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Body Sights: Fashion Models' Constructions of Embodied Identity

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ABSTRACT

Ours is an increasingly 'looksist' society in which we come to know bodies and selves through the eye. In the ocularcentric bias of high modernity, self-identity is constructed through the appearance of the body surface, while the corporeal body becomes increasingly elusive. There exist, however, conflicting discourses on the value of possessing superior surfaces, presenting an ideological dilemma for attractive individuals. Taking a material-discursive approach, this study examines, firstly, the ways in which fashion models negotiate an embodied identity in the face of this ideological dilemma, with identity being understood as the process by which an individual discursively constructs a sense of self. Secondly, it questions the implications of these discursive constructions for models' relationship to their corporeal body. Ten models (6 females and 4 males) participated in this study. Body-mapping workshops, focus groups and individual interviews were conducted, and data was analysed with critical discourse analysis. In line with previous research, participants were found to oscillate between conflicting discourses that both resist, and identity with, constructions of selfhood upon bodily surface. In both sets of discourse, however, identity was premised on the expulsion of the corporeal body, which was constructed as a site of limitation, suffering and embarrassment. Yet, when epistemology was shifted from the eye to other sensory modes, the body re-emerged as a site of pleasure. It is argued that the fluid, messiness of the corporeal body is better suited as a metaphor for postmodern identity with its oscillations and ambivalences than the smooth, fixed bodily surface; and that, when known through non-visual senses, it can function as a site of resistance, disrupting the power of looksism and opening up new ways of being for body-selves denied legitimacy under the ocularcentrism of high modernity. In conclusion, strategies to 'bring the body back' through future studies are examined.

Key words: body; models; discourse; embodied identity; high modernity; corporeality

THEORETICAL OVERVIEW AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The body in post/high modernity

Academic interest in the body has escalated in the social sciences since the 1970's (Stam, 1998), running alongside the increasing centrality of the body for self-identity in the contemporary West (Giddens, 1971). Post/high modernity¹ has witnessed the evaporation of grand-narratives – their power to regulate bodies and locate existential certainties outside of the individual – and a resulting privatization and fragmentation of meaning (Elliott, 2001). Furthermore, the reductions in space-time boundaries, the rise of capitalism, consumer culture, and technological revolutions have granted reality a highly elusive, flexible and reflexive status (Giddens, 1971). Given the fluidity, plurality and flux of external reference systems (Kubiuk, 1998), the body appears to provide a seemingly solid foundation for constructing a reliable sense of self (Shilling, 1993).

Despite the body's centrality in post/high modernity, however, not all bodily senses are granted equal status; vision and visual metaphors have long dominated in the ocularcentric bias of the West (Howes, 2005; Jay, 1999). From the all-seeing, all-knowing eye of God (Synott, 1993), to the authoritative 'gaze' of empirical psychology that renders the invisible mind visible through measurement and objectification (Hook, 2004; Rose, 1990), the eye has been the principle foundation for epistemology.² Visual knowing is accentuated in post/high modernity's media-saturated economy, in which a rapid flow of images facilitate the "aesthetization of everyday life" (Howes, 2005, p. 9). In fact, Baudrillard (1983) argues that images, signs and simulations of the body have become so intoxicating and seductive that they no longer refer to an external corporeal reality; in the spirit of postmodern 'hyperrealism', illusions, simulations and images have replaced reality itself.³ Indeed, the materiality of the body in post/high modernity is increasingly elusive and highly malleable; technology and consumer culture offer the possibility of reconstructing body shape, size and appearance through surgery, body regimes, cosmetics and adornments (Featherstone, 1982). As the boundary between the 'natural' and the 'social' blur, what precisely the material body is becomes increasingly uncertain (Shilling, 2000). In his review of contemporary bodies, Turner (1984) concludes that although the body may appear solid, "it is the most elusive, illusionary... metaphorical... and ever distant thing". The corporeal body therefore

evaporates under post/high modernity's ocularcentric preoccupation with images, illusions and imitations of the real.

In this context, it is the visual *surface* of the body – the outer appearance – that most matters. According to Budgeon (2003), people live consciously on the surface of their bodies and these surfaces are felt to be the origin of identity. Drawing on Lasch's work on social narcissism, Frank's (1995, 1996) concept of the 'mirroring body' suggests that selfhood is constituted through surface imitations of surrounding images; the flickering of media surfaces are mirrored internally so that a narcissistic preoccupation with appearance, image and style dominate the regulation of the self. The body surface becomes a 'work of art' to be decorated, adorned and regulated through 'body regimes' such as dieting, slimming, exercise and cosmetics (Turner, 1996), and a commodity to be displayed, attractively packaged, marketed and sold (Featherstone, 1982). Dramaturgical (Goffman, 1971) and performativity (Butler, 1993) theories of identity also emphasize the importance of the body's outward appearances for micro-social interactions, impression management and preservation of self. For Goffman (1971), the self exists 'on stage' performing a multiplicity of roles for an audience of other actors. Bodies are "on display" (Radley, 1998, p.13), positioned in relation to other bodies in mutual visibility, and are constantly 'giving off' and receiving information through positional, gestural and linguistic cues. Under this visibility, bodily surface is integral to credible performance and must be managed through a self-directed gaze of surveillance in line with social conventions (Goffman, 1971). Mirroring and performative bodies articulate the power of consumer and mass culture in which marketing, manipulation, media and imagery reach down to the intimate textures of personal identity.

The fashion model exemplifies embodied identity in post/high modernity. Models' conscious use of the body as a literal commodity, persistently 'on display', makes visible the presentation of self through body performance. Operating within the subculture of the fashion industry, which accentuates society's ocularcentric obsession, the model's body is the ultimate 'mirroring body', existing for the purpose of adornment and regulated through strict body regimes of diet and exercise. As such, models' embodied identities can only be understood with the sociocultural context of post/high modernity in which selfhood is centered on the bodily surface.

Politics of appearance

Not all bodily surfaces are equal under the gaze of post/high modernity. Certain kinds of surfaces give rise to more legitimate selves than others. In particular, the young, beautiful, firm and well-toned surface – mimicking the smooth and firm, plastic packaging of consumer goods (Bordo, 1993) – is promoted as the ideal, against which the old, fat, ugly, unfit and sagging body is constructed as the deviant Other (Grogan, 1999). A wealth of studies has documented the internalization of this ideal appearance (Cash, Cash & Butters, 1983; Thomsen, McCoy & Williams, 2000; Wykes & Gunter, 2005). In post/high modernity, the closer one's corporeal body approximates the ideal, the higher its 'exchange value' (Williams & Bendelow, 1998). Looks, therefore, are not neutral, but laddered along a status hierarchy. Kanin (1990) refers to this hierarchy as 'pulchritudism': the claiming of a specialized kind of appearance to be superior to another. Others have referred to the 'looksism' (Freedman, 1986; Pipher, 1994) or 'aesthetic discrimination' (Synott, 1993) of the contemporary West as another identity politic parallel to, and intertwining with, the more well-known gender, class and race discriminations. Models, embodying the ideal, are positioned at the powerful top of the hierarchy with the highest 'exchange value'.

The power of aesthetics, however, is not simple. Superior surfaces may position models powerfully in a looksist society, but such surfaces also invite 'the gaze', rendering their bodies objects of an ocularcentric culture. For Foucault (1979, cited in Hook, 2004), 'the gaze' maintains social control through the surveillance of bodies. Feminists have applied his insights to the politics of gender; women's bodies are the object of the male possessive gaze and they are objectified and powerless beneath its stare (Waterhouse, 1993). For Burnett (1995), however, the argument that the look objectifies, empowering the surveyor and disempowering the surveyed, collapses the complex power processes of seeing into a deterministic chain, premised on a simple object-subject condition. Drawing on Simmel's 'interactive seeing', Burnett (1995) argues for a mutuality of glances; the observer discloses his/her own body as he/she glances to reveal the Other. The model's body with its superior surfaces, as a 'body on display' subjected to the gaze of other bodies, is simultaneously powerful and disempowered.

Cultural discourse on beauty/attractiveness

Given the complexity of power operating through ‘the gaze’ in an ocularcentric and looksist society, it is not surprising that literature records conflicting discourses on beauty ideals and attractiveness.

In the West, beauty has been associated with goodness, truth and morality (Freedman, 1986; Grogan, 1999) and fairy stories, advertising, film and television have institutionalized these associations in what Synott (1993) calls ‘the beauty mystique’.⁴ Adding to its positive associations, Bordo (1993) suggests that the smooth, firm, well-toned body surface has become emblematic of the ‘correct attitude’; of willpower, energy, self control, success, morality and power. Her argument echoes in the wealth of studies documenting ratings of attractive individuals as more confident, successful, sensitive, kind, sincere, interesting, poised and sociable than the homely (Dion, Berscheid & Walster, 1972).

In this context, possessing superior surfaces is advantageous and empowering. Attractive individuals are treated better, secure higher-paying jobs, are more likely to be acquitted on criminal charges and elicit assistance from strangers more easily (Grogan, 1999; Synott, 1993; Wykes & Gunter, 2005). Apart from its practical advantages, bodily surfaces in high modernity can also be psychologically empowering. Shilling (1993) argues that investing in the surface of the body provides people with a means of self-expression, a way of potentially feeling good, and increasing their sense of control in the face of postmodern chaos.

At the same time, however, beauty/attractiveness also carries negative associations that can be disempowering to those possessing superior surfaces. Critiques of the ‘beauty mystique’ are common, lead by feminism which denounces the modern emphasis on appearances as oppressive for women (Grogan, 1999; Freedman, 1986). Woolf (1990) exposes “the cult of beauty for what it really is... an increasingly cruel trap” (p. 5), while the fashion and advertising industry has been criticised for “propagating lies, distorting reality” and objectifying bodies (Wykes & Gunter, 2005, p. 4). Health workers have revealed the costs of ‘looking good’ (Nader, 1986), and psychologists have contributed with studies documenting the effects of ideal body types and attractive models on viewers’ body image, body dissatisfaction, development of eating disorders and pathology (Harrison, 2000; Streigel-Moore, McAvoy & Rodin, 1986). In this context where surface appearance is oppressive and unhealthy, looksism is reversed against attractive

individuals. Hatfield & Sprecher (1986) found undergraduate students to rate extremely attractive individuals as arrogant, aloof, self-indulgent, conceited, less moral, materialistic, snobbish, vain and egotistical. In an inversion of the beauty-mystique, therefore, beauty/attractiveness also carries a range of negative associations.

Thus, it is not surprising that qualitative studies investigating the experiences of attractive individuals have reported a problematic side to beauty/attractiveness. In his paper, *Beauty as elite stigma: Notes on an ambivalent identity*, Salmon (1983, cited in Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986) reports on his interviews with female fashion models in top modeling agencies in New York City. His participants complained that they struggled to develop friendships with other women due to perceived rivalry, and felt like 'public property' because men approached them without invitation. Similarly, in Hatfield & Sprecher's (1986) interviews with students, attractive men and women spoke of their problems in maintaining romantic relationships, developing friendships with the opposite sex, dealing with jealousy and confronting other people's prejudices against beautiful people. These results were replicated in O'Brien's (1979) interviews with handsome men. Possessing superior surfaces can be, as Salmon (1983, cited in Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986) concluded, a form of stigma, experienced as disempowering.

There are, therefore, conflicting cultural discourses regarding the value of superior surfaces. Associated with goodness and positive personality attributes, beauty/attractiveness is a positive deviance that empowers, while its association with oppression, lies, illusions, poor physical and mental health and negative personality traits can be experienced as stigmatizing and disempowering. 'Surface as empowering deviance' and 'surface as stigmatized deviance' reflect what Edley (2001) refers to as an 'ideological dilemma'. Unlike intellectual ideologies, lived ideologies (e.g. ideologies of beauty) are not coherent or integrated. Drawing on Billig's work on reality as rhetorically constructed, Edley (2001) argues that contradictory discourses or 'interpretive repertoires' develop alongside each other as opposing sides in an unfolding, historical argument. Oscillation between competing subject positions, inconsistency and contradiction in people's discursive accounts reflect these 'ideological dilemmas'.

Indeed, ambivalence and uncertainty regarding appearance has been the core finding in qualitative studies with attractive individuals. In a series of interviews with attractive women, Lackoff &

Scherr (1989) found that, on the one hand, women cling to ‘cultural clauses’ that underplayed the relevance of beauty in society (e.g. stating that “looks are not important”), while on the other, they acknowledged the positive and negative impacts that being beautiful had in their lives: women valued the ‘special treatment’ they received, but also worried that people responded only to their looks. The researchers concluded that “for beautiful women, there is always ambivalence; at one moment their beauty is an asset to be coveted, the next it is a liability to be shunned” (p. 94). Fashion models, with their superior surfaces, then, occupy a similar ambiguous position in the face of the ‘ideological dilemma’ regarding the value of beauty/attractiveness in the West. Indeed, Salmon (1983, cited in Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986) considers fashion models to possess a conflicted, “ambivalent identity” (p. 420).

Corporeal bodies

In ocularcentric post/high modernity selfhood is constructed upon the body surface which empowers and dis-empowers selves as the corporeal body becomes increasingly insignificant. Material-discursive scholars argue, however, that “the body has definite and distinctive biological and physiological characteristics” (Turner, 1996, p. 30) which pose certain limitations to surface-selves; bodies die, age, feel pain and resist easy molding into ideal shapes (Shilling, 1993). Rather than being unlimitedly malleable and elusive then, the corporeal body for material-discursive scholars is significant in the construction of identity (Ussher, 1997). Sampson (1993) argues that social constructionism, with its interpretive metaphors of ‘reading’ the textural body, reproduces an ocularcentric epistemology, thereby reducing the body to an empty surface for signs and symbols. It thus mimics other discursive expulsions of corporeality: from early religious denunciations of the flesh as sinful; to mainstream psychology’s pathologization of the body in its Cartesian elevation of the mind (Baerveldt & Voestermans, 1993). ‘Corporeal denial’ forms part of what Elias (1991) refers to as ‘the civilizing process’ of the West. Beginning in the Enlightenment, detailed codes of conduct for etiquette and manners have placed ever stricter taboos on bodily functions (e.g. urinating, spitting, blowing one’s nose) and serve to distinguish people in terms of their social worth. As such, the fleshy body has become concealed in a ‘conspiracy of silence’ as a site of embarrassment and shame.

To ‘bring the body back’ (Ussher, 1997), some material-discursive scholars have borrowed the psychoanalytic concept of ‘abjection’ to examine the corporeal body in the construction of identity. Expelled during the process of identity formation, the abject – flesh, blood, urine, vomit, mucus and pus – transgresses bodily boundaries, disrupting smooth surfaces and threatening to expose the boundary between self and other (Kristeva, 1982). As such, it evokes an embodied response of disgust and loathing, representing a “corporeal refusal of corporeality” (Weiss, 1999, p. 42); a desire to transcend the defiling, impure, polluting materiality of the body. In his studies of ‘leaky bodies’, Longhurst (2001) employs abjection to examine identity politics. He argues that the messiness of leaky bodies exposes identity as relational and can be a site of resistance against dominant identity ideologies. For material-discursive scholars, in order for the body to be properly examined, there is a need to consider the ways in which the fleshy, corporeal body interacts and interrelates with the discursive bodily surface (Ussher, 1997).

Rationale

Literature demonstrates that, under the ocularcentric bias of post/high modernity, accentuated by consumer culture and the fashion industry, identity is constituted through the surface of the body; surface images and appearances replace the increasingly elusive corporeal body. With their bodily surface constantly ‘on display’, functioning as a literal commodity, the fashion model epitomizes embodied identity in this era as the ultimate ‘mirroring’ and ‘performative’ body (Frank, 1995; Goffman, 1971). An ocularcentric focus on bodily surfaces, however, also positions people in relationships of power, facilitating a looksist society in which models, with their superior surfaces, are empowered. Investigating model’s constructions of identity therefore responds to discursive psychology’s call to understand identity formation in sociocultural contexts, but also contributes to the study of power relations in ‘studying up’ and examining looksism as an identity politic.⁵

Literature also reveals, however, that cultural discourses on superior surfaces are conflicting, thereby producing an ideological dilemma. Previous studies interviewing attractive individuals have found them to experience their bodily appearance with ambivalence and uncertainty. This study therefore questioned the ways in which models’ embodied identities are negotiated in light of the ideological dilemmas regarding superior surfaces. Within a social constructionist approach,

identity is understood to be the process by which an individual discursively constructs a sense of self (Parker, 1997). It also, however, examined the implications of these discursive positionings for models' relationships to their corporeal bodies. As such, it responds to Ussher's (1997) call for a material-discursive approach.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

Three different data collection methods were used: body-mapping workshops, focus groups and individual interviews. Two body-mapping workshops, lasting approximately three and a half hours, were held in a photography studio with five models participating in each. The body-mapping technique, developed by the CSSR HIV unit (Solomon, 2003), was modified and a semi-structured approach was adopted (see Appendix A). Participants were guided in creating life-sized artworks of their bodies that reflected their embodied experiences as models (see Appendix B). Body-mapping was particularly suited to this study for a number of reasons. Given the ocularcentrism of the fashion industry and models' familiarity with visual media, the visual method proved effective for exploring identity construction through surfaces. Furthermore, Schmitz (2006) theorizes that because language is a cultural vehicle, and because the body has been neglected in Western culture, verbal language lacks the symbolic resources to speak of the body. Visual art provides an alternate mode of communication wherein particular meanings are created through the use of 'signs' (Rose, 2001). Finally, Leder (1990) has suggested that the body is absent to its host most of the time, making it difficult for participants to speak of their bodies. Body-mapping, however, is an embodied process in itself; the large-scale of the work means that participants use their entire bodies to move around and create the artwork. This physical action facilitates the 're-appearance' of the body in the awareness of its host.

Focus groups immediately followed each body-mapping workshop and lasted approximately one and a half hours. Within the focus group, body-maps were presented and used as props for an open-ended discussion about bodies, modeling and the advertising/fashion industry. Bodies and embodied experiences can be a sensitive topic of discussion. Focus groups, however, have proved useful for addressing sensitive topics because people may feel more comfortable disclosing in a

group environment in which there is less individual pressure (Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Morgan, 1996).

Individual interviews supplemented other methods with in-depth data on model's embodied identities. Four models volunteered to be interviewed further on their experiences of modeling. Interviews were open-ended, allowing participants to return or add to their accounts. In this case, the postmodern approach to interviewing was followed; informed by the notion that people's lives under high modernity and late-capitalism are constructed from a multiplicity of competing accounts rather than one single story of progress, postmodern interviewers are open-ended to allow for contradiction and ambivalence in responses rather than demanding consistency (Parker, 2005).

Participants

Participants were recruited through modeling agencies and personal contacts, using snowball and convenience sampling. An email outlining the study, its objectives and participation requirements was sent to agency directors and forwarded on to models. In total 10 models participated in the study (6 females and 4 males) of which 7 were full-time professionals and 3 part-time models. They ranged in age from 18 to 26 years and had between 6 months to 7 years of modeling experience. With the exception of one participant who specialized in ramp modeling, most worked in a variety of modeling forms, including ramp, fashion, advertising, underwear, foot and hand, promotional and still modeling. Participants came from a variety of racial groups, but due to the financial expense of body maintenance regimes, all were middle-class individuals. All participants have been provided with pseudonyms.

Data analysis

Following a general material-discursive orientation, critical discourse analysis was employed. In a discursive approach, the language of participants is constitutive of reality and does not necessarily reflect an external, fixed and pre-given 'truth' (Parker, 1997). Rather than searching for psychological processes or 'authentic experiences', the text is examined for its organization of language and meaning, and is assumed to be a product of social, historical and cultural processes

in which language is embedded (Edwards & Potter, 1992). Discourse analysis is therefore particularly useful for assessing social constructions of identity in the cultural context of high modernity, but also for reflexively acknowledging the research process itself as a social context in which participants' accounts are intersubjectively co-constructed through interaction.

A combination of three different approaches to discourse analysis was used. Edley's (2001) approach seeks out 'interpretive repertoires' and the 'ideological dilemmas' embedded in cultural; Edwards and Potter's (1992) approach focuses on contradiction, paradox, inconsistency and ambiguity in subject positions and discursive complexes; and Parker's (1994, 2005) critical orientation adds an examination of power and resistance. Whereas most discourse analysis reproduces the visual metaphor in 'reading' the social world as textual, thus focusing on surface, Parker's (1994, 2005) critical approach acknowledges the 'extra-discursive' – some form of reality independent of language – and is thus particularly useful in addressing the corporeality of the body as a material subject independent of its signaling systems. Critical discourse analysis of transcripts therefore looks at the multiple, contradictory and fluid subject positions of a speaker; the organization of language into social bonds; and the 'speech acts' that exclude and include certain kinds of people and experiences (Parker, 2005). Finally, body-maps were analysed with semiological analysis as outlined by Rose (2001), which examines a visual text for the manner in which it constructs meaning through signs and thus compliments the aims of discourse analysis.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Positioning selves

Model's discursive constructions of embodied identity were fleshed out against a backdrop of an 'othering' process that took place at multiple levels. Douglas (1966) notes that the self is a symbolic process constructed against a 'Generalized Other', which may consist of a variety of 'not-me' subject positions. On the one hand, models constructed themselves as members of an elite subculture in opposition to non-models or 'normals'⁶. Employing an Us-Them/We-They distinction, Ziaad notes, "Our lifestyles are just different to most people's... They don't always understand what we do... but *we* understand each other". The marker of difference between 'normals' and 'models' is models' superior surfaces – their physical attractiveness that enables

them to participate in the industry. Given the ocularcentric bias of high modernity and the looksism it gives rise to, ‘the model’ is an empowered subject position in relation to the disempowered ‘normal’.

Othering also operated within the constructed category of ‘the model’ as different ‘kinds’ of models were distinguished. In particular, two main subgroups of ‘the model’ emerged: the ‘good model’ and the ‘bad model’. As Giddens (1997), argues, modern social life is characterized by heightened reflexivity; models were acutely aware of criticism against the modeling profession and the ‘beauty-mystique’. Cyan acknowledged, “they say it encourages unrealistic ideals of how people should look and gives off unhealthy messages”. Under this reflexive awareness, participants positioned themselves as ‘good models’, distancing themselves from an unspoken stereotype of the ‘bad model’ that surfaced in the shadows of their words: Jasper asserted that he “would never participate in something that would send the wrong kind of message” and Busisiwe insisted, “I have a healthy body... and you can see it in my pictures... my body’s completely in proportion. I’m hardly skin and bones.” These statements position models in opposition to ‘bad model’ - the model that *is* ‘skin and bones’ and *does* ‘send the wrong kind of message’. The subject positions of ‘the normal’, ‘the good model’ and ‘the bad model’, however were hardly fixed or static; participants shifted between them as the context of conversation changed. For the most part, however, participants constructed themselves as ‘good models’ and they did so primarily by resisting an identity constructed on the body surface surface.

RESISTING THE SURFACE

Performative selves and role distance

In line with Goffman’s (1971) dramaturgical approach to identity, participants constructed themselves as role-playing stage actors, when describing their experiences of modeling. In Amore’s body-map, a mask from a masked-ball, a glamorous, glittered eye, a framed face and the word ‘Mona Lisa’ attest to the exhibition of self; she is at once a beautiful artwork, a body on display, a shiny surface and an actor playing a part (figure 1). Describing her body-map, Cyan explained, “I’ve got a couple of body shots there with the faces blackened out simply because every single day the shoot is different because... I’m playing a different role” (figures 2 – 3) Like

a role, modeling is a learnt skill, a ‘body technique’ (Williams & Bendelow, 1998) or ‘habitus’, acquired through training: “it takes practice to learn how to move in front of the camera... or to walk the ramp”, but other performative skills must also be learnt for successful role maintenance: “how to present yourself to casting agents, shake hands firmly... smile charmingly.” These acting skills learnt within the industry can be transported to other contexts where performance takes on the appearance of ‘the natural’ (Longhurst, 2001): “I smile when I don’t really feel happy and I think modeling taught me that because... even if you don’t like what you’re wearing, you have to pretend to be proud of it”.

In performing identity, it is the outer surfaces of the body that are important for the presentation of ‘face’ (Goffman, 1971). For models, these outer surfaces undergo multiple transformations: “you can come in with jeans and takkies... then first your make-up is done, then your hair, then you get into the clothes, then more touch-up make-up and then styling... you’re like a changed person after”. This transformative process continues even once the real body of the model has gone home: the image is further adjusted in Photoshop, cropped and airbrushed, blemishes are smoothed out, body shapes are slimmed and eye colour changed: “sometimes I don’t even recognize *myself* when I see the ad in the mag.” These multiple transformations represent the malleability of the body surface in high modernity (Shilling, 2000), to the point that the surface of the body becomes detached as an entity in its own right.

Performative identities therefore are intertwined with unrealities; artifices, illusions, acts, pretences and surfaces that become the hyperrealism of the postmodern age. Yet, participants employ a performative discourse precisely to *resist* identification with superficial artifice. By articulating a reflexive awareness about the illusionary quality of the industry in comments such as, “it’s all a myth”, “it’s a role I play” or “it can be so *superficial*”, models separate themselves from the artifice. Goffman (1971) refers to this strategy as “role distance” – the means whereby an individual expresses a separation between role and self, so as not to be symbolically defined by the role and its social meanings. Through role distance participants deny Baudrillard’s (1987) notion of the ‘crushed self’ and insist on a true, authentic, natural self that exists independent of the performance. Through a performative discourse that constructs modeling as an act of role-playing, participants position themselves as ‘good models’, demonstrating their awareness of the

myths, artifice and appearances of the industry, while separating their ‘true selves’ from it through role-distance.

Beneath surfaces: A psychologized discourse

Having split the ‘true self’ from its performative roles, all models drew on a psychologized discourse and its Cartesian split to position ‘authentic’ selfhood *inside* the individual. Resisting identification with bodily surfaces, Ziaad chose to paint his body-map face black “because to me beauty is not as important as what’s on the inside”. Instead he drew a rainbow as emblematic of himself because “the rainbow represents someone who is beautiful, but with an *inner* beauty”. As a student at a local technikon, Ziaad conceptualized this ‘inner beauty’ in the form of “an intelligent mind”, represented by the “apple of knowledge” (figures 7 – 8). For others, self was internally situated through its construction as ‘personality’: “I think I succeed in this job because of who I *am*, my *personality*... and not because of what I look like” (figure 6). Self-descriptions were riddled with personality traits: Sizwe saw himself “as someone who is driven”, “a go-getter”, while Cyan “outlined [her] body in red because [she feels she has] a very, very charming personality” (figure 9). Olivia asserted that the people in the industry “remember your personality more despite the photo, they say ‘you know what, I remember her, she was wonderful to work with, she has a great personality...’, so you get jobs that way.” Featherstone (1996) argues that this discourse of ‘magnetic personality’ is a product of consumer culture’s emphasis on salesmanship and marketable selfhood, and replaces the earlier morally-loaded concept of ‘character’. Complementing ‘personality’ and ‘mind’, the idiom of ‘inner strength’ was particularly common: “you need to be strong to be in this industry...you need to draw strength from *inside* yourself... modeling’s made me develop a mental strength”.⁷ Closely related, was the age-old Cartesian manta of self-knowledge: “you have to know yourself... know who you are, to succeed in this industry”.

The psychologized discourse of ‘mind’, ‘personality’, ‘inner strength’ and ‘self-knowledge’, premised on the Cartesian body-mind split, constructs selfhood as internal, rendering surface appearances insignificant. As such, it is especially functional for negotiating possible threats to selfhood that emit from being ‘bodies on display’. Speaking about how he deals with the criticism of photographers and art directors, Jasper acknowledges that “You’re more than... just the body,

and a pretty face or whatever, its like there's more to you, so you know if someone's criticizing the outside of you, it's okay" and Cyan adopted a similar approach: "I feel what's on the inside of here is a lot stronger than what's out here and what's inside is going to *last* a lot longer than what's out here, so if they don't like my body, doesn't mean they don't like *me*". Recording the age at which she started modeling, Nikita's body-map expresses a similar resilience using the idiom of self knowledge: "Age 18: I knew who I was so they couldn't break me" (figure 4). Parker (1992) notes that people take up particular discourses because of the agency it allows them; a psychologized discourse positions models as resilient subjects, rather than victims, of the industry's gaze and is thus empowering.

Edwards and Potter (1992) argue that discourses are political, legitimizing certain ways of being, while excluding others. When selfhood is assumed to be internal, models who identify with surface appearances are constructed as 'the Other'. Dylan told of a friend who "lost herself" in becoming "obsessed with her looks; she went for plastic surgery and just couldn't stop. She didn't know who she was – that's destructive". Melissa echoes Dana concern about the destructiveness of a lack of self-knowledge: "I've seen examples, especially of younger models, who don't yet know who they are...eating disorders, drugs, things like that happen to them because they think looks are everything." When models adopt a psychologised discourse, situating selfhood internally, they do so in opposition to 'other' models who center selfhood in surface appearance, and thus strategically distance themselves from the 'bad model' subject position.⁸

Stigma and power inversions: A new kind of victim

When discourses deny the role of surfaces in identity, possessing superior surfaces in the form of beauty/attractiveness can even be disempowering. As Edwards and Potter (1992) claim, people position themselves discursively, but they are also positioned by others. Although participants positioned themselves as 'good models', they were aware that 'normals', using the same psychologizing discourses, often positioned them as 'bad models' based on their appearance: "I think there [are] stereotypes that people hold... they think because you're gorgeous, you're dumb or shallow... or stuck-up and snotty".

In his analysis of stigma, Goffman (1968) suggested that people see themselves through a mirror which offers a reflection framed in terms of society's views and prejudices. A 'spoilt identity' arises when there is a discrepancy between a person's 'virtual social identity' as perceived by the self (the good model) and their stigmatized 'actual social identity' as perceived by others (the bad model). From the victimized position of a 'spoilt identity', models listed the 'burdens' of being beautiful. Mellissa found that "other women get jealous... they think I'm going to steal their man", while Jasper found it "difficult to be taken seriously" and Amore was "tired of all the dumb blond jokes". Models also worried that people only responded to their looks and complained about being treated as objects. Such complains are similar to the findings of Hatfield & Sprecher (1986), O'Brien (1979) and Salmon (1978, cited in Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986) from their interviews with attractive individuals and reflect participants' awareness of the 'surface as stigmatized deviance' discourse prevalent in high modernity.

Constructing themselves as 'stigmatized', models occupy a 'victims' status. Similar to men's complaints of victimhood at the hand of feminist critique or white people's complaints of 'reverse racism' (Hook, 2004), theirs is a 'reactionary victimhood', a cry of 'reversed looksism'. William and Bendelow (1998) note that, when the powerful in society take up the role of the disempowered, their victim-position can usefully conceal the reality of power relations.

Discursive normalization

To further resist identification with the 'bad model' subject position, participants employed strategies of discursive normalization to blur the lines between 'normals' and 'models' and underplay the relationship of power between them. One strategy consisted of resisting the identity of 'model' as primary identity, de-glamorizing their lifestyles and emphasizing the mundane and ordinary activities they share with 'normals'. Body-maps are populated with images and phrases that speak of participants' hobbies and interests outside of the modeling industry: watching television, playing sports, being outdoors, "cooking, baking and entertaining friends", "filling out crosswords, playing boardgames and reading books", spending time with family, "eating Mac Donalds", swimming at the beach, "slob-ing out and lazing around" (figures 10 - 12). In her interview, Cyan reported, "when I'm with family doing things I love – that's when I feel *myself*, my absolute self". Centering selfhood in hobbies *outside* of the modeling industry – some which

are particularly ‘un-model-like’ – places models on equal footing with ‘normals’. An extension of this strategy was to stress a plurality of identities – friend, swimmer, baker, student, South African, daughter – of which ‘model’ was only one. As Lisa stated, “I wouldn’t say that I’m *primarily* a model. I wouldn’t say I’m *primarily* anything really... I am so many things.” Multiple, plural selves and shifting situational identities are the ultimate signifiers of postmodern subjectivity (Kubriak, 1998; Elliott, 2001); they are also advantageous in that unwanted subject positions can be suppressed as more contextually desirable ones are elevated.

Another normalizing strategy used by those in positions of power is to discursively construct the ‘signifier of difference’ – in this case, the superior surface appearance – as accessible and attainable for all (Parker, 1997). In place of adjectives such as ‘beautiful’ or ‘attractive’, which infer fixed and innate qualities, participants considered themselves “well-groomed”. Grooming, which might consist of the various body maintenance regimes (Shilling, 1993), is an active process rather than a fixed attribute. As such, what Bordo (1993) calls ‘the look’ is a *becoming* – not an innate accessory – and is available to anyone willing and disciplined enough to commit to the process. Rendering identities as ‘becomings’, or processes of construction, has become particularly popular in post-structuralist theorizing of subjectivity, and disrupts modernist insinuations on the self as a fixed and pre-given entity (Elliott, 2001).

Other ways of normalizing superior surfaces included a relativist discourse that denied the existence of objective criteria for beauty/attractiveness, rendering it personally subjective and culturally specific. Lisa questioned “the very notion of beauty itself. What is it really? It’s so personal”. Busisiwe commented on the role of culture in constructions of beauty as well as its historical contingency: “where I come from, people used think... [of] plump as beautiful, black as beautiful... Now they’ve taken on white values and it’s different... There are different ideas of attractiveness and they come from... culture” and culture changes. Resisting the objective, fixed status of beauty/attractiveness opens up the powerful subject position to all since “everyone is beautiful in some way... at some time to someone”.

Discursive normalization therefore takes the form of either emphasizing the ‘normal’ aspects of multiple identities or rendering the criteria for membership in ‘the model’ subject position as

accessible to normals. Through these strategies, participants discursively equalize the power imbalance between ‘normals’ and ‘models’ thereby positioning themselves as ‘good models’.

IDENTIFICATION WITH SURFACES

Surface Matters: the ‘mirroring body’

Edley (2001) argues that people hold competing discourses even within the same sentence. Indeed, alongside discourses that resist surface-selves, participants also adopted a ‘surface matters’ discourse that elevated surfaces and beauty as empowering components of selfhood. In contrast to assertions that personality matters more than appearances, participants claimed that “the world *is* actually based on the way people look” and listed examples of the empowering quality of appearance outside the modeling industry. Dylan spoke of a friend who “can have any woman he wants”, leading him to conclude that “beauty does play a role... it’s a reality that you get ahead faster or you get promoted or you have more friends or attract more chicks”. His words echo the claims of literature documenting the ‘lookisim’ of our ‘narcissistic age’ (Grogan, 1999; Synott, 1993; Wykes & Gunter, 2005).

In a context in which surfaces *matter*, models’ superior beauty/ attractiveness is an empowering resource. Across her body-map, Amore drew a map to record the variety of countries and places she has travelled to as a result of modeling (figure 14), while Nikita regarded modeling as “a way to make money – an opportunity to use the assets you have” (figure 13) – a position echoed by Ziaad’s comment that he is “merely using the gifts and talents God’s given [him]”. It is precisely because the body is a source of capital in high modernity and can be marketed and sold (Lowe, 1995), that beauty can have real economic advantages: coming from a poverty-stricken background, Busisiwe regarded modeling as her “ticket out”; “[she] can use [her] beauty to put [her] kid through school and food on the table, and make something of [herself]”.

Under a culturally approved discourse which constructs surfaces as empowering, identification with superior surfaces is legitimated. Rather than normalizing their positive-deviance, models lay claim to their superior beauty/attractiveness: “I know I look great and I love it”, was Ziaad’s assertion, while Lisa reported that she enjoys “looking good” and Cyan admitted, “I do like pretty

things and being pretty”. As such, models position themselves beside the ‘bad model’ subject position as Franks (1996) ‘mirroring bodies’ obsessed with their own surfaces. As such, beauty/attractiveness is valued as expressive of a particular relationship between self and body. Body maintenance regimes like grooming, working-out, exercising and eating healthily, are discursively constructed as acts of love and care for the body (figures 15 – 17); models talk of “taking care of”, “looking after” and “protecting” their bodily surface. Metaphors of ‘investment’ also merged with those of self-care and love in models’ descriptions of body regimes: “I don’t see anything wrong with investing in yourself, because you’re actually rewarded in years to come by looking after and caring for yourself”. Investment metaphors linguistically carry the discourse of ‘body capital’ with monetary worth, and also draw legitimacy from the recent health promotion movement in high modernity which promotes ‘investment’ for future outcome: “to preserve one’s beauty is to preserve health and prolong life” (Featherstone, 1982, p. 23). ‘The look’ in a surface-matters discourse therefore is emblematic of good health, investment, correct attitudes, concern and love for self; is something to be celebrated rather than normalized; and is reserved for a privileged few.

While a psychologized discourse constructs the ‘bad model’ as ‘the other’, in a context in which the well-toned, beautiful, youthful and smooth body is prized, it is bodies that are old, sagging, fat, marked and unfashionable that are expelled. For all models, the mere thought of being, or being seen with, such a body evokes anxiety. Jasper recounted a time when he had made a friend of his change “into something decent because she was wearing god-knows-*what* and looked a mess and I was like ‘girl! I can’t go out with you looking like *that*.’” Amore, soon to have an eye operation so that she no longer has to wear glasses, nervously pondered the implications of being unable to have the operation: “If I can’t do the operation then I have to wear glasses for the rest of my life and I would feel less sexy and less powerful and less of a person... [looking good] is a big, big part of my life in the way I feel”. When selfhood is constructed upon surface appearances, ‘othered’ bodies with poor surfaces are disempowered selves.

By identifying with a ‘surfaces matter’ discourse which constructs beauty as integral to selfhood, empowers models because of their superior surfaces and excludes ‘normals’ as ‘other’, participants actively occupy the ‘bad model’ subject position. As ‘reflexive agents’ (Giddens, 1997), however, they remain acutely aware of the social stigma attached to the ‘bad model’ and

thus employ discursive defenses to legitimize their position. Some adopted a ‘so what/ why not’ approach: “Yes, I’m good-looking and it makes life easy, but so what? Why shouldn’t I use what I have? Other people who are intelligent... they might use intelligence to get ahead in life... I use my looks and I have no problem with that”. Others blamed ‘the ugly’ in defense: “it’s usually ugly people who have a problem with [modeling]... they’re just jealous and they want to make themselves feel better, so they try to make it into a bad thing”. Almost all models who adopted a surface-matters discourse qualified their statements with disclaimers such as “this is going to sound vain, but...” or “I know it sounds cocky and arrogant, but...”, or with devices that Goffman (1971) refers to as ‘face-saving’; laughter and humour, exaggeration and parody, or eye-rolling and other embodied gestures that minimize the seriousness of their words.

Oscillation, contradiction and ambivalence

Models oscillate therefore between two contradictory sets of discourses. On the one hand, role-distance, psychologizing discourses, discursive normalization and inversions of power resist the construction of selfhood on the bodily surface and favour a psychologized depth approach to identity; on the other, participants adopt discourses that construct surfaces as empowering sites of selfhood. As such, they shift from positioning themselves alongside ‘normals’ and in opposition to ‘bad models’, to actively adopting the ‘bad model’ subject position and constructing ‘normals’ as distinctly ‘other’. In the former, superior surfaces are stigmatized and normalized, while in the latter, they are claimed markers of superior identity. The embodied identities of models are therefore riddled with ambivalence, ambiguity and contradiction. This is consistent with the findings of Lackoff and Scherr (1989), as well as with Salmon’s (1983, cited in Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986) conclusion that fashion models possess an ‘ambivalent identity’.

Due to its stubborn quest for a singular, scientific truth and the resulting value placed on consensus, consistency and convergence in evidence (Durrheim, 1997), mainstream psychology has little to say about contradictions, ambiguities and oscillations, apart from some fleeting attempts like dissonance theory (Festinger, 1959). In discursive psychology, on the other hand, where plurality of truths and multiplicity of selves are given pride of place, oscillation, paradox, contradiction *without* mediation or convergence is part of fluid identities; “to refuse to be fixed one way or another... not to swear consistency ...the hub of postmodern life strategy is not

making identity stand – but the avoidance of being fixed” (Elliott, 2001, p. 145). The desire to remain fluid, to resist being ‘fixed’ in the way mainstream psychology categorizes and classifies, is eloquently captured in a song quoted in Felicity’s body-map: “In this world where classification is key, I want to erase the straight lines and just be me. I come in too many flavours for one fucking spoon”.

Discursive approaches offer useful consideration of models’ oscillations in identity. Edley (2001) suggests that oscillation, ambivalence and shifting subject positions are a telling sign of an ‘ideological dilemma’; model’s oscillations attest to their reflexive awareness of the positive and the negative associations of beauty/attractiveness that form part of common-sense in post/high modernity. Parker (2005) argues that conflicting cultural discourses can offer useful resources in the negotiation of power in the arena of identity politics. The most powerful of positions are those in which the workings of power are obscured (William & Bendelow, 1998). Owing to their superior surfaces, models occupy powerful positions in a looksist society – a position supported by a surface-matters discourse that runs congruently with interpretive repertoire of ‘surfaces as positive’ in high modernity. The contra interpretive repertoire of ‘surface as negative’, however, threatens to expose the workings of looksism, disrupting model’s powerful position. Thus, power is discursively obscured and denied by their employment of discourses that resist identifying with the object of power, namely the body surface. In other words, models discursively undermine their power in order to protect it. This is in accordance with discursive strategies employed by those rendered powerful in related identity politics of gender, race and class (Hook, 2004).

Models’ discursive constructions of embodied identity demonstrate it to be a fluid and dynamic process of oscillation; people *become* identities rather than possess them and these identities are situational, contextual and constantly in flux. Hardly autonomous and bounded as mainstream psychology insists, models’ identities are relational and political, constructed always in relation to something or someone positioned as Other, be it ‘the normal’, ‘the bad model’ or even the corporeal body itself.

CORPOREAL BODIES

Expelling the flesh

Both discourses that resist, and those that comply with the postmodern obsession with bodily surfaces, do so at the expense of the fleshy, corporeal body. A Cartesian psychologized discourse renders the body an empty vessel for a disembodied mind, casting it as insignificant in the construction of identity. In fact, the body itself disappears from conscious awareness: “when I’m on the shoot, it feels that my body isn’t there... because it’s not mine because like whatever is in my head is mind, my body is just following what I’m wearing that day”. As Leder’s (1990) ‘disappearing body’, the fleshy body is subordinated to ‘mind’ and disclaimed as not-mine/Other. Although a ‘surface-matters’ discourse celebrates the bodily surface as integral to selfhood in high modernity, it is a particular kind of surface that is privileged: a smooth, fixed, solid and clear surface. Under both discourses, therefore, the corporeal body – the noisy, leaky, aging, sagging, feeling body – is excluded from identity construction.

Yet, the flesh refuses to be silenced. Models are persistently reminded of their inability to escape corporeality because of the restrictions it poses for ‘bodies on display’ (Radley, 1998). Unlike their illusionary images on glossy magazine pages, real bodies get tired, hungry, uncomfortable and pained. Busisiwe spoke about how difficult it could be to “keep going and keep moving for the camera when you’re so tired”, given that shoots can continue for hours on end. Brain complained about one shoot which continued “right through lunch and I was starving! They don’t feed you and then expect you to ‘give them your all” Because advertising companies shoot promotions a season before the clothes come to the shops, models had to model summer clothes in winter and winter cloths in summer: “You freeze your ass off... outdoors in flimsy tops and summer shorts... smiling and pretending its summer, when it’s like 2 degrees.... And then in summer, you boil with the studio lights and jerseys when [it’s] hot out”. Physical bodies were also sites of real pain. Curling, bleaching, piercing, waxing, binding, plucking and girdling all hurt. Nikita particularly disliked “those hair artists who pull so hard it feels like my scalp is going to come off”. Complaining that “excruciating high heels really kill [her] feet”, Amore drew painted brown smudges across them in her body-map (figure 22), while Dana recounted a painful experience of having his entire chest waxed for a particular shoot (figure 18). Physical pain, however, was accommodated through a ‘sacrifice for beauty’ discourse that echoed early religious discourses of virtuous suffering of the sinful flesh for moral good: “you can always look good... but if you want to look *great*, that comes at a cost... you have to put up with [pain]”. The

toleration of pain and exhaustion, as Bordo (1993) notes, has become a cultural metaphor for self-determination, will and moral fortitude. The corporeal body with its fatigue, hunger, discomfort and pain is a limitation undermining perfect performances of self.

The greatest limitation and resistance of corporeal bodies for models, however, is their time-bound quality. Under consumer culture's emphasis on youthful, smooth and tight surfaces, aging bodies are particularly 'othered' (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1996; Hugman, 1999). Almost all models feared the bodily changes they would endure with age – “the sagging breasts and floppy thighs”, the “loosening of skin around the neck and dark circles under the eyes” and the wrinkles (figure 25). Death, the tail-end of aging, is also dreaded. One body-map reads, “you are born. You die. That's it. Your 'soul' is your physicality – without your brain, without your physical being – *You are nothing*” (figure 29). Shilling (1993) argues that in the cultural context of high modernity which centers selfhood on bodily surfaces, death is constructed as a particular problem.

Apart from being a site of discomfort, suffering and restriction, the fleshy body also limits through embarrassment and shame. Purple marks covering the legs of Amore's body-map representing “how easily [she] can bruise” (figure 23), while on Melissa's body-map “a large, strawberry birthmark stretches across [her] arm” and eczema scars scatter her hands and legs (figures 19 – 21). Where clean and clear surfaces are valued in an ocularcentric industry, bodies that bruise, get pimples, are marked with scars, eczema and birthmarks are less useful as display objects and thus regarded with expressions of frustration and disgust: birthmarks are “ugly”, pimples are “a nightmare” and bruises “a real pain”. Constructed as deviant, the marked body occupies a 'spoilt identity' (Goffman, 1963).

Noisy and leaky bodies are particular sites of embarrassment and shame for models. Jasper recalls a time that he accidentally farted on set; “it was *loud* okay, I mean *loud*... [the cameraman and art director] were laughing so hard we had to stop shooting... and I just stood there like ‘what do I say now?’”. Mellissa recalls a similar embarrassing moment when her “tummy grumbled so loud... *everyone* could hear!”; Lisa has listed asthma and hayfever on her body-map (figure 26), because her sneezing and wheezing come in the way of her working sometimes for months on end. When the fleshy body transgresses its 'veil of silence' and speaks with farts, coughs, sneezes, hiccups, wheezes or grumbles, it is not only a Goffmanesque embarrassment and slippage in

‘face’, but it also undermines successful performance and display. Bodily leaks present the same dilemma: “no amount of make-up can hold a runny nose in place” and thus colds and flu are particularly unwelcome for Nikita; for Sizwe, the hot lights on set make him “sweat uncontrollably... the make-up artist has to be on-standby to powder”. As an underwear model, Cyan has to be watchful of vaginal discharge and menstruation times present particular problems requiring additional self-surveillance to avoid spills and leaks. The embarrassment and shame that covers corporeal bodies is integral to Elias’s (1991) ‘civilizing process’ and is particularly problematic for models’ bodies that are constantly ‘on display’ (Radley, 1998).

In both discursive contexts, then, the fleshy body is the ultimate ‘abject’ – that which must be expelled, rejected and contained to maintain an ordered identity (Weiss, 1999). The volatile, messy and fluid body is a threat to the psychologized self that centers selfhood *inside* an autonomous, bounded body because it threatens to spill and transgress borders between self and other (Kristeva, 1982). The fleshy body also provides real limitations that a psychologized discourse cannot override: bodies get hungry and fatigued, they experience pain, they age and die, regardless of ‘inner strength’ or mind. On the other hand, the fleshy body with its markings, noises, leaks and spills is also threatening to a surface-matters discourse, which constructs selfhood on clear, silent, smooth and firm bodies for visual display; in this context fleshiness is constructed as ‘dirt’ because it is “matter out of place” (Douglas, 1966). In both discourses, therefore, models display a “paradoxically necessary, but impossible desire to transcend corporeality” and refuse “the defiling, impure, uncontrollable materiality of [their] embodied existence” (Grosz, 1989, p. 72) in order to maintain their identity positions. Hence, the body is consistently inscribed with negative connotations; it is at once a limitation, a restriction, a site of pain and discomfort, a vehicle for embarrassment and shame. The corporeal body is the ultimate ‘Other’ against which identity is constructed.

Reviving bodies and remaking selves

According to Leder (1990), the body is primarily absent in self-awareness, re-appearing in a sensory focus in times of pain, illness and restriction; we can only know the corporeal body through its pathological and deviant forms. Yet, sensory awareness is *not* reserved for moments of pain and discomfort; it is also heightened in bodily pleasure (Erlmann, 2005). Discussing the

times they feel most comfortable in their bodies, models described a range of sensual activities. Commenting on pictures of nude girls on her body-map, Amore stated, “When I feel most comfortable in my body is when I’m naked... not necessarily in front of people, just normal” (figure 30). Asked to elaborate, she responded, “my skin is more sensitive to the world when its nude... I like feeling different breezes, air... different fabrics I move past... I feel silky and soft”. Lisa’s body-map displays a luxurious bubble-bath (figure 32); “it represents that my body feels best in a hot bath after a long day”. Prompted to explain why the bath is comforting, she added, “the bubbles tingle on my skin and the water feels like it’s... stroking me... my whole body feels warm and content, relaxed... I also like the smells... lavender salts and vanilla” Dylan loved his body best “in bed after a long day” and Sizwe liked the way his body felt light and free when swimming in the sea, bobbing in the waves with the sounds of the ocean (figure 31). Cyan boldly announced that her body felt good “during sex... orgasm... [my body] feels full and bursting and all my senses take part”.

In moments of bodily pleasure, the role of the seeing eye is dramatically reduced. Most descriptions of ‘comfortable bodies’ consisted of experiences that took place in what Goffman (1963) calls ‘backroom performances’ when bodies were not on display for other eyes. Liberated momentarily from ‘the gaze’ of the other, corporeal bodies can take pleasure in their fleshiness. As descriptions reveal, furthermore, bodily pleasure is a sensual experience involving the senses of touch, smell, sound and taste – not simply vision. Shifting epistemology from the visual to other sensory modes, therefore, opens up new possibilities for knowing, being and ‘doing’ corporeal bodies in a way that does not reduce the flesh to a site of embarrassment, pain and limitation.

At the heart of the ‘identity politics’ agenda, is a search for alternative concepts of identity and emancipatory strategies for resistance that will disrupt the reproduction of unequal power relations (Parker, 2005). In high modernity, in which identity is centered on the body, finding new ways of “doing bodies” (Butler, 1993) allows for new ways of being selves and possibilities for disrupting looksism. When positive meanings are attributed to the corporeal body – when leaks, noises, mess and spills are routes to pleasure and enjoyment through other bodily senses – identity can be grounded in real bodies, rather than in surface appearances and illusions. As such, currently ‘othered’ identities and bodies – ‘the aged’, ‘the fat’, ‘the ugly’, the sweating and the

noisy-bodied – are granted a new legitimacy denied to them under the ocularcentrism of high modernity. Positive attitudes towards bodies – expressed in the gold lines radiating out of Amore’s body-map, or Cyan’s comment, “I’m very comfortable in my own skin. I have no hang-ups about my body; I love each and every part of it” – can be available to those *without* perfect surfaces. Knowing bodies through neglected senses thus invests the corporeal body with new value and opens political possibilities for the currently disempowered.

Apart from being politically advantageous, acknowledging the corporeal body through other sensory epistemology is also helpful in gaining a more realistic understanding of identity in post/high modernity. Douglas (1966) argues that the way we understand the body has implications for the way we understand selfhood. The smooth, tight and bounded bodily surface metaphorically articulates the Western obsession with the autonomous, bounded, independent self (Strathern, 1996). It is a product of the empirical gaze, grounded in modernist discourses of positivism and rationality, which searches for consistency in identity. The messiness of material, corporeal bodies, with their fluids, leaks and spills, demonstrate the impossibility of clear-cut borders, lines, demarcations and divisions (Grosz, 1994). As such, the corporeal body is a better suited metaphor for the relational, fluid and shifting identities of post/high modernity and its contradictions, ambivalences and oscillations, as expressed through the fashion model.

Conclusion

In post/high modernity, where we are selves through bodies and we know bodies through eyes, surfaces and appearances are what matter in the construction of identity. Conflicting cultural discourses on superior surfaces (i.e. beauty/attractiveness), however, present an ideological dilemma. In light of this dilemma, fashion models adopt discourses that oscillate between resisting selfhood situated in surface appearance, and identifying with surfaces as empowering sites. As material-discursive scholars predict, however, in both sets of discourse the corporeal body is expelled as the ultimate ‘Other’ in the construction of identity: the fleshy body becomes a site of embarrassment, pain and limitation for models under ‘the gaze’, yet can become a site of pleasure when other senses are granted equal epistemological status. It is argued that models’ oscillations, contradictions and ambivalence, mark identity as a relational, fluid and political process of power negotiation in a ‘looksist’ society. This is in line with constructionist theorizing

on identity and in opposition to mainstream conceptions of the autonomous, bounded individual. Furthermore, it is also argued that the discursively expelled corporeal body, in its fleshy fluidness, is better able to metaphorically express models' inconsistent, relational and political identities in a way that the smooth, fixed surface of bodies cannot. 'Bringing the body back' is thus necessary for understanding identity formation in post/high modernity, but it also has a political imperative: the fleshy body can be a site of resistance, opening up new ways of being and re-legitimizing selves rendered illegitimate under looksism.

'Bringing the body back' into psychology has slowly begun in theory (Stam, 1998), but remains a hesitant process in research itself.¹⁰ This study is thus a useful beginning, but a wide 'bodyscape' of unexplored territory nevertheless remains for future studies. Responding to Synnott (1993) and Hatfield and Sprecher's (1986) request to consider aesthetic discrimination as a serious societal problem, this study has focused on 'looksism' to develop it as an identity politic in its own right, rather than regarding it as a mere subsection of feminist theorizing. This is not to say, however, that identity politics do not intertwine. Gender *does* matter; women are more affected by looksism than are men. Reproducing this study under a feminist orientation with only female participants may contribute a great deal towards our understanding of power and identity formation under high modernity's ocularcentric gaze. Indeed, post-structural feminist is particularly well suited to disrupting artificial binaries such as 'the fluid' and 'the solid', 'the corporeal' and 'the surface', alongside 'the feminine' and 'the masculine'.

Content apart, methods of analysis should also be open to revision if the body is to be brought back to psychology. It has been argued that, for the corporeal body to play a positive role in identity formation, visual epistemologies must be complemented by other ways of knowing. One possibility would be to combine discourse analysis and its 'reading' metaphors with methods of audio analysis that focus on 'listening' to voice positioning. Sampson (1993) argues that "language itself is embodied even as the body is en-languaged" (p. 39). Like Kristeva (1982) in her psychoanalytic work on the semiotic mode, Sampson (1993) suggests that researchers learn to listen to, and analyse, the 'breathiness' of speech – its pauses, tone, pitch, rhythm and sound. Some developments in this direction have been made recently in social anthropology (see Erlmann, 2005), and might provide some direction for discursive psychology.¹⁰ Whether building on content focus or methods of data analysis, future studies that 'bring the body back' into

investigations of identity are politically and practically necessary for developing a comprehensive body of work in psychology informed by material-discursive insights.

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FOOTNOTES

¹ Postmodern scholars argue that we are living in a world in which modernist values and processes have become inverted; the Enlightenment's emphasis on rationality, consensus, the individual and progress towards a singular truth has been replaced by postmodern flux, fluidity and fragmentation in which a plurality of truths give rise to conflict, ambivalence and inconsistency (Durrheim, 1997; Elliott, 2001; Kubiak, 1998). Giddens (1991, 1997), however, refers to the same cultural climate as 'high modernity' arguing that, instead of having entered a new epoch, we are experiencing the tail-end of modernity with its political, economic and cultural processes accelerated to a new speed and scale. I use the term post/high modernity to combine these two approaches.

² The primary of a sight-based epistemology is evident in the English language itself. A wealth of words and phrases metaphorically tie sight to knowledge: "seeing is believing"; "I'll believe it when I see it"; "See for yourself"; "I see what you mean"; 'insight', 'clarity', 'overview', 'show', 'enlighten', 'illuminate', 'visible', 'reflect', 'observation'. Similarly, the antonyms of these words imply a lack of knowledge: 'blind', 'dim', 'obscure', 'hidden', 'dark', 'invisible' and 'cloudy'. Given social constructionism's insistence that language not only reflects, but constructs reality, the continued use of such diction and phrases continually reproduces the ocularcentric gaze of post/high modernity.

³ As part of Dove's 'campaign for real beauty', the company's advertisers have designed television commercials that expose the disjunction between surface appearances and the corporeal body. For a telling example of the process of separation, visit the website at www.campaignforrealbeauty.com and watch the commercial entitled 'Evolution'.

⁴ The 'beauty-mystique', simply put, is the cultural belief that the beautiful is good and the ugly is evil; and conversely, that the morally good is beautiful or good looking, and the evil is ugly (Synnott, 1993).

⁵ In the arena of identity politics, to 'study up' is to study those who occupy power in a given society. Researchers have a tendency to study the disempowered in an attempt to give them

‘voice’ and thereby disrupt power relations (e.g. women, the poor, the disordered, the ugly, the marginalized Other). Recently, however, it has been suggested that researchers should turn their attention to powerful identities – masculinity, whiteness, wealth, beauty – in order to expose the contingencies of their power (Longhurst, 2001).

⁶ Models commonly referred to individuals who are not models as “normal people”, thus discursively constructing themselves as ‘not normal’. Indeed, their superior surfaces might be regarded as a positive and empowering form of deviance, positioning them on the elite upper end of the normal distribution of beauty. When Goffman (1963) speaks of negative deviance in the form of stigma, he uses the term ‘normals’ to refer to the ‘normal’ people against whom the stigmatized deviates. I use his term ‘normals’ in this paper to refer to what models call “normal people” and to allude to Goffman’s work on stigma, since models’ positive deviance can, as shall be demonstrated, also be re-constructed as negative in some cases.

⁷ Ironically, the concept of ‘*inner strength*’, which functions to construct the interiority of self, was often expressed through use of the bodily *surface* metaphor of a ‘tough skin’.

⁸ It may be argued that participants’ employment of a psychologized discourse was a response evoked by my own identity as a psychology student. Parker (2005) notes that the research relationship between ‘researcher’ and ‘researched’ is inherently unequal with the former in a position of power over the latter. Employing a psychologized discourse for my benefit may be a strategic attempt by participants to place themselves on equal footing with me. Alternatively, it may be a discourse that they felt I, as a psychology student, would want to hear. In their work, Hollway & Jefferson (2000) noted that they had to actively discourage interviewee’s tendency to couch their experiences in psychological terms for the benefit of the researchers. However, this kind of criticism assumes that there *exists* an authentic, ‘true’ experience behind participant’s words that that can be unproblematically conveyed through language and that it is the aim of research to access this authentic voice. Discursive analysts and postmodern theorists, however, argue that such an approach is itself flawed: there is no authentic experience to be accessed because language itself creates, rather than reflects, experience and is furthermore *always* interactive, *always* intersubjective and *always* performative. Goffman (1971) argues that there is no ‘true’ self beneath performances of self to audiences; that participants language acts will

always be performed for the audience of the researcher; and that this is not a limitation, but merely an opportunity to recognize the persistent performativity of selfhood that is constantly working to manage impressions.

⁹ Further information on Dove's 'campaign for real beauty', as well as some of the commercials and advertisements that form part of this campaign, can be found at their website:
www.campaignforrealbeauty.com

¹⁰ Another way of shifting sensory epistemology would be to focus on the contribution of participants' tactile experiences to identity formation. In particular, phenomenologically-based approaches are well-suited to exploring the tactile sense and might be combined with a discursive approach in investigating identity constructions (Shilling, 2000).

APPENDIX A

Body-map guideline questions

Use your body-map to represent the ways in which **your body expresses and communicates who you are**. When doing this, think about how modeling has contributed to who you are (i.e. your identity). Below are some questions to guide you. You may want to respond to these questions on your body maps by thinking of your answers in symbols, colours, patterns, pictures or words. Please note that these questions are only a guide; you are free to create your body map however you like.

- What has modeling taught you about a) yourself and b) your body?
- How do you feel about your body?
- How would you describe yourself?
- What parts of your body are you most proud of? What parts are you least happy with?
- How does your body feel to you when you are posing for the camera?
- Do you have any specific memories of your body while modeling?
- When do you feel most comfortable in your body? And when do you feel least comfortable in it?
- What do you associate with ‘beauty’ or ‘attractiveness’? What do you regard to be beautiful?
- How do you maintain your appearance and the shape of your body?
- At what age did you start modeling? In what ways has modeling changed for you as you have gotten older?
- When casting directors or photographers talk about your body in front of you, what have you heard them say? What does it feel like to have your body discussed in that way?
- When other people look at you, what do they see?

PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

1. I know that plagiarism is wrong. Plagiarism is to use another's work and pretend it is one's own.
2. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in this essay that I have taken from the works of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.
3. I have used the APA method for citation and referencing.
4. This project is my own work.
5. I have not allowed, and will not allow, anyone to copy my work with the intention of passing it off as his or her own.

Signed:

Dated: