodies perpetually present. Rather than being part of the corporeal background, the body for my participants is part of the corporeal foreground. The body at home is produced in and through the practices that take place there, that incorporate both the intentional management of the everyday as well as the unintentional intrusions that disrupt the

self from the self. These practices construct the home as a site of ambiguity and ambivalence but critically, they also construct the self as a site of ambiguity and ambivalence. The body's disappearance and reappearance throughout a multiplicity of external and internal disruptions, renders the self unstable. This uncertainty and ambivalence ensures a psychological, social and cultural clash that threatens the hard fought for stability that is in the process of being negotiated. Thus, despite attempts to construct a stable sense of self, everyday practices and occurrences intrude on that stability and threaten constructions of identity.

Chapter Eight

Unravelling Spatial Tensions

In the previous chapters I focused my attention on the clothing practices of my participants in various public and private sites. These chapters explored space as though outside of the self; a geographical site into which the body enters, or does not. However, these spaces are not benign. Ultimately, they are sites of inclusion and exclusion; they are political. They are also corporeally contingent. The fat, female, clothed body alters these sites, shaping the ways in which they may be experienced. Longhurst (2005b) argues a need for research that links subjectivity with spatiality, suggesting it is “time to write fat bodies geographically” (p. 256). What Longhurst proposes is not simply research of fat people as they are located in spatial locations but instead an uncovering of how, and to what extent, spatial sites link together with the space of the body. Responding to Longhurst’s challenge, this chapter shifts emphasis. Rather than focusing on my participants’ clothing practices in a further spatial location, I focus instead on the body itself as intimately bound together with the clothing that resides around it; I consider the space *between* larger women’s bodies and their clothing.

Certainly, the body is not a space in the same way the beach can be considered a space. The body is not a structural or structuring space in which a person may enter or not. However, in an embodied sense the body can be a site of hunger and denial (Bordo, 2003), a site of and for the senses (Rodaway, 1994), and the site of emotions (Lupton, 1998) and desire (Bordo, 2003; Game & Metcalfe, 1996). As individuals, we are protective of our bodily space. Not only do we, at times, protect the space between ourselves and others (Novelli, Drury, & Reicher, 2010), we might also protect the integrity of our bodies through watching what we eat and being mindful of the way we move our bodies. We protect the boundaries of our bodies in multiple ways.

The 'boundary' is a useful conceptual tool for this chapter. The boundaries of the individual body are not clearly delineated. Cavallaro and Warwick (1998) underline the ambiguity of all bodies by drawing particular attention to those aspects of a person's biological body that are resistant to being firmly located either within the body or outside the body (such as hair, nails, sweat and tears). The boundaries of the female body are considered especially problematic, given the *fluidity* of women's bodily boundaries (for example, menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth) (Longhurst, 2001). However, given that fat is worn both *on* the body and *in* the body, the boundaries of the fat woman's body are further problematised for a number of reasons. First, larger women challenge the socio-normative boundaries of acceptable corporeality through their failure to conform to social expectations of slenderness (LeBesco, 2001). In turn, this challenges the extent to which they are placed unproblematically within the boundaries of femininity. Second, the materiality of fat on the body's surface is encapsulated by the language of ambiguity. Common parlance of fatness accentuates the ambiguity of its borders: bulging, chunky, bumpy, fleshy, lumpy, soft, squishy, rolls of fat, stomach flaps, and dimpled cellulite, each indicating the lack of solidity to fat flesh (Longhurst, 2005b). In chapter two, I discussed how the fat woman's body is constructed as the abject; the ambiguous and the in-between that defies boundaries of categorisation (Cavallaro & Warwick, 1998). If the *smooth* body is held up as an ideal standard by which all women may be compared (Morrison, 2007), the words and phrases mentioned above capture the

irregularity of larger bodies and highlight the extent to which the fat body's topography has a distinct spatiality in possession of uniquely ambiguous borders (Colls, 2007).

The ambiguities of these borders are further complicated when considering the role of clothing. The body is pivotal to 'carrying' clothing; clothing necessarily shadows the body suggesting it is *of* the body. Even when hanging in the wardrobe unworn, clothing possesses a ghostly shadow of its wearer (Ash, 1999). Equally, however, clothing stands apart from the body, serving as the body's appendage. These two contradictory positions, clothing as simultaneously part of the body, and adjunct to the body, highlight the extent to which clothing can be considered both a boundary and not a boundary of the body (Cavallaro & Warwick, 1998). Given the fleshy materiality of larger women's bodies, the relationship between clothing and their bodies is doubly ambiguous. It is this troublesome space between the two that is the focus of this chapter. Specifically, I argue that tensions emerge between the self, the body and clothing as my participants aimed to contain and control the boundaries of femininity, and the materiality of their clothed bodies. As I work through these tensions, the extent to which clothing acts as a powerful (and potentially autonomous) mediator in the construction of selfhood is illuminated.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, I examine my participants' efforts to dress themselves in femininity, challenging the discursively constructed boundaries of femininity in doing so. Second, I consider how my participants used clothing to alter the physical materiality of their bodies, resulting in corporeal boundaries more in keeping with ideal constructions of femininity. Finally, I examine the tensions arising from these practices, paying particular attention to the way agency is 'played out' in the intimate space between larger women's bodies and their clothing.

Constructing the Feminine

Clothing is pivotal to the construction of larger women's selfhood. Giddens (1991) argues that the self is constructed through a reflexive awareness of one's biography as a coherent temporal narrative. A reflexive engagement with one's narrative actively

and self-consciously shapes how we interpret our past, how we experience the present, and how we imagine our future; it assists the shaping of identity. Of course biographies are not rigid. Rather, biographical narratives are subject to the ebb and flow of life events that shift in accordance with our life span. Although Giddens pays little attention to the role material objects such as clothing have to play in the construction of biography, clothing can be crucial for the construction of biography both past and present (Woodward 2007). Connections with particular items of clothing allow the wearer to construct a sense of the self in the present while also retaining a sense of connection to times past (Banim & Guy, 2001). Similarly, clothing serves as a material prompt for the potentiality of future selves. Additionally, on an everyday basis, clothing is chosen, discarded and worn in order to quite literally clothe the body in the story of oneself.

The extent to which clothing serves as a tool for self-construction is important for considering larger women's use of clothing on an everyday basis. As discussed above, the boundaries of larger women's bodies are not clearly delineated. However, fat, fleshy bodies also fall outside the boundaries of socio-normative constructions of femininity that abound in popular culture. Few women in the western world would remain unaware of the current constructions of ideal feminine beauty (Carryer, 1997). Slim, tall, athletic, and tanned are just some of the characteristics of the so-called ideal feminine body while their antonyms (fat, short, unfit and pale) draw an image of the most undesirable physical characteristics. My participants used clothing in an attempt to bridge the space between these two positions.

Dressed Femininity

When dressing, my participants were often mindful of their bodies' failure to align with feminine ideals and, as a result, it was not uncommon for them to experience daily dressing as a challenge. In chapter five, I discussed the masculinisation of larger women's clothing in the marketplace. This was often experienced by my participants first, as a source of frustration and second, the sub-text internalised by some as a belief that they were unfeminine. In response, a number of my participants attempted to intentionally dress themselves in femininity, drawing on distinctly feminine

archetypes of women's clothing that are (speciously) assumed to be unambiguous in their representation of feminine identity.

To be clear, my participants did not have a unitary notion of what constitutes feminine representation through clothing. In fact, they had remarkably different ideas of how to represent themselves as feminine women. For example, although Lynn liked to wear smart business style suits with lots of funky jewellery to “pretty it up”, Georgie appreciated “bright, fun and feminine” colours such as shocking pink and citrus yellows and greens. While Ann opted for classic and elegant black or edgier street styles for casual wear, Charlotte enjoyed dressing as a “vampy femme fatale” with lots of dark colours that edged toward the erotic in style. Often clothes were adorned with traditional markers of (feminine) gender such as frills and lace:

The skirts are feminine ... a brown one with velvet in material, layered ... Another one's ... got lace, it's sort of like frilly and it just comes down to lower mid leg, it feels good.

(Annette, Clothing Journal Interview)

It's a lovely skirt on ... it does feel very feminine. I think all this 'round the bottom makes it feel nice ... and it's just really pretty ... it's a nice light material ... but it's frilly at the bottom so it makes it feminine.

(Beth, Wardrobe Rummage)

The variable feminine clothing repertoires of my participants are indicative of the diversity of subject positions available to them to construct a feminine self, despite the existing limitations. Moreover, the diversity evident *within* each participant's wardrobe is also evidence of post-modern subjects resistant to singular notions of selfhood. That said, key ‘looks’ did dominate many of my participants' wardrobes and these looks were often aimed at establishing an unequivocally feminine identity. The case of Annette captures how comprehensive these understandings were, encapsulating a multi-sensory understanding of clothing that incorporated style, fit,

colour and fabric. Although Annette could not identify her favourite item of clothing during the wardrobe rummage, she had no trouble identifying her favourite ‘look’:

Overall [I prefer] skirts ‘cause it feels nice and feminine. I do have some trousers ... but I don’t feel as feminine. It’s practical but it’s not feminine and that’s an important part of me ... Things like my handkerchief skirt ... I like [how] it falls down the sides and makes different lines. Feeling really good when I wear it ... it makes me feel feminine ... I like to be feminine so there’s gotta be a flow of things ... I tend to like stuff that gives a floaty image ... I like the pinks and the pastels and the mauves and the blues. I do go for brighter colours sometimes but it’s the smoother colours and the nice skirts that have a bit of a swirl to them or whatever that I feel good in.

(Annette, Clothing Journal Interview)

Annette owned a number of these skirts in a variety of soft pastel colours, although her favourite colour is reportedly pink: “pink to me is very feminine so when I’m wearing that I feel feminine”. The fabrics too were soft and “light” in texture and weight; velvets that were soft to the touch, or polyester blends that would slip and slide across the skin. Even Annette’s winter weight wool coat has a free-floating shape that “swished” as she moved in it. These elements are clear markers of conventional femininity and they serve her well as she attempts to dress herself in femininity. Annette’s appreciation for feminine, floaty clothing must be read in context. Annette feels that because of her size, she does not always appear feminine. She is mindful that others might see her as “big and bulky”, ideas that resonate with common constructions of masculinity. However, “inside” Annette still wants to *be* feminine, wants to be *perceived* as feminine, and in fact, still *feels* feminine. By wearing clothing that draws heavily on stereotyped constructions of femininity, Annette actively constructs her body as feminine in appearance. Crucially, she renders visible the way she *feels* about her body and herself, despite private concerns that her efforts are not fully successful.

The second major way my participants constructed a feminine identity for themselves was through their use of clothing to accentuate feminine curves and shapes, thus emphasising the femininity of the body itself:

Hey we've got boobs, we can show them off, we might want to disguise our waists a little but don't discount the fact that we've got shape.

(Janie, Shopping Trip)

Accentuating feminine curves often involved revealing to others that they did have a feminine shape, the only exception being that it was a “bit bigger than other peoples” (Beth). For example, Jen pointed out to me that she did in fact “still have a waist” while Charlotte described her shape as an “hourglass”. Evolutionary psychologist, Singh (2004) considers the role of waist-to-hip ratios (WHR) in determining physical attractiveness, arguing that one of the prerequisites to being considered attractive is to have a low WHR. For my participants, who often had fuller waists, the emphasis tended to be placed on the breasts. In contemporary western society, “breasts are the symbol of feminine sexuality” (Young, 1990, p. 190). In fact, the value of a woman is often considered in relation to the size and shape of her breasts with “the ‘best’ breasts ... [being] firm, round, sitting high on the chest and large, but not bulging (Morrison, 2007, p. 29). With this in mind, it comes as no surprise that some of my participants spoke of their breasts as a redeeming physical feature that unquestioningly placed them within the category of the feminine woman.

I've got these breasts. I love my breasts. Yes, they're huge, but with the right bra ... makes me look nice and round.

(Jen, Photo Elicitation)

Jen believed that many smaller-breasted women would be envious of her generous bust-size and declared them her “best feature”. As such, she enjoyed wearing clothing that accentuated her breasts and cleavage. She did this by wearing tight fitting tops

that clung to the body and revealed the underlying shape²³. One of Jen's favourite tops was "quite figure hugging". Jen loved it because "it really clings to my breasts, made the breasts nice and rounded, and comes in at my waist and still has a little bit to go over my jeans". Similarly, Laura liked to wear tops that drew attention to her breasts, revealing her cleavage and in the process drawing attention away from other parts of her body, such as her hips and thighs. For Jen and Laura, the attention gained was attention gained for the "right reasons". Their standpoint reflects a positive "breasted experience" (Young, 1990, p. 190), where they felt able to appreciate their bodies as sexual, sensual and intrinsically *feminine*. They used clothing to reveal the body in careful and considered ways in order to enhance the construction of their bodies as feminine.

In doing so, Jen and Laura challenge unitary notions of what it means to be feminine by attempting to position their own (socially unaccepted) larger bodies *within* the boundaries of heteronormative femininity. This is quite different from actions that challenge the existing boundaries of feminine beauty. For example, the *Fat Acceptance Movement's* primary objective is the subversion of (thin) beauty norms through redefining the fat body as beautiful (Wann, 1999). However, my participants do not adopt an overtly political position. On the contrary, they intentionally retain the existing boundaries of femininity by drawing on a diverse range of feminine signifiers including lace and pastels, and breasts and cleavage. This allows them to reposition their bodies within the boundaries, rather than on, or beyond, the margins of femininity.

Embodying the Feminine

My participants' emphasis on wearing feminine clothing and emphasising overtly feminine aspects of the body raises important matters in considering the relationship

²³ Not all of the participants felt this way. For example, Ann, felt self-conscious of the size of her breasts and the uninvited attention they were awarded, especially by men. However, in this section I want to focus on those participants who appreciated their breasts and used clothing to *enhance* them.

between clothing and the body. The clothing we wear, and the meanings we imbue those garments with, are closely connected with how we feel when wearing them:

Inside I'm very feminine. I take pride in trying to get my hair and makeup right and to look like a woman 'cause I am a woman [laughs]. But there's something that's a little bit different when you're bigger ... There's a difference between what one must be seen to be perceived as, to what one is, or what one wants, and I guess that's carried over in how I look, but inside I still want to be feminine. That's me, that's not got anything to do with anything else.

(Annette, Clothing Journal Interview)

Annette describes how she feels inside but contrasts this with her understanding of how she might appear to others; she understands that others might not view her in a feminine light. Yet she insists her appreciation for feminine clothing and the way it makes her *feel* is most important. The body is endlessly invoked in moments of dressing. As we dress, we feel cloth slide against the skin, and we feel the sensation of flesh shifting against fabric. However, clothing is not simply worn on the body as bodily embellishment or adjunct (Entwistle, 2000; Sweetman, 2001). Nor is it simply another part of the process of self-presentation (Guy & Banim, 2000). Rather, clothing also serves as a means through which the body is constructed (and continually transformed) as we subjectively *embody* the clothing we wear (Entwistle, 2000; Entwistle & Wilson, 2001). Annette, irrespective of the perceptions or opinions of others, feels feminine when wearing her feminine clothes. In effect, she takes on or embodies the meanings she awards the garments. In this way, clothing provides a powerful tool for the construction of a positive and feminine sense of self, important for those facing social judgment and condemnation.

While Annette (and others) embrace and embody a particular style of clothing, Georgie embraces a particular fabric - animal prints. Georgie owns numerous tops and dresses, as well as the accessories of handbags and shoes, in a variety of animal prints. Over time, the prints have become an integral aspect of her identity, so much

so that she now enjoys impromptu animal-printed gifts from friends and family who equate the patterns with her. Georgie weaves the prints tightly with her personal narrative as she tells funny stories of threatening to attend a local rugby league game wearing a cougar printed dress, when the opponents were named *Cougars*. Despite being informed by an expert wardrobe stylist that animal prints were “not such a good idea” for her, she continues to wear and enjoy them. The mistake the wardrobe stylist made was to assume Georgie chooses the print because of how it looks. However, for Georgie, her attraction to the prints moves beyond the appearance of the cloth and instead encompasses the power and authority of the animal itself. When I asked her about her love of animal print, she explained:

Spiritually ... I know that we're attracted to something that ... we need at a time ... I'm kind of associating [animal prints] with coming into my own power which I seem to have done since I've got to 50 and gone grey and now I don't actually care what anyone thinks ... it's obviously doing something for me at the moment.

(Georgie, Clothing Journal Interview)

The central storyline of Georgie’s narrative, evident in the quote above and my conversations with her throughout the course of the research, is that of spiritual independence, freedom and the possibility of “coming into [her] own power”, all characteristics she feels are represented in powerful animal prints. In Georgie’s case, there is a successful fit between the idea she has of clothing and how she feels while wearing clothing.

Both Georgie and Annette embody the positive meanings they attribute to their chosen clothing. However, while Georgie appears fully successful in adopting the positive characteristics of the animal prints and all they convey, Annette articulates a disconnection between how she feels on the inside as a “feminine woman” and her ability to pass as feminine over a sustained period. Although she dresses as feminine and wants to feel feminine, Annette often reportedly feels “unattractive, big and bulky”. Clearly, the clothing she wears on the outside and the way she feels on the

inside are at times incongruous. Unlike Georgie, Annette does not *fully* embody the meaning she has attributed to the clothing she wears. Despite the agency she demonstrates in actively choosing ‘womanly’ clothes, a tension ensues between her intentions and her body as Annette’s body refuses to fully comply with her desire to present herself as fully feminine. Charlotte also experiences a corporeal disjuncture when wearing her full-length maxi-dress:

I don't feel feminine in my figure and in myself so if I put on a dress I feel weird in it... and I feel like matronly ... just freaks me out ... there's so much fabric in it as well. I just feel like this great big wall of fabric coming at somebody, you know ... it just makes me look enormous and it's kind of how I feel in that dress.

(Charlotte, Clothing Journal Excerpt)

Woodward (2005b) writes of an “aesthetic disjuncture” to describe what happens when a person puts an outfit together that fails to come together and represent them as they desire (p. 24). The process described above is not dissimilar. The difference here, however, is that the disjuncture occurs between the clothing and the body itself; there is in effect a corporeal / sartorial incongruity between the larger woman’s body and her clothes. Although I concur with Entwistle’s (2000) thesis that clothing is embodied, it seems in this circumstance that it is the tension between the clothing and the body itself that is embodied. In effect, Charlotte, and to a lesser extent Annette, embody this tension that develops between their intended feminine construction and the failure of their fleshy over-sized bodies to comply.

Shaping the Body

The plasticity of bodies means they can be ‘worked on’ and shaped in accordance with current social expectations (Shilling, 1993). With this in mind, control over the body has become a prominent discursive repertoire in contemporary western society as women in particular seek to regulate their everyday practices in order to take charge over the flesh (Turner 1992). The beauty industry is founded in women’s desire to align their bodies more closely with the heteronormative feminine ideal.

Typically, this can involve a cycle of reduction dieting (Bordo, 2003; Germov & Williams, 1999), inestimable time spent at the gym shaping the body into submission (Markula & Pringle, 2006; Wharton, Adams, & Hampl, 2008), plucking and waxing at beauty salons (Black, 2004), and even cosmetic surgery to slice the body into submission (Bordo, 2003). While some of these practices might be pleasurable for some women, the reality remains that they encapsulate the operations of the wider beauty industry that constructs the fat feminine body as inherently problematic and objectionable (Black, 2004).

Shaping Materiality

With the malleability of the body in mind, a number of my participants aimed to shape the materiality of their bodies using clothing. In particular, underwear, including bras and control garments, were often used to bring the physicality of the body under control. Bras have a long history in western society, the contemporary design of which can be traced back to the corsetieres of the nineteenth century (Farrell-Beck & Gau, 2002). Historically, bras reflect the fashions or social occurrences of the day, binding the breasts flat in the 1920s when flapper style dresses and a boyish figure were *en vogue*, and lifting and separating with the conically shaped Torpedo bra to allow for the sweater-girl look during World War II (Farrell-Beck & Gau, 2002). In the 1980s, the bra *created* fashion when Jean Paul Gaultier dressed Madonna in conically shaped satin bras, making it legitimate for underwear to be worn as outerwear. More recently, not only the shape but also the pattern of bras is closely tied to the fashion system. However, while the New Zealand based underwear company *Bendon* may claim the inspiration for their most recent designs was “gypsy caravans and prancing ponies” (2010), the broad goal of the bra remains: to lift and separate, enlarge or minimise the bust as required, thus creating the desired contemporary feminine silhouette. Bras, it seems, are particularly useful for shaping the body into a desired fashionable and feminine form, and thus prove effective in controlling the appearance of the body.

I spoke earlier of my participants’ desire to emphasise the overt femininity of their bodies by drawing particular attention to their breasts. However, larger in overall size,

most of my participants also had larger breasts (“whopping big boobs” as Charlotte described hers). And larger breasts typically lose the desired ‘perkiness’ as gravity challenges their capacity to sit high on the chest:

My breasts hang low [laughs].

(Rose, Wardrobe Rummage)

Trying to get the proper lift to stop the gravity.

(Annette, Clothing Journal Interview)

Although Rose preferred not to wear “uplifting” or “bony” bras, most of my participants chose to wear the “right” bra in order to modify the physicality of their bodies in accordance with the expectation that women’s breasts be perky, as well as relatively immobile. From Jen:

The bra I’ve got on now is very pretty and just perfect and holds me up and gives me a bit more definition. You know, I don’t like saggy old bras ... it holds you up and makes you feel proud ... not pulling at the back, not pulling down, or not giving the extra breasts out the sides or the back ... with the right bra ... it makes me look nice and round ... it lifts your bosom up and then shows your waist.

(Jen, Photo Elicitation)

A wire will give you just a little bit more shape ... you get better uplift ... and good support makes you look good on the outside.

(Ann, Shopping Trip)

By wearing bras that lifted, separated and created the desired shape, my participants effectively altered the physicality of their bodies in accordance with the ideal feminine body. I appreciate that most women in western society wear a bra, and most do so in order to lift and contain their breasts. However, uplift was just one goal for

my participants. Wearing a bra also clearly differentiated between various parts of the body; it lifted the breasts away from the stomach and torso, “break[ing] up” the apparent solidity of fat flesh:

With the bra and knickers, they sort of lift this up and suck this in, and break up the flesh. But when you’ve got it all in one, flesh and rolls ... you can see all the rolls and the curves, and the size of it on the side ... seeing that the belly is out the same distance as your boobs, and it just mushes into one big fleshy mess.

(Charlotte, Clothing Journal Interview)

Breasts were not the only part of the body to receive my participants’ attention. They also spoke of other parts of the body which required bringing under control in various ways. Georgie, for example, sought to “smooth” her body by wearing either a one piece swimsuit or an all-in-one control undergarment under her clothing. This, she found, was the ideal antidote to the “lumps and bumps” as the swimwear “held all these bits in and gave me a flattering figure”. Similarly, while Beth has her “standard underwear”, she also has “magic knickers” which are “kind of meant to be the ... answer to every large woman’s problems”. Although the magic knickers are “hot” and “tight” and “not overly comfortable”, Beth wears them at times as they “iron out” the creases of her body (see Figure 8.1):

When you’re wearing a particular dress ... and you want to just iron out the creases a little bit ... the magic knickers ... come right up to your chest, but they will smooth, they will flatten ... they don’t flatten my tummy, they just hold it firmer. I mean they don’t make it go away and it doesn’t make it any smaller, it just holds it steadier.

(Beth, Clothing Journal Interview)

Figure 8.1 Magic knickers.



Underwear has been shown to be invested with meanings of sexuality and power (Fields, 2006). However, the primary discursive repertoire being drawn upon by my participants when discussing underwear was a desire for physical control over the body. The ideal feminine body is smooth and has clearly differentiated parts. The “creases”, rolls and folds of a fat, fleshy body sit in opposition to this. However, by using ‘control underwear’ that sucks flesh in, and smoothes the surface of the body, the boundaries of the fat, unruly body are (partially) transformed into a controlled and more acceptable silhouette. Importantly, this work on underwear actively transforms the appearance of clothing on the body as the fabric of outerwear now resides against a smooth surface. In this way, my participants’ practices bring order to the disorder of their bodies, and their practices serve a disciplinary role that effectively forces the body into submission:

Look at the straps ... look, look at this. The straps are monsters. Look at the back. You know it is a piece of engineering, isn't it?

(Beth, Wardrobe Rummage)

The suggestion her bra might be “engineered” is revealing. In keeping with suggestions by Spitzack (1990), these practices demonstrate a self-disciplined subject readily embracing behaviours in order to shape their bodies into a more desirable and currently fashionable shape. In effect, the materiality of underwear shapes the materiality of the body, which shapes the materiality of outerwear, moulding the form of the body more closely with current ideas of feminine attractiveness (Fields, 2007).

It was not only important for my participants to control the appearance or static physicality of their bodies but also to control the *movement* of their (clothed) body in a dynamic sense. The ideal woman’s body does not only look a particular way but it is also relatively immobile. The stomach is flat, the thighs are toned, triceps are steady, and the breasts are firm; the normative feminine body moves little. In contrast, the fat body seemingly has a life of its own. Indeed, it is difficult to speak of the fat, fleshy, female body without reference to movement directly, such as, “*jiggly* bits around my stomach and thighs” (Laura), and “*wobbly* bits under my arms” (Jen), or metaphors of movement, such as “[my] *jelly* belly” (Charlotte).

The excessive movement of the fat body further marks the fat fleshy body as beyond the boundaries of acceptability; the jiggly, wobbly, jelly-like body is a transgressive body. The fat body transgresses the bounds of accepted corporeality through its appearance, and its movement. The latter underlines a lack of control over the (unruliness of the) body generally. However, by wearing underwear that constrains and confines the body, the defiant *movement* of the body is brought under control; albeit in limited ways. In addition, the outward appearance of clothing is improved as the body appears smoother because as Ann pointed out, the appropriate underwear “makes you look good on the outside”.

Unravelling Spaces of Tension

So far, I have discussed the everyday clothing practices my participants engage in as they attempt to bring their bodies under control and align their bodies more closely with a feminine ideal. This perhaps suggests, somewhat problematically, that my participants were fully successful in taking control over the appearance and

movement of their bodies. It implies they were fully agentic and were able to move beyond the constraining limitations of their bodies and the dominant discourses of fatness that inscribe their bodies with meaning. However, this was not always the case. In practice, their attempts to bring their unruly bodies under control, both socially and physically, were embedded within on-going tensions between their (embodied) selves, socio-cultural understandings of fatness, and clothing.

In the following, I turn my attention to the tensions operating within this triadic relationship, while emphasising the practices my participants engaged as they mediated this tension. First, I discuss how my participants ‘carried themselves’ in an attempt to negotiate others’ perception of them and alter the physicality of the body. Second, I consider more closely the tension between the body and clothing itself. In this section, I explore the way clothing acts against the larger wearer. In particular, I address how my participants aimed to ease the tension in the intimate space between the body and clothing by engaging in a variety of habitual corporeal practices.

A Peopled Tension

One of the tensions that arose as my participants clothed their bodies was the difficulty of successfully navigating the space between themselves and another. As discussed throughout this thesis, the larger body is constructed as problematic in today’s society. Yet through the clothing choices they made, many of my participants aimed to reposition themselves within the bounds of heteronormative femininity. Their practices emphasise a rational actor taking advantage of the communicative capacity of clothing and the extent to which both bodies and clothing are assumed to be encoded and consequently able to be read by others in an accurate fashion (Davis, 2007). However, although my participants could dress themselves in femininity by drawing on a range of feminine signifiers such as breasts and cleavage, and lace and pastel, and they could “feel quite sexy” (Jen) or “feel more feminine” (Annette) as a result, they had limited control over how others perceived them. Given the hegemony of the dominant discourses of fatness, their (clothed) bodies got in the way of how they could be read by others, ensuring a fully feminine identity was a tenuous subject position to maintain.

The capacity of others to read the clothed body accurately is not straightforward. Certainly, there are moments when my participants were assured their feminine performance had been successful and they had ‘passed’, to borrow Goffman’s (1990) terminology, as feminine. This was especially the case when they received feedback from others, such as when Charlotte was thrown an appreciative glance, or a work colleague commented positively on Annette’s appearance. However, at other times, the experience of ‘being in’ the clothed body did not align with my participants’ intentions. For example, despite Annette wearing overtly feminine clothing designed to construct a persuasive feminine persona, catching sight of herself in the mirror as a hunched and bulky old woman brings her back to her (over-sized) body, highlighting the extent to which she failed to personify her construction of the feminine.

It seems the stability of a fully feminine subject position for the clothed larger woman is perpetually provisional as the interplay of bodies, clothing, and the socio-cultural construction of the meanings associated with each are brought together. The negative discourses of fatness weave their way into the everyday clothing practices of larger women, rupturing the space between the objective and intentional actor and the subjective and emotional self. This creates an unstable space in which the boundaries of (clothed) feminine identity are often elusive. It seems somewhat paradoxical that even in the moment of ‘passing’ as feminine, larger women’s corporeal failure can be simultaneously laid bare; a visible trace of their failed bodies left behind.

In addition to dressing themselves in feminine clothing and using clothing to emphasise the most feminine aspects of their physicality, my participants also engaged in various practices of *comportment* in order to further negotiate the space of their bodies. Given the ways in which clothing shadows the wearer, following every movement of the body itself, comportment is crucial to the way clothing represents the self. The way clothing and the body move and work together is important for the performance of self. An important aspect of this was how the self was ‘carried’:

I am inclined, you know - big bust, to hunch a little bit. So I do try to remind myself to pull my tummy in and straighten myself up too. Because it's better for my posture, but also, it does make me look better.

And I think it just separates out [the torso] ... it gives me a bit more shape really. So holding my stomach in ... trying to suck it in ... it doesn't make me look any smaller. It just makes me look more under control I guess ... I try to remind myself to lift my head and hold my shoulders back a bit more, but I just kind of automatically try and hold my stomach in a wee bit.

(Beth, Clothing Journal Interview)

Corporeal comportment, or the way one carries the self, was crucial for my participants. By reminding herself to “pull my tummy in” and “straighten myself up”, Beth attempts to alter the shape of her body, and the appearance of her clothes. She lengthens her torso, separates her bust from her stomach and importantly, aligns her body more closely with social understandings of the ‘best’ feminine shape. By altering the materiality of her body, Beth creates the illusion of someone taller with a more defined shape. In doing so, she potentially alters the way she will be perceived by others.

Similarly, Jen discussed how her effort to “stand tall”, could alter others’ perception of her. While Beth altered the materiality of her body, Jen shaped the space between herself and another, thus presenting her body more favourably:

If you feel good about yourself it really shows. The minute you start camouflaging you start to hide behind the camouflage. The aura that it gives is really obvious and people see it ‘cause as soon as I started feeling good about myself and standing tall I never got teased for being fat. As soon as I sort of claimed myself ... it was the aura, the persona I took on and never once did I get teased about being overweight.

(Jen, Wardrobe Rummage)

By “standing tall”, Jen and others *feel* more confident, more able, and more assured about their bodies. Although different in intent, the everyday clothing (and habitual bodily) practices Beth and Jen engage in, reinforce Giddens’ (1991) understanding of

the self as a reflexive project. Through shaping the body or shaping the perceptions of others, they are able to construct a more positive sense of themselves. These “techniques of the body” (Mauss, 1973, p. 70) are thoroughly gendered and sized; the practices are directly connected to a desire to construct a more feminine physique and overall appearance. Moreover, these habitual corporeal techniques do so without verbally laying claim to such an identity. As de Certeau (1984) suggests, it is possible to uncover how the body speaks through everyday practices rather than language. Through conscious and unconscious techniques of the body, my participants’ bodily practices challenge the topography of the available map of fatness, and instead create possible itineraries for themselves.

Spaces of Intimate Tension

Throughout this thesis, I have placed a good deal of emphasis on larger women’s

Figure 8.2 Like a vine on a Rata tree.



agency in respect of their clothing practices. This section shifts focus and instead considers the tension that arises in the intimate space between clothing and the body itself - inadvertently produced through the women’s agency. Although as the wearer of clothes we enact agency, choosing what to wear and under what conditions, clothing does not always behave in ways we might expect (Woodward, 2005b). At times, clothing challenges the wearer’s authority in a multiplicity of ways and to

various effects. In the following, I suggest that larger women animate the agency of clothes, opening up an intimate space of tension.

Clothing marks the boundary between oneself and another (Entwistle, 2000). Equally, the boundary between bodies and clothing is clearly delineated. However, while it seems obvious to suggest that the materiality of cloth is distinct from the materiality of the body, these seemingly obvious distinctions become troublesome when considering the fluid boundaries of the body (Longhurst, 2001). Moreover, when considering the larger body, these claims become more troublesome still. For my participants, the boundary between clothing and the body was ambiguous and not clearly delineated. At times, clothing clearly left its mark on the body by “digging”, “biting”, “rubbing” and “chafing” the surface of the skin. For some, the result was a permanent reminder of the clothes’ presence. For example, as a result of wearing bras to accommodate her larger (and heavier) breasts, Ann now sports permanent indentations in her shoulders where her bra strap has dug into her flesh. The materiality of the bra has permanently etched its way into the materiality of the body. Rose captured the relationship between her body and clothes photographically (see Figure 8.2), likening the tree to her body while the vine wrapped around the tree denoted clothing wrapping itself around her body. On taking the photograph Rose wished to metaphorically demonstrate the way clothing clings, and possesses the capacity to constrain, hold, restrict and confine the body.

Clothing also finds its way (uninvited) into the fleshy crevices of the larger woman’s body. All my participants spoke of the way their clothing moved around their bodies in ways they did not intend. Charlotte spoke of a semi-fitted t-shirt sliding up over her hips, creating a “body sock” effect. Janie discussed her dislike of stockings given the way they rolled down over her stomach, settling under her belly. Rose told me about trousers and jeans that rode up, at the same time as her fat spilt over the top and Laura talked with me about tops that caught under her breasts, slipping forward to reveal more cleavage than intended. Clothing does not always behave in the ways intended by the wearer and, importantly, clothing often breaches the boundaries of the body itself.

Clearly, the relationship between clothing and the (larger) body is not straightforward. This is not to suggest that clothing does not move around the smaller woman's body in the same way. However, the difference for larger women is the lack of smoothness to the surface of the body which provides multiple ridges and crevices, or "hills and valleys" (Rose), for clothes to lodge. As previously discussed, these creases and folds of flesh create ambiguous bodily boundaries, allowing the increased encroachment of clothing on, or in, the body; clothing and fat flesh are forever encroaching on each other's space:

I'm constantly making sure that it's [clothing] where I want it to be. I'm always conscious of the fact. Has my top ridden up? ... Is it down over my bottom? Or, is it down over my stomach? ... I would constantly be checking ... all the time, and I do it unconsciously. I don't realise I'm doing it ... Can I pull this down? Rearrange it better. I guess kind of make it look a bit better.

(Rose, Clothing Journal Interview)

Sitting at desk. Very aware of top riding up over back. I keep pulling it down. Don't want to show bare skin ... very conscious all day of spare tyre. Every time I sat down I rearranged my top. Can't wait to get home and change into something more comfy.

(Beth, Clothing Journal Excerpt)

When first trying on clothes, they may look good, and the boundaries of each may be clearly differentiated. However, as we get on with our day, clothing shifts and moves. It moulds around the body, it rides up over flesh, and it slides down around rotund bellies. At these times, the boundaries of the body become temporarily enmeshed with the boundaries of clothes. Participant Rose explains that one of the functions of clothing for larger women is to disguise, or cover up, the rolls and folds of the flesh. However, when clothing slides into the body's crevices, it accentuates the ambiguity of the body's boundaries, amplifying the "lumps and bumps". This spatial

encroachment between fleshy bodies and clothing emphasises the ambiguity of each of their borders.

However, I found that my participants engaged in a variety of habitual practices that mediated unwanted revelations of the body, and tempered the problematic boundaries of body and clothes:

I've got this thing when I'm walking around ... [standing to demonstrate] making sure that my t-shirt, it can't be stuck up here [within the folds of her waist]. So when I'm walking around ... I've got this little flicky thing and it kind of flicks it out of the groove here ... it's a habit and it drives me insane but I'm constantly conscious that I'm doing it, and it's all to do with rearranging my top

so that it ... still falls right.

(Rose, Clothing Journal Interview)

The subconscious flicks of the wrists to dislodge t-shirts from folds of flesh, as well as other participants' practices such as pulling the edges of cardigans across the chest to disguise the stomach (Beth), and scooping tops up to cover the cleavage (Charlotte), clearly demonstrate corporeal knowledge garnered to mediate the body's failure to fit. Through constantly addressing the fit between the body and clothing, my participants ensure the private body remains private. Moreover, these practices ensure their clothing 'behaves'. The word *behaves* denotes the anthropomorfication of clothing; clothing either does, or does not, do as it is told. While clearly, the clothing does not possess the human characteristics required to make such a decision, the body itself 'makes' the clothing misbehave by not "fall[ing] right". Equally, however, it is through the routinised practices of my participants that they manage to bring the clothes back into order and their rightful place. At such moments, tacit knowledge is carried, or lodged, in the body as they demonstrate their awareness of their bodies' failure, but also demonstrate their awareness of the practices required to (partially) remedy that failure. In doing so, they realign (momentarily) the tension filled space between clothing and the larger body.

There is a further important tension residing within these corrective practices or bodily techniques. Meyers (2004) rightly suggests that “countless women who believe in their own equality embody their own inequality” (p. 80). Although speaking of a different context this is a useful insight when considering the remedial practices of my participants. Through their attempts to bring the body under control, and the relationship between the body and clothing to order, my participants inadvertently claim their bodies as out of control. In doing so, they reify the dominant discourse that constructs their larger fleshy bodies as problematic in the first instance which unintentionally reinforces the social illegitimacy of the fat woman’s body. Although Uhlmann and Uhlmann (2005) might argue such practices are *extra-discursive* in that they are produced in and through social interaction, I suggest they are deeply embedded within the dominant discourses available for thinking through fatness. Moreover, among other things, it is the engagement of bodily practices such as wrist-flicking, t-shirt scooping and arm-folding that simultaneously animates those discourses, bringing them to life and ensuring their on-going legitimacy.

Conclusion

The sociological canon has placed great emphasis on the place of the body and its influence in the construction of selfhood (Crossley, 2006; Howson & Inglis, 2001; Shilling, 1993). In particular, the plasticity of the body and its capacity to be reshaped into a socially accepted and ideal form has received considerable scholarly attention (Bordo, 2003). In this chapter, I have reopened the space (and plasticity) of the body, considering more specifically the role of clothing in shaping larger women’s bodies.

Not always overtly discussed, but always underpinning this chapter, is the conceptual notion of boundaries. In a geographical sense, boundaries mark one place from another, creating clear territorial distinctions. However, boundaries are not only geographical. The body also possesses discrete impermeable boundaries that mark the final frontier between the self and another (McDowell, 1999); the boundaries of the body are symbolic and powerful signifiers of the margins between self and others (Tulloch & Lupton, 2003). However, the boundaries of the body are not clearly

established. Douglas' (1966) work on the problematic boundaries of the body is useful here:

We should expect the orifices of the body to symbolise its specially vulnerable points. Matter arising from them is marginal stuff of the most obvious kind. Spittle, blood, milk, urine, faeces or tears by simply issuing forth have traversed the boundary of the body. (p. 121)

These words emphasise the ambiguity of the body's borders, and the ease with which the boundaries of the body may be breached. However, as first discussed in chapter two, the boundaries of the fat, fleshy, female body are more troublesome because fat is located both *inside* and *outside* the body. Corporeal boundaries are penetrated as fat enters the body but also settles on the body's surface; a substance at once *of* the body and *on* the body. Additionally, the discourse of fat itself is unquestionably dangerous for both individual and society; it is constructed as an impurity or polluting substance that is inherently threatening to the internal machinations of both the individual and the social body. Considering also the permeable and problematic boundaries of clothing, the space between clothing and the larger body becomes troublesome as each intrudes on the space of the other.

Taking this as a starting point, this chapter has shown how my participants engaged in a variety of habitual practices that effectively served as a negotiating tool between the boundaries of clothing and the body, and aimed to bring the unruly boundaries of their bodies under control. Dressing the self in femininity allowed them to more clearly delineate their position within the category feminine. Moreover, a variety of techniques permitted them to alter the physicality of their bodies, shaping the surface of their bodies into a more accepted feminine corporeality. Thus, the materiality of clothing makes possible the reshaping of the materiality of the body itself, aligning the body more closely with feminine ideals. These agentic practices support Giddens' (1991) claim that the self is a reflexive project. However, somewhat paradoxically, the practices at once provide greater freedoms to larger women as they reposition themselves within the boundaries of the category feminine, while also serving as a

dominating force that accentuates their failure to meet the requirements of femininity in the first instance.

The simultaneously liberating and controlling effects of these practices, demonstrate the tenuous relationship between clothing and the body. On controlling the physicality of the body, the body itself becomes a site of tension as it is actively and intentionally constrained, sucked in, pushed out, and generally manipulated. Additionally, through this external manipulation of the body, the body itself becomes a further source of tension, constructed as an object to the wearer. Rather than being *in* the body, the wearer works *on* the body, carefully controlling and manipulating its surface in order to reproduce a desired physicality. A sense of corporeal alienation potentially ensues as clothing practices get between understandings of the clothed self (and the connected relationship with the body). It seems larger women are perpetually caught within an on-going tension between their desire (to dress themselves in femininity), their bodies, their clothing, and the problematic construction of their fat fleshy bodies.

Additionally, there is a further, more intimate tension operating in the space between clothing and the body, as clothing acts against the body in various ways. Clothing betrays as it fails to fully deliver on its promise to construct the wearer as fully feminine. Likewise, it betrays when it fails to reside against the body as intended by the wearer. As it creeps, rides, rubs, and slides uninvited into and around the body, it acts against the intentions of the one who chose to wear it, challenging preconceived notions of the edges of the body and clothing. I do not suggest the inanimate (clothing) has absolute agency *over* the wearer. However, I do suggest that it is through the practices of larger women themselves that the agency of the clothes is *animated*. Through choosing the clothes to wear, and more importantly, providing the body for it to reside around, larger women establish the context for the clothes to behave or misbehave. Put another way, the wearer creates the conditions in which clothing may be animated, so clothing *depends* on the wearer for its agentic potential. This relationship of co-dependency is reliant upon the tension-filled space between soft fleshy bodies and clothing. With this in mind, clothing possesses a *contingent agency*,

as it is ultimately contingent on the wearer herself to bring its agentic properties to life.

It is this mutually dependent sharing of agential space where the tension truly lies. The paradox is that this tension arises at the same time as my participants attempted to bring the body under control and in so doing, release the tension that arises from their bodies' failure to fit heteronormative constructions of feminine beauty. However, in doing so, a new tension arises, one that is embedded not in *ideas* of the body but in the *materiality* of the body itself as the body acts back and asserts its authority over clothing. Here in this space the larger woman occupies a tenuous space in which her selfhood is perpetually provisional and inherently unstable. The discussion throughout this chapter has continually edged its way toward boundaries - boundaries of the body and boundaries of clothing. The instability of the body's boundaries, the rolling hills and valleys of the fat fleshy woman's body, in particular, perpetuate the instability of these boundaries. While the relationship between the *smooth* body and clothing slide against each other relatively untroubled, the relationship between the *fat* body and clothing is more problematic. The indiscretion of fat corporeal boundaries and clothing make it so.

Chapter Nine

Wrapping Up

This concluding chapter has two broad aims. First, I consider the strengths of the research and the value of its methodological emphasis on everyday multiplicities. Second, I stitch together key ideas woven throughout the thesis. In particular, I step back from the detail of the situated clothing practices of my participants and offer an analysis of the overarching practices in which they engage and consider what these practices can reveal about the contemporary social world. With these aims in mind, the chapter is divided into two parts. The first considers the benefits of adopting a methodological approach that emphasises the integration of multiple, individual, innovative research methods. I argue that research multiplicities - transcending multiple disciplinary boundaries, carrying out multiple integrated research methods that produce multiple types of spatially situated data - can inform complex socio-personal processes as they take place in macro-sociological environs. Such multiply informed research practices extend traditional conceptualisations of sociological inquiry and are better suited to capture the specificities of everyday life as they occur within a given social milieu. The second section outlines the contributions the research has made to the fields of clothing studies, fat studies, material culture studies and sociology. In this section, I first outline the key findings of the research that

speak to larger women's navigation of the 'map' of fatness. This leads me to step beyond the research findings and consider also, the contributions made to broader sociological debates. In particular, I argue that the concept of boundaries is crucial for understanding the relationship between larger women's problematic bodies, the worlds they inhabit, and their clothing practices. My emphasis in this section is on the permeable boundaries of bodies, clothing and space, and the capacity for clothing to transcend those boundaries in multiple ways. The third section revisits core sociological themes of structure (both material and discursive) and agency and considers the role clothing can play in mediating the space between them.

Methodological Strengths and Contributions of the Research

There are a number of methodological contributions this research has made to the study of clothing and the study of fatness. First, multidisciplinary is a key strength of the research. The research integrated a range of disciplines including sociology, material culture studies, anthropology, fat studies and human geography, and scholarly inputs from these fields contributed to the research at epistemological, methodological and analytic levels. Each discipline offered valuable insights for understanding the practices of people and edged toward the research question in different ways. However, *integrating* these disciplines facilitated my emphasis on multiple aspects of everyday life and enriched the research landscape. Through drawing together a number of disciplinary fields, I was able to consider place and space, production and consumption, the politics of identity and gender, culture and society, and their inter-relationships. Such disciplinary multiplicity facilitated my focus on the multiple threads of larger women's lives and in particular emphasise their lives as situated, gendered, sized, and politicised.

The second methodological contribution the research made was to shed light on the everyday. Sociological approaches to the field of clothing often emphasises clothing as either a category of production or consumption. However, over the last decade there has been a resurgence of interest in 'the everyday' which shifts attention away from primarily structural matters toward the everyday routine things people do. de Certeau (1984) rightly points out that investigating the everyday permits an

understanding of how people operate in a multiplicity of ways which challenge structural limitations. For de Certeau the emphasis must lie not with the things we buy, for example, but with the *uses* to which we put things. Importantly, to do so draws attention to the “innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of the dominant economy and cultural order” that individuals engage in to make society work for them (de Certeau, 1984, p. xiii). In my research, I extend de Certeau’s work by considering the role of clothing as a material object that serves as a navigational tool for creating alternative itineraries when negotiating the map of gendered fatness. Focusing on everyday clothing practices ensured I consider how clothing shapes the unfolding of everyday life. This shifted attention away from processes of production and consumption and illuminated instead the agency large women enact as they negotiate their way in, through and around such spaces.

The third methodological contribution the research made, and a key strength of the research design, was my use of multiple research methods. Each creative research method I used was designed to capture a different edge of everyday practice. While I am not the first to study everyday aspects of clothing practice (for example, Woodward (2005) studied the daily ‘wardrobe moment’ and Colls (2004) examined routine clothes shopping practices), the *multiple* lenses of my research design ensured I focus on the complexity of everyday life, while simultaneously understanding how they operated together. In addition, research that makes larger women and clothing the centre of analysis is currently limited. Highlighting the multiple extends current singular methodological approaches and generates understandings of the multiple socio-cultural concerns of gender, size, clothing and place. This emphasis on multiplicity creates space for considering clothing practice as privately, spatially, and socio-culturally situated. As such, the research moves from matters of the individual toward the socio-cultural and socio-political processes at work. Equally, the emphasis fosters an understanding of clothing as embodied and situated which is important for understanding the dressed body (Entwistle, 2000). With embodiment in mind, my research extended understandings of dress as embodied by applying these ideas to the larger woman’s body. Importantly, these integrated research multiplicities introduced a further temporal dimension to the research space, a useful dimension when

considering the *on-going* negotiation of gendered size in one's clothed world. Although creative methodologies, including visual methodologies, are gaining traction and are now used more frequently, I have yet to find any research on the clothed body that has incorporated such a diverse range of qualitative inductive research methods. The benefits of such an approach are clear. Generating a multi-method research design edged into everyday practice in different ways and shed light on different aspects of my participants' practices as they were spatially and socio-culturally situated. Also, a multi-method approach assisted in traversing disciplinary boundaries, allowing my research to enter spaces that might otherwise have remained off the map.

Somewhat unexpectedly, these research multiplicities also generated a reflexive space at multiple levels: for me as a researcher; for my participants as larger women; and *between* the participants and me and others we each encountered. While the benefits of researcher reflexivity, and to a lesser degree participant reflexivity, is discussed and promoted at length in qualitative methodology texts, I found the multiple approaches to doing this research broadened and deepened the reflexive space beyond those directly involved in the research. In particular, an integrative and organic reflexivity emerged which fostered a dynamic space for reflection between participants and me, and importantly, introduced the potential for personal and social transformation. This extends prominent understandings of reflexivity in research which focuses on those directly involved in the project. Instead, I suggest reflexivity is multi-layered and that opportunities for extending reflexivity reside in the spaces *between* members of the research and those they encounter.

Extending the Field of Clothing and Fat Studies

Along with these methodological contributions, there are a number of key contributions the research has made to the field of clothing studies, sociology and fat studies. The first contribution brings together the field of clothing studies and fat studies. Perhaps with the exception of Coll's (2006) investigation of larger women's emotional experience of shopping for clothes, little empirical research has been conducted that considers larger women as clothed. Thus, my research brought

together previously disparate fields. In respect to the findings of the research, there are also a number of contributions made which can be readily identified along spatial lines.

First, clothing and bodies rub up against each other in intimate ways. As they do, the social meanings attributed to each equally ‘rub off’ on the other, further contributing to their socially determined meanings. My application of these ideas to larger women’s bodies extends current understandings of the boundaries of gendered bodies and clothing. As a material object, clothing contributes to the construction of the self as a ‘reflexive project’ (Giddens, 1991; S. Woodward, 2007) as larger women use clothing to seek unequivocal femininity. Doing so mediates the negative construction of their problematic bodies. However, the ubiquity of negative fat discourses ensures clothing is an uncertain tool in the hands (and on the bodies) of larger women. The relationship between larger women’s bodies and clothes is complex and troublesome, as the boundaries of each encroach on each other’s space and ultimately misbehave. The outcome for larger women is instability as they get caught between the boundaries of their bodies, their clothing and geographical locations that construct their bodies as problematic in the first instance.

Second, I have extended scholarly understandings of the home by considering clothed corporeality and its place in the negotiation of the self in the private space of the home. There are numerous challenges to scholarly understandings of home as a distinctly private place. However, in my research I extend this body of literature, suggesting that the home is at once a site of refuge beyond the gaze of others, as well as a site in which larger women are subject to on-going disruptions both from beyond the home’s borders and from within. My research has demonstrated that clothing plays a key role in the negotiation of private space. On the one hand, larger women construct the home as a place where comfort is key, and they are free to ‘be themselves’ in respect to their clothing choices. On the other hand, disruptions occur which traverse the homes’ material boundaries, disrupt understandings of the self, and hold the potential to remind of the larger woman’s failed corporeality. Not only do these disruptions challenge the boundaries of private and public space, they also challenge the boundaries of private and public selves.

Third, my research extended the field of clothing studies by intentionally situating my inquiry within public sites. To do so I brought together cross-disciplinary fields of exclusionary discourse, the politics of fatness, and everyday clothing practice. This revealed complex processes of revelation and concealment that take place in publicly situated encounters encapsulated by multiple processes of judgment. By using the beach as a distinctly public and corporeal case-study, I illuminated larger women's wide-ranging use of clothing to manage their public marginality. However, while clothing as a material object can be used to construct more positive understandings of the self and negotiate difficult public sites, it is a difficult subject position to maintain. Dominant constructions of fatness are such that clothing can only go some way to challenging the positioning of the misplaced body.

Finally, the study extended research on sites of consumption as a social space by placing at the centre of analysis, larger women - a group who often fail to be considered in the clothing consumption literature. By going shopping with larger women, my research showed that they face numerous exclusionary practices enacted by others, as well as multiple structural exclusions; larger women are positioned as 'out of place' while shopping for clothes. Despite this, they manage the marginalisation of their bodies in multiple ways. They can be creative, resourceful and ultimately agentic as they actively shop their way back into the (albeit limited) marketplace. This work extended current understandings of the gendered practice of consumption by considering the sized practice of shopping.

A goal in this final chapter is to consider my findings in a broader capacity and, in particular, consider what this research about fat and clothing can say about society. To do so, I revisit two core themes that have continually arisen throughout the empirically-focused chapters. First, I consider boundaries as a conceptual tool for understanding the relationship between larger women and their bodies, larger women and their clothing, and larger women as they are situated in a variety of (potentially) exclusionary sites. Second, I consider the on-going tension that arises between structure and agency, and the role that clothing plays in mediating this dualism. In this section, I raise the possibility that the everyday clothing practices of larger women can be discussed as (passive) acts of resistance which reposition their bodies

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more positively within the dominant structural constraints. I address each of these in turn.

Bound Bodies, Clothing and Space

A consistent theme throughout this thesis has been the conceptual notion of boundaries: spatial boundaries; corporeal boundaries; clothing boundaries; and the uncertain negotiation between each. There are soft, fleshy and fluid boundaries of fat women's bodies, semi-fixed permeable boundaries of clothing itself, and oftentimes closed boundaries of geographical spaces, such as shopping malls and beaches, that indirectly exclude larger women and mark their bodies as 'out of place'. Clearly, the boundaries of bodies, clothing and place are important.

Societies possess "external boundaries, margins, [and] internal structure" (Douglas, 1966, p. 114); spatial boundaries order society. The operational boundaries of society effectively mark one group from another and carve society into categories of inclusion and exclusion. Groups on the boundaries or margins of society are considered risky by those in the centre and their liminality constructs them as Other (Tulloch & Lupton, 2003). I have demonstrated throughout this thesis that the ideological and literal positioning of larger women on the edges of society constructs them as problematic, illegitimate, potentially polluting and dangerous. Larger women's bodies are further problematised through the ambiguity of their bodily borders. "Rolls and folds of flesh", "hills and valleys" and "lumpy bits" each denote the lack of smoothness to the surface of the larger body. Equally, fat simultaneously settles *on* the body and *in* the body (Huff, 2001). As such, fat is 'matter out of place' and constitutive of a symbolic form of pollution (Douglas, 1966). Most importantly, the lumpy, bumpy, fleshy, female body fails to reside within the boundaries of heteronormative femininity. Quite simply, the larger woman fails to fit.

However, my research has shown that clothing can be used by larger women to challenge all of these boundaries. First, larger women engage in a variety of clothing practices to transform bounded sites of exclusion into sites of at least partial inclusion. Second, they use clothing to challenge the material boundaries of their bodies -

smoothing flesh out, sucking flesh in or pushing flesh out. Third, they use clothing to reposition themselves within the boundaries of heteronormative femininity by using archetypal feminine signifiers. Despite the social construction of larger women's bodies as fundamentally problematic in western society, they attempt to use the materiality of clothing to bring the unruliness of their material bodies to order.

Addressing Structure and Agency in the Field of Clothing and Fatness

Considering boundaries necessarily demands consideration of the boundaries of structure and agency, ideas that have underpinned this thesis in its entirety. Early in the thesis, I introduced the work of de Certeau (1984) and the analogy of maps and itineraries to denote the relationship between structure and agency. The spatial metaphor appealed to me as it focused my attention on structuring forces and agentic practices, while foregrounding the importance of place. Hence, in reporting the findings of this research, a 'storyline' of the situated lives of clothed, fat women emerged. Typically, this first involved the identification of dominant structures (both linguistic and material), that limited the clothing capacities of larger women. In response, larger women are agentic, engaging in a variety of practices that skirt, directly challenge, and sometimes subvert those structures.

Harding (1986) describes the space between structure and agency as a "line of fault" (p. 157). Harding's choice of words is fitting. Synonyms for 'fault-line' include crack, fissure, fracture and split. These descriptors denote tension - a tension readily found in larger women's relationship with their socially-situated clothed bodies. By exploring the clothing practices of larger women, the tensions that reside between the materiality of the larger body, the materiality of clothing and the material social world they inhabit is laid bare. These tensions have implications for agency. Agency is spatially and structurally contingent, and ultimately dependent on the on-going relationship *between* bodies and clothing. Tenzer (1989), quoted in Longhurst (2005b) writes:

Fat people carry an enormous burden ... They are weighed down not by their weight, but by the force of hatred, contempt and pity, amusement

and revulsion. Fat bodies are invaded by comments, measured with hatred, pathologized by fear and diagnosed by ignorance. (p.249)

Although first written over 20 years ago, the relevance of these words has not dimmed. Such discourse provides the structural context of larger women's everyday lives as they attempt to negotiate the clothed world. Yet the high visibility of fat ensures the perceptions of others are inescapable (Murray, 2007). Perpetually negotiating the boundaries of structural forces produces a subject position encapsulated by tension that is always in the process of becoming. Perhaps most problematic, the larger body becomes perpetually present as it requires careful and on-going management and negotiation. Awareness of the larger body challenges research that argues the body becomes part of one's corporeal background (see, Leder, 1990), or that clothing for non-large people becomes a second skin (see, Banim, et al., 2001). Instead, at the same time as larger women seek invisibility through their clothing practices, the body insists on its reappearance as the edges of the body and clothing become frayed, or the social gaze is cast upon them.

The tension in play between larger women's bodies and clothing, and between structure and agency, results in an unstable identity in which understandings of the self are corporeally bound and perpetually provisional, due to the tenacity of authoritative dominant discourses that construct the larger body as abhorrent, problematic, and illegitimate. The socio-culturally marginalised position larger women occupy, limits their capacity to fully participate as legitimate social citizens. To pass successfully in the public arena, larger women must challenge their bodies, managing the materiality of their bodies and their clothes in order to construct an identity more in keeping with normative constructions of femininity. The on-going negotiation of the body, place, clothes, and societal condemnation ensures larger women are always situated on the edges of corporeal legitimacy. This is not to suggest that other women, and indeed men (large or small in size) do not experience their bodies in similar ways. Certainly, we must all negotiate gender, sexuality, ethnicity, the market-place, spatiality and numerous other factors as we clothe our bodies. However, the difference for larger women lies with the social construction of their bodies as problematic and abject. Crucially, the difference also lies with the

omnipresent and unavoidable visibility of their bodies. To attain a legitimate corporeality one must visibly embody corporeal norms in order that the body is fully legible (Huff, 2001). However, the edges of larger women's bodies betray, negating the wearers' intentions to fully clothe their bodies in feminine legitimacy. Whether speaking of private or public stages, the social construction of fatness is such that it ensures the larger woman's performance is always under the scrutiny of others or themselves. While we must all negotiate the space of our bodies and clothes, larger women must also negotiate the troublesome discursive space of their bodies. For larger women, the body is omnipresent and perpetually requires management and negotiation; the body cannot be forgotten as it insists on remaining centre-stage.

My discussion thus far has centred on the uncertainty for individuals as they attempt to occupy a legitimate status as clothed larger women. However, there is a further instability that arises in respect to macro-sociological issues. Larger women engage in subversive practices by using clothes to construct feminine identities, by repositioning themselves within the marketplace rather than beyond it, and by transforming sites of exclusion into sites of inclusion. However, in doing so, larger women inadvertently reify the authority of the dominant discourses of fatness as their practices are grounded in the knowledge their bodies are constructed as illegitimate. To *respond* is to suggest there is something to respond to. For example, thinking of the larger *consuming* body, engaging with a clothing market that marginalises one's corporeality, inadvertently serves to reify its oppressive construction.

Also, given the strength of beauty discourse and the authority of consumer society, I question whether attempts to be included in these highly problematic and contentious realms are truly desirable. Much of the consumption literature speaks to the governing authority of the sphere of consumption; the hegemonic authority of the marketplace to seduce the consumer into purchasing beyond their needs and possibly beyond their means. With this in mind, it seems a peculiar goal to position oneself within the bounds of consumption in order to be seduced into playing the game of consumption (just like the next slim person). However, when consumption practices are constructed as normal, they are difficult to deny. For larger women, to be excluded renders the included more enticing. Crucially, the desire to normalise their

bodies and their practices, by shopping just like other women, far outweighs any desire to resist the controlling and governing practices of consumption.

That said, evidence of resistance is found throughout the analytic chapters. Resistance can be found to be in the smallest of acts (Pile, 1997). Writing of a different context, Scot (1985) points out:

Most subordinate classes are, after all, far less interested in changing the larger structures of the state and the law than in what Hobsbawm has appropriately called “working the system ... to their minimum disadvantage”. (p. 301)

This mirrors de Certeau’s (1984) claim which offers a useful framework for understanding what could be called practices of passive resistance. Assuming from the start that everyday practice is tactical in nature, he suggests:

Dwelling, moving about, speaking, reading, shopping, and cooking are activities that seem to correspond to the characteristics of tactical ruses and surprises: *clever tricks of the “weak” within the order established by the “strong,”* an art of putting one over on the adversary on his own turf, hunter’s tricks, maneuverable, polymorph mobilities, jubilant, poetic, and warlike discoveries. (p. 40, my emphasis).

Applied to my research, these insights are intriguing. To what extent can the practices of my participants be assumed to be practices of passive resistance? Employing the resistant framework proffered by Scot and de Certeau, my participants’ practices encapsulate micro-practices of resistance that defy the existing and dominant order, and instead, transform it to suit their own interests. For example, applied to the field of consumption, the tactics they enact allow them to re-imagine the clothing market and critically, to reposition themselves more ably within the boundaries of consumption space.

Certainly, this is not overt resistance in the same way that fat activists resist the problematic construction of fat bodies. My participants’ practices do not challenge the hegemony of current constructions of feminine beauty - and nor do they want to.

Instead, their goal is simply to create a possible pathway for themselves. However, at the level of the individual, these practices make the large body possible. The transformative potential of clothing practices that challenge multiple boundaries reflects de Certeau's (1984) claim that people "metaphorize the dominant order, making it function in another register" (p. 32). By using the materiality of clothing, larger women challenge the boundaries of their bodies, the boundaries of normative femininity and the boundaries of social meanings of public sites. By insisting on the legitimacy of their (clothed) bodies, they actively (if not intentionally) construct their bodies as possible in the face of practices that construct them as beyond legitimacy; they challenge the marginality of their bodies.

However, enacting practices of resistance (and potentially subversion), is a troublesome subject position to hold and maintain. There is an inevitable accompanying instability, partially because their practices can never be absolute. Their practices fail to have absolute authority over the structural limitations in place that marginalise them. Although they shift the boundaries of marginalisation and hence shift the way they are positioned within them, the boundaries themselves remain. Although they reframe their practices, they are not fully able to step beyond the boundary as they remain within the broader processes of marginalisation that construct the fat woman as beyond the bounds of normality.

The relationship between individuals, bodies and clothes is important. It is a complex relationship that is founded in materiality: the materiality of the body; the materiality of clothes; and the materiality of space. Through examining these relationships, as well as the slipperiness of each of their boundaries, I have shown throughout this thesis that larger women defy the positioning of their bodies on the margins of society, and act to construct their bodies as legitimate. In doing so, the space between the individual and the social world, between the private and public world, and between the individual as both subject and object to themselves and others is split open. The centre of these relationships is fluid, uncontained, indeterminable, and perpetually in flux. Yet clothing can go some way to negotiating this uncertainty, acting as a bridge between material and discursive structures, and the socially problematised larger woman's body.

Postscript

Corpulent Beauty Visualised

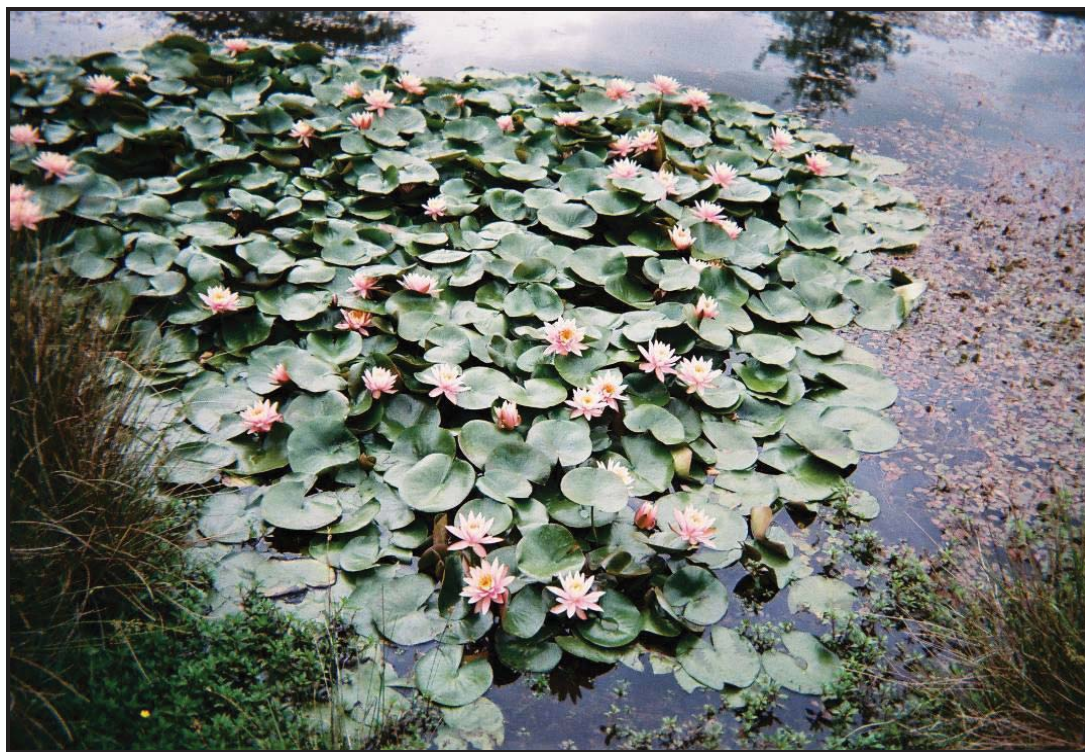
The negative talk of fatness has so much traction, and is disseminated with so much conviction, that it is near impossible to deny that fat can be considered anything less than abhorrent. However, on beginning this research, a primary goal was to create space for talking positively about fatness. I began this thesis with a poem, written by me, to communicate the *potential* for considering the fat woman's body as beautiful. I close this thesis with a photograph (see Figure 20), taken by Rose during the photo elicitation stage of the research, with the same goal in mind.

Rose initially captured the image to denote her relationship with beautiful clothes; the flowers analogous to the clothing with which she could adorn her body. However, as we talked, the meaning Rose constructed for the image extended, as she considered instead that her body could be considered beautiful. While Rose was quick to admit that the water was “pretty murky”, she was captured by the striking beauty of the lilies residing within the murky waters of the pond.

Thinking through the image further, it is not difficult to consider the murky water as analogous to the dominant discourses of fatness which provide the context in which larger women must live their lives. However, Cixous (2000) urges women to “write

your self [because] your body must be heard” (p. 165). The writing of which Cixous speaks is a poetic language that captures the beauty of the feminine body. In capturing the image, Rose engages in such a practice, albeit beyond language. Through the photograph, Rose challenges the structural and structuring discourses that construct her body as problematic and beyond the bounds of possibility. In doing so, Rose constructs her body as possible, and ‘writes’ her problematic corporeality into a legitimate and potentially beautiful existence.

Figure PS.1 Corpulent beauty visualised



Appendices

Appendix A: Fictionalised account of the data

The Hangar

I've been dreading this day all week. I can't believe she talked me into going with her. But Sal promises me this place will be amazing. Life changing even. Apparently everyone's raving about the factory shop that sells swimsuits from the old hangar over on Clemow's. Miracle suits – or so she tells me!

I drag myself out of bed and pad down the hall to the bathroom. Turning on the shower tap, I whip off my baggy P.J.s and step under the water, closing my eyes against the reflection opposite. Finished, I grab blindly for my oversize towel wrapping it tightly around me. Facing the wall, I wriggle into my daily uniform – cargo pants and a t-shirt.

Sal arrives bang on nine, chattering excitedly and doesn't let up the whole way there. As I listen to Sal's giddy chatter, I scrunch myself a little lower in the passenger seat. By the time we get to the hangar I'm willing myself to disappear. We step inside the giant hangar and look around. Thousands of swimsuits fill the entire space. But from what I can see, there's only one style and just two colours to choose from: gun metal grey or khaki.

“Army or navy Sal?”, I whisper to my friend.

I check out the long line of women waiting in line for the changing room. There are all sorts. Every shape and size. I stare at the skinny ones resentfully and wonder why they're here shopping for miracles. I especially notice the bigger women. One in particular catches my eye. She clutches an oversized handbag close to her body. I loosen my grip on my own enormous bag and try to relax. I feel mean but I'm glad I'm not the biggest.

The sound of shrieking and laughing draws us to the back of the hangar where we find dozens of gorgeous women in the grey and green swimsuits preening and posing in front of a bank of mirrors. There's no way I'm trying on togs around here, I think to myself. But then a woman catches my eye. It's the woman with the handbag. She's wearing the grey. It shouldn't look good on her. But it does. Her rolls of flesh are smooth under the one piece

maillot. The grey of the swimsuit enhances the blue of her eyes, making them deeper, more intense. I can't believe my eyes. She looks stunning.

We watch mesmerised as a steady stream of women emerges from the changing room transformed.

"These are miracle suits" laughs Sal. "We have seriously gotta get one of these". Sal shoves a khaki swimsuit into my hands and grabs a grey one for herself. We take our place at the back of the winding queue. I feel sick. As I watch the women on the far side of the hangar, spellbound by the sight of themselves, my sense of dread escalates. What if I'm the exception? What if it doesn't work for me?

Before I know it we're up to the front of the queue. Like a condemned criminal I walk slowly to the available space. I slip off my underwear and pants and step into the swimsuit. It looks ridiculously small. There's no way that's going to get around me. And yet as I pull the straps over my shoulders I feel the stretchy fabric yield to my body. I can't believe it's so easy.

"Come on then. Let's have a look at you" Sal yells through the door.

There's no mirror in here so I'm not sure. I slide my hands over my body and feel the familiar lumps and bumps. But then they also feel smooth. I don't understand. I edge the door open slightly so my friend can see me.

"Wow. Look at you. You look amazing".

I think I feel amazing but I'm not sure. I can hear Sal's voice telling me how good I look as I'm being pushed and pulled out of the changing room and around to the wall of mirrors.

I'm not ready for this. I feel like I'm in a reality TV show. Any moment now the cast and crew are gonna come out cheering and clapping. But when I look up at my reflection in the mirror, I can't believe what I see. My body is smooth. The ugly flap of fat under my stomach is gone. My breasts are higher and firmer. My legs are toned and muscular, strong. It's not just my body though. My eyes are brighter. My skin's glowing. My hair's shining. I look great. This is one must have purchase!

As we get in the car to drive home with our miracle buys, I ask Sal to drop me at the mall. I want to treat myself to a new dress. I know the shop I want to go to. I've stood outside so often coveting everything in the window. As I step onto the escalator I feel lighter, brighter somehow. Things are going to be different from now on.

As I approach the store I slow down. I glance nervously around. People are busy and don't seem to notice me. I stand outside the shop and look at the window filled with colourful summer dresses. I can do this. Things are different now. But as I step back from the window, I see a woman in cargo pants and a navy t-shirt. The t-shirt like a body sock, cuts her midriff into three distinct lumps of flesh. The pants are a bit too snug around the middle and fat spills over the top. Her hair hangs limp. My heart thumps out of my chest and I feel a prickly heat rising as I recognize my reflection. Drawing my bag tight across my body, I quickly walk away.

Clothed bodies / embodied clothing:

The construction of identity through clothing practice

Information sheet for prospective participants

Thanks for getting in touch with me. This information sheet is intended to tell you more about the project. First, a little about me. I am a PhD student of sociology at Massey University in Albany. As a researcher, I am very interested in the everyday experiences of women. For my PhD thesis, I am conducting research that looks at the everyday clothing practices of larger New Zealand women and how the things women think, do and believe about and around clothing, shapes women's identity. If you consider yourself to be a 'larger' woman, I would like to invite you to take part in this research.

What does the research involve?

I would like to be able to work with just eight women who identify themselves as larger. By using a range of creative ways of looking at clothing experiences, I hope to find out how those experiences impact in different ways on how women understand themselves and their bodies. If you choose to participate, I will ask you to:

- keep a clothing journal for one week and talk with me about the entries you have made;
- talk me through your own wardrobe of clothing;
- take me clothes shopping with you and talk with me afterward about your experiences of shopping;
- spend two weeks taking photographs of the "clothed world" around you and talk me through the photographs you have taken;
- take part in a small group discussion focused around a clothing story that you and other participants have contributed.

It will take between seven and ten weeks to complete all of the research stages. Because of the close and intense nature of the research, all participants do need to be able to speak conversationally in English. Any personal discussions will be audio taped while the final group discussion will be video-taped (although I may choose to audio tape this group discussion if people are too uncomfortable with the idea of video). The data collected from each of these five research methods will be analysed and the findings will provide the basis of my PhD thesis and may also be used for published articles and presentations. You are invited to choose a pseudonym to be used for the duration of the research which may assist in maintaining your confidentiality. I have attached a copy of the general consent form which points out the main ways I would like to use the data. In the future however, I may wish to

present some of the information collected in more public forums. I may also wish to utilise the visual images (such as video and photographs) that result from the research. This raises important questions for you to consider regarding making your visual image available in different ways. However, I have developed a consenting process that ensures that all participants are able to control the way in which their material is used. Should you choose to participate, we can spend some time talking through these options in more detail. On completion of the research, I will send you a summary of the research findings.

What will you have to do?

If you agree to take part in this research, you will be asked to complete each of the five stages. The demands of each stage vary. To help you decide if you would like to participate, I have briefly outlined the various stages of the research, including the time I anticipate you might spend on each stage. As we reach each subsequent stage, I will provide more written information and we will spend some time talking through the research process, making sure you are comfortable with everything you are being asked to do. Although consenting indicates a willingness and intention to take part in all five stages of the research, I realise that for whatever reason, you may at some point wish to reconsider your involvement. Should this be the case, I would like to reassure you that you are under no obligation to complete all five stages.

Stage one: Clothing journal: The clothing journal is a one week personal project. I provide each participant with a notebook. In this notebook, I would like you to jot down every time clothing, or your body as it relates to clothing, intrudes on your thoughts or actions. I call these ‘clothing moments’. At the end of each day, I will ask you to expand on just one of these clothing moments and reflect on it, writing in the notebook your thoughts around it. After I’ve had an opportunity to read your journal, I’d like to get together with you in your own home, and at a time that suits you, so you might talk with me about the entries you made. I expect that our meeting will take between one and two hours. This discussion will be audio taped.

Stage two: Rummaging through the wardrobe: In stage two of the research, I would like to spend some time looking through your wardrobe with you. I’d like to hear about the clothes you own and the stories you associate with some of those garments. Again, I anticipate this will take between one and two hours and I will audiotape our conversation.

Stage three: Shopping excursion/ discussion: In this next stage of the research, I accompany you on a shopping trip to the places you would usually visit in order to purchase clothing. While we’re ‘shopping’ we’ll talk about some of your experiences around shopping for clothes. There’s no expectation that you’ll purchase clothes or try clothes on during this time, although you’re welcome to do so. I may take some notes during this time. Once we’ve finished our shopping excursion, I’d like to take you for coffee so that we can have a chat about some of the things I noticed, or that you experienced during this time. I’ll audio tape this conversation so that I’m able to listen to it again at a later date. I expect this will take up to three hours in total but this is something we can negotiate at the time.

Stage four: Photographing the ‘clothed world’/ discussion: The first three stages of this research ask you to reflect in various ways on your own clothing experiences as an individual. The fourth stage of the research is designed to ask you to look outward. I will provide you with a disposable camera with 24 colour exposures. Over two weeks, you are asked to use the camera to capture images of the “clothed world” around you. These may be inanimate objects

such as places, buildings or shops. Or, you may wish to capture people, including yourself, in your photographs. It is up to you to decide what images you wish to capture. After two weeks, I will collect the camera at a pre-arranged time and get two printed copies of the film developed. One of these will be used for data analysis while the other will be yours to keep. I will also get a digital copy of the photographs that will serve as a back up. Once developed, I would like to get together with you at a time and place that suits you, so that you can tell me about the photographs you have taken. Although this discussion will be very informal, it will be audio recorded so that I can listen to it again later. I would expect this discussion to take no more than two hours.

Stage five: Group discussion: In this last stage of the research, I'd like us to get together with up to three other women who have also taken part in the research. In preparation for this group chat, I'd like you to think about a 'clothing story' from your own personal experience that you are willing to share with others in the group. These stories will provide the springboard for our discussion. I anticipate this will take no longer than three hours. It is likely that it will take place either in my own home in Whangaparaoa or in a suitable room at Massey University in Albany. Ultimately, it will be at a location and a time that suits everyone taking part. I would like to video tape this discussion so that I'm able to review it later, but I will mount the video on a tripod so we won't be disturbed by an extra person behind the camera. If anyone is particularly uncomfortable with this, it is something we can negotiate closer to the time.

That is an overview of the research as a whole. I do have individual hand-outs available that outline the specifics of each research stage. If you decide to take part, we will spend some time working through these hand-outs and talking about each stage of the research in greater detail.

This research and your potential involvement is quite an intensive process. It requires that you take some time reflecting on your own personal experiences and the way you feel about your body- at times you're even asked to share those experiences with other women. It also asks that you look at the world in different ways (such as through the eyes of a camera) that may feel a bit strange and unsettling. I expect that during this time you'll become very conscious of clothing and in fact, very conscious of your body in your clothing. It is possible that there may be times when you find this upsetting in some way. If you do, we'll take some time to talk through this, looking at the various options open to us for proceeding with the research, including consideration of your involvement in further stages of the research. I hope however, that the opposite will be the case, and that you will actually find taking part in this research to be a rewarding experience and that you'll enjoy the opportunity it provides to think and talk about your own clothing experiences.

Your rights

With the above in mind, I would like to remind you that you are under no obligation to accept this invitation to participate in the research. Although the design of the research will benefit from continued participation in each stage of the research, your involvement in one stage of the research does not obligate you to participate in future stages of the research. Should you decide to take part, you have the right to:

- reconsider your involvement in the project as a whole;
- ask any questions about the research at any time;

- withdraw from the research at any time and withdraw your data for any stage of the research up to one week after any personal interview has taken place;
- decline to talk about any issue or answer any question during any personal or group discussion;
- request that the audio tape be turned off at any time during any individual discussion;
- request your personal audio tapes be returned to you on completion of the research;
- outline the ways you are comfortable for me to use the information we gather and be assured that I will not use material in any way that you are not comfortable with;
- provide information on the understanding that you can choose whether or not you will be identifiable in any reports/ articles that are prepared from the study. The use of data such as photographs, audio sound bites and video will be in accordance with your wishes as you agree to in the consent form;
- assurance of adequate safe storage of audio tapes, photographs and video tapes, and appropriate disposal of same on completion of a five year period following completion of the research project;
- receive a summary of the research on completion.

This has provided a broad overview of your rights in regards to taking part in this research. The project as a whole is a very involved process however that results in lots of different types of data, such as audio tapes, photographs and videos. The way this data is used is negotiable as they will each need to be treated in different ways. The attached consent forms provide you with some of the ways I might like to use this data in the future. If you would like to participate, I encourage you to have a think about these different options and the level of consent you wish to agree to. Should you decide to take part, this information sheet is a useful document for you to keep and refer back to as we work through each of the research stages.

Contact details

I hope you will consider taking part. If you would like to hear more about the research or think you might be interested in taking part, I can be contacted using the information below. I would love to meet with you so that we can talk a bit more about the research. Please be

assured that meeting with me doesn't obligate you in any way to take part in the research. If you prefer, my supervisors, Ann Dupuis and Kerry Chamberlain are also available to answer any questions you may have. Many thanks for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Trudie Cain

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This research has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application 07/044. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr. Dianne Gardiner, Acting Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 ext. 41225, email humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz.

Clothed bodies / embodied clothing:

The construction of identity through clothing practice

clothing record/ discussion hand-out

Thanks so much for your willingness to take part in this research. I truly appreciate the commitment you've made. I find it such an exciting topic and I'm really looking forward to working with you and exploring some of your experiences around clothing.

In this stage of the research, I'm interested in clothing practice. In other words, I'd like to look at the everyday things that women such as you think about, believe and actually do, around clothing. With this in mind, I'm asking you to complete a personal project of keeping a clothing record for one week. I'm providing you with a notebook for this purpose. In this notebook, I'd like you to jot down 'clothing moments' as they occur throughout the day. By 'clothing moments' I mean every time clothing, or your body as it relates to clothing, enters your thoughts or affects what you do. It's important to remember that there's no right or wrong way to do this exercise. The things you record, and the way you record them, including the sort of language you use, is entirely up to you. It would be great if you can write your entry as soon as is practically possible following the particular 'moment'. You don't have to spend a lot of time doing this. Just record enough information so that you can remember the event well enough that you'd be able to share it with me later.

At the end of each day, I'd like you to choose just one entry from your clothing record for that day and expand on it. It is up to you which entry you choose. Writing in the notebook, I would like you to reflect on that entry. You might like to begin by describing what happened and providing background information if you think that will help me understand what was going on for you. Think about your reactions during that experience. How did you feel at the time? How did you respond? How did you make sense of it at the time and do you understand it differently now you're thinking back on it. Try to write freely... and try not to worry about grammar and whether you think you are 'making sense'! Although I encourage you to write for as long as you feel you need, I don't expect this exercise to take any longer than half an hour and may in fact take you considerably less.

After I've had an opportunity to read your journal, I'd like to get together with you (at a time and place that suits you) so you can tell me about the entries you made. A few days before we get together I will send you a 'guide' outlining the sorts of things I

would like to talk with you about. You might also like to think about other things around your clothing experiences as a larger woman that you'd like to discuss. I expect that our discussion will take between one and two hours, although this is something we can talk about before we start. Although it will be a very informal conversation, I will audio tape it so that I can listen to it again at a later date.

In many ways, this phase of the research is quite an intensive process. You will no doubt become very conscious of clothing and indeed your body in clothing! I can imagine that this may be upsetting in some way. I hope though, that the opposite will be the case, and you'll find the task interesting and enjoy the opportunity it gives you to reflect on your own clothing experiences as well as having the opportunity to share those experiences. If you have any concerns or questions about this stage of the research, feel free to give me a call so that we can talk through it and you can make an informed decision about whether you'd like to proceed.

I look forward to working with you

Trudie

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Appendix D: Wardrobe rummage hand-out

Clothed bodies / embodied clothing:

The construction of identity through clothing practice

Rummaging through the wardrobe hand-out

Thanks so much for taking part in this research project so far. I hope that you enjoyed keeping a clothing record and having the opportunity to talk about your experiences afterwards.

In this stage of the research, I'm interested in the actual clothes that you own and/ or wear. I would like to visit with you in your home and look through your clothing with you. I'm particularly interested in hearing your stories and personal experiences around various items of clothing.

You don't need to prepare anything for this stage of the research. I imagine that it will be a fairly casual affair, simply having a rummage through your wardrobe as we chat about the clothes you own. I expect this will take between one and two hours but we can always discuss this before we make a start. Even though it will be very casual, I would like to audio tape our talk so that I can listen to it again later.

For each stage of the research, I have tried to think about how taking part might affect you. I imagine that this stage will actually be a lot of fun. However, I'm also conscious that it might feel incredibly strange to throw open your wardrobe to a relative stranger. If you do have any concerns or questions about this stage of the research, feel free to give me a call so that we can talk through them.

If I haven't heard from you, I will give you a call in a few days so that we can organise a convenient time for me to come and have a nosey through your wardrobe!

Cheers, Trudie

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This research has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application 07/044. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr. Dianne Gardiner, Acting Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 ext. 41225, email humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz.

Clothed bodies / embodied clothing:

The construction of identity through clothing practice

Shopping trip / discussion hand-out

Thanks so much for taking part in this research project so far. I hope that you enjoyed keeping a clothing record and having a rummage through your wardrobe with me!

For this next stage of the research, I would like to specifically examine the 'shopping moment'. By this I mean the experience of actually finding clothes to purchase. To do this, I'd like to quite simply, join you on a shopping trip! I'd like you to take me to some of the clothing stores you usually go to. The shops or malls we visit are entirely up to you. You might want to try clothes on while we're out and about or even purchase some clothes. Again, this is up to you.

While we're shopping, we can simply have a chat about your past and present experiences of shopping for clothes. There are also other specific areas that I would like to raise during this time such as:

- whether clothes shopping is a positive or negative experience for you;
- your experience of changing rooms;
- your thoughts about your purchases once you get home;
- your experiences of wearing your new purchases for the first time.

There may also be things that you would like to specifically talk about. Although I imagine our conversation while we're 'shopping' will be very informal, I will audio record it so that I'm able to listen to it at a later date. I expect the duration of our shopping excursion to be no longer than three hours (and may in fact be considerably less). I'm happy to pick you up and we can drive to the shops together. Or, if you prefer, I can provide you with a petrol voucher to cover your travel costs and I can meet you there.

I realise that going shopping can be quite a personal experience so you may find it a bit strange to go with someone you haven't known for too long! I hope however that you do feel comfortable with me tagging along and that after having completed the first two stages of the research together, we've got to know each other well enough that it will actually be a fun experience for both of us. Feel free to give me a call, or send me an email if you prefer, if you have any concerns or questions about this stage of the research.

Many thanks

Trudie

Appendix F: Photo elicitation hand-out

Clothed bodies/ embodied clothing:

The construction of identity through clothing practice

Photographs and Discussion Hand-out

I realise that your role as a participant in this research has been quite demanding. I truly appreciate the time, energy and enthusiasm that you've put into this project. A study of this sort depends on the willingness of people like you getting behind it so thank you. I hope you've enjoyed it along the way.

So far, I've been asking you to look inward, reflecting on your own personal experiences as an individual. For this next stage of the research, I'd like to do something a bit different - I'd like you to look outward at the world around you. I will provide you with a disposable camera with 24 colour exposures. Over two weeks, I'd like you to use the camera to capture images of the "clothed world" around you. These might be inanimate objects such as places, buildings or shops. Or you may wish to capture images of people. You may want to be in some or all of the photographs. If you do, you can ask someone else to take the photograph for you. It's up to you what images you would like to capture.

After two weeks, I'll collect the camera at a time that suits you and get three copies (two hard copies and one digital copy) of the film developed. One of the hard copies will be yours to keep and the other I will use for my data analysis. The digital copy will be kept in storage as a back up. We'll then work out a time and place for us to meet, so that we can look through the photos together and you can tell me about the shots you've taken and what they mean to you. Like the other times we've spent together, this won't be like a formal interview. That said, I will audio tape our conversation so that I can listen to it again at a later stage. I imagine this will take up to two hours.

A note on the privacy of others

I really hope that you'll enjoy this part of the research and that you find it fascinating to look at what I've called the 'clothed world' around you. I certainly don't want to discourage you from taking photographs of people, but I would like to take some time to discuss with you some of the things that we need to bear in mind while completing this exercise. I have outlined some of these below.

- Ask permission from the store owner/ manager before taking photographs while in a shop
- If taking photographs of people you know, ask for their permission to take the photograph (ensuring they are aware that photographs may be published with their identifying features obscured)
- Should the situation arise that I would like to publish a photograph you have taken of a person you know, I will only do so with any identifying features obscured, unless the person provides written permission to use the photograph untouched. I will take care to ensure that the publication of their image does not inadvertently reveal your identity beyond the level you have agreed to.
- Where photographs have been taken of people unknown to you, and so consequently, permission to use the photograph in publications has not been attained, photographs that may be used will have identifying features obscured.
- If, after taking a photograph, someone requests that their photograph not be used in the research at all, please let me know about this and I won't use the photograph.

When I drop the camera to your home, it would be great if we can talk further about these points and others that need to be considered when capturing photographs of people. If any specific concerns or questions arise once you've started doing the exercise, you're welcome to call me anytime (or text me and I can give you a call straight back).

I realise this is quite an intensive personal project. I have given you two weeks as I thought this would provide you with plenty of time to capture the sorts of images you would like. You don't have to spend a full two weeks doing this however. I'm confident that you'll find the project really fascinating. I'm aware though that it does ask you to look at the world in a different way and this may be a bit unsettling. If you have any concerns or questions about this stage of the research, please give me a call or email me. This way, we can work through any queries you may have.

Thanks once again

Trudie

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Appendix G: Group discussion hand-out

Clothed bodies / bodied clothes: Clothing the large woman's body

group discussion hand-out

It's been quite a journey and we're getting near the end now. I hope you've enjoyed your involvement in the project and perhaps learned some things about yourself along the way!

For this last stage of the research, I thought it might be time that you had the opportunity to meet some of the other women taking part. This final stage is a group discussion. Don't worry though - it's just a small group. There will only be three other women, and of course I'll be there to facilitate. I would like you to do a bit of homework for this one. Before you come along, I'd like you to identify a "clothing story" from your own personal experience which you would be happy to share with the others. It's entirely up to you what sort of story you choose and of course how much you want to share. I've attached the bare bones of one of my own clothing stories (below) to give you an idea of the sorts of things you might like to talk about (you don't have to write yours down though - unless of course you want to). We'll use these clothing stories as a springboard for our talk.

The group discussion will be held at a time and place that suits us all. That said, I do like the idea of hosting it at my house, in Whangaparaoa. I realise that might be quite a drive for some of you though so we can work this out between us. Perhaps one of the rooms at Massey University might be a good alternative if the drive is off-putting.

I'm sure you are now well used to having our conversations audio taped. This has been incredibly helpful for me to go back and revisit the exchanges we've shared. For this group meeting, I would actually like to video tape our discussion. There are two main reasons why I'd like to do this. The first is critical - there is nothing quite like a visual image to capture the dynamic among a group of women getting together and talking about things they're interested in! The second reason is far more pragmatic on my part. It can be very difficult to work out 'who said what' when you only have an audio tape of a group discussion. Bear in mind though, that I will only use this video footage for the purposes of my data analysis, unless everyone taking part agrees for it to be used in other ways. In these circumstances you will also have the opportunity to say if you would like your identity to be obscured or not.

I realise that you might feel a bit nervous about 'exposing yourself' to other women - strangers - taking part in the research. I can only reassure you that I have had the opportunity of working with all of the women who will be there and honestly believe that you will enjoy being able to talk with other women who have shared similar, yet also different, experiences to you - I suspect you won't feel like strangers by the time you leave! (And of course, I'll be a familiar face).

If you'd like to talk with me about this stage of the research beforehand, feel free to give me a call or send me an email. If I haven't heard from you, I'll give you a call in the next few days to arrange a time for us all to get together.

Talk to you soon

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A clothing story...

The school fundraiser (a dinner and dance) was coming up and I would always stress about what to wear to something like that (there are some very glammy Mums at school these days!) but this time it was okay cos I had it sorted- I was gonna wear my black pants with an oriental style shift type dress over the top. It was a great outfit- it covered up lots, it was flattering and the fabric in the top was sort of chiffony so it was still feminine. Well, I knew I'd put some weight on but I had no idea... When I went to get dressed that night I was bulging out all over the place! I could squeeze into it but the top was so tight- I had rolls on rolls! After the obligatory cry and panic stricken wardrobe session where I tried on absolutely EVERYTHING in my wardrobe (it didn't get any better), I went to the fundraiser in the outfit but with my coat over the top. And I kept it on. All night. I couldn't bear the thought of taking it off and people seeing what I looked like. So I was miserable. My partner was miserable. I'm sure other people at our table were miserable. Actually, perhaps not- they probably just wondered how they got stuck at the miserable table!!! I couldn't dance. I certainly couldn't eat. I felt so crappy. It was a terrible night...

Appendix H: Confidentiality agreement - group discussion

Clothed bodies / embodied clothing:

The construction of identity through clothing practice

Confidentiality Agreement: Group Discussion

I agree to protect the identity and privacy of other women participating in the group discussion.

Signature: **Date:**

Full name (printed):

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Appendix I: Analysis - sample analysis of interview transcript

<p>Charlotte: Clothing Journal follow up interview</p> <p>00.00</p> <p>Gosh I'm a psycho [laughing]</p> <p><i>[I try to comfort her by talking about my own difficulty completing the diary as well as letting her know that others also found it really difficult and that it raised some issues]</i></p> <p>it was really hard yeah. I wasn't expecting it to be quite as hard but instead of them being fleeting thoughts in your head you actually have to own up to them and write them down and yeah in a way that brought them to the surface a little bit</p> <p>...</p> <p>yeah it was [quite tricky] but it was also cathartic as well there's a lot of stuff that's right down there that you don't even think about that probably needs to come out questioning your own beliefs about things and it's so strange 'cause you can look at your body from one day to the next and one day you'll be just like this <i>enormous freak</i> and the next day you think oh I look alright what's changed not a lot</p> <p>...</p> <p><i>and then other days weren't so good...</i></p> <p>no pretty much if I'm wearing these jeans I feel good cos they don't like suck in at the hips which causes all the flesh to sort of bulge out the top which means your tops show all the rolls but these ones fit properly on the hips so you can wear tops</p>	<p>Psycho – language of the monstrous??</p> <p>Potential for account of unintentional ethical dilemmas, resolving (or not) through reflexivity...</p> <p>Owning thoughts... what's the diff between owning or having a thought? – impact on identity for example...</p> <p>Compartmentalising the body in accordance with emotion – see Lupton maybe</p> <p>“looking at your body” objectifying your body (body as object / subject)</p> <p>Charlotte often uses this sort of language: the freak- builds on the monstrous</p> <p>Spillage of the body beyond the boundaries (bodily boundaries – see Longhurst, maybe Douglas</p>
--	--

<p>with them and not but other jeans I've got which might be a bit too tight around the waist or just been in the drier or something it squeezes you in and pops you out the top and it's just like "oh" and I'll look at a whole wardrobe full of clothes and go I can't wear any of these in here I'm supposed to put in an effort and go out and all I want to do is wear my biggest black t-shirts but they're not suitable for where I'm going and it's just a nightmare.</p>	<p>The nightmare – again words that sit alongside the monstrous – see Shildrick??</p> <p>The cover up clothes (the big black t-shirt) still exist in the psyche. Covering the body or covering the self – and what's the diff</p>
<p>3.00</p> <p>...</p> <p>from Farmers Amie brand but the thing is I probably wrote down in the diary 'cause I was going trying them on you can get like these ones fit perfectly but then another pair from the same brand are too tight same size and everything what's going on there</p> <p><i>yeah they were the really weird shape they were the ones that you said looked like a mutant or something no they were made for mutants or something like that and yet they were the same brand</i></p> <p>yeah same brand I don't know if it's different fabric this fabric might be a tiny bit stretchier but not like stretch jeans or anything</p> <p>...</p> <p>yeah cos that was the other thing [height of jeans] that I had cos I found another couple of pairs that I found from Farmers and they looked good in the shop and then I brought them home and they're so low and bulged out at the back it was just bizarre really strange I guess everyone carries their weight in a different place so its hard to design for that cos other people would be barrel waisted whereas I've</p>	<p>I'm referencing Charlotte's comments in her diary!</p> <p>Betrayal of clothes</p> <p>Barrel waist (metaphors of the body)</p> <p>Spare tire (metaphor)</p>

actually got a waist even though I'm a larger size
I've got a waist but they'll make clothes for people
that have got the spare tire round their waist and so
they make the waists too big

... fit the hip ... means the waist too big... gaping...

yeah exactly it does. Yeah I've done that myself
[get clothes altered] just hacked into pieces but it's
awful having to hack them up to make them fit

Excessive language here,
hacking... hack them up to
make them fit- the body is
strange and abnormal in a
sense

Appendix J: Analysis - initial analysis of photographs

	Georgie	Rose	Ann	Charlotte	Laura	Janie	Lynn	Jen
Sartorial rules	11						2	
Clothes as expression of identity	1							
In/exclusion: space/ place where you fit or do not	3			5				
Invisibility of the body		1						
Space between body and clothing		1						
Beauty - alternate		1						
Beauty - ideals			3					
Fat relations			1			1		
Construction of fat stereotypes				1				
Problematic public spaces				2				
Representations of fatness				1				
Identity construction				6	1	1		9
Emotion				1				
Social history of clothing/ narratives of clothing					3			
Role of clothing							1	
Taken	26	6	4	21	6	9	19	11
Discarded	11	3	0	5	2	7	16	2
Retained	15	3	4	16	4	2	3	9

Appendix K: Consent form - research participation

Clothed bodies / embodied clothing:

The construction of identity through clothing practice

Consent Form

[To be completed before commencing the research]

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of each stage of the study explained to me. I've talked through the various stages of the research with the researcher and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I also understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

While my intention is to complete all five stages of the research, I understand that I am not obligated to do so and that I may reconsider my involvement throughout the research process.

I understand that this research will create different types of data such as a clothing record, audio tapes, photographs and video footage.

I understand that my consent to take part in the research at this time means that all of the data can be included in the data analysis for the study.

I also understand that I am consenting to the use of brief quotations from our interviews and extracts from my clothing diary in any scholarly publications or presentations that are made from the study.

I also understand that I will be given the opportunity to consent to the use of any material containing my voice and image as we work through the research process. This will be explained to me as we go along and I will have the opportunity to consent to these uses or not.

I agree / do not agree to be known by my own name in any publication or other material arising from the research.

Where I have indicated I do not agree for my own name to be used, I wish to be known by the pseudonym _____ in any publication or other material arising from the research.

I wish/ do not wish to have my personal interview audio tapes returned to me.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature: **Date:**

Full name (printed):

Appendix L: Consent form - photographs

Clothed bodies / embodied clothing:

The construction of identity through clothing practice

Consent Form: Photographs

[On completion of the photograph discussion]

Throughout this study, you have taken some photographs. As agreed, I will use these photographs in the analysis of the research. Now I would like you to indicate below what other uses of these photographs that you agree to consent to. You are not obligated to agree to any of the options listed.

I understand that any photographs I have taken of inanimate objects such as places, buildings or shops may be used in publications arising from the research.

I understand that where I have taken photographs of large groups of people that I do not know, these photographs may be used in publications arising from the research without obscuring identifying features.

I understand that where I have taken photographs of smaller groups of people I do not know, these photographs may be used in publications arising from the research but with identifying features obscured.

I have had the opportunity to review all of the photographs I have taken that include personal images and withdraw any that I do not wish to be used in any publication. Where these photographs include people known to me, I have made this decision in consultation with the person(s) concerned. I understand that photographs I have taken of people known to me may be published or used, but these will have identifying features obscured.

I agree that the photographs I have signed on the back may be used for the purposes I have indicated below.

For each statement below, please:

either initial the first column to indicate your agreement for these photographs to be used in the stated way untouched (with your identity visible),

or in the second column to indicate your agreement for these photographs to be used with identifying features are obscured.

Use of your signed photographs	Your identity not obscured	Your identity obscured
The data may be shared with other women in the research		
The data may be used in the researcher’s PhD as well as any other written academic publications arising from the research		
The data may be used in classrooms and seminars for teaching purposes		
The data may be used by the researcher for further research projects		
The data may be used for presentations to the academic and/ or professional community		
The data may be used for public presentations to non-scientific groups		
The data may be used in ‘popular’ presentations on television and/ or radio		
The data may be used in creative ways such as fictionalised accounts e.g. short stories, and art installations		

Specific instructions applicable to the treatment and use of any individual photograph
(if required):

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

Signature: **Date:**

Full name (printed):

Clothed bodies / embodied clothing:

The construction of identity through clothing practice

Participant Consent Form:

Non-visual material

As part of this study so far, we have collected a range of 'data'. These include a clothing record, audio recordings of our conversations, photographs taken by you and video footage of the group discussion you took part in. As agreed, I will use these different materials in the analysis of the research, and may use extracts from your clothing record and our conversations in the PhD thesis as well as other scholarly publications and presentations arising from the research. These uses will keep your identity confidential.

Now I would like you to indicate below what other uses of the material generated throughout this research that you would agree to. A further consent form will address the use of photographs and video footage specifically. You are not obligated to agree to any of the options listed below. Note that it may not be possible to maintain your confidentiality in some of these possibilities. Please consider this before indicating your agreement.

*For each statement below, please **either** initial beside it **for each type of material** to indicate your agreement **or** leave unsigned to indicate you do not want your data to be used in that way.*

Use of data	Audio-tape extracts	Tran-script extracts	Clothing record extracts
The data may be shared with other women in the research			
The data may be used in classrooms and seminars for teaching purposes			
The data may be used by the researcher for further research projects			
The data may be used for presentations to the academic and/ or professional community			
The data may be used for public presentations to non-scientific groups			
The data may be used in 'popular' presentations			

on television and/ or radio			
The data may be used in creative ways such as fictionalised accounts e.g. short stories, and art installations			

I have read the above suggestions for uses of the research material and give my consent for the use of my data to be used as indicated by the insertion of my initials above.

Signature: **Date:**

Full name (printed):

Clothed bodies / embodied clothing:

The construction of identity through clothing practice

Consent Form: Video Footage

[On completion of the group discussion]

In the final stage of this study, you spoke with other women in a video taped discussion group. As agreed, I will use this video footage in the analysis of the research. Now I would like you to indicate below what other uses of this video footage that you agree to consent to. I will only use this data in the way indicated with the agreement of all women who took part in the group discussion.

I understand I am not obligated to agree to any of the options listed, regardless of the decisions made by other women taking part in the group discussion.

I understand I am able to specify particular segments of the video footage to be exempt from this indication of consent.

For each statement below, please:

***either** initial the first column to indicate your agreement for extracts from the video footage to be used in the stated way untouched (with your identity visible),*

***or** in the second column to indicate your agreement for extracts from the video footage to be used in the stated way with identifying features obscured.*

Use of video footage	Your identity not obscured	Your identity obscured
The data, in the form of video stills may be used in the researcher's PhD as well as any other written academic publications arising from the research		
The data may be used in classrooms and seminars for teaching purposes		
The data may be used by the researcher for further research projects		
The data may be used for presentations to the academic and/ or professional community		

Specific instructions applicable to the treatment and use of any particular segment of the video footage (if required):

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Signature: **Date:**

Full name (printed):

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