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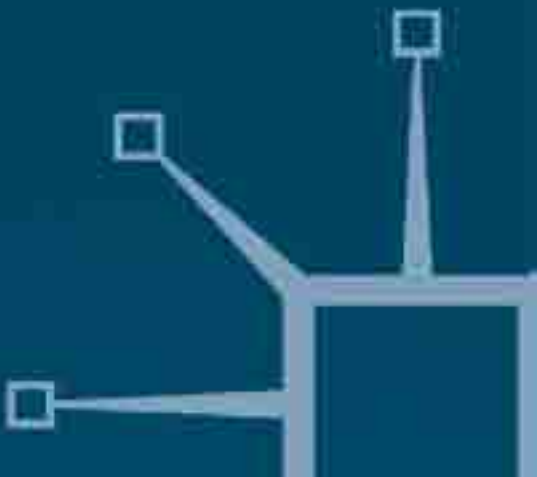
A Feminist Sociology

Liz Frost



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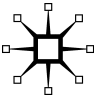

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Introduction: the Alien Body

The concept of body-hatred

The Western world is worried about its young people. In the United Kingdom their levels of depression are increasing, and suicide is now the second most common cause of death in the under-35 age group. (Department of Health, 1999). Fears are frequently expressed that boys seem to be experiencing difficulties with achieving in education and with their identities (Phillips, 1993). That both sexes are using more illegal recreational drugs is an additional source of concern (Graham and Bowling, 1995).

Girls would seem to be struggling in some specific ways. Two-thirds of all 16–24 year old women self-report that they experience moderate to severe stress; their tobacco intake and alcohol consumption is rising, and in the period between 1997 and 1999, 49 per cent of young women were trying to lose weight at any one time (British Youth Council, 1999). Fifty per cent of girls under 15 years have been found to diet (Hill *et al*., 1992). For girls, all issues to do with their bodies and their looks seem to be becoming higher profile and often problematic. Frequently assumed to link with the rise in dieting is the incidence of eating disorders in young women, and their visibility in the recently labelled psychiatric problem 'body dysmorphic disorder', also known as 'imagined ugliness syndrome' (Phillips, 1996; Veale, 1997). Physical self-harming seems to be escalating, and, as with eating disorders, it is mainly a girl's problem (Babiker and Arnold, 1997).

Within non-clinical populations of young women, as well as the obsession with body weight, there seems to be a general obsession with appearance. MacRobbie's analysis of girls' magazines, for example, found a substantial increase in appearance-related subjects between the

1980s and the 1990s (MacRobbie, 1991). 'Body image' has become both a source of noticeable academic exploration (Grogan, 1999) and a media-friendly term with considerable popular currency.

Within the context of late-consumer capitalism, which has been persuasively theorised as image-obsessed, narcissistic and dedicated to physical self-improvement (Lasch, 1979; Featherstone, 1991; Giddens, 1991), young women seemed to be showing particular signs of damage. On a continuum from casual girl interchanges overheard in any playground of the 'I hate my body' style, through to self-starvation and to death, girls' bodies seem to afford them little pleasure and varying degrees of anguish.

Aims of the book

That young women in the West might be said to be suffering from body-hatred, and the causal factors implicated in this, is the central hypothesis of the text.

Overall, the volume aims to examine why it is not just women but young women who may be said to be suffering from alienation from their bodies. Feminist theory has comprehensively explored whether this is the case for adult women (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993). That it is mostly young women, though, has been given little consideration. Rather than when they are in their thirties, or fifties, or older, it seems to be in their teens that women exhibit signs of body self-hatred. This does, at least on a superficial consideration, seem to work against the logic of, for example, a material analysis of their relative positions in Western capitalism. It might appear from such a perspective that in cultures where female youth and beauty are ubiquitous signifiers of desire and success, then it would be those women who are said to be *losing* these qualities who would be suffering most and exhibiting the more extreme manifestations of self-hatred. The comparisons they are likely to make between themselves and the perfected images of the women they are surrounded by, may render significant dissatisfaction likely. This text suggests that this does not seem to be the case in practice.

That there are different and additional factors rendering young women especially susceptible is a primary consideration here. The volume applies a social constructionist methodology, through which the social categories of both *young* and *female* are interrogated from a variety of perspectives. An argument is developed to suggest that both categories are 'inferiorised' within Western patriarchy, and that girls inhabit a range of ideologies which offer them a negative perspective on

their embodiment is suggested. It would seem that in many ways it is 'different for girls'.

Looking at what kinds of manifestations of body-hatred are visible in contemporary society is central to the volume's aims. That there are clinical 'conditions', defined within Western medicine as (mental) illnesses, and what those categories contain is explored, and contrasted with feminist approaches to both specific categories, such as eating disorders, and the general insecurities and fears women have in relation to their appearances.

A further substantial feature of the volume is its exploration of the theoretical basis of the work on body-hatred issues, and it not only attempts to outline current feminist perspectives, but also to consider how the major strands in the discussion – identity, the body, gender and youth – can be understood at the opening of the millennium. The purpose of this is both to offer the reader a digestible update on how young women and their relationship with their bodies can be usefully understood, and even more importantly to construct a theoretical framework on which to hang the substance of the volume itself. The reader's access to both the experiences of the girls interviewed and the analyses drawing on the sociology of youth and of gender, of the body and sexuality, of leisure and the family and of the consumer society, can be guided by the theoretical discussion. How young girls live their everyday lives, in terms of what meanings they inhabit and the material features of their existence, are given an extended scrutiny. Girls' lives are examined in the context of friends, family, school, boys and boy-friends, and in relation to their activities as the consumers of products and of 'cultural forms'. How these patternings of social experience define how girls can experience themselves, both as bodies and as identities (and whether and how these two categories can be/are separated), is explicated.

The world in which girls participate is not just constructed of a range of equally available messages and ideologies about being a girl. To examine the workings of power which position girls firmly inside their bodies is a further intent of this text. Both the categories young and female, it will be argued, are constructed as the 'other' of the male adult subject. This reflects power relations: who defines and who is defined by them; which ideologies devalue and inferiorise and which do not: these relations reflect patriarchy. And within this overall structure of meanings there also exists gradations of difference.

Girls do not just inhabit their bodies and sets of meanings relating to this and their particular social designated 'life stage' in an undifferentiated

and isolated fashion. They belong to classes and cultures as well as being teenage girls, and there are ways in which these structural features of their situation, combined with the life-scripts written within particular families, will effect who and how they can be. Threaded through the volume are reflections on how structural inequalities such as ethnic minority membership and class position may reinforce the discontents girls may feel in relation to themselves.

The body projects

Although this text is primarily concerned to draw on literature from feminist sociology and youth studies to examine young women's relationships with their bodies, it is also underpinned by a substantial interest in the contemporary teenage girl's personal interpretation of their bodies and their selves.

The curiosity behind this volume about young women's unhappiness with their bodies was to some extent originally driven by conversations in adolescent and adult psychiatric units with young women who were diagnosed as having eating disorders, and the realisation of how little their accounts of their feelings differed from the casual comments of the 'normal' girls to whom the author had access in their roles of baby-sitters and as the daughters of colleagues and friends.

The intention here, though, has not been to produce research on young women's relationships with their bodies. It is a primarily theoretical feminist sociological enquiry. However, the spoken lives of contemporary girls have an important function in demonstrating the circulation of socially constructed meanings, and were of great value in generating themes which the text has developed. The voices of the two young women who were interviewed in full also offer a salutory reminder that being at war with their bodies renders considerable damage to their identities. Interview material is used, then, to both enhance and support the text. Speaking to young women was by no means straightforward. Finding methods which would even allow for a small number of interviews on such a potentially painful subject proved complex.

Although it did seem important to try to understand what girls themselves have to say about how their generation, and they themselves manage the demands of 'doing looks', the question of how girls feel about their bodies can touch such negative and painful feelings that a whole range of research methods would automatically be precluded. Much discussion with teachers, nurses and feminist researchers, and

considerable reflection, led to the notion of undertaking specifically targeted projects, one with a sixth-form group at a local authority comprehensive school, and one with the occupants of an adolescent psychiatric inpatient facility.

The least direct and therefore least threatening place to engage with the issue of 'in what way do I see myself?' seemed potentially to be in relation to art and self-portraiture. As part of the 'A' level art curriculum of the (medium-sized, rural) school, students produce self-portraits, starting with a range of details of self and surroundings using various forms, and culminating in painted self-portrait. It was agreed with the school that the lessons immediatly prior to this could be annexed for a loose focus group on how young people see themselves. The pupils, both boys and girls, raised many of the general issues which this volume develops.

The project continued with students then undertaking the practice assignment of producing self-portraits. Those who were happy to undertake individual interviews then bought their work to me as the basis of a discussion of how they perceived these images of themselves, and the presentation of themselves generally. Additional information was sought later in questionnaire form in relation to specific appearance-related topics, and, in all, ten girls chose to contribute interview and questionnaire material.

Working within the health service context proved to be a far more complex process for bureaucratic and ethical reasons. Even with the approval of the consultant and the interest of the nursing staff, gaining Ethical Committee approval to interview young women was a lengthy process. Having gained permission to ask the young people in the facility if they would be prepared to either be part of a group on this issue or talk to me individually, only one person was prepared to be part of a group! The outcome was that instead of young people themselves, a staff meeting became the focus group, offering many helpful perspectives on how they perceive that the young people with whom they work experience themselves.

Although at the time the unit was approached, half the residents agreed to be interviewed, consent from parents was not always forthcoming. A further complicating factor was that even when the young people there had agreed to be interviewed, they were not always actually able to undergo interview on the day. Some days they experienced high levels of distress when talking to a stranger was too difficult. Only three interviews could be obtained with young women at the unit within the correct time frame, though this work is still in progress. The

three girls were aged between 16 years and 18, the same age as the school girls.

The ten interviews and questionnaire schedules, those from the school and those from the unit, provided important directions within the broad range of ideas available, but more particularly form the basis of the discussion of stigma and shame as the subjective experience of body-hatred in Chapter 6.

All of the young women I spoke to, in both contexts, were very interested in the topic under discussion and became absorbed in exploring the issues in relation to their age-group in general as well as to themselves. All were prepared to talk at length on the subject, and the final stage of the project was to undertake case-study style interviews, two of which are included in this volume. Many of their views showed strong similarities with the arguments in the theoretical text, a situation which a social constructionist perspective would anticipate. Meanings circulate within a given culture at a point in time and it is those meanings which offer girls versions of who they are.

Boys formed part of the art classes at the school, and two boys were resident at the adolescent unit. In the former case, four boys formed part of the initial group discussion, and three came to see me with their portraits. At the unit, even though one boy did want to meet with me, he was emotionally unable to. In keeping with the primarily girl-focused nature of the enquiry, the very small number of boys who were involved, and also the fact that there were no available voices of boys from the unit, their interview material is not included in any direct way, although the boys' views did help me understand how being a young man can be experienced, the theme of Chapter 7.

The structure of the book

Conceptually, the text can be loosely divided into three sections: theoretical approaches through which to view the intertwined nature of gender, youth and body-hatred are discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, and to some extent at the beginning of Chapter 6. Three chapters examine the key groupings of ideas currently in circulation concerning young women and these comprise the central section of the book. These chapters are primarily concerned to examine how young women are positioned by sets of beliefs defining what it means to be an 'adolescent', a 'teenager', together with a rather amorphous category concerning girls' (sexual) morals which can be summed up by the good girl/bad girl dichotomy. Chapter 7 looks at the social construction of young men, in order to

offer a comparison with the issues of bodies and looks. A third, rather shorter, section of the book, located in Chapter 6, presents the voices of contemporary young women looking in general terms at their generation's relationship with appearance issues. It goes on to present two extended interviews in which the young women concerned speak freely about their own unhappiness in relation to their own bodies and their looks.

The content of the book

Chapter 1 explores the concept of body-hatred itself. It examines diagnostic categories within psychiatry which incorporate self-hating and self-harming behaviours, particularly body dysmorphic disorder, eating disorders and deliberate self-harm. The high incidence in the young of these phenomena, and their gendered nature are discussed. Psychological approaches to the understanding of women's unhappy relationship with their bodies are briefly presented. A range of feminist perspectives on women and their bodies are then explored, suggesting that body-hatred is not an illness or a psychopathology, but can more usefully be understood as an expression of the generalised discontent with their appearance experienced by all women under patriarchal capitalism.

Chapter 2 critically appraises current sociological and feminist sociological theory which underpins the debate around bodily discontent. Under the key headings of 'identity' and 'the body' work of twentieth-century sociologists is explored for its explanatory capacity. The work of Goffman (1963) and Giddens (1991) is drawn on to explore social identity and the importance of the self-constructed body and self-enhanced appearance to the whole nature of personhood during this epoch. The limits of this self-reflexive subjectivity are given consideration.

Both structuralist and post-structuralist contributions to an understanding of the body are briefly considered, and Bartky (1990) and Bordo's (1993) post-structural feminist analysis of women's relationships with their bodies are examined in some depth. That the body is an actual, lived experience which impacts on the ongoing construction of subjectivity is discussed, drawing on material from Young (1990) and Grimshaw (1999). The nature of this lived embodiment, particularly for young women, is briefly explored.

Chapter 3 addresses the issue of young women and the body, specifically the ways in which the socially constructed category 'adolescent' positions girls as psychologically unstable beings locked in enfeebled and unreliable bodies that may 'let them down' at any time. How the

changes of puberty, for example, the growth of breasts and the beginning of menstruation, are socially understood as negative, painful, embarrassing or even disgusting is examined for its impact on how girls are then able to feel about this transition. That young women also must become 'the object of the gaze' – the object of a visual, male sexual discourse – is considered. That this range of transitions will render girls insecure and suspicious of their bodies is suggested.

Chapter 4 looks at young women in relation to the market economy in Western consumer capitalism. In a context in which it has been argued that contemporary societies go 'shopping for subjectivities' it looks at how women, and youthful women in particular, have been specifically addressed by the market. The highly complex relationship between consumerism, advertising, images and appearance is briefly examined, and found to be implicated in the production of discontent generated by ubiquitous, normative perfection. The argument considers what and how girls consume – their televisions and magazines, their friends and their 'bedroom culture' – and suggests that these features of their lives are likely to circulate the same sets of meanings in relation to being a teenage girl: that visual presentation of an immaculate body and face, 'bought' literally and metaphorically, in capitalist economies, is essential. It will also render girls self-critical and discontented.

Chapter 5 sets out to consider whether the expectations and demands of school, family and boyfriends might offer young women versions of themselves which contain some real alternative to body-hatred and identity conflicts. However, the high levels of sexualisation of girl's behaviour defined in all these contexts, and the frequently contradictory tacit moral imperatives proscribing their identities, renders this unlikely. Girls are positioned as the passive object of male sexual discourse, but forced to accept the moral responsibility for containing male sexuality. Their bodies are for the pleasure of and appropriation of others, for themselves they are not so much sites of pleasure as objects that must be subject to constant restraint.

Chapter 6 interrogates the subjective experience of body-hatred. Its central problematic is 'how do young women actually feel about their bodies and their looks?' A theoretical framework, drawing on Goffman's (1963) concept of stigma and its relationship with the emotional state of shame is constructed, against which the voices of contemporary young women, in a state comprehensive school and in an adolescent psychiatric unit (the projects described above), are presented. The analytical commentary on the interview material raises points of coincidence between the girls' statements and key features of the text. The

case-study interviews with two young women whose unhappiness in relation to their bodies is particularly illustrative of the body-hatred thesis are presented without commentary and with little cutting. The final say on young women and body-hatred is given to them.

Chapter 7 examines the contemporary social construction of young manhood in predominately white, heterosexual Western cultures. From general observations, it could be assumed that the increasing pressures on boys to be concerned about their looks might lead them to bodily discontentment. This assumption is analysed. That the relationship for boys and men with their bodies is defining of identity equally as strongly as it is for women is initially argued.

'Proper' boys need to be physically strong, lean, sexy and sporty, and, additionally, now presented in the correct, market-oriented way to establish identity individually and for group membership. It is a version (the version) of masculinity which is premised on a total rejection of the feminine and the homosexual. It is in the end this crucial facet which makes the experiencing of self very different for boys than girls. The feminine is devalued and rejected in masculinist ideology; boys must never be like girls or women, because they cannot then have any currency or status as men. The essence of patriarchy is the deprecation of the feminine, inscribed on the female body.

In the concluding chapter the volume suggests that it is precisely because young women inhabit meanings which deprecate the feminine that they are likely to experience their bodies as alien and worthless.

1
What is Body-Hatred?

As the Introduction outlines, the overall thesis of this volume is that the relationship between young women and their bodies is a negative and frequently damaging one, that girls can be said to suffer from a set of emotions which can be distilled into the term 'body-hatred'. This chapter explores some important dimensions of the concept of body-hatred. Firstly, it considers how medicine, usually in the form of psychiatry, has positioned such feelings as abnormal, and treated them as individual pathology. It then goes on the consider how some feminist sociological approaches can dissolve the categories of 'sick' and 'normal' and offer the opportunity to consider how all young women may be subject to chronic discontent about their appearances.

Body-hatred and psychiatric medicine

The following is an illustrative example which demonstrates how the pathologisation of everyday behaviours can be the product of a powerful, patriarchal, medical system in which 'normal' and 'abnormal' are judgements which register the difference between the categoriser, who sees himself as 'normal', and the categorised 'other'.

In the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, in January 1984, there appeared a letter outlining a psychiatric phenomenon with the label 'dressing disorder'. Making the point that 'dysfunctional behaviours in common activities are within the perview of psychiatry' and that 'sleeping, sexual and eating abnormalities are now classified in DSM 111' (the American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, 1980), the authors go on to outline a 'disorder' so extraordinarily similar to stereotyped teenage behaviour that, if it were a different publication, it would be suspected of being a spoof. It is worth quoting at length:

> The disorder usually presents in adolescence, with the patient spending inordinate amounts of time, money and energy on clothing. The hallmark of DD is an inflexible insistence on being dressed identically with peers, or in what is believed to be the contemporary mode, no matter how uncomfortable, expensive or aesthetically distasteful the fashion. The patient may also become preoccupied with cosmetics and the appropriate shoes. The disorder often overlaps with eating disorders. The patient, for example, typically avoids clothing that makes her or him appear 'fat', and buys clothes one size too small, in anticipation of losing five pounds. (Frankenburg *et al.*, 1984, p. 147)

Predisposing, precipitating and perpetuating factors are then discussed, again some of them so much the apotheosis of stereotyped young people's behaviour that irony could be suspected: 'currently identified precipitating factors are puberty, entry into high-school and the perceived potential of a new significant relationship'. The letter concludes that further research in this area is needed, together with a more accurate definition (ibid., 1984, p. 147).

This somewhat extreme example of what could rather clumsily be referred to as 'the psychiatrisation of everyday life' illustrates some of the difficulties with which attempting to present and explore a state of mind such as body-hatred immediately confront us. Eating disorders, self-harm, and body-dysmorphic disorder already exist as specific illnesses or 'conditions' within psychiatry. These problems can be conceptualised as the products of medical definition and the power relations which allow a patriarchal medical tradition to define what is and is not a 'normal' state of mind. The example of 'dressing disorder' throws into stark relief how, at the margins, what is stereotypical behaviour and what is a psychiatric condition is arbitrated by structural power relations which enable, for example, adult perspectives to define 'normal' youth, and, similarly masculine perspectives to define 'normal' women.

As Foucault and post-Foucauldian theorists have argued (Foucault, 1976; Peterson and Bunton, 1997), the definitional power of medicine, and more specifically psychiatry (Busfield, 1996), to establish and constantly redefine its legitimate field of interest, is the process by which the definition and redefinition of who is ill, and/or abnormal becomes defined and established.

Any discussion of these psychiatrically appropriated states or difficulties, even if a highly critical discussion, must inevitably navigate sets of meanings reflecting the tacit or explicit inheritance of its medical location.

To begin this explication of what is meant by body-hatred, psychiatry's construction of the current knowledge base will be explicitly examined under three medically determined categories: the relatively unfamiliar body dysmorphic disorder, eating disorders and self-harming.

Body dysmorphic disorder

Body dysmorphic disorder is a relatively newly defined psychiatric problem, though Phillips, one of the few doctors to have researched and written extensively in this field, suggests that 'body dysmorphic disorder has been described for more than 100 years' (Phillips, 1996, p. 184).

The DSM IV (the American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, 1994, p. 33) defines the condition thus:

(1) Preoccupation with some imagined defect in appearance. If a slight physical anomaly is present, the person's concern is markedly excessive.
(2) The preoccupation causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational or other important areas of functioning.
(3) The disorder is not better accounted for by another mental disorder (e.g. dissatisfaction with body shape and size in anorexia nervosa).

From the patient's perspective this is said to be experienced as 'a mixture of emotions that they may find difficult to articulate, such as disgust or hatred, of their appearance' and thoughts such as 'if I am ugly then I will be unlovable' (Veale, 1997, p. 8).

As well as thoughts and feelings, there are a number of specific behaviours, or symptoms, which are associated with the condition. Phillips lists some 25 'clues' to the condition (Phillips, 1996). Paraphrasing the foremost produces a list of ten items:

(1) Frequently checking mirrors.
(2) Avoiding mirrors.
(3) Comparing self to others and thinking you look worse.
(4) Asking or wanting to ask if you look OK.
(5) Trying to convince people there is something wrong with how you look.
(6) Spending a lot of time grooming, getting ready, etc.
(7) Picking your skin.
(8) Covering parts of body (for example, with hats) to hide features.
(9) Often change clothes/take a long time to select clothes.
(10) Adopting body positions to hide parts of self.

Phillips' research, conducted in the USA, has led her to conclude that 'it may effect as many as 2% of the population of the US which translates into more than 5 million people in this country alone' (Phillips, 1996, p. 6), although Veale's research in England led him to believe that the prevalence is unknown (Veale, 1997).

Phillips argues that this is essentially a teenage problem, with the average age of onset in her own study of 200 people being 16.5 years, and the average age from her review of all available research suggesting an average onset of 19 years (Phillips, 1996, p. 159). Veale concurs that 'the onset of BDD is most common during adolescence' (Veale, 1997, p. 7). The gendering of the condition seems more contentious however: Veale comments of his research that it was 'based mainly on self-referrals, the majority of whom were women'. Phillips on the other hand, found that numbers were fairly equally divided between men and women in her own research, and that from studying all published cases she found a sex-ratio of 1.25 women to 1.00 men. It would seem that women are more likely to experience the condition than men.

The research suggests, however, that whereas men and women may be equally likely to develop BDD, how they experience it, and the other 'psychiatric' difficulties with which it may be associated, is highly gendered. For example, Phillips suggests, that although both sexes frequently focus on hair as a source of their distress, men express hatred about balding, and women about body hair. Women are more likely to be anxious about body weight than men are, but men may be disturbed about their bodies being too small. Only men had genital concerns.

Linked psychiatric conditions, where these existed, tended to present in a highly gendered pattern: 'women are more likely to have the eating disorder bulimia nervosa, whereas men are more likely to have a problem with alcohol and drugs' (Phillips, 1996, p. 157). This is consistent with the strong gender bias reflected in those conditions anyway. Far more men than woman have alcohol and drug-related psychiatric diagnoses, and far more girls than boys are diagnosed as having eating disorders (Busfield, 1996).

Eating disorders

The concept of eating disorders is far more common than that of body dysmorphic disorder. Biographic and fictional accounts of women who have lived, and some who have died, within the parameters of an anorectic or bulimic identity, have formed part of the cultural fabric of

our time. The psychiatric version of what constitutes eating disorders, and how they should be treated, can clearly be seen to be the dominant strand informing general opinion. Even psycho-surgical treatments are enjoying a new vogue in England. However, that there may be some connections between the depiction in the media of very thin fashion models and other girl 'stars', the discontent manifested by young women with their weight, and the supposed increase in eating disorders in young women, is also part of the popular debate around the subject. This connection will be considered below.

Within psychiatry, eating disorders normally refers to two linked conditions, anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa (a later 'discovery' within the anorexia grouping). Obesity is, within psychiatric literature, usually referred to separately.

The 1994 American Psychiatric Association criteria for the diagnosis of anorexia nervosa, as set out in the DSM-IV (cited in Heaven, 1996, p. 77), can be summarised thus:

(1) Refusal to maintain minimal normal weight. Body weight is less than 85% of that expected for age and height.
(2) Fearful of becoming fat or gaining weight.
(3) Disturbance in body weight and shape perceptions. Body image linked to self-esteem.
(4) Absence of at least three normal non-drug induced consecutive menstrual cycles.

People with bulimia, comparatively, 'had the psychopathological stance of the anorexic, but . . . may or may not have reached low weight levels; these women engaged in binge-eating and purging' (Szmukler *et al*., 1995, p. xiv).

In more detail, then, the diagnostic criteria (DSM IV, cited in Heaven, 1996, p. 74) for bulimia nervosa is as follows:

(1) Recurrent episodes of binge eating and characterised by
    (a) large intake of food (more than what most people would consume) usually within a two hour period;
    (b) a sense of loss of control during the eating binge.
(2) Recurrent inappropriate compensatory behaviour. The main aim is to reduce weight gain. Methods may include self-induced vomiting, laxatives, enemas, fasting and excessive exercise.
(3) Binge eating and compensatory behaviour occur about twice per week for 3 months.
(4) Body shape and weight are crucial in self-evaluation.

(5) This experience does not only occur during a period of anorexia nervosa.

The incidence of anorexia in the population have been subject to widely differing estimates. Bordo suggests that in the USA: 'In 1984 it was estimated that as many as one in every 200–250 women between the ages of thirteen and twenty-two suffers from anorexia and that anywhere from 12 to 33% of college women control their weight through vomiting, diuretics and laxatives' (Bordo, 1988, p. 86). The addition of 'sub-clinical' features (having some but not all of the medically defined features, for example, is 'sub-clinical') will invariably increase the estimated numbers.

Recently, the condition was found to have a considerable degree of consistency across all women in the USA, Canada, Great Britain, Northern Europe, Australia and New Zealand. Fombonne's examination of the international research on incidence found 'the consistency of the results is striking. As shown by general population surveys, prevalence rates are low for AN [anorexia nervosa], fluctuating around 1 to 2 per 1,000 women' (Fombonne, 1995, p. 637).

Much research has concerned itself with young women, and all studies seem to agree that women are most at risk of developing this condition during this phase in their lives. Some recent findings have suggested that 'the prevalence of eating disorders appears to be increasing and may range from 1%–4% of adolescent and young adult women' (American Psychiatric Association, 1993, p. 212).

In England, recent findings suggest that, when age is taken into consideration, there is a prevalence of approximately 1 per cent for both anorexia and bulimia nervosa among adolescent females which, in a typical comprehensive school of between 1500–2000 pupils, means that up to 20 young women could have an eating disorder (Ransley, 1999).

The current International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10) states that 'the disorder occurs most commonly in adolescent girls and young women, but adolescent boys and young men may be affected more rarely, as may children approaching puberty and older women up to the menopause' (ICD, cited in the Mental Health Act Commission Guidance Note 3, 1997, p. 2). 'Nearly all relevant studies show that the rate of AN peaks between the ages of 15 and 19', concludes Fombonne's review of research in the area (Fombonne, 1995, p. 648).

Although much research supports the view that in 'developed' countries all women suffer from eating disorders at the same rate, this

has not been found to be the case when the comparison takes in 'developing' countries. Fombonne's research review found 'a clear difference between the rates of prevalence found in Asian Countries and Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand'. Where there were statistically significant rates in developing countries, it was more likely to be 'immigrant' rather than local women who had anorexia nervosa (Fombonne, 1995, p. 638).

Evidence of eating disorders in 'developing' or relatively poor countries, then, is minimal, though the patterns for ethnic minority groups in 'developed' Western capitalist countries is less straightforward. As Rhea points out, the true picture is difficult to establish, because most of the research is either on 'Caucasian' women, or: 'often the racial–ethnic background of the participants is excluded or not reported' (Rhea, 1999, p. 379).

Although studies such as Fombonne's declare that eating disorders are: 'much more common . . . among the white majority in the USA and Europe than among ethnic minority groups' (Fombonne, 1995, p. 672), other research has suggested that the situation for all ethnic minority groups is not necessarily comparable. Rhea, for example, found evidence that 'African–American females are affected less by socio-cultural pressures to be thin', and although she acknowledges the contradictory position of some other studies, her own research, in San Francisco, leads her to conclude that of three ethnic groups: Hispanics, African–Americans and Caucasians, 'Hispanic and Caucasian urban adolescent females are comparably more at-risk of eating disorders than African American urban adolescent females' (Rhea, 1999, p. 379).

However, concerns have been expressed from some black feminist writers that the stereotyping of black women as, for example, 'big black mamas' may militate against eating disorders being recognised. Wangsgaard Thompson also makes the point that the notion that these problems are specific to white women prevents professionals from making an accurate diagnosis of eating disorders in black women, or diagnosing only when the condition has become severe (Wangsgaard Thompson, 1992). That the situation for women of colour may be changing has also been argued. Brownell and Fairburn argue that: 'Eating disorder traits, including binge eating, excessive restraint, fear of fatness, and dissatisfaction with body image have been shown to relate to non-Caucasian individual's degree of Westernisation and assimilation into the Caucasian culture' (Brownell and Fairburn, 1995, p. 81).

In Britain, it is only since the mid-1980s that reports of anorexia and bulimia in non-white women have begun to appear (Dolan *et al.*, 1990).

Dolan's own research in South West London led her to conclude that 'abnormal attitudes and concern with body weight and shape are found in all groups of women, regardless of their background' (Dolan *et al.*, 1990, p. 525).

The relationship between social class and eating disorders is also usually contextualised in the literature by a sense of imminent change, but so far the findings suggest that it is still more diagnosed in middle class than in working class girls: 'Among women, there is a clear inverse relationship between socio-economic status and weight, with upper-SES [socio-economic status] women being thinner than their lower SES counterparts' (Brownell and Fairburn, 1995, p. 75).

It seems, then, to be girls from higher socio-economic backgrounds who are most likely to develop eating disorders, though it may be that a class bias in referrals to specialist services such as child psychiatry and eating-disorder clinics distorts the relationship between clinically recorded incidence and incidence in the community. This point may also explain why there seem to be fewer black women with eating disorders. As Dolan *et al.* point out: 'white women make up the overwhelming majority of referrals to specialist treatment centres' (Dolan *et al.*, 1990, p. 523). The notion that it is middle-class white girls who have eating disorders may be self-perpetuating.

In terms of sexuality, whether young lesbian women are more subject to eating disorders is difficult to establish from the limited research available. One underlying assumption about eating disorders – that they are a by-product of over-regulated feminine subjectivity within a heterosexual culture – may have led to a lack of focus on lesbians. Wangsgaard Thomas suggests that until recently there has been almost no research on lesbians, and goes on to suggest that a considerable degree of hiding of disordered eating is felt to be necessary by lesbian women (Wangsgaard Thomas, 1992). This remains a demographic feature that requires further exploration.

That the condition is increasing, though quite often claimed in broad commentaries on the subject, is difficult to substantiate in academic surveys. Fombonne concludes that health service records suggest 'an apparent increase' between 1950 and 1980 in predominantly white Western nations, but warns that: 'knowledge and recognition of the disorder have considerably improved and diagnostic definitions, the availability of services and patterns of care have also changed substantially' (Fombonne, 1995, p. 638). He goes on to express considerable doubt as to the ability to assess the degree of change in incidence, and in his conclusion challenges the notion of 'an epidemic of eating

disorders', suggesting instead that: 'The review of available data has left us without any definite conclusion as to whether or not the incidence of eating disorders has increased over time . . . [though] a number of factors can be identified that might well have lead to such an increase' (ibid., 1995, pp. 671–2). A comparable review of epidemiological research found a similar pattern: an increase of rates generally between 1930 and 1970, but no reliable data to support any real change in incidence since then (Hoek, 1995).

However, perhaps because of the publicity around famous 'victims' and their glamorised world, the sense that eating disorders are threatening to reach epidemic proportions is difficult to dispel. Similarly, there is a general but very hard to substantiate belief that the numbers of boys and men concerned is increasing rapidly. This too may be a product of a similar kind of construction of public knowledge. If eating disorders can be seen as a byproduct of the contemporary 'star system', and good-looking boys are increasingly visible in this world, then, surely, the theme goes, they will also suffer from the dangers it incorporates.

Chapter 7, below, looks closely at the position of boys in relation to body-hatred. Recent research findings, however, such as the Clydeside Longitudinal Study's self-assessment project on teenage mental health, although finding generally high rates of mental health difficulties in Scottish young people, found no evidence of substantial numbers of boys developing eating disorders (West *et al*., 1999). That approximately 5–10 per cent of anorexia sufferers are male is the ratio usually claimed (Garfinkel and Garner, 1982; Fombonne, 1995).

The demographic distribution of eating disorders, then, continues to demonstrate a pattern: they are mostly found in relatively rich Western countries, and affect young women, who seem usually to be from middle-class backgrounds. It seems to impact differently on different minority ethnic groups, though the evidence here is still inconclusive. The demographics in relation to eating disorders, do then, in themselves raise interesting questions. The profile of most modern 'illnesses' (including those perceived as mental illnesses) connects 'lower' class position and poverty to an increased incidence and severity of conditions (Wilkinson, 1996). Mortality and morbidity rates in most modern illnesses increase inversely to class position: 'Individuals from higher socio-economic positions are, on average, healthier, taller, stronger and live longer, than those lower down the social scale' (Giddens, 1993, p. 606). This in itself makes it almost impossible not to interrogate the social factors for some clues as to why the higher general standards of living which normally protect people here lead to a very different outcome. As

Mennell *et al.* comment, 'the demographic distribution of eating disorders implies that socio-cultural components play a larger part than the predominant focus of the research would suggest' (Mennell *et al.*, 1992, p. 50). These demographic trends will receive more attention in later chapters.

Self-harm

The act of deliberate self-injury is enormously difficult to categorise or classify, and its inclusion in a text on body-hatred was by no means an automatic choice. Certainly it does not have the obvious connection with the imperative to produce conventional feminine attractiveness that may be implicated in both eating disorders and body dysmorphic disorder. However, as an *expression* of body-hatred, it may be that the damage inflicted on the body in episodes of self-directed injury has many similarities with the self-starvation at the heart of anorexic or bulimic behaviour. That the body, the subject's own body, is the target of ultimately destructive thoughts, fears and action locates self-harming, dysmorphic disorder and eating disorders in the same conceptual space. This disputed term – self-harm, deliberate self-harm and self-mutilation, being the three most commonly used – can refer to a variety of behaviours. Miller, for example, includes the very broad categories of '. . . eating disorders, substance abuse, self-mutilation, prescription drug abuse, frequent and often unnecessary cosmetic surgery and excessive dieting, bulimic behaviour, self-starvation, suicidal behaviour, and compulsive exposure to danger' (Miller, 1994, p. 7).

Babiker and Arnold use this far more specific definition: 'an act which involves deliberately inflicting pain and/or injury to one's own body, but without suicidal intent' (Babiker and Arnold, 1997, pp. 2–3). Prolific writers on the subject, such as Favazza, adopt the term self-mutilation, which is then sub-divided into 'minor' and 'major' (Favazza, 1989; Favazza and Rosenthal, 1993; 1998). The condition is then understood to be: 'the deliberate alteration or destruction of body tissue without suicidal intent' (Favazza and Rosenthal, 1993, p. 134), though the intention of the act can, of course, be hard to establish in the research.

Dr Favazza's classification, which he claims 'is now widely accepted', recognises a range of self-mutilating behaviours with different levels of severity, but groups together the most common form as 'superficial/moderate SM'. This refers to: acts such as trichillomania (pulling/pulling out own hair), nail biting, and skin pricking and scratching, which comprise the compulsive type, and to skin cutting, carving and

burning, needle-sticking, bone breaking and interference with wound healing, which comprise the episodic and repetitive type' (Favazza, 1998, p. 264).

Clearly, how the acts are defined will impact on the measurement of incidence. Favazza's category of 'superficial moderate S/M' yielded 'a prevalence of at least 1,000 per 100,000 population per year' (ibid., p. 264). However, House *et al.*'s study, which defined deliberate self-harm to include 'intentional self poisoning or self injury (such as cutting) irrespective of the apparent purpose of the act', suggested an incidence of 400 per 100000 population in England, a rate which has been rising continually since the mid 1980s. They also found the incidence to be higher in the UK than other European Countries (House *et al.*, 1999, p. 137).

Who self-harms? Tellingly, for this study, the stereotyped 'self-harmer' of medical literature is precisely the stereotyped disordered eater. Favazza claims that in the 1960's psychiatric literature: 'The typical wrist-slasher was portrayed as an attractive, intelligent, unmarried young woman, who is either promiscuous or overtly afraid of sex, easily addicted and unable to relate to others' (Favazza, 1998, p. 262). Plainly, this stereotype resonates with all the contradictory demands of what a young woman *should* be under patriarchy – attractive and available but virginal; intelligent but indiscriminate and lacking social competence; out of control and in need of help from the masculine science of medicine. It is just these kinds of contradictory prescriptions which young girls must negotiate, and which, this volume goes on to argue, impact strongly on their ability to be comfortable with themselves.

Like eating disorders and to a lesser extent dysmorphic disorder, then, direct physical self-injury is, demographically, a 'woman's problem' as much as the difficulties of classification and the likely under-reporting of such acts allows research to assess. While acknowledging difficulties in accurate measurement, Babiker and Arnold suggest that higher rates among women than men are mostly reported, with a ratio of between 2:1 and 20:1 (Babiker and Arnold, 1997). There is some evidence that this may be changing. House *et al.*'s study argues that although: 'once there were two or three times as many episodes in women as men, now there is near equality' (House *et al.*, 1999, p. 37). It may also be the case that people who repeat acts of self-harming are generally woman, though again House *et al.*'s clinical study argues that: 'the excess of women among chronic repeaters is probably no greater than among the self-harming population as a whole' (ibid., p. 137).

What also seems to be clear, though, is that it is yet another 'body problem' for *young* women. House *et al.* found the peak age for

presentation in women to be 15–24 years, and for men 25–34 years (ibid.). Favazza's figures suggest that: 'in one survey of undergraduate students, 12 per cent admitted to having deliberately harmed themselves by cutting, burning or carving at least once (Favazza, 1998, p. 264). That it is the kind of behaviour which may be emulated in groups of young people has been recognised in the research for some time (Brent *et al*., 1989; Taiminen *et al*., 1998).

The extent to which class, membership of specific ethnic groups, or sexuality effects the incidence of self-harming behaviour is only tentatively becoming the subject of research, and up until now more focus has been given to either clinical studies of treatment and outcomes, or survivors' accounts and self-help literature (Pembroke, 1994). Babiker and Arnold's text attempts to address these structural issues, though frequently by using thoughtful speculation on how the nature of damaging the body might vary where there is an acknowledged absence of research evidence. They point, for example, to the early signs of self-harming in young Asian women in England: a group about whom there are also concerns in relation to the suicide rate (Department of Health, 1999). In this particular group – and perhaps potentially in other minority cultures – the authors suggest, that 'the gulf between the culture of an individual's home and immediate community and that of the wider society may lead to conflict, isolation and alienation, which could have implications for self injury' (Babiker and Arnold, 1997, p. 47).

The link between racism, its focus on bodily features such as skin colour and hair texture, and the potential then for expressions of internalised hatred to be inflicted on this abused and inferiorised body, is also suggested. This issue is returned to in later chapters.

Similarly, there is speculation that the oppression experienced by young lesbians and gay men may lead them to hurt themselves. It is being argued, for example, that it has become clear in recent years that rates of self-harm are disproportionately high amongst lesbians and gay men, and particularly amongst younger members of these groups' (ibid., p. 49). The discrimination faced by lesbians and gay men in Western societies, the possible hostility not just from strangers but from families and contacts, coupled with the possible strong need for friendship group acceptance by young people, can lead to serious isolation difficulties. Where this is experienced as self-hatred, then there are dangers of self-injury being inflicted (ibid.).

What little evidence there is, then, suggests that there is a similar demographic pattern to eating disorders and to body dysmorphic disorder, with significant correlations between forms of social oppression

being noted in some research. The early research trends, which suggest that these problems are just the province of pretty, clever, white, middle-class girls, are being seriously challenged for their stereotyping and their tendency to ignore issues of class, sexuality and colour.

What has been abundantly demonstrated above, though, provides the raison d'être of this text. All three of these clinical categories of difficulty, even when defined within medical manuals and epidemiological research, mostly effect young – between roughly 14 years and 20 years – women. The extreme forms of hating and inflicting damage on the body seem to connect to being both youthful and female. Later chapters will argue that this is not the product of illness or mental weakness in some small section of abnormal girls, but the symptom of a culture in which young women will come to see their bodies and looks to some degree as inadequate and inferior.

Psychological approaches to body-hatred

So far, the central enquiry of this chapter – 'what is body-hatred' – has been pursued via the examination of the psychiatric classifications available. Classification systems in medicine, such as diagnostic criteria, attempt to be value-free and scientific. It is clear from the above, however, that psychiatry draws on more than the purely physiological characteristics of individual patients to make its judgements.

Implicated in the nosology of body disturbance disorders are not just the expected physical features of the patient, such as body weight, or part of body which is self-harmed, but also the somewhat less tangible attitudinal or behavioural criteria, for example 'preoccupation with appearance'. The purely physical thus attempts to engage with the psychological dimensions of altered or abnormal states, which could be interpreted as a humanising feature of modern diagnostic practice.

The broadening out of what might once have been a purely empiricist approach in medicine to encompass some sort of engagement with the cognitive and affective dimensions of an 'illness', however, need not be taken as a radical shift. The causes of the difficulty, and therefore the target for 'treatment', are still located firmly within the pathology of the individual, and/or, in the case of some approaches to eating disorders, the individual's family.

As MacSweeney summarises in relation to eating disorders: 'psychiatric definitions . . . base their explanations of anorexia on individualist and phallocentric assumptions, arguing that anorexia is both explicable and curable at the individual level, and that the concept of the healthy,

mature and psychologically normal adult is gender neutral' (MacSweeney, 1993, p. 69).

This is not to argue that such 'psychiatric explanations' – especially given the inclusion of psychological and psychoanalytical perspectives – can offer no helpful insights into body-hatred experience. Some classic work on anorexia, aiming at both clinical practice and greater conceptual coherence, has been developed from the fusion between psychiatry and its psychoanalytical and psychological progeny.

An example of this is the work of the Italian family therapist Selvini-Palazzoli, who draws heavily on Kleinian theory. Very briefly, then, the key feature of her interpretation of the psychic world of the anorexic girl is that the newly developed adult female body of the patient has become a phobic object for her, and, like the maternal object of the infant, (according to Klein), subject to intense feelings of rage and aggression (Selvini-Palazzoli, 1978).

The extremely influential and prolific Brutch uses a more traditional combination of psychological and medical models, which leads her to propose that there is indeed rejection of the adult body at work, but more related to the perceived demands of impending adulthood than the workings of the unconscious. The young woman is displaying a fear of adulthood itself: self-determination, responsibility, sex and sexuality, and expresses this by the rejection of the adult woman's body (Brutch, 1974).

As with more purely psychiatric explanations, however, the social and cultural context of body disturbance problems is given relatively little attention; the difficulties are those of individual or family psychopathology. This kind of approach has also been subject to the criticism of failing to really explore the *social meanings* of gendered adult sexuality.

> What having an adult female body *means* in a culture which simultaneously eroticises, degrades and devalues both women and their bodies, and how the transformation of the formally asexual child's body into the ambiguous icon of the female body is *experienced*, are questions which are simply left unasked [by Bruch]. (MacSweeney, 1993, p. 42 – her italics)

Attempts have been made, though, to give psychoanalytical approaches a social dimension, which can yield some thought provoking results (Chernin, 1983, 1986; Orbach 1982).

Chernin, for example, drawing on this broad intellectual base, is able to offer an interpretation of eating disorders which draws on the

Kleinian psychoanalytical and the social. Similarly to Selvini-Palazzoli, she suggests eating disorders can be understood in relation to an unconscious memory of infantile rage at the mother and a yearning for penance and absolution from those feelings: 'their [women's] rage is expressed through their mouths, their need for love and solace is expressed as a longing for food. Their shame is transmuted into a sense of dislike for their bodies' (Chernin, 1986, p. 137).

But Chernin's model goes further than the psychoanalytical one. She adds to her account the sociological concept of role-modelling to consider how contemporary daughters must also feel guilty at the rejection of their mothers as role-models, as they have no wish to emulate the 'generation of modern mothers' who sacrifice themselves to the needs of families and their men. 'Mothers and daughters of the modern era face one another, therefore, as beings in struggle for a self – the older woman having failed in this quest as the younger starts out on it' (ibid., p. 81).

Young women, then, are rejecting their mothers as role models, and indeed female identity itself, and attempting to take on maleness, as evidenced by their obsession with becoming thin: 'for now we see that this assumption of male qualities is a temporary part of women's struggle to evolve a new social identity in which women must, during their rite of transition, try out qualities and attributes the culture has long forbidden to women and assigned exclusively to men' (ibid., p. 189).

This offers a valuable synthesis, though it may be difficult to establish in relation to some contemporary exploration of the cultural meanings within which body-hatred is produced. It is difficult, for example, to endorse the notion that body-hatred phenomena are a *rejection* of adult womanhood, whether as 'real' mothers or as introjected 'objects'. The pursuit of thinness, the necessarily self-punishing quest for perfect 'looks' and the experience of the body as 'the enemy', when it cannot deliver the perfection required by a patriarchal ideology of female beauty, seems more to do with *acceptance* of feminine identity than rejection.

Because of just this ideology, there are enormous numbers of 'our mother's generation' at the cosmetic surgeons and the gym, exhibiting the same kind of identity problems as their daughters. This is not a generational difference. Fitting the category *woman*, itself, incorporates the imperatives to 'be beautiful', 'be sexually attractive'. The style required may change from time to time – this era's woman must be slim and toned – but the meaning is the same. Women are still being exactly what it is prescribed that a woman will be, still engaged in the visual

production of gender subjectivity, whether it is in a business suit or an apron.

There are limits, then, in terms of cultural approaches, to where even a feminist psychology can take the debate. Similarly to MacSweeney's work on eating disorders, this volume is concerned with eating disorders, dysmorphic disorder and self-harm only as extremes at one end of a spectrum of signs that young women in Western societies are struggling with extreme discomfort, dissociation and dislike of their bodies. Psychology and medicine disguise, by exclusion, huge numbers of young women, who, for example, may not show all symptoms of a recognised syndrome or condition. They may not fulfil all the defined criteria to be diagnosed as having eating disorders, but regularly limit their eating, and/or use diuretics or smoking to lose weight. Similarly, the category 'body dysmorphic disorder' leaves out all those young women who, as the interviews conducted for this book discovered, can only express negative, critical thoughts about their appearance.

Not only does the psychiatric labelling of a small number of girls allow body-hatred difficulties to be seen as the statistically minor problem of a few 'sick' girls, the pathologisation of such difficulties also conveniently ignores the socially produced and socially experienced nature of body-hatred. This is the area which the feminist sociological perspectives employed in this text attempt to address.

Feminist sociological approaches to body-hatred

Feminist sociological perspectives, though diverse in themselves, can subject the individualisation of body-hatred to a radical reappraisal, locating the source of difficulties within the society, culture, meaning system or linguistic position which women inhabit. As Tseelon neatly summarises:

> Pathologising may be a useful way of defining and treating extreme, maladjustive forms of behaviour. But it misses the point. It reduces a *sign* of a general existential predicament into a *symptom* of a category, and it contaminates the issue by defining it as 'a problem'. (Tseelon, 1995, p. 63, her italics).

How and who women are, generally, in relation to their bodies has been the object of a proliferation of feminist theorising over the last two decades (Butler, 1990; Weitz, 1999; Arthurs and Grimshaw, 1999). However, it is misleading to see this as a coherent body of knowledge.

There are quite disparate approaches within this field. The 'traditional' demarcations of feminist theory into loosely, liberal, radical and socialist/Marxist feminism, have all produced important analyses of women and their bodies, and these perspectives are summarised briefly below. More recently the variously-christened 'new' branch of feminism (post-modern, post-structuralist, social constructionist) has made a dense, prolific and frequently esoteric contribution to the body question. Located frequently at a disciplinary juncture between philosophy, psychoanalysis, sociology and cultural studies, this work has been both useful and frustrating in its deconstruction of the actual categories 'woman' and 'body'. For example, the anti-essentialism of post-structuralist theory does militate towards a healthy unravelling of the fixed boundaries of gender identity and instead focuses on the multiple dimensions which dynamically constitute an uncertain and fluctuating amalgam called 'woman'. There is no longer a unified subject.

Liberating as this may initially seem to be, it does also underline the already existing dislocation of academic feminism from feminist practice. If the recognisable category called 'woman', is to be dissolved and all is to be multiplicity – including the body which is equally freed from the limits of essentialism and locatedness, and theorised as fluid and re-inventable – then does this automatically undermine the purpose, point and even possibility of any coherent 'woman's movement'?

Within academia, there can also be disadvantages to whole-heartedly embracing the post-modernists. A cynicism towards, for example, any theorising which leaves unproblematised the notion of a coherent self, or meta-narratives of power and oppression, can lead to some productive analyses of women and the body being ignored. In relation to work on eating disorders, for example, a post-structuralist writer such as MacSweeney considers the work of previous feminist writers on the subject of eating disorders as 'without a *fully* sociological perspective', because:

> the underlying retention of the bourgeois concept of 'human nature' constrains the extent to which feminism can overturn psychiatric ideology. The fundamental assumption that an individualised self exists *a priori* and in ungendered form, and that the social structure prevents women from fully developing this self crucially limits the analysis. (MacSweeney, 1993, p. 52)

In reality, little feminist thought from any perspective over the last 30 years has found it difficult to *reject* the notion of an *a priori*, essential

self but *keep* the notion of 'women' and 'the woman' as useful categories with common ground between them. Clearly, believing that woman is an identity category about which some generalisations can be made is not the same thing as arguing that they were born with those facets. The post-structuralist feminist project, then, is perhaps best approached tentatively. The project of this text, however, is not to introduce unfavourable comparisons or create a hierarchy of more or less 'fully sociological' approaches, and certainly not one which, as MacSweeney seems to be suggesting, argues that the only proper sociology is a post-structuralist sociology. The useful contributions of this loose grouping of theorising to our overall understanding of why young women hate their bodies will be examined below and in more depth in Chapter 2, and as the text develops. However, the equally valuable contributions of those writers concerned with a more materialist analysis of the issues will also be explored.

The text continues here, then, to contrast the psychological and medical categories of body-hatred phenomena with four different feminist perspectives on how uncomfortable relationships between women and their bodies are a generalised state, produced by the unequal position of women under patriarchal cultures.

Gender ambivalence: a liberal feminist perspective

For liberal feminists, it is almost by definition the case that for centuries, and across cultures, 'women who have striven to achieve intellectually, professionally or politically have confronted massive barriers as a result of being female' (Perlick, in Fallon, 1990, p. 77). Women will be standardly brought up by mothers whose space for achievement is severely curtailed compared to that of their fathers. They will have experienced brothers receiving more encouragement to achieve and more rewards. They will have seen boys in school and in college being offered more and better opportunities for intellectual and artistic fulfilment. In the employment market they will experience men gaining entry to careers more easily and progressing in them at a faster rate. Many of them will be these men's secretaries, assistants, 'handmaidens'.

Generally, they will earn less than men, be less autonomous, and less respected for their contributions and achievements.

This is a significant part of a generalised picture – almost the raison d'être of the feminist movement – which can simply be referred to as the lower social status of women in contemporary Western culture.

Women have less power, and hence fewer resources, less control over their and other's lives and less respect. This has an inevitable outcome:

'An important consequence of women's inferior social status is the devaluation of characteristics associated with or ascribed to, being female' (Striegel-Moore, 1995, p. 225).

Understanding this, women must inevitably experience themselves as inferior and limited in relation to men, something which is likely to lead to gender ambivalence. Because of the overall position of women in this society, then, loosely defined in the traditional liberal feminist terms of lack of equal opportunities, the roots of a discomfort or discontent with the very condition of womanhood are present.

Body debasement: a radical feminist perspective

Moving to a radical feminist analysis, which opens up a consideration of women as the victim of misogynistic power relations between the sexes, the pervasive seeds of self-hatred become even more comprehensible. One of the most powerful strands of this particular perspective exposed and attacked society's debasement of women's sexuality via pornography, via sexual abuse and rape, violent oppression and control: 'men's power over the powerless . . . is celebrated in pornography and the approbation of sadomasochism, and whilst pornography may not make us mad, it contributes to the discourse which positions women as dirty and disgusting – an object to be used and abused' (Ussher, 1991, p. 33).

Something more than 'status' is at issue here, then: woman's fundamental right to control and to redefine the meanings of her own sexuality and, importantly, her own body, and the acknowledgement of how little, historically and contemporarily, this is the case. The difficulties within this analysis become for women, then, not just *ambivalence* about their gender but perhaps some much stronger sense of anger against the vessel of women's degradation. Their own body not just as the potential or actual physical site of abuse, but also constructed in a misogynist meaning system which must inevitably laden it with hatred.

Women, from both of these perspectives, and even more saliently for this discussion, *girls becoming women*, contemplate the devaluation of what they are and what they will become. As Chapters 3 and 5 explore, the notion that woman's bodies are disgusting and shameful, lustful and corrupting, is part of the misogynistic folk-lore which still resonates beneath contemporary attitudes towards, for example, menstruation

and the sexual 'double standard'. This is as apparent to young women, contemplating becoming this reviled body, as it is to the young men who also circulate these ideas, which from a radical feminist perspective explains why girls reject womanhood. Bordo comments that, 'Adolescent anorexics express characteristic fears about growing up to be mature, sexually developed, potentially reproductive women' (Bordo, 1993, p. 102).

In relation to the obvious and extreme forms of body hatred, such as anorexia, being considered, with gendered subjectivity both symbolised by and located in the body, women may experience an intense sense of alienation and rejection.

The capitalist manufacture of bodily discontent: a socialist feminism perspective

Stated very simply, Western consumer capitalism needs women to feel their bodies are inadequate, so that they spend large amounts of money on products to alleviate this sense. This is not in itself a gendered phenomenon, but the extent to which it is experienced is; women are the usual targets.

Wolf describes this 'conscious market manipulation' estimating that in the United States: 'a 33 billion dollar per year diet industry, a 20 billion dollar cosmetic industry, a 300 million dollar cosmetic surgery industry . . . have arisen from the capital made out of unconscious anxieties' (Wolf, 1991, p. 17).

Adding 'patriarchal' to consumer capitalism has led authors such as Bartky (1990), Chapkis (1988) and the more populist Wolf to consider how the creation of such insecurity saps not just women's pockets but their power and potential as people, leaving them diminished and alienated from themselves.

As Chapters 2 and 4 explore in more depth, late-modernity – or post-modernity, or consumer capitalism – as a stage in social and economic development as well as the *zeitgeist*, can be characterised by shared beliefs about the perfectibility of the individual, the self-creative potential of each person in relation to personality, relationships and lifestyle, and the consumption of constantly changing 'fashions' (in the broad sense of the term) with which to bring about this continuous personal revision. 'Consumer culture latches onto the prevalent self-preservationist conception of the body, which encourages the individual to adopt instrumental strategies to combat deterioration and decay . . . and combines it with the notion that the body is a vehicle of

pleasure and self-expression. Images of the body beautiful, openly sexual and associated with hedonism, leisure and display, emphasise the importance of appearance and the look' (Featherstone, 1991, p. 170).

The media generally, and advertising in particular, constantly represent perfected bodies, something which may stimulate desires to emulate, and women's magazines and some sections of the daily press offer women advice (perhaps even imperatives) on how to be thinner, have better skin, shinier hair, etc. and therefore, such magazines may imply, be a better and more loved person.

> But that representation of woman is no ordinary woman – yet she is a woman all the same; she has a glossiness and perfection about her that we, however many layers of beauty cream we daub on (and off), never achieve. We are failures in comparison with this woman. (Winship, 1978, p. 133)

And as it fails us, we may come to revile this imperfect and imperfectible 'container'.

The visual image presented in magazines as well as more generally has become, at the start of the millennium, profoundly important, generating strong emotional responses including pleasure and desire, but also suspicion and fear about its actual and potential power. Did a video cause the death of Jamie Bulger? Do films like 'Natural Born Killers' spawn copy-cat murders? Have images of skinny teenage models produced a generation of anorexic teenagers? And of course it is exactly this last point, not just whether it does but how it does, that has been subject to the kind of feminist analysis being explored.

Women are shown by the media what their bodies could be and should be, and are offered products, endless and expensive products, with which, using their own skills, or time or will-power (and this mediation by the individual is highly important, conferring the necessary late-twentieth and early twenty-first-century sense of self-determination and its corollary, self-blame) to attain this. So, for example, much more is demanded of women generally now than 30 years ago due a more 'naturalistic' style, whereby women no longer wear the kind of under garments that held you in and pushed you into shape, but still have to produce flat stomachs, tight bottoms and high breasts (Chapkis, 1986).

For women, being as near as they can get to 'beautiful' is mandatory. Their value within the capitalist patriarchal system is constructed around their nearness to whatever ideal of beauty is currently functioning.

Being able to come close to the current ideas of what is beautiful can be the basis on which a woman is valued and awarded status and success. No wonder, then, that women pursue this feature of their lives with the utmost tenacity (ibid.).

All women will be rendered discontented with their bodies by this system. 'Symptoms' such as those identified in DSM IV for body dysmorphic disorder and anorexia – seeking reassurance about appearance from mirrors and from other people, for example, and profound discomfort with body image – will be almost inevitable. Women cannot be left in peace to like their bodies, but must strive, via capitalist consumption and misogynistically generated self-doubt, for 'improvement'. As Bartky argues, the 'fashion–beauty complex . . . like the "military–industrial complex" . . . is a major articulation of capitalist society . . . [which] as church and family have declined in importance as the central producers and regulators of "femininity" . . . has grown' (Bartky, 1990, p. 39). Body self-hatred – 'guilt, shame and obsessional states of consciousness' (ibid., p. 42) – is the inevitable product of patriarchal capitalism.

'Woman' as inferiorised category: a feminist social constructionist perspective

The central themes of this volume, given the reservations expressed above, draw significantly on a feminist social constructionist, framework. Chapter 2 considers this in more detail. What is perhaps important for this brief overview is an acknowledgement that from within this strand of feminist theorising, what women do and what they are, and indeed what they can be, is neither the expression of an essential autonomous or semi-autonomous subject, nor just a reflection of their direct oppression by the powerful forces of capitalist patriarchy, but is the product of the intersection of a number of powerful, historically and socially located, strands of thought/groupings of belief.

'Woman', then, as both the subjectively experienced identity and the external description, is 'positioned' – in other words, both circumscribed and empowered – by virtue of various more and less powerful discourses, verbal and visual, of the female subject. Ascendant among these prescriptions for womanhood are: (1) those which insist that a woman *is* her body; (2) that women are the 'deviant' category – in other words 'the other' – from a male model of a 'normal' subject; (3) that women must be slim and 'beautiful'; (4) that feminine sexuality is passive defined by men, and so on.

Similarly, with the category 'young person', there are versions, with historical, legal and social dimensions, of what a young person is, and does and can do, versions which both young people themselves and those who interact with young people are steeped in. All of these specific constructions of what a woman, specifically a young woman, may or may not be are explored in later chapters. They all impact on how girls can experience their bodies. As Malson comments, 'The discourses and discursive practices in which we live infuse our knowledges of anorexia, just as they are also imbricated in the lived experiences and the distress that many girls and women experience around eating and not eating, losing and gaining weight, being fat or thin and being a woman in contemporary Western Society' (Malson, 1998, p. 100).

Feminist social deconstructionists demonstrate a total cynicism towards the notion of 'woman' as a biologically given category, which is not in itself original in feminist thought. However, they do offer a radically different approach to the whole concept of power, ideology and the female body.

Important for this text is that their mistrust of the individualisation of medical and psychological approaches to, specifically, manifestations of body-hatred, produces an insistence on a reconceptualising of eating disorders, for example, as social constructs rather than as disease entities, psychological abnormalities or even the social *products*. Female body-hatred, in the work of Malson (1998), quoted above, or Bordo (1993), for example, and as this text argues specifically in relation to young women, is an intrinsic part of the construction of and lived experience of a/the 'woman'.

Summary

This chapter has examined from three major perspectives the knowledge base underpinning the notion of body-hatred. The psychiatric categories of body dysmorphic disorder, eating disorders and self harm, have been described and some aspects of their epidemiology examined.

A small range of the frequently helpful insights that 'female', rather than necessarily 'feminist', psychology can offer in relation to, specifically, eating difficulties has been discussed. My argument is that the pathologisation of the individual, within medical, psychological and psychoanalytical models, frequently fails to direct attention to the socio-cultural aspects of body-hatred states. In this brief outline of some of the diverse strands of the feminist sociology of women and the body, I have tried to offer both a contrast to the psycho-medical material, and

to introduce the breadth of the theoretical field in which questions of body-hatred can be located. This section stands almost as an introduction to the central purpose of the following chapter, which is to construct a coherent theoretical framework against which contemporary young women and the world of ideas and meanings and artefacts which they inhabit, can be analysed.

2
The Limits of Self-Reflexivity

The purpose of this chapter is to offer readers a means for locating the arguments and discussions addressed in the remainder of the volume. An analogy would be: to offer some general comments about the nature of the terrain before a hiker attempts to negotiate the particular features of a route. The work of some key theorists is drawn on for models of how the relationship between the body and the self can be usefully understood. This offers both the opportunity to reflect in some depth on major themes such as 'identity' and 'youth' and equally importantly introduces limits and boundaries around their use in this particular text. The chapter intends to circumscribe concepts such as the body, which have a diverse and broad range of potential approaches, within a manageable set of meanings, applicable for the duration of this work.

Theoretical texts will be drawn on to establish the parameters of the overall discussion. The previous chapter alluded to some contemporary feminist social theory of body that has been subject to the charge of deliberate obscurantism and academic elitism. In this volume only theory which generally enlightens and elucidates is utilised. The basic tenet, that theory must 'earn its living', not just wallow in its own self-importance, is espoused. As Bourdieu was renowned for espousing in relation to his own work, frameworks of ideas should not be 'the kind of conceptual gobbledygook . . . that is good for textbooks and which passes for theory in much of Anglo-American Social Science [but] a set of 'thinking tools', visible through the results they yield' (Bourdieu, quoted in Jenkins, 1992, p. 67).

This chapter will focus on contemporary discussions advanced by a number of key authors in relation to identity, the body, woman and youth and explore their application to the issue of why contemporary young women can be said to experience body-hatred.

Identity

The issue of what constitutes an individual 'self' represents a body of knowledge so dense and broad that it is conceptually untenable as a whole. Rather like the contemplation of the university or infinity, it seems to lead to intellectual paralysis.

As a social science text, however, there are some pre-givens which can be called on to shrink the potential scale. At its most basic, then, identity here is being conceived of as a *social* phenomenon.

The relationship between the individual and society, encapsulated in such questions as 'what impact do social structures have on modes of subjectivity, and vice versa ?', have formed much of the essence of social theory over the last century, both in terms of the production of subjectivities and the evolving forms of subjectivity being produced. It is in relation to the kinds of selves which can be 'identified' – in both senses of the term – in the affluent Western societies of consumer capitalism, that this exploration begins.

By whom, in terms of theorists, or how, in terms of ideas, can the overall theme of identity and the body be considered? Given, as the last chapter suggested, that there seem to be more and more young women damaging the external surfaces of this *self*, and, as Chapter 7 will argue, for boys too the self-conscious construction of a visual identity has become mandatory, then the issue of what is changing about identity that privileges that which is external (both appearance and presentation), becomes important. That late consumer capitalism is responsible for the rise of appearance-based subjectivity is now widely argued. But this is a little pre-emptive.

The relationship between the visual representation of self, and the society in which these facets are offered, received and reinforced, was classically put on the sociological map by Goffman in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Not, as is the case with the bulk of work from the 1970s on, focusing on *the body* as the intersection between self and society, but focusing on the notion of interactively-produced social self as a presentation, or performance. Goffman is concerned with 'gender displays', with depictions and presentations of gendered identity. His metaphors draw on fine art, and the ways in which gender is illustrated are fundamental to his enquiry:

> What the human nature of males and females really consists of, then, is a capacity to learn to provide and to read depictions of masculinity and femininity and a willingness to adhere to a schedule for presenting these pictures. (Goffman, 1976, p. 8)

These 'pictures' can perhaps also usefully be understood as 'meanings' – humans are able to construct and interpret meanings and to incorporate these meanings into their gender presentation. Two things can be picked out of this as of relevance here. The first is that Goffman places individuals in a continuous interactive process with their surroundings. As Layder comments:

> Goffman cannot be viewed as a theorist whose work is based on . . . the idea that the social order rests on individuals and their motivations. Goffman himself is as clear as crystal about this: the self is a social product and can only be understood in relation to its social context. (Layder, 1994, p. 178)

The second is the constitutive value placed on the notion of presentation and depiction; in other words selfhood is not an intrinsic, individually located, essence, controlling its relationship with a surrounding society, but a surface-located interactive, in-process personhood. The self and the presentation of self become blended, constituting and reconstituting an ongoing personality. This affords the notion, of depiction and construction of identity as inseparable; gender and other aspects of identity are not just 'read-off' at the surface, by way of demeanour and clothes, attitudes and expressions, insignia and badges of affiliation, but are constituted in this realm. As this text examines in more depth in later chapters, appearance can be understood as constitutive of gendered subjectivity.

Both of these themes from Goffman's work provide a key to understanding the epistemological development of this volume. The young girls considered over the next chapters are in the way Goffman's analysis of the society and the individual suggests, *both* the products and the producers of social meanings, and engage in this construction and interpretation at the interactive, externalised level, though this may well be experienced as isolated and self-directed phenomena.

For example, in 'Presentation of Self in Everyday Life', Goffman uses an extended theatrical metaphor, of identity as 'performance', of 'role-playing' and 'scripts' and 'audiences'. However, even within this seemingly self-determining analogy, he emphasises the need to locate self at the juxtaposition of the person and the social:

> In analysing the self, then, we are drawn from its possessor, from the person who will profit or lose most by it, for he and his body merely provide the peg on which something of collaborative manufacture

> will be hung from time to time. And the means for producing and maintaining selves do not reside inside the peg; in fact these means are often bolted down in social establishments. (Goffman, 1959, p. 245)

Although the extent of self-control the actor exercises is somewhat inconsistently evaluated in Goffman's work, the above can elucidate, for example, that a set of meanings such as soft, passive, fragile, which a young girl might see as grounded in her identity and attached to her body, are not generated from within herself but hung on that self-peg via interactive, social processes.

Goffman's enquiry into the relevance of appearance in social interactions seems to have been exceptional in 1950's sociology, and to an extent less than academically respectable. (MacCannell, 1983). For this text, though, it has considerable relevance, and is returned to in Chapter 6, as an interpretive framework for young women's self-reported experience of their own bodies.

Over the last two decades, however, issues to do with both the body and appearance/image construction have come under far greater academic scrutiny, as we have moved into a social era which, it has been argued, can be characterised by its unique obsession with the visual display of identity. Under-pinned by such seminal analyses as Lasch's 'The Culture of Narcissism' (1979), contemporary times have been characterised, for example, thus: 'A decentred selfhood has become a plurality of intermittent, disconnected, recognition-seeking spectacles of self-presentation' (Langman, 1992, p. 40) or 'it is the surface representation of things, their appearance and visual icon, which is valorised in a society concerned primarily with the attractiveness of commodities' (Frosh, 1991, p. 65).

Appearance-obsessed, image-obsessed and self-obsessed, the socially produced subject of late consumer capitalism attempts to exercise some control over existence in the context of impossibly large, rapidly moving unknowable forces of, for example, globalisation, by an over-emphasis on control in the personal sphere:

> As the world takes on a more and more menacing appearance, life becomes a never-ending search for health and well-being through exercise, dieting, drugs, spiritual regimens of various kinds, psychic self-help and psychiatry. (Lasch, 1977, p. 140)

Concerns with the self, the well-being of the self, the 'actualisation' of the self, including the body and appearance, have developed in relation to the needs of consumer capitalism to produce individualised consumers

with a whole range of personal wants and needs. The teenage girls this volume is concerned with are part of a generation – even a second generation – of narcissists, it can be argued; they are likely to be self-oriented, self-critical and highly concerned with their looks.

In exploring the relationship between body and self-identity in late modernity, Giddens, for example, foregrounds bodily appearance as having 'special relevance'. While acknowledging that dress and adornment has always, and does still, 'remain a signalling device of gender, class position and occupational status', he also argues that: 'In the post-traditional environments of high modernity, neither appearance nor demeanour can be organised as given; the body participates in a very direct way in the principle that the self has to be constructed. Bodily regimes, which also bear directly on patterns of sensuality, are the prime means whereby the institutional reflexivity of modern social life is focused on the cultivation – almost, one might say, the creation – of the body' (Giddens, 1991, p. 100).

For Giddens, the widespread importance accorded to bodily appearance is far more significant than 'changing ideals of bodily appearance (such as slimness or youthfulness), or as solely brought about by the commodifying influence of advertising. We become responsible for the design of our own bodies, and . . . are forced to do so the more post-traditional the social contexts in which we move' (ibid., p. 102).

Giddens' important notion of self-reflexive identity construction – which includes both life style and the body – partially elucidates why high levels of concern about personal weight, ageing, or any other aspect of looks are specific to this point in time. Self has become a self consciously pursued – 'reflexive' – project. People make and remake themselves in relation to available versions of what it means to be a person. Perfection, or the 'best version' is pursued. So, having a 'better' relationship, a better family life, the maximisation of career possibilities, and the achievement of a healthy, fit and physically attractive body are all consciously 'worked at'. 'Self' becomes a projection grounded in self-orientation and, most importantly, self-control, precisely the mind-sets so often commented on as the key to understanding anorexia and the 'anorexic personality'. Giddens comments: 'The tightly controlled body is an emblem of a safe existence in an open social environment' (ibid., p. 107).

In this 'high risk' society, as Giddens characterises it, self-control, in literal and less tangible ways, becomes a crucial feature of 'coping'. It offers some sense of relief from the 'ontological insecurity' which for him is the apogee of late consumer capitalism. He theorises a different

kind of subjectivity, an insecure, self-determining, highly individualised person, almost 'making it up as they go along', from available information. That this kind of identity is prone to produce such 'conditions' as eating disorders is quite specifically argued:

> anorexia and its apparent opposite, compulsive overeating, should be understood as casualties of the need – and responsibility – of the individual to create and maintain a distinctive self-identity. They are extreme versions of the control of body regimes which has now become generic to the circumstances of day to day life. (ibid., p. 105).

This is helpful, then. That appearance and identity are tightly bound together in this way in the early twenty-first century forms a sound explanatory context for the particular interest of this volume, and that 'individuality' is a reflexive, self-driven construct offers a way of understanding the relationship with the body which positions it as both self and the object/project of self.

However, in relation to the question of how young women experience their own bodies, there are also evident limitations in Giddens' version. For example, although it is comforting to believe that only at the extreme end of the scale are there 'casualties' of ongoing self-construction (anorexia, for example), in reality there seem to be clear signs of a whole generation of young women who show dissatisfaction with and/or disassociation from their appearances. If they are engaged in reflexive self-construction, it is clear that in some sense they are not able to incorporate this comfortably or successfully into their sense of self. Although the scale on which young women do invest time and resources in appearance construction is visible, it is equally clear, as this volume argues, that this is rarely a source of ontological security, satisfaction or a sense of achievement.

One aspect which Giddens only partially develops, is an analysis of differential access to the possibilities of self-construction, of *which* groups of people have the available tools – including knowledge – for continually consciously or semi-consciously making themselves up. He also gives little consideration to how, in a situation where maximum 'beautification' is an identity imperative, failure to achieve the required outcomes of successful self-reflexive control would be experienced at an individual, highly personal and identity-damaging level. As May and Cooper point out, in relation to Giddens' perspective on late modern identities: 'the constraints that are placed on the capacity of individuals

to construct new identities are profoundly underestimated' (May and Cooper, 1995, p. 76). Although Giddens recognises that the ongoing reconstitution of selfhood is by no means a straightforward or unproblematic operation, none-the less:

> individuals . . . confront both the possibility and the actuality of choosing from a wide panorama of behavioural options . . . conditions do exist that permit personal autonomy to exist and identity to be deliberately constructed. (ibid., p. 77)

Clearly, this fails to seriously recognise three very important aspects of modern identificatory processes. The most glaring, pointed out by May and Cooper above, is that of differential, or simply very limited, resources to construct self and life-style to one's own requirements. Secondly, the hegemony of versions of life-style and identity available to emulate or with which to identify is not recognised. Although Giddens puts forward a plurality of life-style options in multiple milieu there are strong counter-arguments to suggest the stultifying conformity at the heart of late-twentieth and early twenty-first-century consumerism (Featherstone, 1991).

Thirdly, it ignores the possibility that the knowledge and experience of various kinds, with which people reflexively reconstruct their identities – not just evaluation of their own lives and direct observation of the lives of people around them but the advice columns and self-help books, the television and film images and visions of perfect family life and perfect good health – may in fact be distorting what it is actually possible to be. The glossy, perfect people shown and the glossy perfect psychologies suggested are a fabrication of tinseltown and psychology paradise. They are not achievable identities but fictions.

These criticisms, then, to some extent do suggest some limits to the version of self-reflexive personal reconstruction that Giddens is proposing. This is not particularly to suggest that there are some kind of essential limitations on personhood – though that this is the case in terms of the body is given consideration later in this chapter – but that the demands of a very wide range of imperatives for perfection cannot be reconciled within the various kinds of limits of a person's everyday life; even if they were within themselves unequivocal and consistent. Even leaving the question of resources aside for a moment, is it possible to have a good relationship, a self-fulfilled mind, a great job, and a worked, lean and fit body, or are people 'identifying' with delusions, against which any possible reality they

can achieve must induce a sense of disappointment? A young woman who tries to reflexively constitute her physical self to the possibility of perfection suggested by a heavily touched-up, studio portrait of a pre-pubescent model, may well have a sense that she is responsible for how near to this version she is able to be, but in reality she has no chance at all of achieving what she is unlikely to recognise as a clever optical illusion.

Giddens does acknowledge that there will be pressures in how life-styles are chosen: 'the selection and creation of life-styles is influenced by group pressures and the visibility of role-models, as well as by socio-economic circumstances' (Giddens, 1991, p. 82) but he acknowledges neither the crucial issue of the 'influence' of fantasy and impossible perfection, nor the idea that the 'multiplicity of life-styles' between which people choose are narrowly masking a conservative consumerist hegemony, in other words are also illusory. May and Cooper make the additional criticism that 'this multiplicity of images and possibilities is increasingly visible. But this need not mean that it is increasingly *available*' (May and Cooper, 1995, p. 78).

The young women about whom we are writing, then, are living in a high-risk world in which rapid change at all levels of society has produced modern identities which are both insecure and self-reflexive, up to a point. The modern 'project' of self is to establish and re-establish a life-narrative, from a variety of possibilities which surround the person. People's lives and their personhood become a conscious construction. The body and its presentation are part of this ongoing constructive project: an imperative, then, in conditions of late-consumer capitalism. However, the body is also substantial and, even in the age of cosmetic surgery and physical redesign, it still has some element of the pre-given. It may well be that the body itself, as well as social determinants such as gender, class and age, may place some (painful) limits on the levels of successful self-reflexive reconstruction that can in reality be achieved.

The body

That the body, as a subject of enquiry, has been given marked attention by social theorists over the last decades, both within and outside feminist perspectives (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1977; Turner, 1984), has already been remarked on. There are a variety of significant foci within this tradition which can be utilised to explore the social and ideological backdrop against which young women experience their own bodies.

This is, of course, a potentially enormous field; this section of the study seeks only to highlight some significant themes.

The body under consumer capitalism – a Marxist perspective

Featherstone's work on the the body in consumer culture offers a potentially helpful example of how the body can be understood in the social and political context of late-consumer capitalism. That the body is, on one level, a product with an exchange value is usefully tied in to what Featherstone saw as the inescapable nature of body obsession in wealthy Western countries in the late twentieth century.

> Within consumer culture the body is proclaimed as a vehicle of pleasure: it's desirable and desiring and the closer the actual body approximates to the idealised image of youth, health, fitness and beauty the higher its exchange value. (Featherstone, 1991, p. 184)

Bodies matter. They are almost deified in capitalist societies but by no means equally. Unlike Giddens, Featherstone does not give the impression that all bodies can endlessly be redesigned to achieve the highest possible status. Even if they attempt this, there are limits, imposed by differential access to resources, and differential embodiment. The economy may seem to offer the possibility of self-transformation and endless enhancement to all, but this is determined by social class. Sawchuk, for example, makes the point that 'While promising Nirvana to all, the restricted economy limits the flow of goods and services to those with access to capital, thus reproducing the forms of class domination; it creates desires while denying them and making them dependent on the flow of capital' (Sawchuk, 1987, p. 59). As commented on in the previous section, then, not all identities have equal access to fulfilment of consumer-created longings. Another inequality in this system is that not all bodies are equally valued; there is a recognisable, and increasingly hegemonic scale of valuation. All bodies must be young, slim and healthy, but these are not the only imperatives. For example, it has been argued that the skin colour, size and shape of the features of the dominant white populations in Western cultures are more highly valued than those of black women: 'racial minorities may internalise a body image produced by the dominant culture's racial ideology and, because of it, begin to loathe, mutilate and revise parts of their body', argues Kaw in her study of Asian women undergoing cosmetic surgery (Kaw, 1998, p. 168). And although changes in the availability of the technology to alter appearance may add to the ability

of women of colour to change their looks, this is still available to only a tiny proportion of women, and often involves major surgery, with its attendant risk of post-operative 'complications' (ibid.). However, the globalisation of Western media images which uphold the American blond as the ideal 'beauty' means that more and more women may be subject to the confrontation of their inferiorised 'exchange-value'. As Gillespie eloquently comments:

> 'Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the fairest of them all?' America's mirror screams back Blondie, Rapunzel, Cinderella, Marilyn Monroe, Christie Brinkley, Dianne Sawyer, Michelle Pfeiffer. Oh, yes, sometimes the look changes and those who are styled arbiters decree brunettes, exotics or ethnics the latest 'in' look. But no matter that they may sing the praises of voluptuous this year and dark and sultry the next, the objects of beauty are always overwhelmingly white. (Gillespie, 1998, p. 185)

Even if your skin colour is white, not conforming to whatever standard of 'beauty' the current norm requires will also reduce the exchange rate of the body. Wearing glasses, not being thin, not having the perfect arrangement or size of features, will all reduce the status, the 'worth' of bodies, particularly women's bodies, on which their life-chances depend. '. . . looking good' not only becomes necessary to achieve social acceptability, but can become the key to a more exciting life-style' (Featherstone, 1991, p. 185).

Such contemporary applications of Marxist theory can be usefully deployed to understand the importance of body display and the external projection of self in an image-obsessed consumer culture, and have also been used more specifically in feminist analyses of women's experience of their bodies. Bartky, for example, extends the Marxist concept of alienation to account for women's sense of dissociation and discomfort from their bodies and their sexuality. Theorising the subjective experience of alienation thus: 'When workers lose control of the products of their labor or their own productive activity, they have undergone fragmentation within their own persons, a kind of inner impoverishment' (Bartky, 1990, p. 34), she interprets women's experience of producing themselves as feminised beings as necessarily alienating. Women, she argues, are excluded from full 'humanity' because they are over-identified with objectified body parts. '. . . to have one's entire being identified with the body', she suggests, 'a thing which in many religious and metaphysical systems, as well as in the popular mind, has

been regarded as less intrinsically valuable, indeed less inherently human, than mind or personality, is the epitome of alienation' (ibid., p. 35).

That the body, and particularly the female body, is commodified by the contemporary socio-economic conditions, in the West particularly, and that this leads not only to high status being ascribed to particular bodies but also to a destructive internalisation of a sense of self as object, are arguments which usefully comtextualise the body-hatred debate.

As later chapters examine, girls do experience both direct socio-economic restraints and the more subtle pressures of the capitalist system. Advertising, for example, may have replaced actual role models with unachievable fantasy objects. They may also suffer within a system which links them tightly to the production of their own glamorised appearances but neither acknowledges nor rewards the labour and skills they use to accomplish this. That 'beauty' is achieved, as opposed to 'natural' is somewhat ambivalently regarded.

The body and power – a Foucauldian perspective

Issues raised above, for example the differential exchange value and status of the body, are of course both reflections of and demarcaters of the distribution of power in Western societies. In this quite obvious way power and the body are linked. Given optimum conditions, the beautiful can become the powerful in contemporary society, even though the *kind* of power available may be limited.

That only in consumer-capitalist, and patriarchal, society would the issue of the body beautiful – women's body beautiful – become and remain a way of 'grading' people has also been argued (Chapkis, 1988; Bartky, 1990). However, the theorising of a different kind of power in relation to the body is also of considerable use in understanding the nature of body/self relations and how society determines this.

Usually identified as post-structuralist, Foucault's work on the body has been widely utilised over the last two decades by feminist and 'malestream' sociologists and cultural critics to theorise a different kind of politics of the body (Singer, 1989; Weeks, 1985).

Reflecting an interest in questions of identity and how it is both constituted and limited, and in questions of the power relations which act to constitute and limit, his analysis is not concerned with who holds power, but, importantly for our study: 'how individuals in particular social settings and contexts are affected by power relations in terms of their self-identities, attitudes and their (psychological) predispositions' (Layder, 1994, p. 101).

Within this very broad sweep, questions such as what aspects of contemporary life constitute the insecure and self-hating subjectivities of teenage girls? – the kind of discussion this volume is undertaking – can usefully be framed.

Grounded in an historical analysis of the development of forms of power, Foucault identifies a significant form of contemporary power relations which he designates 'disciplinary power'. Essentially, this is power exercised by surveillance, rather than force, and additionally the kind of surveillance which leads people to behave as if they are constantly being watched, a sense which when internalised leads to a state of permanent 'self-policing': 'with the disappearance of older forms of bodily control such as torture, public spectacle and so on, control operates through internalisation, and becomes, to a large extent, self-surveillance' (Wolff, 1990, p. 125).

In relation specifically to the body, Foucault argues, historically such institutions as the military and the school exercised control over every minute detail of deportment, demeanour, etc. leading to physical conformity, or docility: 'A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved' (Foucault, 1977, p. 180). It is rendered so in relation to the impossibility of avoiding the observer's gaze.

Bodies are rendered docile, then, or powerless, by the lived experience of constant observation of every detail. How they 'should' behave, or perform, is not subject to individual interpretation but is determined by mass standards. For example, how soldiers march must be identical from soldier to soldier, and how a women 'should' walk or sit, may carry the same kind of prescriptions. The gaze, then, that is internalised, is a normalising gaze, defining what it is and is not acceptable to do or to be. Feminist writers have found this Foucauldian analysis immensely helpful in understanding the positioning of women in contemporary society and in relation to their bodies (Diamond, 1988; Bordo, 1995).

Bartky, for example, attempting to synthesise Marxist and Foucauldian approaches, usefully links the notions of surveillance and self-policing to the image-obsessed individuality of late modernity which was considered above: 'In the perpetual self-surveillance of the inmate lies the genesis of the celebrated "individualism" and heightened self-consciousness which are hallmarks of modern times.' (Bartky, 1990, p. 65). She then goes on to link this particularly to the disciplinary practices which constitute the 'docile bodies' of women and the effect this has on the female body in a range of ways: for example, size and shape, deportment and gesture and the adornment of the body, are,

importantly, 'the effects of the imposition of such discipline on female identity and subjectivity' (ibid., p. 65).

Individual subjects, then, are constituted in relation to a range of powerful meanings prescribing what it is to be a woman, a set of meanings which are thoroughly internalised and constantly applied and subject to some variation over time, for example: 'Today massiveness, power or abundance in a woman is met with distaste' (ibid., p. 66). 'Distaste' and humiliation are the sanctions deployed to guarantee outcomes. Women's magazines and virtually all cultural 'texts' in circulation either quite blatantly or more subtly insist that women should be slim women. Dieting and exercise are extolled as routes for achieving this, and the imperative to exercise strict controls over the self are internalised: 'Dieting disciplines the body's hungers: appetite must be monitored at all times and governed by an iron will. Since the innocent need of the organism for food will not be denied, the body becomes one's enemy, an alien being intent on thwarting the disciplinary project' (ibid., p. 66).

Bartky draws very direct links by using a Foucauldian analysis of disciplinary power, between the internalisation of contemporary views of what a woman must look like and an intense, individualised experience of self-hatred, a point which will be developed throughout this text. People are policed, in their behaviour and presentation, even in their thoughts and beliefs, by the definition of what is 'normal' at any given time in society, though of course there is not always an agreed or uncontested 'normal' to which to adhere. This is a product of both the disciplinary power discussed above, which has a primary constituting role in individual identity, but also 'bio-power', which is more linked to the definition of 'normal', 'standard' and 'acceptable' in populations. Considering the issue of sexuality from the nineteenth century on, Clegg, for example, elucidates Foucault's argument thus:

> Foucault sees an outpouring of talk, concern and writing focusing on sex. The effect of this discourse, he argues, is the development of a whole new realm of discourse attending to the definition of what is and what is not 'normal', and what is and what is not available for individuals to do, think, say and be. (Clegg, 1989, p. 155)

This kind of power of normalisation, becomes imposed via the self and via self-imposed regulation, so that:

> these ways of constituting the normal are institutionalised and incorporated into everyday life. Our own reflexive gaze takes over

> the disciplining role as we take on the accounts and vocabularies of meaning and motive which are available to us, while certain other forms of account are marginalised or simply eased out of currency. (ibid., p. 156)

These accounts, or 'vocabularies of meanings', or 'discourses', are what constitutes personhood, and in its most simplistic form, then, what this is arguing is that in practice people can only be what there is to be. Or as Davies puts it: 'In poststructural theory the focus is on the way each person actively takes up the discourse through which they and others speak/write the world into existence *as if it were their own*' (Davies, 1993, p. 13, her italics).

And necessarily this will be multi-dimensional and not all available versions of what there is to be will tally: there will be contradictions and subversions as well as dominant versions, and discourses of resistance. Sets of meanings defining what it is to be, for example, a 'normal' teenager may be contradictory, ambiguous and/or hegemonous. As the following chapters argue, there are a variety of different constructions of what it is to be a young person: the developmentally immature 'adolescent', the teenage rebel, the aggressive, irresponsible youth, the sexually 'at risk' young woman, and so on. And even though Foucault can be criticised for an inadequate analysis of where power is generated *from*, his analysis of how it 'sews everything together' (Layder, 1994, p. 107) offers a way of understanding how the circulation and re-circulation of meanings and/or 'knowledges' about teenagers form the 'pattern' against which a young person can be. The 'appropriate' presentation of the body, and the constant self-regulation of this, form a substantial, and feminists such as Bartky would argue, unequally gendered, part of this process.

Theorising the female body

The sections above have attempted to consider some of the ways in which the relationship between the self or identity and its physical presentation can helpfully be understood. Goffman, Giddens, Featherstone, Foucault and Bartky, drawing on different traditions, all offer ways of understanding this complex set of connections. To various extents they also, with the exception of Foucault, recognise that some issues to do with the body, specifically in the area of presentation/adornment, are highly gendered. Having recognised, though, that: 'Women are of course the most clearly trapped in the narcissistic,

self-surveillance world of images.' (Featherstone, 1991, p. 179), there is a tendency to underestimate the extent to which relations between body and self are gender specific. The issue is not just, as Featherstone and Giddens suggest, a matter of degree. The whole nature of women's relationship to their bodies is gender specific. For an analysis of this specificity which is able to take into account the prevailing power relationships within western patriarchy, the work of feminist social theorists such as Bartky is more useful.

Bodies are gendered, then, it has already been suggested, in relation to a range of understandings about what a 'correct' or 'normal' female body (or indeed male body, as Chapter 7 considers), should be. As this book progresses, many of the ideas and meanings – the 'rules' in other words – which determine what a young woman's body can be, and her subjective, lived experience of this body, will be examined. Building on the last section of Chapter 1, what is now briefly addressed here is the question of whether feminist understandings of gender in itself can elucidate the phenomena of female body-hatred.

Is it the case, for example, that the gendered body which all women inhabit carries a set of inferiorised meanings? Women may experience their own bodies in negative ways, for example, as previously suggested, not simply because the distance between the fantasy image and the reality of women's bodies is so large that inevitably women will feel inferior and inadequate, or that certain groups of women – young women, old women, women in poverty, black women, disabled women – may have limited resources to even begin to attempt to achieve the ideal. There may be an even more pervasive set of negative meanings.

It has been argued that women's bodies have come to be seen via a variety of different belief systems as weak, passive, messy, restricting, unhealthy. Women occupy this set of meanings – they are what defines their relationship to their body – and the impact of this, as propounded by, for example, Young, is that: '. . . a woman frequently does not trust the capacity of her own body to engage itself in physical relation to things. Consequently she lives her body as a burden, which must be dragged and prodded along at the same time as protected' (Young, 1990, p. 148).

That women have been theorised, from De Beauvoir (1947) to the present (Martin, 1995), as seeing their bodies in this extraordinarily negative way – and a way which Young contrasts to the active, facilitative unconcern with which men experience their bodies – does raise questions about differential gendering in itself, for example, can men and women be generalised in these broad categories.

The significance of gender overall, its relationship to sex, and how masculinity and femininity are played out in contemporary society are themes too enormous to be undertaken here, and to some extent this volume, as a feminist text, takes for granted the reader's familiarity with contemporary debates about gender.

The debate as to whether and how women directly experience oppression by a monolithic patriarchal structure, has already been subject to some explication via a loosely Foucauldian notion of power and the relationship between disciplinary power, bio-power and the circulation of meanings and identity. Women, then, and men, are positioned by a range of often competing versions of what it is to be a woman or man. The hegemony of certain sets of meanings, the extent to which they are mutually reinforcing, then becomes a dominant theme, and is likely to be experienced as a 'normal' – in other words highly prescriptive – mode of being. This is the effect of power.

The masculine imperative of strength and bravery, for example, is reinforced in cultural texts such as films and books and 'true life' stories in the newspapers, and by what parents tell little boys about not crying, in what schools urge on the sports field, and so on. Competing or resistant versions of what it means to be a man may, in this case, be illusive. Weakness or cowardice are not applauded, but actively condemned, though different kinds of bravery, such as political pacifism, may find a small degree of approval in limited contexts. The dominant meaning has little to contradict it and so young men are positioned very securely in this mode of being. In the sense that few alternative versions of what it is to be a boy are available to them, this could be interpreted as oppressive: they have to be brave and strong, Similarly for women: that they must be *attractive* is an extraordinarily enduring and pervasive idea. Many second-wave feminists in the 1970s did attempt to generate and circulate a different set of meanings in relation to the physical presentation of femininity – for example, that it could be less expensive, less time-consuming, physically less restrictive and painful (Morgan, 1970; Densmore, 1969). However, most of these challenges failed to thrive – the dominant discourse weathered the attack and conceptions of, for example, post-feminism, or 'girl power' draw heavily on traditional versions of 'beauty' as potency. That women's engagement with their appearances has been so puzzlingly enduring has also been interpreted as evidence of oppression or even 'brain-washing' (Greer, 1970).

One strand of the feminist debate within this area, summed up neatly by Davis as 'the problem of the cultural dope' (Davis, 1995), had veered

for some years towards allocating to women an entirely passive and prescribed role in relation to 'doing looks', presenting them as the victims of capitalist patriarchy (Chapkis, 1986), a position challenged within post-structural feminism and the complex reformulation of women as active agents (Smith, 1990).

Without wishing now to enter this dense debate concerning the extent of female individual agency and/or determinism, it is important to clarify that for this text the notion of gender being used acknowledges that women and men, the masculine and the feminine, are socially constructed by the same processes, that is within a range of subject positions, some of which, depending on the level of inter-reinforcement, will be understood as 'normal' and 'right' ways of being, and some of which will be experienced more as possibilities or choices. As Davies comments:

> there . . . [are] many different ways of being male and female and . . . in an ideal world, we would each have access to many or all the different ways of being. In the current social order . . . there are limitations . . . in terms of gender and on what is thought proper for each sex/gender . . . (Davies, 1993, p. 10)

That these imperatives and choices are the defining feature of the actual process of gendering is important to this text: they are what construct boys and girls as recognisably different. However, that the direct imposition of meanings of what it is to be a boy or girl emanates from their opposite is not the point. Girls are not controlled or oppressed, by boys *per se*, only in as much as boys may circulate a very traditional and uncontested version of what a girl should be if they have had little access to more challenging sets of ideas. And this would also be true of girls in relation to boys. But that boys have more rights to control over, and power over, girls – for example, in the area of sexuality – and that girls should be thus controlled may well be part of the dominant beliefs shared by both.

The restrictions and possibilities of gender imposed on girls, the meanings in which and with which they live and act, then, are not primarily the conscious, deliberate impositions of either individual or social categories of boys or men, but products of a vast historical and cultural edifice of meanings, any one of which is reinforced by a specific set of histories. Just a seemingly simple question such as 'why do girls wear make-up' connects into centuries of belief about the adorned and unadorned face, the social significance of artifice and/or beauty, the

need for capitalism to sell cosmetics, what their mother did, what is considered acceptable in their group of friends, the demise of the power of religious discourse which decried 'painted women' as immodest – and so on. The sets of meanings, then, are dense and extraordinarily tangled. They constitute the 'cultural environment' which people inhabit. And even though there will be some differences in every woman's cultural environment, it is also surprisingly unvaried. As Bordo argues:

> But of course we are not all exposed to 'the same cultural environment'. What we are all exposed to, rather, are homogenising and normalising images and ideologies concerning 'femininity' and female beauty. Those images and ideology press for conformity to dominant cultural norms. (Bordo, 1995, p. 62: citing J. Brumberg)

And the cultural norms, the cultural *inheritance* they display is that which many feminist writers simply describe as 'patriarchy': the systematic and all pervasive undervaluing of everything which is female. The maker of the post-enlightenment structures of knowledge and ideas, including mind–body dualism, on which our society still overridingly draws, is 'man'. The rational/humanist product of the enlightenment, the scientist and philosopher, source of meanings and discourses was male. It was *man* the studier, the declaimer, the generator of knowledge, and woman always the relatively voiceless object of this: in other words: '. . . the position of woman has indeed been that of an internal exclusion within Western culture . . . ' (Martin, 1987, p. 13), or, as Heckman phrases it: 'Feminists reject enlightenment thought because of its gendered basis' (Heckman, 1990, p. 5).

Using a Foucauldian perspective which would consider the exercise of surveillance and normalisation as the exercise of power, then, almost inevitably the categoriser of the normal, the observer and reinforcer of 'proper' behaviour was a male; and the starting point of those categories is invariably 'what is like me'. As Chapter 1 suggested, this is a vital issue at the root of what kind of behaviour is seen as normal and what as evidence of abnormal psychology. As Broverman *et al*. asked in the 1970s, how is it that women's expressions of unhappiness are seen as an illness called depression, but men's outbursts of violence, expressing perhaps similar things, are seen as just extremes of 'normal' manhood? (Broverman *et al*., 1970).

The history of man as the generator of knowledge, the interpreter and declaimer of religious and secular ideas, the scientist, the doctor, the poet

and writer, will and has, feminists argue, privileged their own likeness in the scientific and philosophical 'truth' which they have generated. Women and men exist within these patriarchal versions of who is the pattern and who the deviant. What a woman really is and what a man really is are stories created within a one-sided telling. The all-pervasive inheritance of unequal power relations, then, often remains unrecognised and frequently remains unchallenged. So, referring to the point above, for example, that women acting outside the range of 'normal' behaviour frequently become labelled ill (depressed, in this example), whereas men acting outside the range of normal frequently become labelled 'bad', is underpinned with a notion of male as rational and in control, female as irrational, and not in command of herself and not capable of responsibility – an inheritance from both the dualistic thinking of enlightenment ideas (mind/body, subject/object, culture/nature, self/other) and assumptions about man as the pattern of normality.

And as Busfield comments this embodies power relations: 'the linking of assumptions about agency and rationality with masculinity, and of irrationality and denial of agency with femininity are tied, I would suggest, to issues of social power' (Busfield, 1996, p. 108).

Some constituencies in contemporary societies have attempted to contest some of these historical ideas about the inferiority of women, though of course it may be extremely difficult to erect new sets of meanings on contradictory foundations. The material position of women world-wide often seems to glaringly reinforce that in reality very little has changed. For example poverty and poor health, domestic oppression, rape and violence and political powerlessness are still all highly gendered. Capitalism in the 'developed' West in the last hundred years has enforced traditional versions of gendered personhood, in some areas, though, as later chapters will consider, this is inconsistent. Women and men, for example, must be equally flatteringly addressed as active, empowered individuals if they are to be model consumers.

A note on female embodiment

As a final reflection on what theoretical tenets this volume is working within, it may perhaps be worth making the point that the gendered bodies under discussion here are, as discussed above, the products of systems of belief and meaning. Young women inhabit and negotiate sets of ideas about who they can be. But they also – and this is of considerable importance to understanding their situation – live in actual, tangible and specific bodies. Women's bodies are experienced by

themselves not just – or indeed not at all – as a set of meanings but as *being* in the world. As Grimshaw argues:

> The body is our general medium for having a world. Consciousness is in the first place not a matter of 'I think' but rather of 'I can'. . . . Human consciousness and human action are rooted in an ability to *move* in the world. (Grimshaw, 1999, p. 102)

It is, then, through bodies – gendered bodies – that life is undertaken. It may well be, as considered above, that subjectivity is delimited by what there is available to be, but it is also placed in a physical container, of a given, though to some extent adjustable, size and shape, the usage of which is also subject to a range of (gendered) meanings.

The body under discussion has limits to the ways in which it can be. Contrary to Giddens' analysis of the kind of late-twentieth-century ideology which implies that the body is simply another facet of our lives which can be endlessly redesigned and improved on in a kind of physically located DIY, Grimshaw emphasises the material and physical limitations faced in this process:

> The idea that we can all choose our own bodies . . . effaces the inequalities of privilege, money and time to engage in these practices. It effaces addictions, obsessions, botched operations and eating disorders. Above all, despite the frequent popular presentation of body change and shaping as a matter of mere individual choice and will, or even as 'fun' and free play, the body women want is a highly normalised one. (ibid., p. 93)

Women must live and move in specific bodies, but the *desirable* female body comes only in a standardised model, and the time, resources and possibility of achieving this frequently have severe constraints. Similarly to Featherstone's position discussed above, then, Grimshaw recognises the very real material constraints on achieving the normalised body. One set of constraints, for example, could well be about not being in control of the clothes and make-up you can buy, having access only to pocket money, not controlling your diet: in other words being in the powerless position of many teenagers.

The version of the gendered body, then, which this volume is espousing, is that which is physically inhabited, and locked into a system of meanings which can render this necessary habitation a discordant and uncomfortable reality.

Theorising youth

As the section on identity above points out, a variety of 'normalising' versions of what it can mean to be a young person have been proposed; Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 7 look at some of these versions in more depth. This text is trying to presuppose as little as possible about the *different nature* of adolescence, compared to being an adult. As was the case with women, and extremely visibly so, young people have been the object of a range of discourses of 'otherness', from, for example, developmental psychology and cultural theory, as well as, generally, the victims and heroes of the projections and fantasies of an era which betrays something of an obsession with youth.

However having attempted to 'clear the space' to look at young people, there are two facets of the 14–18 age group about which most of this book is concerned which frame the discussions in later chapters. The first is that the actual embodiment of young people, and the meanings that they can attach to this, are undergoing a process of review. They are inhabiting 'new' or changing bodies, and must therefore on some level adjust their perception of embodied selfhood.

If, as this chapter has been considering, the visual projection of self is of massive importance to identity formation in late consumer capitalism, then this changing body may also signal an enforced re-evaluation of identity, as the whole range of meanings of the adult body overlay those relatively less focused on bodies of children.

Young people, are learning a different way of seeing their bodies which is likely to have identity implications. Lee, for example, examines this in relation to the impact menstruation may have on a young girl's sense of self:

> menarche is an important time when young women become inserted and insert themselves into the dominant patterns of sexuality. As a crucial signifier of reproductive potential and thus embodied womanhood, menarche becomes intertwined with sexuality. (Lee, 1998, p. 84)

The young woman must take on new ways of seeing herself, in this case as a sexualised, adult woman. Young's work, mentioned above, provides examples of this by arguing that, for young women, developing a woman's body is a factor limiting her expression of self; girls shrink their use of space, sit neatly, inhibit their body movements, etc. (Young, 1990). This process of identity change, then, of newly

acquiring a set of adult meanings, relates quite specifically but not coterminously with a changing body.

The second theoretical stance which underpins the subsequent chapters is that despite evident increasing attention to children's rights, young people are still on the whole an inferiorised category, politically, socially, economically and legally. Bradley, for example, usefully interprets the politics of 'youth identity' thus:

> Age is viewed . . . as a dimension of inequality because, like class, gender and ethnicity, it involves the construction of social differences which in turn brings differential access to social resources, such as wealth, power and status. In our society there is an age elite of middle age-groups, with the young and old being relatively powerless. (Bradley, 1996, p. 147)

The dimensions of inequality she identifies do, of course, intersect with each other and there are many variations within any category. For example, if youth unemployment rates – in many ways a useful indicator of lack of opportunity – over the last decades in Western capitalist countries are considered, then: 'The official unemployment rate for young African–Americans stood at twice that of their white peers, with a horrifying peak in 1982 and 1983, when just under 50 per cent of African–American sixteen to nineteen-year-olds were officially recorded as unemployed' (Griffin, 1993, p. 72). The situation in Britain in the 1980s became comparable (ibid., 1993).

Other differentials are of considerable importance: for example, the physical re-embodiment of youth may be experienced very differently for a disabled teenager. Variations of wealth may make aspects of youthful disempowerment range considerably.

Using a structural power analysis, it is consistent to argue that young people are relatively underprivileged as a social group. However similarly to the consideration of women as a category above, if a poststructuralist analysis is applied, then young people will also be understood as object, rather than active subjects in the circulation of definitive meanings. Young people are 'deviant' to the norm of adulthood, and the object of adult definition. The section above argued the existence of a male–female dualism, in which women historically have been constructed as the 'other', the 'deviant' to the man the knower, the overseer and organiser. Much of this argument can also be applied to young people, who in the end are also 'other': 'As well as the male–female dualism, the child–adult dualism is a powerful constitutive force in children's lives

(Baker and Davies, 1992) the children in . . . [their] study groups often constituted themselves in their talk as children. By this they meant people surrounded by others who stage direct their choices and often give them necessary information about the possibilities . . . they were very aware of the requirements placed on them by adults to be the kinds of people the adults define as proper' (Davies, 1993, p. 31).

Children and young people are subject to normalising power which offers, through adult circulation of meanings of what it is to be a non-adult, versions of how to be. Children and young people are also, unlike most adults, more likely to be the recipients of directly experienced adult power, though because this is more obvious it may be the easier to resist:

> Direct displays of adult power . . . are different from the more subtle power involved in teaching children the same set of obviousnesses, and the positing of the child in relation to these. In relation to direct displays of power a child can conceive of resistance much more regularly. (Davies, 1993, p. 31)

With young adults, taking orders from parents or teachers or even youth opportunity instructors or bosses, clearly represents being subject to the imposition of a level of power which may be more or less resisted, subverted or complied with. However, the construction of some categories of (particularly male) youth in themselves as rebellious, argumentative and aggressive is a product of a complex historical and contemporary set of ideas – the notion of a 'hooligan' has a venerable history (Pearson, 1983) – is far more controlling and effective, as they are actually experienced as individual or group choices. These matters will be considered further in Chapter 4.

Even if one takes Davies' point that: 'how one does masculinity or femininity with ones parents, say, may differ profoundly from how one "does" masculinity with ones friends, or from one friend to another' (Davies, 1989, p. 2), still the range drawn on in these encounters is the product of a 'cultural environment' which does not accord young people full, ontological validity. Sets of meanings loosely located in child and development psychology, in medicine and the law, in education theory and in popular belief systems offer versions of young people who are troubled, unstable, psychologically unformed, weak, open to undue influence from this nebulous source of corruption called a 'peer group': all these validate the existing power relations and are a product of them. Young people are defined as in need, to minor and major

extents, of the 'protection' of adults as they cannot take responsibility for themselves – even though it is ultimately a set of other meanings of youth – as sexually desirable, for example, which also leads, it could be argued, to their exploitation and corruption by adults.

Young, female and self-hating?

Griffin, in her useful study of youth research, makes the point that a 'mainstream' perspective on young people: '. . . is characterised by the tendency to investigate young people as both the source and the victims of "social problems"' (Griffin, 1993, p. 3). While this text clearly does not blame young people for any social difficulty can simply be asserted, it may be useful to seriously consider whether it does continue in a tradition of interpreting young people as 'victims'. Certainly, the medicalised categories of self-harm, dysmorphic disorder and eating disorders do contain the notion that some unfortunate teenagers are not able to cope with certain kinds of pressures, and are becoming unbalanced by them (whereas others can cope – a swift exercise in locating the problem in the psychology of individuals). However, what this book argues throughout is that, yes, actually teenagers, particularly teenage girls, *are* subject to all kinds of difficulties – though not as 'victims' but as socially constructed subjects.

The volume posits that being a young person in late consumer capitalism in the west does subject all young people to certain kinds of pressures and problems, which a variety of resources – both material and inter-personal – may ameliorate up to a point. There are pressures to consume, manifest in the need to own the 'right' clothes with the 'right' designer labels, to have 'the right' look, to present an attractive and homogenised image, on all western teenagers: Cartmel and Furlong, for example, argue that '. . . consumption and style are central to the lived experience of young people who are required to act as consumers in many different dimensions of life' (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, p. 7). However, the point they go on to make is that this is a source of difficulty in itself generally for teenagers: 'consumption, accountability and personal responsibility are sources of stress and anxiety . . . [and] a sense of increased personal risk' (ibid., p. 7). Teenagers do, then, have a social problem.

As Giddens (1991) and Frosh (1991), for example, argued in relation to late-twentieth-century identity, the mental states produced by late consumer capitalism *are* insecure. This text does, then, start from the point that the expectations of being young now do create internally

experienced difficulties, and that the resources available to young people, in terms of socio-economic realities and in terms of the available sets of meanings in their 'cultural environment' may offer differential levels of counter-balance, or protection, to the idea that self-worth is purchased over the counter, or dependent only on visual image.

Summary

This chapter has attempted to construct a theoretical framework against which to interrogate some central issues implicated in the theme of young women and body-hatred. Goffman's social interactionist work was drawn on to consider how best a visually defined, social identity can be conceptualised, and one of Giddens' central themes, that of self-reflexive nature of modern identity, was explored. By introducing concepts of power however, specifically Marxist and Foucauldian notions of power, some limits on the parameters of ongoing self redefinition were examined. Bartky's synthesis of both of these analyses of power to examine the regimes in which the female identity and the body are constituted was examined, and the work of the feminist philosophers, Young and Grimshaw, on embodiment was highlighted to underline the importance of the lived physical experience of contemporary women.

The book's overall position on gender was explicated. Briefly, then, men and women are locked into a system of meanings which reflect the enduring legacy of a patriarchal culture. They also reflect contemporary social structures and power relations. So, for example, as Weedon points out: 'The most powerful discourses in our society have firm institutional bases, in the law, for example, or in medicine, social welfare, education and the organisation of the family and work' (Weedon, 1987, p. 109).

All contemporary women will be subject to a range of meanings emanating from an historically patriarchal society, which on the whole problematise and inferiorise their very difference from men. That women experience their bodies as deficient, an encumbrance and a limitation is the product of this: they are, crucially judgements made in relation to a set of beliefs about the strong, unencumbered physically uninhibited bodies – the 'standard' bodies – of men. They also continue to have fewer resources and less access to political power and how they experience themselves is a product of definitions from within these institutions, which in themselves are changing and inconsistent.

All young people, given their relative powerlessness in terms of access to resources and in terms of having 'a voice', will be less able than

the category 'adults' to comply with the demands of late consumer capitalism, that insist on self-actualisation, self-determination and constant self-improvement via conscious, reflexive attention to 'life-style'. They will also be subject to a range of adult definitions, formed by histories of meaning, by 'experts', and by myths and popular demonisation, which may position them in contradictory, and frequently disjointed subjectivities.

That young women, then, as the category formed at the intersection of these two dimensions, may well be likely to experience themselves as 'difficult', dissonant and uncomfortable, is the theoretical starting point from which this text will examine the question of young women and body-hatred.

3
Adolescence and Body-Hatred

As the Introduction explained, the purpose of Chapters 3, 4 and 5 – the central core of the this text – is to consider how the expectations of, and ideas about, young women in relation to various aspects of their lives can produce a dissonance between girls and their own bodies. In keeping with the social constructionist perspective outlined in the last chapter, young women will be considered as positioned by three different sets of ideas about what being young means. The psycho-biological category of 'adolescence' is explored in this chapter, the 'teenager' as economic consumer is explored in Chapter 4 and the category created within legal and moral definitions of young people (quite often encapsulated in the term 'youth' in relation to boys but with no real equivalent term for girls) is the theme of Chapter 5.

The three chapters link these abstracted categories with core aspects of contemporary young women's lives. For example, Chapter 4's examination of teenage girl consumers considers how practices of consumption are imbricated within their leisure pursuits and their friendship groups, reinforcing this identity. That girls' morality is interpreted in relation to sexual relations (imagined or real) with boys is one central theme of Chapter 5. In both cases, then, there is an examination of the ways in which everyday aspects of girls' lives and the categories within which they are defined are enmeshed. In this chapter, it is the specific relationship girls have with their bodies in relation to puberty and growth – becoming women – which is central.

This chapter begins by looking briefly at the social construction of young people from an historical perspective, before pursuing its central problematic: what is there in the concept of 'adolescence' which positions girls, metaphorically, at an uncomfortable distance from their bodies? Having considered the primarily psychologically defined state

which is adolescence generally, it goes on to consider the specific question: what does it mean to be an adolescent *girl*?

The chapter goes on to examine what ideas about their changing bodies and psychology, at the stage at which a female child is becoming a woman, must be negotiated. It will be argued that the prevalent ambivalent and misogynist attitudes to some specific aspects of women's bodies: for example, menstruation, breasts and manifestations of sexuality, offer girls contradictory and often negative messages about their bodies, which have a detrimental effect on their ability to establish a positive and confident subjectivity. The notion that children may be considered sexually neutral or androgynous, and it is at puberty that girls take on this baggage of gendered sexuality, will be explored as factors in the production of body-hatred.

Having interrogated the category 'adolescent girl', Chapter 3 will go on to focus on the visual presentation of self required of teenage girls, and attitudes which render this a somewhat precarious source of pleasure and satisfaction. The chapter concludes, then, that the process of renegotiation of identity that accompanies the entry into womanhood in predominantly white Western cultures which denigrates *and* reifies women's bodies, renders alienation from and dislike of their own bodies hard to avoid.

Age difference and social difference

The expectations generally held of how a person should behave and of who they may be, are, in the West, very specifically linked to age, but not in any essentialist sense '... chronological age in itself has no significance; it only gains meaning from the behavioural characteristics imputed to it, so that the idea of a person 'being elderly' or 'being adolescent' triggers off certain expectations about how that person will act, think and feel' (Bradley, 1996, p. 146).

It would not be difficult to make a case that in the West the demarcation of all aspects of identity into 'age appropriate' categories is illustrative of dominant discourse at its most hegemonic. What people can appropriately do with their leisure time, whether they may have sex and with whom, what they may wear and what kind of economic pursuits they may engage in, are loaded with notions of age appropriateness. At a point in time when many people's lives and life choices are less constrained by mortality and morbidity than in previous ages, the limitations on their options in all sorts of areas are firmly established by the intensely powerful effects of pervasive normalisation with potential

ridicule as the potent sanction for those who are seen to transgress. However, this is somewhat contradictory because within this schema youth has also come to represent *everything* that is active, free and desirable: the Holy Grail of the twentieth century 'religion' of identity as a self-driven, ongoing construction, as discussed in the previous chapter.

For those who can afford them, the technologies are now available to modify, shape or transform the body, so that young people can become 'perfect' and old people can look it. 'Youth' now has symbolic value as the 'outcome' of the process of becoming more and more in control over ones body' (Wyn and White, 1997, p. 20). 'Mutton' can and should be 'dressed up as lamb', as long as it can sustain a credible imitation. If people can still construct a youthful identity then they may participate in the youthful world; if not then they will risk being subject to ridicule.

However, because it is the notion of youth that has come to symbolise desirability in many aspects of contemporary life, it does not mean that those who occupy these social positions have any particular access to power. The existence of ageism as a form of prejudice and an expression of unequal power distribution is relatively unrecognised and unaddressed. However, the dimension of relative powerlessness may be key to the understanding of the range of factors constituting 'youthful' identity. Bradley argues for viewing age 'as a dimension of inequality because, like class, gender and ethnicity, it involves the construction of social differences which in turn brings differential access to social resources, such as wealth, power and status. In our society, there is an 'age elite' of middle age-groups, with the young and the old being relatively powerless' (Bradley, 1996, p. 147).

The middle-age group may simultaneously reify and denigrate youth, and in their role as medical, psychological or social 'experts', journalists, advertisers or politicians have the power to define them both in contrast to, and invariably then as deviant from, adults. By this mechanism they can decide who youth can be, what is 'normal' youth and what pathological. Certainly, it is not constructed as equal, and power is not shared with them. Similarly to adults in contemporary Western culture, the idea that they are individually autonomous and accountable for their own destiny is offered to them, but in practice with little political or economic 'clout' to effect change. As Furlong and Cartmel comment: 'Individual accountability and achievement are values which are constantly reinforced by the school and media, yet in reality the individual often remains powerless. The combined forces of individual

responsibility and accountability, on the one hand, and vulnerability and lack of control on the other, lead to a heightened sense of risk and insecurity' (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, p. 8).

Versions of what a young person is, including legal, psychological, social and economic versions, are formulated by and within the adult world. Within these sets of expectations there may well be contradictions which are damaging for young people.

Historical constructions of adolescence

The period of transition from childhood to adulthood, biologically perceived as the stage at which the physical capacity to procreate is established, rarely seems to pass unnoticed across cultures and epochs. How this stage is understood socially, the meanings and rituals ascribed to these changes and, in the West, the individuals undergoing such transition, are subject to considerable variation. Although this text is in no sense an historical or cross-cultural analysis, it is perhaps worth keeping in mind that the demarcation of 'life stages' frequently does form part of the cultural ordering of societies and that rites of passage marking entry into adulthood seem almost universal phenomena. 'However great the differences among various societies, there is one focal point within the life span of an individual which in most known societies is to some extent emphasised: the period of youth, of transition from childhood to full adult status, or full membership of society' (Eisenstadt, 1972, p. 17).

As with chronological age, though, it is the social reading of physical 'maturity', not the biological events which change the body, which define how youth will be perceived. The differences in how the *biology* of teenage development dictates *social* understanding of what it is to be 'a child' or 'a youth' has been subject to sustained academic analysis (Stainton-Rogers, 1987).

Within the social constructionist framework outlined in the last chapter, it is argued that in different cultures and generations there have been varying 'versions' of what it means to be a young person, which are formulated within a variety of different fields of knowledge and belief: medical, psychological, economic, and so on, which reflect the power relations outlined above. For example, then, the current notion of an 'adolescent' includes ideas of psychological instability (moodiness, angst, emotional outbursts) and intellectual vulnerability (being impressionable, being subject to peer group pressure). This will be considered in more depth below.

The social construction of the various meanings linked to stages of human life is of course a dynamic historical process. To briefly use 'childhood' as an example: the present century has 'common-sense' views on what constitutes childhood: a distinct life-stage that lasts from post-baby to well into the teens, which has clear gender demarcation from birth, and a range of 'protected' features that all children *should* have (play, freedom from responsibilities, economic dependence, sexual innocence, and so on), which can be traced back little more than a century. If earlier epochs are considered, some of this taken for granted 'wisdom' about children was radically different. In England, for example, in the early modern period:

> Though society had sharply defined gender roles for adults, children were all dressed alike for the first several years of their lives (there was no equivalent of the pink and blue dichotomy) and comments by parents about their small children show less gender stereotyping than is evident among many contemporary parents. It was when children began their training for adult life, at the age of four or five, that distinctions become apparent. (Wiesner, 1993, p. 43)

It is a very different set of constructs determining the normal child than current versions. Expecting a child to be a useful contributor to the household from such a young age, for example, would normally now be seen as oppressive, if not abusive.

Youth, as the stage between childhood and adulthood, also seems to have been regularly defined in the context of economic production prior to the nineteenth century. It was usually seen as the phase during which economic activity was being undertaken but independence (from family or from family to which one had been 'apprenticed') had not been established and the person had not set up a new family or independent economic unit. This stage was likely to be very long indeed compared to youth now, starting in early teens and continuing to mid or late twenties, and was unlikely to be defined in terms of intellectual, moral or psychological factors but simply by those transitions connected to social and economic independence. Occupationally defined social groups also suggest the predominance of 'worker' as the significant identity construct. 'Students, journeymen in many of the major trades, and novices in the army, clergy and bureaucracy all had their own organisations and traditions which distinguished them from children on the one hand and married adults on the other' (Gillis, 1974, p. 4).

Economic identity, however, was clearly gendered. Being an apprentice or junior member of a particular occupation identified and defined mainly boys. This is not to argue, though, that girls had no economic role or definition. In some senses, their whole identities seemed to have been even more of an economic issue. Making a 'good' marriage, for example, as all fiction-readers are aware, was an expectation of girl's families. But their personhood as financially productive was implicated in more subtle ways. 'The training of upper-class girls and young women in decorum and dancing . . . was carried out by the families not for the girls' own enjoyment but to allow them to catch a royal eye and perhaps gain a lucrative post for a family member; service at court was also an economic activity' (Wiesner, 1993, p. 83).

Simply as members of rural and 'trade' households, which constituted economic units, girls shared in that economically productive and reproductive activity. And in many European countries, dowries were expected of rich and poor girls, and not infrequently had to be earned.

For boys and girls, then, youth was seen as the period for social, as well as economic, preparation for adulthood. It also seems to have been designated as the period in which finding a life partner should or could be instigated, and special events were encouraged to allow the young to meet each other. For example, Hufton's research suggests '. . . religious festivals, processions and dances assumed a preponderant part in helping promote contact between the young. In most instances the young men made their own arrangements for these festivals . . . the dancing that followed the procession was the high spot (Hufton, 1997, p. 127).

As is apparent, then, the early modern period defined a category of the human life cycle as youth, as the current epoch does. Also, as is still the case, this category is underpinned by biological changes (increased physical strength in boys and the development of sexual reproductive capacity in girls). What kinds of identities are then understood to be the product of this physical changes are, however, very different and underline the socially constructed nature of contemporary notions of what it means to be, say, an adolescent. In the early modern period in Europe, a young person was a trainee adult with less physical and economic capacity, still connected into the family of birth but in some cases placed in a different household. Being young was a bio-economic state, within the everyday context of family membership and family trade or occupations. Young people were essential parts of the economically productive family unit, with a special, but not yet adult, contribution to make. What youth meant, in other words, was both 'dependence and separation from the family of origin' (Griffin, 1993, p. 12).

What it did not mean was to be economically inactive or consuming, unproductive and psychologically infantalised. However, a close scrutiny of how this construction of young people mutated over three hundred or so years into the kinds of ideas we hold about them in the early twenty-first century is outside the scope of this work. The intention here has been to briefly problematise contemporary 'common-sense' understandings of what it means to be a young person by highlighting that different ages (and cultures) could invest the period of time between childhood and adulthood with rather different meanings and expectations.

Present-day young people as adolescents

There seems at this point in time to be some considerable blurring of distinction between the terms 'youth' and 'adolescence', with often very similar meanings accruing to both. Here, the concept of adolescence will be analysed as the perceived biological and psychologically determined or predisposed performative state.

The folk-lore of youth studies claims that adolescence as a concept was virtually invented by G. Stanley Hall at the turn of the last century, and that his primary notion of adolescence as a set of physiological changes tied into the physical developments of puberty is still extremely influential (Cote and Allahar 1994; Griffin 1993, 1997). Certainly, it is evident that Hall's ideas lurk beneath popular views about the nature of young men and women, and are also detectable within professional definitions and categories of what is 'usual' or 'normal adolescence', and what is, therefore, by implication 'unusual' and 'abnormal'.

Ideas, of course, never exist in a vacuum, and certain nineteenth-century trends underpinned Hall's physiological thinking. Changes in class relations (the need for a cheap labour force), and the growth of industrialisation (the factory as a unit of production instead of the family, forcing more young people away from home) sentimentalisation of attitudes to children leading to their removal from the economic sphere, fears of social disorder arising with the new urban poor, (Griffin, 1993), were all important,. Less tangible changes in attitudes, though harder to pin-point, seemed to have had an impact by attempting to impose a new kind of moral stricture. Stainton-Rogers suggests, for example, that in the late nineteenth century:

> A campaign was afoot to turn out a morally upright and educated cohort of young workers, professionals and (in that very gendered

> world) wives and mothers. Young people found themselves the target of a spectrum of moral entrepreneurs. (Stainton-Rogers, 1997, p. 9)

The developing militaristic public school ideology of an assertively masculine, Christian, physically active, heterosexual and healthy (in every sense) male adolescent seems to have become something like the ideal, with the developing science and practice of medicine and increased emphasis on schooling an essential part of this construction (ibid.).

Female adolescents, even at this conceptually formative stage, are difficult to detect. The demarcation of the categories of male and female are certainly subject to some intense late Victorian middle-class ideology, with women and girls cast as the helpless, dependent and innocent hearth goddesses for whom men must be strong, competent and independent providers active in the outside world. Gender categories were, then, built into the very concept from its beginning, as indeed were those of race and class:

> . . . the 'discovery' of adolescence also marked a key moment for social relations around gender, sexuality, 'race' and nationality. The emerging ideology of adolescence marked out a biologically determined norm of youthful behaviour and appearance which was white/Anglo, middle-class, heterosexual and male. (Griffin, 1997, p. 18)

Those who came to define it were social reformers, educationalists, doctors, and, increasingly as the twentieth century developed, psychologists.

The problematisation of adolescence

Puberty, then, and the biological changes which constitute it, anchored the notion of adolescence to physical transition from early in the twentieth century. As Stanley-Hall advanced, biology was seen as the root cause of unstable emotional behaviour which rendered young people as tumultuous and therefore problematic, a stage they must overcome. 'Storm and stress' was the attached descriptor of the adolescent, a stage that, even though seen as somewhat 'distasteful', was tolerated because of the belief that during this period of storm and stress we learn how to manage our impulses and achieve a balance' (Cote and Allahar, 1994, p. xiii).

Similarly to much essentially modernist theorising, adolescence was conceptualised as a period of progress towards an achievable and desirable static state of being – the self-contained, rational 'I' of enlightenment

thought – and the journey through which children travelled to arrive there. From this perspective, then, each person is a separate individual with a distinct self, which is achieved by undergoing the transition from the uncontrolled, instinctual rather animal state of baby through to the rational, stable identity of adulthood.

An essential concomitant of adolescence as defined in this intellectual and ontological tradition is that it is one of the specific psychic stages on such a developmental journey. Personality development, it is argued, is predicated on the notion of successive life stages to be negotiated by all 'normal' people. They have to be surmounted in the same order and over roughly the same time-scale, regardless of gender or ethnicity. That pre-adult life can be demarcated into a series of ongoing, progressive developmental stages or transitions which must be successfully passed through, of which adolescence is one, underpins much contemporary understanding of young people. It is the pivotal assumption of developmental psychology's reading of adolescence and still holds considerable sway over 'common sense' views of how young people are perceived.

Freud's psychosexual stages (Freud, 1905), Erikson's stages of psychosexual development (Erikson, 1965) and Piaget's more cognitive, intellectual schema (Piaget, 1953), epitomise such theories of personality development. They were, and in some places still are, widely influential in the training and practice of teachers, welfare workers, child psychologists and, more broadly and intangibly, in constructing public opinion. One overview of these stage models in relation to adolescents, taken from an introductory training text for social workers/psychotherapists, is worth quoting at length:

> In adolescence, pressure comes from the internal upsurge in strength and sexuality, fired by hormonal changes which give new impetus to primitive drives. . . . The adolescent has to work out a new psychosexual identity for himself; the task of separating from the family and establishing one's own individual identity repeats the task of separating the father from the mother in the earlier separation–individuation phase. Earlier problems of dependency, autonomy, rivalry and sexual differentiation, are reactivated in ways that accentuate the crisis, and may lead to disturbances of feeling or behaviour such as delinquency, promiscuity or experimentation with drugs. (Brown and Peddar, 1979, p. 48)

Adolescence, then, is a dangerous stage. Adolescents seem almost certain to have a problem, which may well lead them to become a

problem. Uncontrolled drives, confusion, problems of separation leading to sex, drugs or crime – the stereotype which still governs a whole belief system about young people – seen here in the process of creation. Adolescence is firmly located within separate, distinct individuals (not social or culturally determined processes) as an essential psychosocial stage, and problems are privatised, the results of intra-psychic and/or intra family relations. The need for certain kinds of professional interventions (particularly medical/psychological) is firmly established within this perspective.

Adolescent girls

The historical construction of adolescence and youth which has been briefly considered above purports to be gender-neutral, although feminist critiques would point out that the subject in modernist theorising is inevitably white, male and middle class: 'The universal "human experience" that is defined in the development model refers to the options, experiences, struggles and outcomes most common to some groups of men' (Wyn and White, 1997, p. 60).

If it *were* useful or credible to see development, including adolescence, as a series of progressive stages with 'tasks' to complete in each, then, it has been argued, that, anyway, the tasks would be different for girls (Johnson, 1993). For example, the issue of developing separation and independence would not be similarly expected in normal female development, as women are expected to be dependent on men, and their families, or at the very least to form strong emotional attachments and value interdependence. In terms of the demands of 'ungendered' developmental theory, though, 'dependent' is a sign of failed identity. That girls are positioned within this kind of contradiction – to be a womanly woman is to be an abnormal person – is the logical outcome of such gender blindness.

The foundations have been laid, then, for a set of firm beliefs about the nature of young people, linked to their physiology, and reinforcing the notion of adolescence *per se* as a period of difficulty – of 'storm and stress'. That this model is grounded in an androcentric notion of 'development' has by no means prevented it being applied to girls and differing cultures.

The implicit belief underpinning much recent psychology and psycho-medicine, that male development is the normal pattern, and female differences are then deficiencies, may well underpin the obvious and fundamental differences in conceptions of what a teenage girl is

and can appropriately be, which this chapter now goes on to consider. The impact of such a pervasive but intangible ideology is profound.

To illustrate this with an example, then: self-determination, rationality and control are seen as male/normal, and their opposites as female/abnormal. This can be used to explain the differences in treatment of what Griffin refers to as 'disorders of consumption' (Griffin, 1993). Extreme forms of dieting are an almost exclusively female behaviour, as Chapter 1 demonstrated. They are also behaviours which are seen as psychiatric/psychological disorders, in need of passively (sometimes compulsory) received medical treatment to which girls must submit to be 'cured'. Extreme forms of drug and alcohol use are predominantly male behaviours. They tend to be perceived as, say, a habit or addiction, in which the mainly male 'user' is seen to maintain some kind of ultimate responsibility ('will not ill'), and do not in themselves constitute a mental illness. They are specifically excluded from categorisation as a form of mental illness and cannot be compulsorily treated (Mental Health Act, 1983). This gender difference underpinning how psychiatry and psychology define problems is the product of the gendered construction of feminine as lacking rationality and control, not bad (for which morally responsibility is apportioned) but mad: in other words not normal/male (Ussher 1991; Busfield, 1996).

The generally greater medicalisation of girls and the interpretation of women's psychological make-up as deficient are both part of this pattern. Adolescent girls are more likely to be seen as weak, passive, sick and in need of help. Griffin comments that in teenage welfare work of various kinds 'young men were assumed to be actively (and often aggressively) deviant, and frequently seen as a threat to the status quo. Young women, however, were usually treated as passively "at risk" and in need of protection from "society" or as actively deviant, usually in sexual terms' (Griffin, 1993, pp. 127–8).

Given that there are such contradictions in the expectations of what 'youth' is, and the expectations of what constitutes 'normal' femininity, it would be almost impossible for any young woman to experience herself as comfortable and coherent. This issue will be returned to later.

Girls, then, may be constructed as the 'other' of two already problematised groups – 'deficient' adolescent boys and adult (deficient) women – as a kind of multiple negative in relation to adult males. As adolescent girls they must, then, almost by definition, be understood as problems, which leads on to the question of in what areas and in what ways are girls most likely to be problematised. Simone De Beauvoir's 1947 version of female adolescence is useful, as it illustrates a variety of

themes which have had considerable and continuing influence in the social construction of young women:

> true enough, puberty transforms the young girl's body. It is more fragile than formerly; the feminine organs are vulnerable and delicate in their functioning; her strange and bothersome breasts are a burden, they remind her of their presence by quivering painfully during violent exercise. For the future her muscular power, endurance and agility will be inferior to those qualities in a man. The imbalance of her hormones creates nervous and baso-motor instability. Menstruation is painful: headaches, over-fatigue, abdominal pains, make normal activities distressing or impossible; psychic difficulties often appear; nervous or irritable, a woman may be temporarily in a state of semi-lunacy. . . . (De Beauvoir, 1988, p. 353)

De Beauvior's teenage girls were presented as the victims of their bodies, and to a large extent young women still are. Biology, sexuality, sexual reproduction, and appearance, in other words the body in its workings and its presentation, are the areas to which young female subjectivity can be usefully traced.

Girls and their bodies

Perhaps the principal defining features of this constructed stage referred to as adolescence can be, for girls, the enforced location of self or identity within the confines of a gendered body. Throughout childhood, of course, there is in reality no disembodiment, but the relative anonymity and at least social androgyny of children's bodies may allow many girl children the space to be unselfconscious in relation to their physical self, and to mainly ignore it. That being 'grown-up' necessitates being massively identified with the body, is the change that girls undertake which has inherent difficulties, such as alienation and objectification of parts of the self. As Martin argues, '. . . becoming sexually female entails inner fragmentation of the self. A woman must become only a physical body in order to be sexual: . . . [and] beyond this the body she becomes is itself and object to her' (Martin, 1987, p. 21).

This contradictory construction of female as almost synonymous with body on the one hand, but as an object, in the way that it is defined by others as an object: in other words, the lived contradiction of the body as somehow self and not-self, may be precisely what growing up introduces.

The process of experiencing the body as alien and frequently limiting – not a linear developmental stage but a multi-dimensional, incoherent and incomplete process – seems to have its roots in earlier life. The feminist philosopher Young, for example, in scrutinising female identity and embodiment, argues that even as girls, females are not given the opportunity to use their full bodily capacities in free and open engagement with the world, and are not encouraged to develop specific body skills. This, however, is closely related to growing up:

> While very young children show virtually no differences in motor skills, movement, spatial perception, etc. differences seem to appear at elementary school and increase with adolescence. If these findings are accurate, they would seem to support the conclusion that it is in the process of growing up as a girl that the modalities of feminine bodily comportment, motility and spatiality make their appearance. (Young, 1990, p. 152)

As she moves away from childhood, then, her body intrudes more and limits her more. From Bartky's Foucauldian stance, outlined in Chapter 2, she 'polices' her body more, exercises more discipline over it. She adopts 'a reluctance to reach, stretch and extend the body to meet resistances of matter in motion – as in sport or in the performance of physical tasks – and in a typically restricted posture and general style of movement' (Bartky, 1990, p. 67).

She also learns to become unconfident in her own body, to be 'timid', and 'The more a girl assumes her status as feminine, the more she takes herself to be fragile and immobile and the more she actively enacts her own body inhibition' (Young, 1990, p. 154).

But not only does the girl-becoming-woman inhibit her movements to become acceptably feminine, she may also be inhibited by the unpractised management of physical changes her body undergoes, particularly the beginning of menstruation, and the development of breasts, both the subject of very ambivalent social messages, in different ways.

Girls and physical changes: menstruation and breasts

Menstruation, in predominantly white Western cultures, is still a topic which is mostly subject to public taboo. 'The by now rich sociological literature on menstruation is marked by three features: silence, shame and medicalisation' (Oinas, 1998, p. 54). The problem for adolescents in relation to menstruation is little to do with any physical sensations

(though there may be discomfort) but much more to do with the fear of the potential humiliation of unsuccessfully maintaining the secrecy and silence demanded. As Oinas expresses it '. . . the experience of menstruation is dominated by efforts of concealment, and the body is viewed from the spectator's perspective' (ibid., p. 55).

The negative associations generally ascribed to menstruation in the West construct women's own views of the situation, in ways that connect to a general thesis of body-hatred. Lee's research on women's own views of menarche discovered that some women: '. . . stated that their first menstrual blood made them feel dirty and unclean, ashamed and fearful. . . . Such feelings affect women's sense of self and worth, establishing female bodies as bad and corrupting' (Lee, 1994, p. 85).

Young women may have to negotiate an experience of feeling disgust and dislike of their own bodies, and acute anxiety at managing it; that this may produce some sense of disjuncture and discomfort would seem probable.

It is also for many young women the introduction to the medicalisation of their bodies and minds. Women's reproductive systems have been the focus of high levels of medical intervention since the late eighteenth century, and invariably interpreted as unstable, dysfunctional and biologically inferior (Ehrenreich and English, 1979). It is also important that the history of linking women's reproduction and women's bodies with their state of mind also goes back to this period, and continues to the present. The aetiology may be perceived differently but the effect may be the same: 'Instead of the impact of the womb or ovaries through some imprecise specified mechanism, it is women's hormonal activity associated with puberty, menstruation, childbirth and the menopause that are seen as central both to the higher aggregate levels of identified disorder and to the particular types of mental disorder in women, especially the tendency to depression' (Busfield, 1996, p. 154). This point clearly connects with the suggestion earlier in the chapter that women's psychological make-up is interpreted as not just different to but 'weaker' and less stable than men's.

It is particularly at puberty, and in relation specifically to the entry into the reproductive stage of life, that girls become subject to this historically grounded medicalisation and pathologisation of their gendered subjectivity. In relation to the commencement of periods, the notion of pre-menstrual tension, or syndrome, introduced in the 1930s, not only 'extends the length of the problematic period of the menstrual cycle . . . but also extends the pathologising tendencies from body to mind' (ibid., p. 155).

The adolescent girl is, at least on some level understood by herself and others, as actually or potentially physically limited, ill and depressed, as an inferiorised, physically imprisoned being in need of medical attention. As many writers have argued convincingly, it is also at this stage that she becomes as well as the object of medicine, 'the object of the gaze' (Berger, 1972; Betterton,1987).

The physical development of breasts is perhaps the issue in which the overlap in the physical and medical construction of girls, and to which the process of adult gendered sexualisation and objectification can be traced.

Breasts are the most noticeable sign that a female is to be seen as a child no longer, but as a woman. By no means some kind of neutral indicator, though, they are also highly fetishised by contemporary Western cultures, seemingly almost the defining feature of whether a woman will be seen as sexually attractive or not. When men stare and shout comments at women, they quite often focus on 'knockers', 'tits' or any of the other slang terms that men have ascribed to them.

Breasts cannot help but render girls more self-conscious, whether there may be pleasure to be had from a sense of sexual power, or just a sense of inadequacy to be had as a result of men's scrutiny. Anxiety is an emotion which many girls seem to experience in relation to growing breasts. Lee's research subjects made strong connections between their feelings about menarche and their developing bodies, and specifically the visual aspect of this: 'For most women, anxieties about their developing bodies at menarche concerned the way these bodies looked and might be interpreted by others, rather than how they looked and felt to themselves. Breast development seemed particularly fraught with such anxiety' (Lee, 1994, p. 89).

Women are evaluated and judged on their breasts as a quite central part of an appraisal of overall attractiveness against which all women are judged. Not all breasts will do. As Iris Marian Young comments in one of the few pieces of scholarly writing about embreasted experience: 'This culture fetishises breasts. Breasts are the symbol of female sexuality, so the "best" breasts are like the phallus: high, hard and pointy' (Young, 1992, p. 125). As she goes on to say 'it is an ideal that only a very few women's bodies ever approximate . . . ' (ibid., p. 127). It is hardly surprising, then, that the new technologies of cosmetic surgery are frequently applied to breasts: second only to liposuction in America in 1990 (Morgan, 1998). As Davis's research on women undergoing breast operations found, women will go to extraordinary lengths 'to avoid being reduced to "just a pair of tits" ' (Davis, 1995, p. 77).

However, most adolescent girls do not have access to such radical transformation, and if in interpreting the gaze aimed at her finds herself wanting, is more likely to suffer a sense of shame and humiliation as she 'takes pains to hide her chest behind baggy clothing and bowed shoulders (Young, 1992, p. 126).

The girl becomes the object of sexual desire and enmeshed with this the object of a status appraisal based on approximation to a socially determined notion of attractiveness, a very normalising and contradictory definition which purports to applaud individuality and originality, but in fact tightly proscribes what good-looking is, and is not. At the same time as being defined as physically deficient and psychologically unstable, she is now also subject to a beauty imperative against which she is likely to estimate herself as wanting. A 1960's volume on 'The Problems of Adolescent Girls' sums up beliefs which are still normalising now: 'It is the desire of every girl to be good-looking, attractive and popular. This is natural as she is a young woman' (Hemming, 1960, p. 127).

The construction of womanly appearance

The requirement in contemporary Western societies that all women must be as 'beautiful' as possible has been significantly theorised across a range of academic disciplines and in feminist and non-feminist texts (Marwick, 1988; Brownmillar, 1986; Tseelon, 1995). The psychological literature has underlined that good grades at school, good jobs, choice of marriage partners, even preferential treatment in courtrooms goes to those women who are considered good-looking (Berscheid, 1986). As Chapter 1 briefly considered, and the next chapter will give further consideration, a more political feminist analysis would argue that it is in the interests of patriarchal capitalism to keep women self-doubting and insecure in relation to their looks (Chapkis, 1988; Wolf, 1990). The notion that women 'voluntarily' also subscribe to these evaluations, and the need therefore to constantly 'improve' their appearance, has also been given considerable scrutiny, and psychoanalytical interpretations using the notion of desire and/or the introjected male gaze (Coward, 1984; Young, 1988) have been advanced.

The media's role in constructing and/or reinforcing the notion that to be a woman means to be a visual object, slim, 'attractive' and preferably blond and white skinned has also been convincingly theorised (Winship, 1978; hooks, 1998). Girls clearly understand that to become a woman means developing the ability to construct a visual and strictly governed identity; 'doing woman' means doing make-up and choosing

styles, manicures and hair-do's, deportment and increasingly, and sometimes quite savagely, the alteration of actual body shape and size itself.

As Chapter 1 considered, how, and how critically, this has been theorised within feminist social science has varied, and certainly in the light of the whole body of work it would be extremely difficult to see this situation as only a reflection of oppression, without giving serious consideration to the positions women take up in the ideological reproduction of normative beauty standards and practices. Little girls playing 'mummies' by wearing lipstick and staggering around in grown-up high-heels, or adolescents who spend Saturdays in the shopping mall or the hairdressers may not be the subject of such feminist anxieties as in the 1970s, but it is still hard to ignore the damage inflicted by the extremes of producing sexual 'desirability', which in itself may be constitutive of the girl and intrinsic to the ideology of the time.

At adolescence, then, girls must be slim, pretty and sexually attractive. This is not necessarily a new set of prescriptions: pretty little girls are valued highly too, but whereas 'tomboys are tolerated and even enjoyed as children . . . at adolescence tomboys are expected to naturally transform into feminine beauties' (Martin, 1996, p. 12). Adult heterosexual femininity is passive and primarily visual in its manifestations, though the current standard of beauty in terms of body shape and size may, paradoxically, be far nearer that of an androgynous adolescent than anything traditionally interpreted as 'feminine'.

Despite the occasional rumour that big models are now in vogue again, or that curves are fashionable, the 'desirable' size for a woman has consistently dropped over the last few decades, so that the icon of feminine beauty in the late fifties – Marilyn Monro in her size 16 black dress in Billy Wilder's 1959 film 'Some Like it Hot', would now generally be perceived as fat (Bordo, 1993). Whereas the medically-based statistics regularly cited in relation to weight in the Western world show that populations of women and men are becoming considerably heavier, due to sedentary life-styles and changes in diet (Grogan, 1998), the ideal image of adult womanhood is shrinking. This difference is negotiated individually, and frequently most relentlessly in youth, as Chapter 1 demonstrated.

Dieting, exercise and the self-policing of their bodies is a pervasive part too of the collective engagement that girls have with each other, part of the language and activity of girl culture, an issue that will be considered in more depth in the next chapter. Here the point is being made that this is a significant part of the cultural baggage defining what

it is to be an adolescent girl, and in many ways perhaps one of the easier, more accessible ways of 'doing girl' because it requires relatively few resources and is the realm – their own bodies – in which girls may feel they have the power to act, perhaps the only realm in which they have the power to act.

However, that in the main the activities in which many women regularly or occasionally engage to construct a suitably feminine appearance may simply be outside the financial reach of many girls, is also considered in Chapter 4. And whereas parents may well be prepared to pay for some fashionable clothes and perhaps even make-up and hair styling, they may not necessarily do so without exercising control or at least influence over choices which are made.

Other aspects of the 'performance' of womanhood, such as perhaps contact lenses instead of glasses, facials and manicures, professional make-up instruction and salon hair colouring, electrolysis or liposuction are in many cases unlikely to be underwritten by parental cash. Girls are unlikely to acquire the sheer range of technology and products that may be required even to 'do-it yourself'. Producing the requirements of 'beautiful woman' may be a fraught and frustrating process, in which images in magazines and on television of how young women who have had professional resources and considerable time and money spent on them look, may be contrasted with the inevitably relatively modest results that girls can achieve themselves or with their friends at home.

In this way, then, the whole process of 'doing looks' can be frustrating for girls, and other social meanings can also make it likely that at best young women are only likely to feel ambivalent about a major area of their life.

Vanity and self-appreciation

The critical label of 'vanity' and its psychoanalytical, and often misused, counterpart of 'narcissism', and the widespread condemnation of forms of self-love and self-appreciation is of considerable importance to how women can feel about themselves (Frost, 1999). Although appearing as young and beautiful as possible could be seen as people's ultimate ambition in the twenty-first century, predominantly white Western cultures have an historical, Christian and misogynist tradition of condemning women's interest in looks as 'pride' or 'vanity', while still making strong connections between being beautiful and being good.

Research by Dion and Berscheid, for example, showed that the personal attributes ascribed to stereotypically 'attractive' people were

mostly positive – kind, friendly, successful, etc – and those ascribed to 'unattractive' people were negative – lazy, unfriendly, unsuccessful (Dion and Berscheid, 1972). This kind of prejudice is grounded in mythological and historical meanings evident in fairy stories and folk-tales, in which almost inevitably a beautiful face confirms a good and generous nature and ugly was always evil, like Cinderella's ugly step-sisters and countless wicked witches. But not only is being beautiful necessary to demonstrate essential goodness, it is also necessary to be naturally and unselfconsciously beautiful. To resort to contrivances of beauty or to mirrors to appraise one's own beauty showed a corrupt heart. Witness the wicked queen in 'Snow White' whose evil nature is made manifest in the unforgivable sin of self-appreciation (Frost, 1999).

To return to Davis's cosmetic surgery research, it is quite noticeable that the women she interviews all condemn the notion of having plastic surgery to try to be beautiful, and are scornful of women who engage in this and other activities just to improve their appearance. They did not interpret their own breast operations in this way, a rejection of meaning which Davis interprets as having roots in Northern European belief systems. She suggests that the influence of Dutch Calvinism is such that obvious or excessive vanity is unacceptable; such a motive would be inadmissible to self or others (Davis, 1995).

Girls, as they approach adulthood, have to insert themselves into the paradoxical and highly complicated sets of regulations governing the presentations of their physical self, and particularly manage the rule that they must be pretty to establish a positive identity, but they must hide any signs of constructing this as 'pretty', and must not themselves gain any obvious pleasure from their own looks. These are for the pleasure of those who gaze on her; she is not for self-consumption, which may have implications for the sense of 'her but not her' that seems to become of significance initially in these teenage years.

As well as vain, 'trivial' is the further critical social designation of women, young and not so young, attending to their appearance which also functions to limit how much self esteem a girl might get from skills and activities which for many take up considerable thought and time. As one of the girls who was interviewed for this study points out, it is very easy to be seen as superficial if you are seen to take too much interest in your looks.

Adolescence, for girls, is substantially defined in relation to physicality, and that acquired, invisible space between self and body, briefly considered earlier in the chapter, becomes more tangibly experienced. There would seem to be a developing sense of separation from their

own bodies that happens to girls as they develop, and an ambivalent or even critical stance taken towards this 'not-them' being which they inhabit.

Martin, for example, in her recent research with teenage girls in the USA, found that the physical changes of puberty, leading to the sexualisation and objectification of young women's bodies, had a constituting relationship to girls' sense of their bodies as not them but 'other'. So, for example, Martin discovered that the sense of shame experienced when cultural stereotypes of 'dirty' are ascribed by girls to their menarche is one factor which leads them to 'separate body and self and thus deflect the negative cultural judgements of their bodies from themselves' (Martin, 1996, p. 41).

The whole process of objectification, then, connects to intimate and secret changes, but probably even more so to the heightened visibility of the girl becoming woman, the attention that the growth of breasts and the presentation of 'womanly' appearance that growing up is defined by.

This leads, by a process which psychoanalytic terminology denotes 'introjection', to the girl taking into herself the position of audience and critic, just as if she were the external observer. As Chapter 6 explores, this 'internal observer' is fundamental to the subjective experience of shame which can be the definitive state in relation to their appearance for many girls. There is also a process of reinforcement of the objectification by others at work here.

The young woman scrutinises herself as a viewed object, a scrutiny that is likely to reflect the socially generated, and necessarily unobtainable, desire for perfection. Bartky's explanation of such objectification, then, takes a more political perspective:

> The fashion-beauty complex produces in woman an estrangement from her bodily being: on the one hand she is it and is scarcely allowed to be anything else; on the other hand, she must exist perpetually at a distance from her physical self, fixed at this distance in a permanent posture of disapproval. Thus, insofar as the fashion-beauty complex shapes one of the introjected subjects for whom I exist as object, I sense myself as deficient. (Bartky, 1990, p. 40)

The fashion beauty complex, the appraising eyes of the male other, the sense of shame and embarrassment created by bodily reproductive systems and, perhaps, burgeoning sexuality, the normative limitations on posture and bodily freedom, are all involved in the separation and

discomfort with body that teenage girls express. They are formed within these attitudes and systems, and will inevitably therefore see their bodies as limiting, wanting and humiliating. This in itself opens up the likelihood that girls can only feel unhappy about their bodies. However, the inescapability of their bodies, the paradoxical over-identification with their bodies, reinforces this uncomfortable state: 'thus, when I asked girls, especially working-class girls, to describe themselves or asked "Tell me about yourself", they described their bodies and had a difficult time describing any other aspects of who they were' (Martin, 1999, p. 39).

They are identified, and self-identifying in the physical arena, and though some may have access to cultural and/or class milieus in which they are offered other ways of valuing themselves, this is likely to be as well as, not instead of their appearances. Hollway quotes a middle-class and achieving girl in her study, thus:

> when I was fourteen or fifteen I went on a diet – I went down from being quite big to seven stone. It was an absolutely wonderful thing. . . . I thought I would be more attractive to boys . . . I was no longer destined to be the ugly clever type. It would be all right because I was actually quite attractive as well. (Hollway, 1984, p. 240)

As later chapters explore, if girls are black-skinned, or bought up on the kind of diet that reflects poverty in their appearances (fat, poor skin), then their chances of achieving this sense of 'attractive enough' where others define then as unattractive will be very limited.

Girls both objectify and identify with their bodies and are defined almost entirely within the confines of and yet located at a (critical) distance from their physical self. It may – given for many girls the limits of access to any other 'resource', both material and in more abstract conceptions of power – be the only forum in which they feel they have any control, or site over which they experience some freedom of expression or choice. 'How shall I have my hair?' or 'Shall I lose some weight?' are questions which may reflect the only readily accessible source of a any sense of agency or self-determination for many adolescent girls.

Summary

To summarise briefly: youth in this society may seem to be idolised as *the* desirable commodity for adults, but in reality offers little power or

status for either sex youth. Adolescence has now for more than a century been pathologised by adults as a time of difficulties and disturbances, needing a variety of kinds of interventions and reforms. The gendering of this process has led to young women's problems being primarily connected to their reproductive biology and the psychology difficulties inevitably elided to this by traditional Western medicine. What constitutes an adolescent girl – the version that constructs who she is seen as and who she can be – links her in a variety of ways to her body, in terms of her socially defined experience of the physical changes she undergoes, and in terms of becoming the object of sexual positioning as the recipient of a visual definition of self. In all of these areas it is negative, or at best ambivalent, attitudes that frame this bodily being.

Young women develop a sense of self which is on the one hand welded to their (inferior and deficient) bodies, while simultaneously splitting girls so that they live with the sense of body as something not themselves, as something at a conceptual distance from them. Many feminist writers have argued that this uncomfortable paradox is the everyday experience of being a woman:

> patriarchal society defines woman as an object, a mere body, and that in sexist society women are in fact frequently regarded by others as objects and mere bodies. An essential part of the situation of being a woman is that of living the ever-present possibility that one will be gazed upon as a mere body, as shape and flesh that presents itself as the potential object of an other's intentions and manipulations, rather than as a living manifestation of action and intention. (Young, 1990, p. 24)

However, it may well be that the socio-political situation for teenagers (a subject to be explored in the next chapter) who are lacking in political power and financial muscle, reinforces this sense of bodily discomfort.

4
Teenage Consumers and Body-Hatred

Similarly to the last chapter and the next, the purpose of this chapter is to examine a particular 'version' of being a young woman, in this case the 'teenager'. It considers the ways in which this designation itself constitutes and is constitutive of both identity and particular aspects of young women's everyday lives, and how this may impact on how girls view their bodies and their appearances. The specific concern here is to discuss the relationship between girls, and economic consumption. That the whole concept of a 'teenager' was mostly produced by the requirements of the market economy under consumer capitalism will be considered in the first section of the chapter. How this socially constructed category positions girls in particular as consumers will then be analysed.

The chapter will go on to peruse what girls consume, for example, the magazines they read and the television they watch, and the conditions under which they consume it. That the friendship group is highly significant in interpreting and circulating the consumer-oriented ideas which define what their appearance and identity as teenage girls can be will be considered. Teenage leisure activities, including shopping, and 'bedroom culture', are part of the lived experience of young women which are included in the examination of the process by which teenage girl identity is reinforced.

Girls as a group of consumers and producers, within contemporary Western culture, and in the context of their own friendship groups and leisure activities, will be examined in order to attempt to understand the importance given to looks and bodies, and to what extent young women are confined within this agenda. The next chapter will apply the same problematic to girls in relation to their school, family and sexuality.

The central issue, then, is the examination of the relationship between consumption, bodies/appearances and the identity of the teenage girl. The role of friendship groups in not only constructing and/or reinforcing shared meaning in relation to negative body image but also in the demarcation of acceptable levels of active alteration of and damage to girls' own bodies will also be considered.

A consuming society

Both Chapters 1 and 2 outlined theoretical perspectives which are used here to frame the discussion of young women and market forces. However, it may be useful to reiterate the point that this book is not arguing that young women are merely the helpless dupes of consumer capitalism, but is concerned to examine the way in which market forces present a certain model or set of ideas about what being young is: the 'teenage' identity that will be examined here. For the discussion of how girls then take up, or are 'positioned by', this as one of a range of possible identities, Chapter 2, the theory chapter, must be referred to.

The connections between identity and economic consumption rather than economic production – who people are and both *that they* buy and *what they* buy – has become a central problematic within the social sciences over the last decades (Giddens, 1991; Featherstone, 1991; Beck, 1992).

Commercial consumption is frequently seen as one of the primary sites of the construction and expression of identity, both individual and intersected with class, culture, gender and age in all groups of people. It has been argued, for example, that for the populations of the affluent West at the turn of the millennium, 'Everyday life has been transformed into an extension of consumer capitalism' and importantly: 'the ideology of consumerism promises the good life, good feelings and good selfhood. Emotional satisfaction and self worth are dependent on the orderliness of your bathroom' (Langman, 1992, p. 47).

How people are able to be, and who they are able to be, then, directly relates to the version of self available in commercial transactions. In purchasing goods, in the choices made and what meanings are attached to these, facets of an identity are bought. Advertising images both reinforce and guarantee this process by both offering some packaged, 'off-the-peg' version of subjectivity attached to a certain product or service. The adverts suggest that the consumer might be, for example, a late-night, smoky-bar cool and unconventional jazz musician, or one of the lads in on the joke in the pub after the match, or the have-it-all

woman with a career, a husband who finds her desirable and children who adore her. They create unfulfilled desires and longings to be *that person*, which the consumer will hopelessly try to assuage with purchasing the product to which the image has been attached: 'A dialectic of desire, envy and power is embedded in these advertisements form of address and the currency of the appearances they endorse' (Goldman, 1994, p. 108).

In advertising-land nobody is left out or lonely (unless to provide the 'before' of the 'before and after'); nobody is a loser; everyone is slim and good-looking and in control of their own destiny. As Featherstone notes: 'Certain themes, infinitely revisable, infinitely combinable, recur within advertising and consumer culture imagery: youth, beauty, energy, fitness, movement, freedom, romance, exotica, luxury, enjoyment, fun' (Featherstone, 1991, p. 174). These have become the desirable signifiers, attached to all that people must want, and against which ill-favoured comparisons of people's own bodies and lives must be made to guarantee discontent, greater efforts at improvements and hence more purchases.

Within the range of themes in advertising land, the body itself is frequently portrayed almost as 'the enemy', in need of harnessing and ordering and acting upon. Bordo puts it more strongly: 'In advertisements, the construction of the body as an alien attacker, threatening to erupt in unsightly displays of bulging flesh, is a ubiquitous cultural image' (Bordo, 1993, p. 189).

That the sense of separation of body from self – conceptualised as alienation or disassociation – may be a particular difficulty for teenage girls, was considered in the last chapter. However, the broader message of 'inadequate', generally, must also inevitably have an obvious and detrimental effect, producing '. . . a world in which individuals are made to become emotionally vulnerable, constantly monitoring themselves for bodily imperfections . . . ' (Featherstone, 1991, p. 175). This sets the scene, then, for the likelihood that people will feel discontented with their own less-than-perfect bodies.

Consumption and the visual

As the previous section considers, advertising shows consumers pictures; images with meanings attached that may be 'read' or identified with in various ways but are likely to be read in the way that the producers have intended. Considerable care and research has been put in by the producers of these images to attempt to guarantee the identifications the audience will make.

This process can be interpreted as the visual stimulation of people's desires and in contemporary society it is mainly through the visual that desires are created (Berger, 1972).

Though certainly the most obvious connection between consumer society and the visual, advertising is by no means an isolated process but part of a much more general shift to a highly visual contemporary society. Television, photography, video, film, magazines and newspapers are all part of a world in which seeing – visual representation – is ubiquitous. Much of this either literally or metaphorically is about selling something: a version of the truth or a version of self, with which it is hoped people will identify. For example, in relation to fashion photography in the mid-twentieth century: 'Photographs became synonymous with "the modern look" which encapsulated Hollywood glamour, new urban life-styles and new freedoms for women (Australian National Gallery, 1986:2). . . . 'Fashion photographs were "quite conspicuous constructions" portraying an "unreal", glamorous world designed "to seduce and to captivate the viewer: images such as these promised an easy life . . . " (ibid.)' (Craik, 1994).

Either deliberately, or with less intent, the myriad visual images by which contemporary people are surrounded stimulate desires to be *the* person or *a* person within the context of the image (Stacey, 1995).

This may also connect to how people then relate to other people; the visual appraisal of appearance, for example, may work with the same logic. The roles of both viewer and viewed are then both available to all.

Langman explains this somewhat complex process in relation to the role of television in identity formation, particularly for young people. We look, she suggests, at other people as if we were the camera: 'role taking and making are less based on words than images. . . . Consumption based self-hood sees itself as the key figure of a T.V. programme, movie or commercial. . . . Being seen brings gratification through recognition of the self' (Langman, 1992, p. 56). Identity is based, then, on visual engagement with others, and the identity produced is dependent on being seen as well as seeing.

A full analysis of the pervasive effects of consumer culture on modes of being in contemporary Western society is beyond the scope of this study, but the important point made above is that not only have consumption and identity become intertwined, but that 'the visual' is fundamental to this process. Images and representations have an ability to create desires and longings, but also school people in how to view and be viewed. Being seen and seeing, and creating and consuming

bodily appearance are firmly elided, and are part of the compulsory spectacle of modern life.

Teenagers, teen-culture and consumption

The history of the construction of 'adolescence' as a problematic and inferiorised social category was addressed in Chapter 3. Synonymous with this construction at the turn of the millennium, however, has been another set of meanings emanating from within, or perhaps circulating around, the nature of late consumer capitalism in the West. This is the notion of 'the teenager': style-conscious, street-sussed, confident, socially bonded with other like-minded teenagers, oppositional to adult 'authority' in minor or major ways, with clearly demarcated tastes and interests.

Post-second world war affluence is usually credited with the rise of spending power in young adults that led to the designation of a particular marketing group, towards whom clothes, music and entertainment of various sorts were aimed. 'Young people became set apart by their market choices and were defined in terms of leisure and leisure goods' (Garratt, 1997, p. 145).

In post-war Europe, North America and Australia, a carefully attuned market economy addressed young people as a different kind of adult. They were offered choices, but also, cleverly, they were offered a version of themselves which clearly needed things of their own, things, the message was, that their parents and other adults would not like and would not understand. The idea of the 'teenager' therefore was in some sense a positive and flattering re-interpretation of the psychological version of the 'adolescent' (discussed in the previous chapter) as a deviation from adult norms.

Johnson, looking at this process occurring in Australia in the 1950s, makes a helpful comparison:

> As 'adolescents', young people were represented as a separate category of person, but precisely then to define them as dependent, in need of supervision and regulation. The status of the teenage consumer, on the other hand, as a separate category of person, was claimed to stem from the specificity and independent character of their needs, desires and interests. (Johnson, 1993, p. 91)

Carter, too, comparing post-war Britain and Germany, found evidence that 'the middle-class housewife enacted her political enfranchisement

through the exercise of economic rationality: choosing to buy or not to buy, to spend or to save, to covet and to shun' and, importantly 'this was part of the "political" future to which teenage girls were widely urged to aspire' (Carter, 1984, p. 190). Girls were initiated into shopping, partly simply as a preparation for the female role they were about to take up, but also were provided with a market aimed entirely at them, which provided the opportunity to develop different skills of taste and choice for girls (Carter, 1984).

Generally, young people (like women), were addressed directly by the market, and were persuaded to believe that they had teenage-specific needs, desires and interests, provided for by 'the formation of a specialist youth market, supplying goods and services ranging from fashion and entertainment to food and drink' (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, p. 61). Within a social constructionist framework, this is of fundamental importance to the formation of subjectivity. These versions of what a teenager likes, what kinds of attitudes they have, and even how they feel about life, become building blocks with which to form individual and collective identities in a continuous and dialectical process in which identities make choices, which remake identities which remake choices.

The specific and conscious targeting of young people by the market has guaranteed that the link between their identities and what they buy is particularly relevant. This form of identification may have become more important at the end of the last century than more traditional identifications. Furlong and Cartmel, for example, argue that:

> While traditional sources of social differentiation based on social class and communities are thought to have weakened, young people are seen as attempting to find self-fulfilment and ways of identifying with other young people through the consumption of goods, especially fashion. (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, p. 61)

Teenagers constitute a highly profitable market category, for although in a real sense their incomes are considerably lower than an older age range, whatever money they have – from allowances and pocket money, presents, Saturday and holiday jobs, baby-sitting and, for the older age range, wages, grants, and/or benefits – can usually be spent on fashion and leisure items. Langman estimates they 'control about 10% of the GNP in the western core nations' (Langman, 1992 p. 58).

The chapter will return to current deployment of income later; however, it may be worth noting that the issue of the role of teenagers

in market consumption from the middle of the twentieth century to the present can be somewhat obscure. Within sociological theory the positioning of the majority of young people at this point in time within these practices can be more difficult to locate than the sub-groups (sub-cultures) which were the subject of considerable academic activity from the late 1960s (Cohen, 1972; Hebdige, 1979). Much time and attention was paid to these small factions who may have represented some kind of exception or opposition to mainstream cultural trends.

From the 1960s on, a variety of different kinds of texts, including, it may be argued, the sensationalising ones of the popular media and the (in retrospect perhaps rather romantic) narratives of sociologists and cultural commentators, wove stories of adventure, danger and subversion around self-identifying sub-groups whose relationships as producers and consumers of particular kinds of youth identities remains somewhat unclear. That they had a distinctive and collective 'style', for example, the draped jackets of teddy-boys or the parkas of mods, certainly indicates an engagement with purchasing; in addition, the music that inevitably went with particular sub-cultures had to be bought, as indeed did the far more expensive purchases such as motor-bikes or scooters, essential requirements for certain affiliations.

Alongside the consumption of these various 'badges' of affiliation there was in some teenage groups the semi-productive activity of creating 'street fashion', which could range from raiding parent's attics or cupboards to buying second-hand and recycling: a kind of reappropriated 'make it up as you go along' approach that some sub-cultures are either explicitly or implicitly credited with. That within sub-groups there was more organised commercially productive activity going on (not just commercial 'exploitation' from outside as capitalist marketing caught up with the new style), is only relatively recently recognised. McRobbie, for example, mentions the example of Westwood and McLaren selling punk 'style' to punk rockers (McRobbie, 1993, p. 411).

That there was little discussion of the politics of shopping and a rather romantic vagueness about consumerism may well connect to the point which has subsequently been made by feminist academics that much of this youth studies material from the 1960s and 1970s is heavily gendered, the majority of studied sub-cultures being male phenomena analysed through male perspectives (Lees, 1986). Certainly the shopping habits of mods or skinheads receive little attention.

As Griffin argues: 'Male researchers' relatively uncritical interest in the gendered nature of cultural processes and practices involved in gang life has produced an emphasis on 'bad boys' and the consequent

invisibility of young women' (Griffin, 1993, p. 151), a situation which has since been addressed in the work of feminist sociologists such as herself.

The study of girls has mostly shied away from attempting to detect and analyse distinct subgroups and more efforts have gone into considering the impact of unequal gender relations on various aspects of girls' lives and of the cultural positioning of girls. Within feminist cultural studies, for example, girls' magazines and television watching choices have been analysed in relation to their role in the ideological process of constructing femininity (Walkerdine, 1984; McRobbie, 1991). Feminist sociologists have been more interested in girls' economic position, relationships with families, friends, and boys and their gendered sexuality, than their sub-cultural identifications (Griffin, 1993; Lees, 1989; Holland *et al.*, 1998).

Also of importance to the study of teenagers (girls in particular) and women has been an ongoing analysis of their specific, gendered relationship with capitalist consumption. As Erica Carter comments: 'If sub-cultural theory has traditionally remained standing somewhat suspiciously on the sidelines of commercial youth culture, the same has not been true of research into girls' culture' (Carter, 1984, p. 188). Girls in relation to the market, then, are visible in the literature.

What is of particular interest to this enquiry is whether this relationship with the market reinforces their already established unhappiness with their physical manifestation, their 'looks' and body. Two directions seem worth pursuing within this – how they consume (the relationship between the conditions of consumption and the visual) and what they consume (cultural artefacts such as magazines and television).

Young women and the process of consumption

That shopping is essentially a female activity was recognised by the retailing trades by the end of the last century. By the 1890s, shops begin to exploit the fact that the majority of customers were women. They constituted between 70 and 95 per cent of all shoppers and spent three times as much as men (Reekie, 1987, quoted in Craik, 1994). As one trade journal proclaimed: 'Man is essentially the earner: woman the shopper' (ibid., p. 177). This declaration has remained the catchcry of consumerism' (Craik, 1994, p. 71)', although what may well be different now for many women is that they too are 'the earners'.

Shopping 'sites' were consciously made female-friendly and 'departments in the burgeoning department stores, and commodities

were ascribed genders, reflected in the techniques used by the new form essential to marketing-advertising. A whole pattern of the 'feminisation of consumerism' can be detected (ibid., p. 70).

Shopping became defined as a female pursuit, and, differently from many traditional roles, one which took place outside the home in a public place where looking and acquiring – the visual creation of desires and the possibility of meeting them – are brought together.

As the above section on the visual argued, there are roles of actor and audience involved. The part the shopper takes in this is not just *to see* but also *to be seen*, to demonstrate the skilled use of the objects of consumption, and to identify with the ideal images of women presented as lures, inducements and sources of pleasure. There is a situation, then, in which 'the expressive aspects of role performance are intertwined with consumption to provide affective gratifications, and/or are themselves instrumental in securing them' (Langman, 1992, p. 55).

Women entering the public space for commercial exchange also display themselves. They dress-up and make-up, look as nearly as they can approximate to the models in the windows and in the magazines and the other women also engaged in self-display. They show-off their taste and fashion sense while searching for new techniques and products to enhance these. Of course, not all women do this, and not all women do this all the time. 'Ladies who lunch' have different time-scales and financial limitations to, say, working women with children, unemployed women or indeed younger women. However, the process – including consuming images of women, their clothes and their make-up, posture and style from film, magazine and shop display – remains constant.

The construction of an appropriately feminised image, as well as any specific appropriations from self-selecting categories of women whom the subject might particularly wish to emulate, takes place at the point of consumption. The shopping mall may have replaced the department store as a primary geographical location of such feminine self-construction.

For contemporary young women (and indeed boys), the blending of shopping and the leisure activities of meeting friends and 'hanging around', into one seamless activity, may make such sites as malls the ideal social space. That it is increasingly boy space as well as girl space may also have become part of its function. Constructed heterosexual femininity can be given its ultimate test in the sexual arena: does it make girls sexually desirable to boys?

Langman, for example, argues that the shopping mall is the contemporary site of both self-constitution and sexual attraction for

young people: 'Malls become stages in which the identities gleaned in earlier socialisation by parents or media are expressed or recognised . . . [they] involve . . . for young women, extensive rituals for make-up and costume selection to ensure the proper image and impression management for group inclusion and initiating relationships that might become sexual' (Langman, 1992, p. 59).

The importance of the sites of consumer activity even to girls who may have relatively little actual spending power has also been highlighted. They are still the chosen spaces of seeing and being seen. Griffin noted from her working-class sample that: 'Visits "up town" usually took place on Saturdays, when groups of young women (and men) would spend the day hanging around, window shopping, stealing from shops, watching other young people and "winding up" the police (Griffin, 1985, p. 63). Assuming that Griffin had no wish to imply that stealing and the working-class necessarily have any particular link other than in the realm of class prejudice, this does still demonstrate that there are differences in the appropriation of shopping spaces by different groups of teenagers.

A full role in the process of *buying to produce a self which buys* is not entirely available for kids whose backgrounds and financial circumstances are poor. The unmitigatedly heterosexual version of femininity which the consumer process proscribes would be likely to alienate lesbian girls and the emphasis on a hegemonic physical perfection may have a similar effect on young women with any kind of disability. None of these groups can comfortably identify with the subjectivities 'for sale' – white, heterosexual and physically 'perfect' identities – and may therefore feel excluded from a key element of young people's life.

This is the category 'teenage', being played out in the arena of consumption, with the backdrop of a feminised consumer culture to offer versions of who to be, versions which have the ability to generate unfavourable comparison and discontent. The images are all of perfection: size, shape and desirability achieved via careful camera work – and the 'look' changes every season. Many young women can neither be 'it' nor afford 'it'. The carefully cultivated message that others can, and those who cannot are missing out, is likely to lead to misery.

The attempt here in this chapter to separate what young women consume from the conditions under which they consume is not altogether successful, suggesting in itself the enmeshed nature of the categories 'woman' and 'consumption'. Women are in some sense consuming *women*; producing and reproducing femininity, becoming what they buy and buying what they become.

As Carter argues, 'For the female consumer, the focal point of leisure, pleasure and personal freedom is not traditionally any fixed geographical location, but the female body itself. It is therefore the 'image industries' – the female mass media, the fashion and cosmetic industries – which constituted the largest sector of the post-war market in leisure commodities for girls' (Carter, 1984, p. 205). The connection between female subjectivity, images and the 'body-beautiful' is endlessly underlined.

Young women and the products of consumption

That the young spend most of their money on their appearance is well-established. A 1990 survey by the British Market Research Bureau and Mintel found that teenager's spending priorities were clothes, (68 per cent made this a priority), records/tapes/music (34 per cent) and going out. Cosmetics and haircare products constituted 8 per cent of the figure which the teenagers were asked to prioritise. The gender differences are not highlighted in the statistics, though Stewart, in her interpretation, comments that 'marked differences are evident in the spending preferences of men and women. . . . Although young women are still more likely to buy clothes, the gap is narrowing' (Stewart, 1992, p. 214). Certainly there is a general sense that boys' consumption of items for the construction of personal appearance is increasing (see Chapter 7).

That the amount of interest girls take in all aspects of appearance is also on the increase has been noted. McRobbie, for example, in comparing girls' magazines in the 1990s with the 1970s, notes that 'fashion and beauty features take up a great deal more space and are also more dispersed throughout girls' comics and magazines than they were in the 1970's' (McRobbie, 1991, p. 174).

The patterns of consumption identified earlier are reflected in, and reinforced by, other leisure activities which may also form part of the identificatory process. Reading magazines and books, and watching TV are cited as major pastimes for girls (a subject which will be returned to later). When not shopping, do other leisure pursuits act to reinforce just the same ideology of appearance as synonymous with being female, and 'beauty' as *the* female imperative?

It may be helpful to look at teenage leisure pursuits in general terms, then go on to give some consideration to the kind of cultural artefacts that do form a part of the world of girls and therefore provide them with versions of who they might be.

Gender and teenage leisure

Leisure in itself is by no means a straightforward concept. In this chapter, the kinds of meanings attached to the term are: time in which attendance at school, or home-work or paid work or household chores are not being undertaken. It also has attached to it some notion of activity not directed by parents or other adults specifically: some sense of personal choice, and also of potential or actual pleasure. Clearly, this is a matter of linguistic convenience, not discrete categories: for example, the decoration of a bedroom could be seen as either pleasurable or a household chore. However, it will serve to help us grapple with broad concepts, if not every particular instance.

In terms of overall trends, then, it would seem to be the case that: 'Males and females from all social classes tend to have more free time than previously and engage in a wider range of leisure pursuits' (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, p. 53). And not only more free time, but also more disposable income. This now seems to be roughly equal for young women and young men under 18 years old. Stewart's analysis of young people's income found that for under 18s, whether receiving pocket money or wages: 'the differential between men and women is not very marked' (Stewart, 1992, p. 210).

In terms of using this income, as the chapter noted earlier, since the 1950s, a lucrative youth market has been targeted increasingly vociferously and the consumption of culture in its various forms may have become part of the identification process itself for young people: 'identity is formed through relationship to particular kinds of friends, music, family ties, choice of movies, school subjects and so on' (Wyn and White, 1997, p. 87). Most young people may have more disposable income but the pressure to consume, and to use consumption to identify with other young people, may be strong.

Even though longer periods in education – associated with more, and more varied leisure activities – are becoming less unusual for working class as well as middle class young people, there still seems to be little doubt that unemployment is capable of making a big impact on how young people are able to live their lives. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the research which has concluded that students had the greater spread of leisure activities and the broadest social networks, also found that unemployed young people had the most impoverished social lives (Wallace and Cross, 1990).

In terms of the content of leisure, writers have identified both a trend toward boys spending more time in the home, and a trend towards girls going out more.

Furlong and Cartmel (1997) suggest a more generally individualised and privatised notion of leisure, and Hendry *et al*. (1992) conclude that within a population of 10 000 13–20 year olds, watching television is the most popular leisure activity with most adolescents of both sexes. Girls' leisure activities may now take them outside the home more than was traditionally the case, and, particularly for those in higher education, the gendered nature of leisure activities is at its smallest. Roberts *et al*. (1990), however, having made these points about gender similarities, it still seems to be the case that leisure activities are highly gendered in a number of ways.

The point made convincingly by writers such as Lees in the early 1980s, that, overall, girls get less leisure time than boys, and that there is a general requirement that older girls in households begin to take-up domestic responsibilities still seems to be the case (Lees, 1986). Griffin, for example, found that 45 per cent of the young women she interviewed did housework, compared to 8 per cent of their fathers and none of their brothers (Griffin, 1985). Even in the last decade, Blackman found in his 1990's research on youth groups notable gender differences in employment outside the home and in domestic chores: 'The new wave girls had experience of working in the local labour market, on Saturdays, Sundays or midweek and during the school holidays. Their employment ranged from hotel work, to working in restaurants, public houses, farms and running a shop. When the girls were younger they baby sat. The new wave girls did their share of domestic labour within the home (unlike the mod boys) . . . ' (Blackman, 1995, p. 13).

That girls spend far more of their leisure time inside the home, even if some shifts in student groups have been noticed, still seems to be overwhelmingly the case. The chapter considers 'bedroom culture' on page 102.

It seems to be the case that: 'Every study throughout the history of youth (and adult) leisure research has shown that female life-styles are the more home-based, and the majority of investigations have indicated that boys are the more likely to belong to gangs or similar groups' (Roberts *et al*., 1990, p. 132).

Boys go out more and participate more in sporting activities and attend formal leisure spaces such as gyms, whereas, as is considered in more depth below, girls are more likely to spend time mixing with friends at their own or their friends' houses. That gender is still of tangible significance in determining where young women feel they can go is an issue examined by Furlong and Cartmel, who look at the way in which 'at all stages, women's leisure participation is constrained by

gender relations. . . . In particular leisure opportunities are restricted through conventions governing the use of space . . . restrictions which may be inforced more strongly in Hindu and Muslim cultures. It has been argued, for example, that when girls want to participate in sport, they often need to involve a friend or relative before it is considered safe or appropriate' (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, p. 57). That this is not just a difference but a limiting of opportunity for women to escape home-based pursuits is significant, as is the argument that reinforcement of restrictions may be variable across cultures.

The last important point to note is that whereas in general women are not leading narrower leisure lives than men (Roberts *et al.*, 1990) there are still striking gender differences in the content of leisure: 'Adolescent girls continue to be more involved in music, books and socialising with friends', both indoors and outside the home (Hendry, 1993, p. 42) whereas 'more males were playing and watching sport and placing bets' (Roberts *et al.*, 1990, p. 131). That boys and girls have a different relationship to sporting activities has often been documented, for example, 'young women spectate; they do not expect to participate' (Hendry, 1992, p. 73).

There has been some discussion too that the gap between female and male sports participation may be lessening a little, and that what is classed as sport makes a difference to how gender differences in participation are perceived. Girls may be more likely to go to dance classes, or aerobics, or go swimming, which could be perceived as undertaking traditionally gendered activities related to grace and femininity, body-shaping, weight-loss and the recent athletic, toned aesthetic of female beauty. They undertake uncompetitive, essentially individualistic activities, but are not so visible in competitive team games. Again this could be related to very gendered definitions of appropriateness.

Age may be another significant factor in the gendering of leisure time. Hendry's work, for example, suggests that in the older teenage years the move out into the public spaces of pubs and clubs, as centres for the opposite sex to meet and mix, may be used fairly equally by young women and young men (Hendry, 1993).

Girls as viewers and readers

As the statistics above demonstrate, then, girls still spend a large part of their leisure time in their own houses or in the houses of girl friends, in both of which watching television and reading magazines, or swapping magazines and novels for home consumption, are significant pastimes.

A considerable body of highly innovative and informative feminist work on girls in relation to comics and television was carried out from the 1970s onwards. The ways in which, and the extent to which, the cultural texts to which young women have regular access dictate or influence (or control or suggest) how they must be has been the subject of a productive debate (Winship, 1978; Walkerdine, 1984; McRobbie, 1982, 1991).

Exactly what process of identification is at work when girls read girls' magazines, watch soap operas, look at romantic films or read romantic fiction is subject to some debate. For example, Winship's essentially Marxist–feminist study of 'Woman' magazine considers how women are *positioned* by capitalist patriarchy and defined in relation to men and consumption via the text. The ideology of femininity, as articulated in the magazine, commodifies and dehumanises women: 'the woman is not simply an "ideal" woman, but also not a woman; it is not her as a live, fluctuating and enigmatic person that is represented, but her as a thing. She is constructed from commodities: make-up by . . . , clothes by . . . , hair by . . . ; reified, her person denied her as she becomes the named photographer's (usually male) constructed feminine commodity' (Winship, 1978, p. 134).

This is the version of feminine identity offered by this and many similar magazines, a version which women both consciously try to emulate and which firmly delimits the notion of what a woman is, under capitalist patriarchy. Girls and women, then, are constructed within the ideological imperative that women must be flawless bodies and faces, neatly packaged for male consumption. This inevitably produces the insecurity of never quite achieving the standard expected, constant dissatisfaction with their own bodies, and the likelihood of objectifying them further as recalcitrant projects that must be worked on. As Bartky notes: 'These images remind us constantly that we fail to measure up. Whose nose is the right shape after all, whose hips are not too wide – or too narrow? The female body is revealed as a task, an object in need of transformation' (Bartky, 1990, p. 40). Women's magazines – and indeed the many other images of perfect women used in advertising and the media generally – produce, as Bartky goes on to argue from a Marxist – feminist perspective, 'a sense of estrangement and a sense of deficiency' (ibid., p. 40).

Not all feminist writers considering the issue of the relationship between women or girls and the cultural products they consume as quite so monolithically oppressive, and some, such as McRobbie (1994), have changed their theoretical perspective so that the relationship

between readers and artefact is presented as containing a greater element of negotiation, and more agency on the part of the reader. The active involvement of readers and viewers is, generally, given more credibility (Gamman and Marshment, 1988).

In McRobbie's study of girls' magazines produced in the 1990s, she compares the theoretical approach as well as the changes in girls' magazines over a roughly 20-year period, and analyses some of the ways in which girls play a part in the process. For example, she looks at a currently popular girl's magazine – 'Just Seventeen' – and concludes that not only would the magazine lose its readership if it offered passive stereotypes of femininity, but that girls use their market power, and choose to buy only those magazines which are congruent with who they see themselves as being in the rest of their lives, for example, in relation to their families or their friends, and in relation to the values and ideas they hold (McRobbie, 1991).

The girls, it is being argued, are not forced into a normative femininity by the magazine, but chose the magazine as part of an identificatory process; in other words they accept that which resonates with other aspects of self. However, having argued this in general terms, McRobbie still goes on to identify that the emphasis on physical attractiveness, as a set of activities, achievements and ways of being, has increased, not abated, over time:

> There is more of self in this new vocabulary of femininity, much more self-esteem, more autonomy, but [there is] still the pressure to adhere to a perfect body image as a prerequisite for the success in love which is equated with happiness. (McRobbie, 1993, p. 416)

More pages, not less, of girls' comics and magazines are filled with fashion and beauty items (McRobbie, 1991) and even though she does not feel that it is quite as 'slavish' as in the 1970s, and that there is 'a greater fun element', she also recognises that 'an undeniable element of regulation', is still present in the 'implicit assumption that beauty routines are a normal and inevitable part of being female' (McRobbie, 1991, p. 175). That this 'paves the way' for the whole issue of appearance to be built into how girls value themselves, and who they see themselves as being, then becomes inevitable.

And just as Winship and Bartky argued above, McRobbie suggests that the process of 'selling' women and girls a version of themselves as a process, involving beautiful bodies and consumption 'both unsettles and undermines' female identity. 'If there is always another better look

to be achieved or improvement to be made then there is no better way of doing this than introducing a note of uncertainty and dissatisfaction' (McRobbie, 1991, p. 175).

For women to be the perfect heterosexual consumers that magazines, as well as other forms, urge them to be, their identities must be predicated on this kind of dissatisfaction. This is the perfect breeding ground for bodily discontent in a situation in which, as a teenager, even the fleeting sense of occasional fulfilment of desire via product purchase that may be available to economically independent women, may not offer itself.

Girls' leisure habits, of course, do not just involve reading magazines; indeed, television watching was cited above by teenagers as their main relaxation (Hendry *et al*., 1993). Programme choice is reasonably varied, but watching soaps has long been recognised as a feminised activity (Geraghty, 1991). The placing of some of these in late afternoon and early evening time slots is very much linked to the understanding that they have a young viewership.

Girls may spend considerable time exposed to a version of traditional femininity in which, on the whole, girls and women are perfectly beautiful, thin, and well-groomed, and also embody other aspects of traditional heterosexual desires and values, a point which will be considered at more length in the next chapter. That the teenage viewers do not just passively absorb such messages as instructions on who they can be is a point now being emphasised in the literature of media studies. For example, Gilbert and Taylor's 1991 study of girls watching soaps argues, like McRobbie above, that people do not uncritically take on everything that – in this case soaps – throw at them, but that even so, 'such popular texts, along with "real life" experiences, nevertheless become part of a repertoire of ways of thinking about and talking about "being female". Consequently it is this range of available discourses which is drawn on in the construction of femininity and is crucial in providing the frame work in which this takes place' (Gilbert and Taylor, 1991, p. 72).

Versions of what it is to be a woman, then, are offered to the teenage viewer; versions which become part of the range of ideas which form an identity. Whether they are incongruent with other ideas being offered, or identical to them, may, of course, make a difference to how much influence they have. So, for example, if all the cultural messages a young women receives tell her that she must, first and foremost, be a perfect body, then it is possible to surmise that this would have more impact than if it were only coming from one direction. If other aspects

of their selves and lives had little connection to the notions of what it is to be the girl represented on the screen, then those images may well be less acceptable. Gilbert and Taylor found that teenagers are probably less likely to make oppositional readings of texts like soaps than, for example, their mothers, because of 'limited life experience' (Gilbert and Taylor, 1991, p. 73).

That even the advertising that goes alongside such programming offers a very small range of versions of femininity, and indeed a traditional one reinforcing that of the soaps, focusing on appearance particularly, was also noted in Gilbert and Taylor's analysis.

The impact that this might have was the subject of some research by Myers *et al*. in the early 1990s to look precisely at how advertisements affected girls' perceptions of themselves. Having ascertained that approximately 1 in 3 of all adverts involved 'attractiveness-based messages', they went on to substantiate that the response of girls to these (not in the short term but in the long term), led to the contrast between real body and ideal body producing 'depressive and unhappy views of their present body'. Body image, they suggest, is 'elastic' and susceptible to screen influence from messages about perfect bodies contained regularly in commercials and programming, and 'it is reasonable to imagine that each of these body messages is just one strike of a chisel sculpting the ideal body inside a young women's mind' (Myers *et al*., 1992, p. 111).

Soaps and adverts containing anonymous models and fictional characters provide idealised versions of femininity next to which girls may compare themselves unfavourably. Even the 'real' role models with whom girls may to an extent identify are experienced similarly, as primarily visual images gleaned from screens. Langman cites television heroes as the current models for imitations: stars of manufactured fame 'who are more likely to live affluent and exciting lives rather than doing good or brave deeds without reward' (Langman, 1992, p. 56). As the contents of information pages in girls' magazines attests, it is mainly actresses – in and out of role – and models who are offered as icons, and their look or looks, and sometimes how their particular style is created, is crucial to this.

Research such as Stacey's on women viewing the 'screen goddesses' of film in the 1940s highlights that there is nothing particularly new about women hero-worshipping other, glamorous women and trying to look like them (Stacey, 1995). What perhaps is different is the all-pervasiveness of such identifications. Numerous glamorous girl stars are available as role models on the screen in virtually every home, virtually

every day. Every girls' magazine, viewing and listing magazines, tabloid newspapers, as well as film, contains them, to the extent where these images may have replaced the less-perfect but multi-dimensional characters who people the reality of girls' lives. If the role models are only ever those who achieve success and fame via a beautiful body and face, then it is likely that girls who do not have these will find it harder to rate highly other facets of themselves, such as their talents or characters.

Teenagers and friendship groups

But, of course, girls are not just surrounded by images of perfect, fatless, successful models and their like; they are surrounded by families and friends, teachers and boy friends and all kinds of other social contacts in leisure time and school time.

Leaving the subject of school, boys and family for Chapter 5, the issue here becomes how do girls spend their time with groups of friends, and what significance does it have on how they perceive themselves.

Similarly to theorising about adolescence generally, much of the available work on adolescent peer groups seems to be grounded entirely in an adult perspective of how young people are seen and see themselves, and also underpinned by an implicit, modernist version of social relations in which the all-important, rational and self-determining individual-in-the-making is heroically battling in opposition to the sway of a corrupting group.

The peer group, then, seems often to be conceptualised as a source of pressure experienced by the individual in opposition to parental influence, and frequently a pressure to behave in ways that adults interpret as undesirable. Peer group pressure is frequently foregrounded as the reason why young people smoke, drink or take drugs. 'Good' parents, the implication frequently is, would produce children who are not influenced by the activities of peer groups: 'parental support and effective communication lessen the adolescent's reliance on the peer group and decrease the likelihood of substance abuse and sexual involvement at a young age' (Hendry *et al*., 1993, p. 115).

These particular authors go on to talk of peer groups also offering things to adolescents – for example, opportunities to practise social skills – but that *conformity* is the *price paid* for this. If it were adults in groups being discussed, the notion of *finding pleasure* in people with whom you *identify*, might be the alternative interpretation of this situation.

The peer group is inevitably written about as a powerful source of influence, if not control, pressurising somewhat helpless young people into its thrall. The theory resonates with the classic parental self-absolving of 'my child is innocent, the crowd she/he mixes with leads him/her into trouble'. It also seems to demonstrate a deep-seated fear that adults may not be entirely in control of the youthful.

Within this 'helpless teenager/powerful peer group' theorising only certain kinds of behaviour are interpreted, however, and certain other ones are more likely to be seen as the product of individual responsibility. Issues to do with girl's appearance and body image are frequently considered within a framework of 'self-esteem development'. For example: 'It is possible to suggest that in adolescence, girls show an increased tendency over boys to place a high value on body image and same-sex popularity. Thus girls might be placed in increased jeopardy both because they value peer opinion more . . . and also because they value body image more at a time when their bodies are changing dramatically and social comparisons along this dimension become problematic' (Hendry *et al.*, 1993, p. 18). The implicit problem here is not what the group does to girls, but the expectations and values they have and may put on the group.

Various other aspects of peer group theorising are either unsatisfactory and/or very reductionist: for example, the implication that somehow groups in which people share a variety of tastes and offer various kinds of social and possibly emotional contacts are an aberration – experienced mostly by young people – from a norm of *family* as the significant and appropriate reference group: that somehow it is deviant to make friendships more or as important as family or heterosexual couple ties. In addition, there seems to be little analysis of the meanings of such relationships or their power dynamics from the perspectives of the young people themselves. For example, precisely the text that argues (quoted above) that good parenting decreases 'dependence' on peer groups, also presents research by Leyva and Firth (1986) which shows young people saying they prefer to talk about feelings and thoughts with their peers because, with adults, if conflicts arise 'the adults would win the conflict merely because they were in a power position' (Hendry *et al.*, 1993, p. 116). Certainly in this study, then, it was precisely because they *did not* feel oppressed by them, or subject to their pressure, that teenagers preferred to confide to equals.

In the current chapter, the notion of a friendship group, rather than a peer group, has been adopted to look at collective girls' behaviour, because the range of meanings attached to 'friendship group' seem

more to imply equal status for all involved, a self-chosen grouping, and that it is essentially the same kind of phenomenon whether they are groups of 3 year olds, 13 or 63 year olds. If friendship group as a term does carry any other implicit notion of power it is only perhaps that people are able to both be influenced by and influence the social world in which they move.

When girls get the chance to speak themselves about the groups in which they mix, the kinds of issues they pinpoint as important are frequently those which enhance the quality of their lives, rather than corrupt it, such as having company and having a laugh. In Blackman's recent research, he found that 'The girls' unity is assured in their celebratory laughter and asserted collective outrageous behaviour' (Blackman, 1995, p. 59) just as Griffin had found a decade earlier in her interviews: that girls really valued having a laugh (Griffin, 1985).

Close friends and 'bedroom culture'

To query the often implicit notion of the peer group as overly influential of its individual members as the chapter does above, and to opt instead for some more interactive concept such as a friendship group, is not an attempt to decry the importance, to young people, of group relationships.

It may indeed be the case that relationships with their contemporaries are becoming increasingly more relevant, and replacing to some extent the traditional affiliations of class and family. For example, Furlong and Cartmel consider arguments suggesting that there is an increasing importance of youth cultures now that many more young people are in higher education and in states of semi-dependence for much longer: 'young people today spend longer periods in the company of their peers and youth cultures have become more isolated from the adult world' (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, p. 73). Langham goes further in proposing that relationships with contemporaries are currently one of the three significant features of teenage identity formation. 'Adolescent peer-group experiences are *crucial* in the consolidation of an identity', alongside television watching and the psychic stress generated by 'pluralities of contradictory self-presentations' (Langman, 1992, pp. 55–6, her italics).

Stewart reports research from the Henley Centre in which 16–24 year olds were asked how much they agreed with various groups of people, and how much they were influenced by them. Friends came out as the top group, a little above parents, in both categories (Stewart, 1992, p. 222).

How important to young women their friendships are, and precisely what they get from them, are questions the studies of teenage girls rarely address directly, however. Griffin does look at this in her research on working-class young women and observes: 'These friendship groups were close, and arguments could be emotionally traumatic. Many "best friendships" lasted over several years' (Griffin, 1985, p. 60). It is unusual to see this issue approached so directly, though a general assumption in youth studies that 'girls do close friendships' does tend to be made: 'Girls' friendship groups, if portrayed at all, are seen as more intense and exclusive than boys' groups' (Lees, 1986, p. 26).

As previously noted, much of girls' leisure time tends to be spent in the private sphere of either their own or their friends' or families houses, and the close relationships with friends that girls sustain are often developed and played out inside the domestic environment of the girls' own rooms. The notion of a 'culture of the bedroom', as described by Frith (1978), has come to incorporate various assumptions about girls' leisure, implying perhaps two or more girls, maybe sleeping over at someone's house, and engaging in a range of traditional 'girlie' activities to do with appearance, which could also include watching video, TV or listening to music. Griffin's teenage sample illustrate this: 'Much of the young girl's leisure time was spent in the home, and centred on female friendship groups. Young women would meet after school in each other's houses, usually in their bedrooms for privacy. They might play records, experiment with clothes and make-up, have a surreptitious smoke, and talk about teachers, boys, school and sex' (Griffin, 1985, p. 60).

What the arguments seem to suggest is that in groups with same sex friends – though McRobbie has argued that actually now girls are more likely to also number boys in their friendship groups (McRobbie, 1993) – many of the activities girls engage with, precisely reproduce (through shopping and hanging-out around shops, and even more usually through 'bedroom culture') the normative, consumer orientated, body-obsessed, heterosexual femininity suggested in magazines and on TV.

Girls spend time preparing their bodies to be 'feminine', and engaging with all the trappings of socially acceptable womanhood. These are group as well as individual pursuits, though whether mostly in the spirit of companionship to lessen the toil involved (as, for example, in other eras women sat together and told stories while they spun wool (Warner, 1995)), or whether mostly in the spirit of sharing pleasures for maximising enjoyment, it certainly reflects very different gender requirements than those of boys. As McRobbie notes, boys don't

have to do this, so they can use their time in other ways, which girls have to give to 'the requirements of being beautiful'.

> It is convenient, then, that more female leisure time is spent in the home, and that girls are still expected to pay much more attention to their appearance than boys are . . . when boys do become interested in style and personal appearance, this interest is much less tightly tied up with the home and the processes of continuous consumption. (McRobbie, 1991, pp. 175–6)

In this way, the establishment and maintenance of friendship groups connects into material issues such as the ability to use consumer goods to produce feminine looks. Friendships themselves may have come to be expressed via the consumption and display of appearance-enhancing products, for example, Griffin found that 'best friendships were typified by young women going everywhere together, walking along arm-in-arm, wearing *exactly* the same clothes, shoes, hairstyles, even jewellery' (Griffin, 1985, p. 61, her italics). The same kind of phenomenon on a wider, perhaps less intense spectrum, may also connect with the contemporary non-gendered wearing of and using of certain 'labels' or brands or styles of goods as the badges of affiliation and mutually reinforcing group identity in a broader sense, though the role of these broader bands of affiliation groupings in interpreting and reinforcing what it means to be a contemporary young female remains obscure.

What seems far less obscure is that one of the range of body-related behaviours with which girls engage individually and collectively is losing weight. Reproduction of feminine image in the contemporary West is not limited to the same kind of outfit or the same colour lipstick, but connects into the societal imperative for all age groups and, some would argue, both sexes, to take individual responsibility for pairing the body down to the currently socially acceptable slim size. Many adolescent girls have just gained weight for the first time, giving some a body with new curves rather than a totally lean one. For reasons discussed in the last chapter they may be newly self-conscious and therefore particularly conscious of body weight issues, and vulnerable to images of thin as perfection.

Now that studies seem to be suggesting that in Western countries such as United States, upwards of 70 per cent of adolescent girls have dieted, and 80 per cent said they often feel fat (Hill *et al.*, 1992), then part of the collective interest in body matters is to do with body weight and the skills and activities needed to control it. This is also reflected in

the magazines and programmes directed at girls, often subsumed under the semi-euphemistic notion of 'body health'.

When girls in groups have been closely studied, then, prevalent sets of behaviour frequently do seem to link to the processes of a fairly traditional feminisation via body-related activities. A young woman interviewed in relation to this study commented that diets were as a result of spread in friendship groups: when one girl wants to be thinner then they all do.

Chernin, exploring this collective dieting in groups of American college girls, detected a bonding, group identification process, centred around a culture of calorie counting, exercise, and other aspects of body control, which becomes central to the reinforcement of group belonging and which she likens to an, albeit unproductive, rite of passage (Chernin, 1986). This very direct exploration of the relationship between girl groupings and what could be referred to as 'body culture' is, however unusual, though Furlong and Cartmel do argue that the increased importance of the relationships with contemporaries noted above may have this element. 'The protraction of school to work transitions also leads to an increased significance of the peer group and conformity to norms and standards which, for young women, can mean conformity to stereotyped body images' (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, p. 71).

And being fat, in itself, as research from psychology particularly has underlined, is likely to lead to complete social isolation. The child who least children wish to sit next to is the fat child; fat people are accredited with a number of critical personality traits, such as laziness (Grogan, 1999). The language of calories and low-fat foods, of exercises and dress sizes, may well have become as central to the intercommunication of groups of teenage girls as what happened on last night's soap and whether they can do their homework.

Arguments are being advanced, then, to suggest that the close relationships that girls have with other girls may act as a reinforcer to ideological messages about the production of 'beautified' womanhood. This may manifest itself in a number of hugely enjoyable ways for young women: the fun of experimenting with a new hair-do or beauty product and the sense of power derived from the result of the activities, which mean being seen as attractive in the approved feminine way. Clearly, girls are not just victims of this process but actively engage in it and derive some satisfactions from it. But that the same processes can also limit and even damage young women's sense of themselves by generating discontent, alienation and self-hatred also seems evident.

The impact of feminism and social and economic changes over the last two decades may have produced a much more fluid situation for teenage girls and a far greater range of possibilities may now be available from which to carve out a contemporary female identity. McRobbie, for example, refers to this as 'a dramatic "unfixing" of young women in British society', which goes with 'a greater degree of uncertainty in society as a whole about what it is to be a woman' (McRobbie, 1993, p. 418). This seems to have led to considerably more freedom, in various directions: choices about education and careers, leisure activities and friendships. What it does not seem to have freed girls from, though, is the compulsion to direct large amounts of emotional energy and physical time towards producing a traditionally feminised physical self. And although it may well be the case that such activities have been reconceptualised as post-feminist and empowering and 'fun', this does not mean that they cannot also lead to the incorporation of insecurity, a sense of inadequacy and bodily objectification into girls' identities.

Summary

The consumer capitalist basis of contemporary Western society has, the chapter has argued, produced a contemporary society in which individuals are dependant on consumption for their sense of identity, leading, via the creation of desire and the impossibility of fulfilment, to a mass phenomenon of 'ontological insecurity' (Giddens, 1991). Young people have been specifically targeted since the 1950s by marketing strategies, and the role of consumer of certain kinds of products and leisure has been incorporated into the very concept of a 'teenage' identity.

Certain kinds of products become the badges of affiliation for various teenage groupings, and the conditions under which consumption is conducted, as well as the products themselves, construct much of teenage subjectivity. As 'female' and as 'teenage', girls are particularly targeted by consumer capitalism. The female body as the icon and site of contemporary consumption offers itself as subjectivity to these young women, who may take both pleasure and dissatisfaction from such an affiliation. The range of primary leisure pursuits in which girls engage, from visits to shopping malls, to viewing TV and magazines and being part of friendship groups with other girls, reinforces the tight configuration of girls and bodies and 'doing' attractiveness, which at this point in time also means thinness. Traditional heterosexual feminine subjectivity is thus continually reinforced. Indeed, other forms of liberation may

have actively increased the extent to which girls' and women's identities depend on the beautification of their bodies. Public spaces, rather than the private, domestic sphere in which women traditionally dwelt, are visual places calling for gender-appropriate display.

Access to the temporary and fleeting belief in the fulfilment of desire on which the whole consumption process depends may of course be very limited for the young. Frequently, beauty and fashion products are massively outside the financial scope and range of school or college age girls. And of course there are still plenty of young women and men who cannot partake of even standard teenage consumption on equal terms with their peers, causing damage and unhappiness of its own. Unemployment and poverty – both their own and their parents' – exact a hard toll. 'Exclusion from consumer cultures can reduce young people's confidence and prevent their acceptance within a youth culture which cross-cuts class divisions' (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, p. 63).

However, the lure of the life-styles and identity positions seductively connected to the products with which they are surrounded are unlikely to be diminished by the inability to purchase the products. Indeed, such products may take on enhanced importance. The perfect lover, the perfect friends, the perfect body, that quirky sense of humour, the clever back-chat, the girl-power assertiveness, may still seem versions of a self that are achievable, even if the actual product is too expensive to buy, through working on the self. It all looks so effortless on the screen that the temptation to assume that they too can be like that if only they try hard and work at it, may be irresistible, and deeply disappointing. And of importance in all this is perhaps the notion that, without access to resources, it may be only in relation to the body itself that young women feel able to be the interventionist, constantly improving and in-control personality which is suggested within this system. The perfect car and the perfect clothes may be impossible, but their own bodies are there to work on. Consumer culture, then, in yet another way, tightening the relationship between girls and their never-to-be-good-enough bodies.

5
Sexuality and Body-Hatred

Introduction

In the previous chapter, consideration was given to how consumer culture generally has rendered Western capitalist populations insecure about their bodies. An exploration of how this is particularly pervasive for women, and especially so for young women, was undertaken. That ways in which girls spend their leisure time – what they watch on television, what they read, and the company they keep – may reinforce their sense of alienation from and discomfort with their physical selves was argued.

In keeping with the overall aim of exploring the most significant groupings of ideas in currency about the nature of young womanhood, this chapter attempts to explore issues of young women's sexuality and how girls are caught up in contradictory expectations that they will be, for example, 'nice' and 'good' but also attractive and 'sexy'. There is considerable overlap here with ideas about adolescence and about teenage behaviour, considered respectively in Chapters 3 and 4, but in this chapter the issue of who girls are and how they can be is set within the contexts of school, family and, particularly, boys and boyfriends.

That young womanhood is highly sexualised in a number of different ways is a central consideration of the chapter. The school context as a site in which particular implicit, explicit and frequently contradictory messages about how young women should behave, is initially examined. The circulation of meanings as to what being a girl comprises is considered in relation to both the formal structures of education and the informal relations between the young people themselves.

Still searching for counter-evidence to the 'body-hatred' thesis, the chapter goes on to consider whether 'dating', by providing active proof that they are (sexually) attractive, offers young women access to a whole range of good messages about their bodies.

Having discovered, for example, that their bodies are attractive to men, and then that their bodies are the source and site of pleasurable sexual encounters, would seem potentially to offer a different set of body messages to those we have detailed so far. Girls might wish to 'own' their bodies if they experience them as productive of pleasure, and even if they still do feel somewhat separate from self then perhaps this 'other' could be seen as a friendly ally, rather than a cruel persecutor or an unruly enemy in need of suppression.

However, that this is actually unlikely to be the case will be argued. Attitudes towards girls' sexuality, attitudes circulated in society generally and specifically in families, schools and via welfare agencies, and apparent in gendered relationships between girls and boys, make such positive meanings extremely difficult to acquire.

The messages offered to girls about themselves have little to do with being confident and comfortable with their sexuality or with being passionate and self-determining. That young girls should be restrained and passive sexually is part of a whole package of ideas that construct youthful feminine subjectivity as 'good' is examined next in the chapter. That deviancy in girls – getting into trouble', for example – is frequently linked to societies' policing of girls' sexuality is argued. Whether 'being good': the compliance and conformity expected of girls, links with the very high levels of conformity to heterosexual ideology of appropriate femininity visible in, for example, anorexia, is part of this enquiry.

Finally, the role of the family in reinforcing the compliance and passivity of girls is considered. That the structure of power relations in modern Western families may lead to the excessive control of young women, and at its most extreme their sexual abuse, forms part of this discussion.

That young women are principally defined by their sexuality, but at the same time denied any pleasure in this, is, then, the central theme of this chapter. At school, with boys and at home, girls must police their sexual behaviour and attitudes, and must simultaneously resist and comply with the projections of a highly sexualised society. That these contradictions, both reflective of and the products of unequal power relations in the ascription of versions of who a (girl) friend, or pupil, or daughter must be, render discomfort and alienation from her own body likely, will be suggested.

The sexualisation of girls

This volume has already considered how girls become the object of the specific and generalised male gaze when they develop 'womanly' bodies – and, increasingly perhaps prior to this – how this construction of a traditional heterosexual physicality is likely to be experienced as an uncomfortable and contradictory imperative for teenage girls. It also seems to be the case that the negotiation of actual heterosexual relationships at this life stage will have similarly destabilising effects on identity formation, serving generally to reinforce girls' inability to take pleasure in their bodies.

Part of the difficulty for girls that would seem apparent from the literature revolves around the contradictory nature of the expectations and demands placed on girls. Even though she is clearly an icon of sexuality for male consumption, she herself, it has been argued, must have no sexual drives or passions, but must be only responsive, passive and restrained (Holland *et al.*, 1997). The 'sexiness' is for the pleasure of men, not for herself, in the way that it was noted in Chapter 3, her 'natural' or achieved 'beauty' was not for her to take pleasure in, but for the pleasure of others. It may be useful to consider this seeming paradox in more detail.

The unremitting sexualisation of women and girls and the oft-noted 'double standard' in relation to male and female sexuality, is hard to refute. The gender differences in, for example, a personal and moral concept such as 'reputation' are indicative of the taken-for-grantedness of both the inextricability of 'woman' from 'sexuality', and the different construction of masculinity: 'To speak of a woman's reputation is to invoke her sexual behaviour, but to speak of a man's reputation is to refer to his personality, exploits and standing in the community' (Lees, 1989, p. 19).

The idea of morality, for women, is linked in to her sexual behaviour. Being a 'good' woman or girl, has a sexual resonance, which is perhaps even more noticeable in the idea of 'bad' girls.

Not only is a woman constantly defined sexually in relation to the visual appraisal and scrutiny of her body, but also her morality is defined in relation to sexual criteria. The costume which girls must don, when they take to the stage as fully fledged women – to use a Goffmanesque metaphor – is constructed from sex, sex and more sex.

Lee's research into teenage girls in London in the 1980s strongly underlined the operation of a 'double-standard' of sexuality operating as a controlling function in relation to girls' behaviour. The notion of a

double standard was nothing new. Pearson highlights both the class and sex differences at work in the Victorian era: 'It was a strange society that worshipped "purity" in women while accommodating the inherent "evil" in men. It believed that since the modesty of ladies must be protected, natural male lusts should be serviced by the poor who supplied most of the basic needs of the upper classes' (Pearson, 1972, p. 11, quoted in Petrie, 1986).

Theorists from feminists such as de Beauvoir (1947) to contemporary socio-biologists such as Ridley (1993) have acknowledged this difference and sought explanations for the phenomena.

School and the sexualisation of girls

The institution in which young people of both sexes spend a highly significant part of their lives plays an important part in the circulation of available meanings and messages about what a young person can and should be, as well as serving to generate and reinforce elements of this identity. Relations of power, control and resistance are highly visible in these hierarchical settings, and the policing of behaviour and attitudes undertaken formally by staff and informally within group and pupil inter-relations is evident.

Self-regulation seems to also be an important feature of the formal and informal curriculum of the school system, with young women having to learn very quickly to check their behaviour and attitudes. That the whole system is under constant and intense government and media scrutiny and is therefore itself regulated and self-regulatory is a further dimension in the very complex web of power relations constituting 'school'.

Schools in themselves, then, cannot be held responsible for the sexualisation of young women's identities, and the uncomfortable relationship with their bodies that this connects with, but neither are they responsible for attempting to challenge or reinterpret the dominant attitudes and meanings being reprocessed.

The central paradox in relation to schools and sexuality is neatly summed up by Epstein and Johnston: 'On the one hand schools go to great lengths to forbid expressions of sexuality by both children and teachers. This can be seen in a range of rules, particularly those about self-presentation. On the other hand, and perhaps as a consequence, expressions of sexuality provide a major currency and resource in the everyday exchanges of school life' (Epstein and Johnson, 1998, p. 108).

Pupils trying to appear 'too grown-up', a ubiquitous euphemism for 'too sexual', formed the basis of battles between staff and pupils observed in many studies of classroom behaviour (Hudson, 1984). Skirt-lengths, jewellery, make-up and boy–girl interaction have been noted as issues frequently attracting confrontation. Schools in the United Kingdom, and ex-British colonies, with uniforms and dress-codes controlling what pupils may wear, and in more detail at what age they may start to dress more like women than children, can be a battlefield where the 'right to define' may be fought out.

Interpreted by some as 'the tools of . . . teenage rebellion' (Young, 1988, p. 178), the messages from the market place are, as Chapter 4 suggested, that the latest styles and labels and fashions in hair and make-up are essential to the process of identification. That young women should be feminine and sexy (but not too sexy) in their appearance is part of the visual image of themselves being 'sold' to them. School rules, however, rarely allow fashionable clothes or make-up or jewellery, and if they do tolerate restrained use of any of these it is likely to be only for the oldest girls. Girls, then, must deal with this contradiction. As Hudson comments: 'By their emphasis on dress, teachers deny girls' success in maintaining this feminine appearance: one of the perennial battles in schools is over girls trying to sexualise their appearance by altering the way in which uniform is worn (changing the length of skirt, the heel height of plain lace-up shoes, the type of stockings) as well as drab, regulation clothes' (Hudson, 1984, p. 39).

Perhaps if it were simply a 'teachers versus pupils' battle, conducted around two clear clashes of meaning, then the formal insistence that girls should not think about their appearance, or become sexual 'sights', could offer girls greater choices in terms of a sense of who they can be. In other words, schools' ability to insist on a version of girlhood that rejects pressures to be a grown-up female sexualised consumer in favour of, for example, intellectual or sporting achievement, could perhaps counter-balance pressure from consumerism to be constantly engaged with appearance production. Between the opposites of these two versions of young womanhood there would seem to be some freedom for girls to adopt a variety of stances.

However, the meanings of clothes and make-up in the context of school are by no means this simple and the pressures to 'conform' are multiple and insidious. What girls wear and how they wear it, how much make-up and how short a skirt, as well as behavioural issues such as whether they talk back or cause trouble, are strictly policed by the pupils themselves, both male and female.

Lees' work in London in the late 1970s and early 1980s offered comprehensive insights into the important but precarious nature of girls' 'sexual' reputations, within which clothes and make-up played a significant role. She found that appearance was a feature of how girls get labelled 'slag':

> Appearance is crucial: by wearing too much make-up; by having your slit skirt too slit; by not combing your hair; by wearing jeans to dances or high heels to school; by having your trousers too tight or your tops too low. As one girl said, 'sexual clothes' designate. Is it any wonder when girls have to learn to make fine discriminations about appearances that they spend so much time deciding what to wear? (Lees, 1986, pp. 22–3)

Lees goes on to illustrate how such regulations are so strict that even by association with transgression girls can be smeared. She goes on to quote a girl in her study saying: 'I prefer to hang around with someone who's a bit decent, 'cos I mean if you walk down the street with someone who dresses weird you get a bad reputation yourself (ibid., p. 23).

It would be reassuring to think that the two decades of feminism since Lees began this work would have by now made significant inroads into such attitudes. However, in a girls' school in the mid 1990s, Epstein and Johnson found the same attitudes at work: a group of Muslim girls [names fictionalised] condemned a contemporary thus 'Shamira is not traditional. She is a big tart and wears lipstick that doesn't suit her, and walks around sticking her tits out' (Epstein and Johnson, 1998, p. 117).

As the authors reflect, not only are the girls in this case reflecting the usual Western dichotomy of Madonna/whore (or 'nice girl/slag') but also a polarisation between 'traditional' Muslim and Westernised 'tart', making the set of ideas with which Shamira must grapple for her own identity even more complex.

In mixed schools, and indeed in social contexts, boys are very much part of the system of strict control exercised over to what extent girls may project a grown-up, sexualised image. In one school studied by Measor, the wearing of 'too much' make-up for example could be the cause of much abuse. For wearing 'great black eye-shadow and blusher', 'they call her horrible names, like tart, and say she's easy to get and things like that. Look at that slut, look at her waiting on the corner again' ('Jaqui', quoted in Measor, 1989, p. 48).

Appearance must be very carefully regulated by girls themselves, if they do not wish to be reviled or humiliated. The age, class, culture and even probably sub-group rules of 'the right amount' in relation to 'doing looks' are broken at a price.

As theorists from Goffman (1959) onwards have long since established, *all* social contexts have these kinds of rules of demeanour and behaviour, which people do learn both consciously and unconsciously, in order to gain social acceptance. What perhaps is particularly striking here in relation to school-girls and their developing bodies, sexuality and socially constructed gender identity, is that the rules seem extraordinarily prescriptive and rigid. There is a whole range of related sets of rules, or social prescriptions, with which compliance is potentially damaging to identity formation, self-esteem and physical health. Because even if the official attitude of the school staff seems to offer no alternative but to play down the womanly presentation of self, and high levels of inter-generational policing disallow a particularly obvious, uncontrolled and brash version of sexual attractiveness, nonetheless, girls are still applauded for their femininity and 'prettiness'. The issue is that girls must manage the contradictory requirement that they *produce* an appearance which is '*naturally*' good-looking.

Girls' 'reputations' at school rest not just on what they put on, or leave-off, but issues such as weight, height, shape and perceived degrees of good-looks are part of this pattern. Terms like 'dog' employed by the boys in Wood's study attach a whole set of derogatory attributes to girls who are simply not considered pretty enough, which he found related to an assumption that unattractive girls would engage in sexual activity with any boy because of the girl's perceived lack of opportunity. 'Thus "dogs" are constructed as being especially "horny" because they cannot find any boy to have sex with them' (Wood, 1984, p. 63).

Girls who do not live up to the standards of 'good looks' may still be evaluated reasonably well by boys if they have 'nice personalities' – which Wood suggested tends to mean 'lack of resistance to the boys' dominating ways' (Wood, 1984, p. 60), but if they were argumentative or resistant to the boys as well, then they were likely to be at best ignored and at worst abused.

In mixed schools, girls are likely to be the subject of constant sexual appraisal by boys, within a context of formal school rules forbidding girls active engagement with this process. The physical developmental stages that they will usually go through in these years: the beginning of menstruation, for example, and the development of breasts a subject considered in Chapter 3, can also form the basis of considerable

inter-gender humiliation. Prendergast found from her interviews with teenage girls that the onset of menstruation was inevitably experienced as negative and disgusting by the girls. This was because of the school context, which included the attitudes among the staff and lack of facilities in the structure to help them manage their periods, and because of the humiliation boys subjected any girl to who broke the strict rule of totally secrecy by, for example, being found to have sanitary products in her school bag. Utilising a substantially Foucauldian analysis, Prendergast considers how the intense scrutiny of the body, and the fears of 'accident' or lack of control lead to 'the regulation of the self as a model for future gender roles' (Prendergast, 1995, p. 205).

As well as having to produce a feminised appearance as part of the task of growing up, the young women in her survey revealed attitudes about how 'the body must be repressed, guarded and contained so that its secrets could not be known' (ibid., p. 206).

That these kinds of imperatives have links with potential body self-harm is of course the over-riding theme of the present volume. Prendergast goes on to suggest a very direct relationship. She suggests that the institutionally dictated experience of menstruation, causes: 'bodily shock, fragmentation and disorder' in itself, but also because these feeling invariably connect with other bodily changes. This set of feelings when juxtaposed with girls' understanding of the 'beauty' requirements of women to stay adolescent looking – very young, smooth, under-developed – can be understood as having connections with disordered eating patterns – 'the attempt to freeze adolescence, to hold on to a child-like body, and to control it rigidly through diet' (Prendergast, 1995, p. 208).

The various levels of constant self-regulation – of dress and make-up, of size and shape, of standard of perceived attractiveness and social worth, and of bodily functions – has a range of likely implications for girls. An intense and watchful focus on the body becomes an inevitability, when its appearance and functions are so subject to appraisal. Disassociation from her body, which must be subjected and controlled, and discomfort with her body as the centre of potential humiliation and discontent with body which may not 'naturally' pass muster amid the ongoing vociferous appraisal of its perceived flaws, will invariably be destructive.

School's insistence on, for example, putting girls in minimal sportswear such as shorts, where boys can then 'take the Mickey', as reported by girls in Measor's research (Measor, 1989, p. 49) can reinforce bodily discomfort in a way that seems unwarranted and very nearly cruel.

Given that the sudden entry into public visibility that girls moving through to womanhood experience is in itself frequently discomforting, physical education, 'which provides a situation where the body is on show and therefore at its most vulnerable' (Scraton, 1995, p. 94) can be experienced as extremely humiliating.

Schools, then, by attempting to repress the significance of girls' changing bodies, by not accommodating girls trying to deal with menstruation, by not engaging with the bullying or harassment and abuse that polices girls' looks, sexuality and behaviour, exacerbate and reinforce the negative and/or contradictory messages about young women and their bodies which girls are offered in other social contexts. The very unhappy subject of one of the case studies in Chapter 6 makes a strong link between being perceived as not good-looking enough and being harassed and ridiculed within the school context.

Going out with boys

The extent to which girls between roughly 14 years and 18 years are preoccupied with relations with the opposite sex is hard to gauge. As we will consider later, interest in, for example, the literature of heterosexual relationships is undoubtedly popular with young women, though clearly this does not in any way guarantee what they are doing in practice. A National Survey of sexual attitudes in Britain found that 18.7 per cent of girls under 16 years were sexually active (Wellings *et al*., 1994), though a similar survey in the west of England found the figure to be 41 per cent (Ford, 1993). The figures in such studies are based usually on the notion that 'sex' equals penetrative sex, hence the numbers participating in all kinds of sexual activity are likely to be much higher.

It also seems to be the case that the majority of younger women have sex with a very small number of partners (Ford,1993). Sexual activity seems mostly to happen within the context of an ongoing one-to-one heterosexual relationship with someone who can be referred to as a 'steady' boyfriend.

Two issues are worth exploring here in relation to the body-hatred thesis: what difference does it make to how a young women perceives her body, whether she is found attractive, and publicly acknowledged within the status of being a couple to be found so? And does the discovery of her own body as a source of sexual pleasure introduce opportunities to feel more associated with and generally more at ease with her body?

For girls, the meanings of dating, and having a boyfriend are likely to be laden with another set of meanings: the ones concerned with 'true love', and even 'happy ever after'.

Traditionally, female destiny has been connected to an overriding theme of heterosexual 'love' and all that implies, as the pinnacle of achievement and organising principle of their lives from childhood onwards. Literature and fiction, music and painting, film and television, all attest to the huge significance placed on love for all people, and the specific expectations that women will be the seeker of and sufferer for true love, due to the greater importance it is seen to have in their lives. Why this should be the case is of course contested, and within, for example, Marxist–feminist theory, oppositional readings of the meaning of 'romantic love' are advanced. That the ideology of romantic love is a necessary concomitant to patriarchal capitalism is the central tenet of this view. Burr summarises the position simply:

> 'Falling in love' is the precursor of marriage, and from a classic Marxist view, marriage and the family play a crucial role in the maintenance of capitalist economy. It is vital that men appear each day in the market place ready to sell their labour power. They need to be fed and clothed, to have their health attended to. . . . Women . . . play a central role in both the daily reproduction of the labour force and in its renewal from generation to generation . . . it is also vital that women provide these services free of charge. (Burr, 1995, p. 73)

Capitalism needs to be supported by an ideology which deludes women into believing that heterosexual love and marriage are the route to emotional fulfilment for women. That heterosexual love, however, is not only common-sense, normal and natural, but also an imperative biological survival strategy, represents a backlash to such ideas. The current high-profile resurgence of socio-biological ideas have focused attention on the supposed 'naturalness' of women pursuing traditional romantic love, by arguing that women's genetically determined strategy is to find one single male partner and commit to them, whereas men's is to get as much sex with as many different women as possible (Ridley, 1994). The cliché that men use love to get sex and women use sex to get love, though, is not upheld without contestation (Angier, 1999).

The inextricable imbrication of ideologies of romantic love and the 'nature' of female subjectivity is, however, apparent. The very designation 'women's', for example, in relation to 'women's books' or 'women's films', invariably means it is to do with 'romance', whereas 'men's'

books or films are to do with adventures and actions, and the term 'men's' magazines usually implies soft pornography and/or sport.

Girls are schooled in the requirements of heterosexual romance from a young age by a whole range of cultural forms and products. Even though McRobbie's comparison of changes in girls comics since the 1970s suggests, for example, that there is less emphasis on romance now than there was (McRobbie, 1991), the rise of 'teen romance' novels has also been documented.

Christian-Smith's research into girls' romance novels, for example, explains that even though such a genre has been in evidence since the 1940s, when a new version was developed in the 1980s, it was extraordinarily successful, showing 'a rise to international readership in only twelve years' (Cristian-Smith, 1998, pp. 100–1).

Christian-Smith goes on to make a case that, despite the changes that feminism and other social forces have made to opportunities for girls and the seemingly broadening choices in relation to careers and lifestyles, that for many young women confronting 'the realities of early pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, a job structure segmented by gender, class, race and sexuality . . . ' has reinforced the 'escape' into romance (Christian-Smith, 1998, p. 101).

Unemployment and lack of other opportunities, the rising profile of 'family values' as a social and political ideology in England, happily reinforced by the fashionable socio-biological determinism referred to above, may well have served to make 'true love' both agenda and escape for many young women at the turn of the millennium. This has a range of destructive ramifications. For example, there is no space within this discourse for young lesbian women to identify themselves; they are the excluded deviant category created by the hegemonic version of 'normal' heterosexuality. Sex, too, is rigidly delimited. The engagement with such ideas echoed in various cultural products serves to focus girls on the importance of 'relationships', which are both monogamous, and in which sex is subsidiary to, and an expression of, love.

To instigate sexual pleasure, perhaps even to demonstrate sexual pleasure, seem still to be forbidden roles for girls to take. Michelle Fine, looking at formal and informal attitudes to sexuality in American schools in the 1980s, found that the idea of sex as *pleasure* was rarely heard: 'the naming of desire, pleasure or sexual entitlement, particularly for females, barely exists in the formal agenda of public schooling on sexuality' (Fine, 1988, p. 33).

Holland *et al.*, in their more recent study of young people in England, found the same phenomena that Lees had found ten years before (Lees,

1986): 'the silencing and disembodiment of female desire appeared to have been so effective that it was difficult to find expressions of a positive heterosexual feminine identity . . . ' (Holland *et al*., 1998, p. 9).

The collection of ideas constructing young girls as romantic rather than sexual, as passive and receptive, rather than active, and as innocent rather than experienced, has also been focused on in relation to work on the spread of AIDs in heterosexual young people, and rates of teenage pregnancy. One determining issue which has been explored is the fear that girls have that they risk their reputations if they are seen as knowledgeable about and in charge of contraception. Even when girls were well informed 'they feared that to appear to know about sexuality would brand them, in the eyes of their partner, as a 'slut'. 'Good' women were ignorant, inexperienced and responsive but did not take the initiative in relation to their men, who should be more knowledgeable, experienced, and able to take charge' (Wyn and White, 1997, p. 61). This was not always the case, however.

Holland *et al*. found in their survey that some girls were attempting to insist on condom use, and that actually mentioning fears of AIDS helped them to introduce the subject. Their overall conclusion in relation to this was however very similar to Wyn and White:

> Young women are certainly concerned about sexual safety, but few are able to actually achieve safer sexual practices consistently across different relationships, since prioritising their own safety carries meanings of both being an independent sexually desiring women, and also judging male partners as possible risks. (Holland *et al*., 1998, p. 39)

Young women, then, are offered versions of themselves in which their sexual pleasure, and indeed protection, must be instigated within a 'loving' relationship and by the male partner. What seems to connect to this is the likelihood that their bodies are seen as sources of pleasure and desire not for themselves, who cannot experience sexual agency, but for the male in the encounter.

This does not mean, however, that women have no sense of responsibility or engagement with their bodies in sexual encounters. Theirs is the role of maintaining the delusion of perfect fantasy femininity, the body which has no flaws or smells, makes no noises and shows no fluids. The 'disciplined' body, restrained and wholly managed, which has been considered previously in this work, must also be maintained in sexual encounters. The contradictory task of exercising

control, while 'letting go' just enough to reassure the male of his sexual prowess, falls to the female. Holland *et al*. conclude precisely this in their interviews: 'women are under pressure to control the unruly body which may intrude upon sexual encounters in unacceptable ways, and to subordinate their desires to men's' (ibid., p. 119). Control, then, and even responsibility for sexual encounters and their content, falls to women, but not power over or within them.

And of course this connects with the 'moral' messages women are subjected to in all areas of life about self, body and self-control. Ferguson's analysis of 25 years of women's magazines led her to conclude that: 'self-control was the most visible value held up to females . . . towards the self it was associated with beauty admonitions against letting yourself go' – putting on weight or looking a mess, or sexual commandments 'not to let yourself go' (Ferguson, 1983, pp. 68–70, quoted in Malson, 1997, p. 132.).

The uncontrolled woman, sexually rapacious and subject to her own authority, has been a construction of and repository for misogynistic fantasy and fear for many centuries, and these meanings are still powerful in relation to what is acceptable. Appetites, for example, hunger and lust, which have been 'culturally constructed and coded as female . . . are by their very nature excessive, irrational and threatening to erupt and challenge the patriarchal order' (Bordo, 1993, p. 206).

In sexual encounters, then, as in other areas of their lives, young women should be controlled, self-disciplining and passive. Their bodies could let them down at any moment. They must produce a feminised appearance and the 'correct' degree of contained feeling. Their bodies are for the fulfilment of the desires of and for pleasure of the man.

Additional messages circulated by families particularly but also schools and friends may not only lend girls the notion of passivity but of victimhood in sexual encounters, so that sex becomes construed as something from which they must protect themselves and guard against. That men are 'naturally' sexually predatory forms part of this version, that 'they only want one thing' and that girls have to exercise extreme caution not to encourage this in any way, indeed to avoid it, becomes an imperative. Fine found in her research that one of the prevailing discourses of female sexuality in schools was that of 'sexuality as victimisation':

> Female adolescent sexuality is represented as a moment of victimisation in which the dangers of heterosexuality for adolescent

> women . . . are prominent. While sex may not be depicted as inherently violent young women . . . learn of their vulnerability to potential male predators. (Fine, 1988, p. 31)

That men and sex are harmful, as a set of messages, are, of course, unlikely to sit comfortably with any ideas of the body and sex as sources of pleasure.

And of course this is but one of the impossible sets of contradictions which the whole situation throws up for young women. Schooled by almost all available sources that it is their prime duty to be as visually attractive as possible – the currently fashionable idea of 'girl power' being one more inducement to girls to package their bodies to maximise sexual allure – girls are apportioned the responsibility for controlling a male sexual 'drive' which they have been warned is threatening, if not actively dangerous. 'Look sexy', 'act sexy' demand both traditional views of feminine identity and the scarcely veiled repetition of this to be found in new version of 'girl power', 'but don't be sexy'.

For the girls themselves, then, sexual encounters with boys, even within the context of the kind of loving relationship which they have been schooled to hope for, is likely to lead rather to disembodiment, or disassociation from body than to embodiment and active pleasure. Even if their own desires or physicality do become part of the sexual scenario, it is likely to represent a tension or disjuncture with the construction of their sexuality as passive or absent. Girls may be unable to recognise or 'own' such responses.

As has been noted in previous chapters, the body has been theorised within various strands of Western thought as inferior to, threatening to and in need of subjection to the mind. The identification of women with the body – the inferiorised and unruly body – and the profound, misogynistic fears which construe their sexuality as rampant and destructive, elide to produce a version of female subjectivity which is still powerful in the present day (Clack, 1999).

For young women, then, there is a philosophical back-drop as well as the current meanings at work in their lived experiences which are mutually reinforcing. These kinds of available ideas in circulation about what it is to become a young women – the building blocks from which girls form this new identity – make a lack of ease with their physical sexuality highly likely. Girls may well experience fears of being out of control, of being overwhelmed with physical appetites. As well as inciting a negative sense of her own body in relation to sexuality, this may also directly connect to eating disorders and self-harming. Bordo, for

example, makes the point that: 'the anorectic experiences her female, bodily self . . . as voracious, wanton, needful of forceful control by her male will' (Bordo, 1993, p. 163).

Young women, sexuality and being 'bad'

The colloquial expression for pregnancy in unmarried young women – 'getting into trouble' – neatly reveals society's attitudes to girls' behaviour, their troubles and their form of deviancy. 'Trouble' and sex in relation to girls are intractably linked. When girls are identified as worrying or problematic by schools, or welfare agencies and sometimes even by families, this usually relates to fears of promiscuity, or otherwise sexually 'at risk' behaviour, from which basis is then conflated the whole notion of the disruptive girl. Girls' moral identities are tied to their sexuality in an inextricable way. The expression being a 'good girl' implies chastity, and being a 'bad' girl, sexual profligacy. Sexuality defines women, from young to old.

Cain's comment in the introduction to her edition on girls and deviancy makes this point fluently and is worth quoting at length:

> The contributors of this volume are frequently, though not exclusively, preoccupied with the sexuality of girls for at least three very good reasons, the most overwhelming of which is that everyone who comes into contact with girls, *including other girls*, seems to be preoccupied in just this way. Sexuality first, and beyond that a range of gender approved ways of behaving such as mothering and caring, are what girls and boys, mums and dads, teachers, judges, social workers, prison guards, the medical profession, and just plain men and women talk about to any researcher interested in girls. For us to give primacy to another aspect of girl's lives would involve ignoring this fundamental and near universal discourse in terms of which girls are constituted and in large part constitute themselves. (Cain, 1989, p. 4)

Girls' morality, sexuality and identity are imbricated, so that, for example, the imputation of sexual immorality seemingly implicit in the accusation of 'slag', considered above, may actually rest on some level of rejection of traditional feminine identity. Lees suggests:

> The term slag therefore applies less to any clearly defined notion of sleeping around than to any form of social behaviour by girls that would define them as autonomous from the attachment to and

> domination by boys. An important facet of 'slag' is its uncontested status as a category. (Lees, 1989, p. 25)

And girls whose sexuality is active, who are 'unfeminine' in that they are 'mouthy' or argumentative at home or at school, are likely to be interpreted as a problem and as 'at risk'.

In the studies of girls referred to so far, such as Epstein and Johnson's, there are almost always girls like 'Tracey': ' . . . a young woman who was overt in her sexuality and constantly used it to bait teachers . . . ', whose ' . . . sexuality and generally disruptiveness had become conflated' . . . 'she was sexually aware, possibly "immoral" in sexual terms, "a problem" for the school . . . and "..seen as the single young mother of the future"' (Epstein and Johnson, 1998, p. 119). They are interpreted by pupils and teachers alike as 'trouble'; the slag label easily attached.

The forms of rebellion or resistance, of acting grown-up when schools and families insist on prolonged childhood, will inevitably draw on the range of ways available to, for example, 'act older'. In the case of young women, the kind of deviant youth behaviour frequently studied in young men (see Chapters 3 and 7), including gang or subcultural expressions of independence, resistance or even lawlessness are less available. The equating of 'youth' with traits such as rebelliousness, aggression, opposition to adult rules and values is, as noted previously, a highly gendered one. As Hudson comments: 'Boundaries between girlhood and womanhood are far less accentuated, and the confined and permanent status of womanhood cannot easily be distinguished from girls' transient subordination as youth' (Hudson, 1984, p. 15).

Fully imbibed then, with the consciousness of their own designation as, first and foremost a visual, sexualised body, it is in this arena that girls rebel. As already noted, battles with school about grown-up appearance abound, and displays of adult sexuality are the connected, more threatening form: – 'Where they do rebel against the confines of girlhood, this is likely to take the form of overt expressions of sexuality and can include pregnancy, and motherhood (ibid., p. 15).

And if, as is being argued, girls are primarily 'identified' with their bodies, as subject and object, then the logic of interpreting eating disorders and self-harm as another kind of protest or resistance, both to particular family dynamics (which will be considered in the next section), and to broader social/ideological controls and constrictions, becomes clear. Chernin, for example, whose approach is both social and psychoanalytical, talks of: 'this futile attack [self-starvation] upon the female body, through which we are attempting to free ourselves from the

limitations of the female role . . . ' (Chernin, 1986, p. 93) whereas Orbach similarly interprets obesity as a challenge to society's prescription for appropriate femininity (Orbach, 1981).

The body, it is being argued, is the site of resistance, a resistance which can be interpreted variously as resistance to the limitations of the female role, or in some theorisations of this, a more specific resistance to becoming an adult women by attempting, unconsciously, to revert to a curveless, childlike, unsexualised body (Counihan, 1985).

Such 'acts of rebellion' as self-harming and eating disorders, for example – though, as this chapter considers later, there are also good reasons for seeing these as the most extreme forms of conformity – become subject to normative definitions and sanctions. These are gendered, as Chapter 3 noted. Young people may be 'troubled', but girls are 'ill' and need treatment. There is a strong overtone of mental imbalance in interpretations of body-related 'disorders', unlike other 'disorders of consumption', such as drinking too much or taking too many drugs, which are gendered 'male' and are then more likely to get interpreted as youthful bad behaviour, or criminal deviance, even though in extremes they are as self-destructive and indeed lethal (Griffin, 1993).

The pressures are far more on girls, though, as noted above, not to be rebellious but to be 'good'. The more standard and traditional interpretation of girl's sexuality, that it is passive, and renders them vulnerable to 'predatory' males, also leads to a situation in which individuals can easily be seen as 'at risk'. The notion is that 'good girls' say no, though the gendering of girls generally as eager to please, compliant, helpful, and prepared to put others before themselves, creates lived contradictions with the assertiveness and resistance that 'no' requires.

Girls are seen as needing to be protected, both from their perceived tendencies to be too emotional and out of control, and from being taken advantage of. This protection, or 'policing', is undertaken by boys, friends, schools, families, and, where this is not interpreted as 'effective', by social services departments of local governments.

Annie Hudson, studying girls 'coming into care' – in other words being accommodated in children's homes or foster homes by the state in the form of local authority social services departments – found that they were predominantly removed from their families by virtue of being categorised as 'beyond control and/or morally at risk' (Hudson, 1989). The 'risk' was the assumption that: 'girls' sexuality, once unleashed, is uncontrollable and not bound by any sense of responsibility or self control' (ibid., p. 207). Parents requested, or social services instigated,

state controls when families were unable to exercise this. Barbara Hudson found it to be the case that connected to the notion of 'at risk' was the idea of passivity which reinforced the notion of girls as a problem: 'the view of female sexuality as passive, open to abuse and exploitation colours the social worker's emphasis on what happens to the girl when she runs away . . . ' (Hudson, 1984, p. 45).

The care system, which separates young people from their families and places them with alternative parents or in institutions, because of difficulties within families such as violence or abuse, or because of the activities of children such as crime or 'promiscuity', has been interpreted as one more system in which the gender restrictions on young woman, tightly tying identity to body/sexuality, receive further reinforcement. Within itself, and in its overlap with other parts of the criminal justice system, girls' sexuality, either because it can be interpreted as 'too passive' or as 'too active' is equated with male forms of deviance such as juvenile crime and anti-social behaviour. The pattern, it is argued, continues into adulthood: ' . . . we can see that in law women become their bodies, they were reduced to their reproductive functions . . . legal and medical discourses have tended to make women no more than their bodily functions and processes, or bits of bodies' (Smart, 1989, p. 96).

Girls' bodies and their sexuality are constructed as moral indicators, by which they are judged good or bad, or passive sites for the projection of others' 'goodness or badness', and by which they may project rebellion or conformity. The lack of a script for the variety of forms of 'youthful rebellion' expected and even encouraged in boys does make it unsurprising how few girls do resort to forms of rebellion. This propensity to conformism, similarly to the apparently opposing notion of 'rebellion' discussed above, has been theorised as explanatory of body harming activities in young women.

Gimlin, for example, proposes the notion of 'the anorexic as overconformist', in a variety of senses, one of which is quite straightforwardly that: 'the anorexic overconforms by affirming social notions of female sexuality by becoming submissive, androgynous and vulnerable in the most ultimate (sic) sense. That is, the anorexic complies perfectly with social ideals concerning female sexuality' (Gimlin, 1994, pp. 108–9).

Young women with eating disorders who become obsessed with their bodies – passive and fragile, rigidly controlled, fatless and so on – are not *different to* but the 'purest' version of those things which this volume has argued in various ways are still the overriding definitions of what it is to be a woman: the identities available to *all* young women.

The ways in which girls are being 'good', or, relatively rarely, being 'bad', are expressions of the social construction of youthful feminine subjectivity. If girls *are* their sexualised bodies, moral meanings will be written and interpreted in this sphere, and moral judgements and the actions leading from these will similarly be located. Rebellion and conformity will be in relation to the body. 'Getting into trouble' and 'being good', and endless other descriptions of teenage girl's characters and actions, will necessarily reverberate with sexual connotations.

Young women, sexuality and the family

As Chapter 1 briefly illustrated, the pathological interactions of certain types of families has formed the basis of an established tradition of theoretic work and practice texts about young women and body-hatred, both in relation to eating disorders (Selvini-Palazzoli, 1978) and in relation to self-harming and/or eating disorders as a consequence of sexual abuse within the family (Miller, 1994; Pembroke, 1994). It is not, however, the intention of this volume to reinforce the notion that specific family or individually psychologies lead to the phenomena of body-hatred.

This section will reflect instead on how the positioning of girls within the family in the affluent capitalist West – in itself a variable form – may have implications for the general discomfort, disassociation from and dislike of their bodies which the volume argues is the general experience of young, Western women.

For women, their positioning in relation to the family as an institution must invariably encompass lived contradictions. Traditionally seen as women's 'domain', and the physical space women may organise by their choices and exercise power in relation to their children, it has long been acknowledged that this is also the environment in which women are most at risk of all forms of gendered violence and abuse (Dobash and Dobash, 1980). For *young* women, the latter point is also the case, with childhood sexual abuse still mostly but not exclusively inflicted by male members of families on girls (Nelson, 1987). The former point is unlikely to be the case however: the power structure within families establishes children as subordinate to adults. Young people are subordinate to and dependent on their parents and their welfare is mostly seen as the business of their parents.

The last two decades, with changes such as the increase in numbers of young people undertaking further or higher education, and changes in social security and housing benefits, making it extremely difficult for

unemployed or lowly paid young people to leave home (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997), have served to increase this dependence.

For many young people, access to longer periods of education seems to have bought improved life-styles: not just the obvious change of better 'prospects' but also the engagement with a broader range of social and leisure activities noted in Chapter 4. However, commentators have expressed concerns in relation to both boys and girls that the extension of semi-independence that such changes have brought about has also had a damaging impact on young people's identities:

> For young people, the lengthening of the period between physical maturity and the attainment of adult status can be seen as problematic due to difficulties involved in constructing a stable identity in a period characterised by economic and social marginality. Youth is a period of uncertainty and where young people have no idea of what the future holds, this confusion can play a central role in the construction of identity. (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, p. 44)

The potential for damaged identities in modern youth is, it is argued, a non-gendered, general product of semi-dependency and other changes in inter-generational patterns, such as family breakdown, and the relative lack of continuity with their elders.

It seems, further, to be the case that although all young people may well be undergoing identity crises connected to family life, there do seem to be specific, gender differentiated patterns between girls and their parent or parents, which may lead to the experiencing of difficulties in different ways. The largely domestic setting of girl culture: visiting friends, 'bedroom' culture, reading and so on, examined in Chapter 4, is an expression of and part of the ongoing production and reproduction of what it means to be a young woman. Girls are linked to their domestic and family context, as they are with their bodies, in socially reinforced ways. Griffin, for example, argues that in relation to the whole discourse of youth deviance: '. . . hearth, home, family-life and the domestic sphere represent the female and the social, whilst life on the streets (not shopping but "hanging around") comes to signify masculinity and the anti-social' (Griffin, 1993, pp. 127–8).

And as they physically mature, and become, as noted above, sites for the projection of all kinds of anxieties and fears around sexuality, the family will have some relationship to this. Families are clearly part of the system of circulation and regeneration of meaning. When small girls become young women, the family's relationship may also change

in relation to them. It may, for example, become highly restrictive. Nava found in her research in London in the 1980s that 'girls are less of a problem on the street because they are predominately and scrupulously regulated in the home . . . [their] sexuality is subject to far greater parental scrutiny and vigilance, and they are frequently just not allowed out' (Nava, 1984, p. 11).

Parents are afraid that girls will 'get into trouble', and, as noted above, that invariably means sexual trouble. Hudson's research, cited above, suggesting that girls frequently come into the local authority care system because of fears that they are sexually at risk also illustrated that it was frequently a parent or parents who were requesting such state intervention. So important is the protection of girls from either their active sexuality or from sexual 'exploitation' that parents may ask for the state to intervene when they feel unable to police their daughters themselves (Hudson, 1989).

Most girls, of course, do not come into care, and there are significant class differences in terms of who would and would not approach state welfare agencies. Clients, whether 'voluntary' or for reasons of statutory involvement, of welfare agencies, on the whole represent a small section of the most deprived working class people (Thomson, 1993). The approach via the GP referral system to child psychotherapy clinics or indeed private centres for child psychotherapy and/or family therapy may serve similar functions for more affluent social groups. Girls are constrained or cajoled to 'be good' by therapists, social workers or the courts. The forces which define the nature of femininity as compliant and 'good' operate standardly, though perhaps in less blatant ways for the middle-classes.

The majority of girls, consciously or unconsciously, avoid conflict by 'policing' their own behaviour. The selection of the 'safety' of the home as their prime site for leisure activities may serve to reduce any potential disputes in this area.

It has been noted that girls leave the parental home earlier, both to study and to marry but also, importantly, this 'has also been linked to the different ways in which parents treat daughters and sons; the behaviour of young women may be subject to closer scrutiny' (Cartmel and Furlong, 1997, pp. 45–6).

Families, whether single parent or with two parents, 'natural' parents or reconstituted families, are placed in a position to exercise control over the behaviour and sexuality of their daughters, thereby reinforcing and recirculating the range of contradictory messages in relation to sexuality that the chapter has considered. As briefly commented on at

the beginning of this section, the power that families may exercise over their daughters includes at its most extreme the power to sexually abuse female children and young women (Dobash and Dobash, 1980). One aspect of patriarchal power relations, feminists have argued, is that the majority of sexual abuse in Western societies is perpetrated by male adults on female children, within the context of the family. Parton notes, for example, that: '. . . such abuse was perpetrated almost exclusively by men and reflected not only the inferior position of children within the family but also the power and predatory attitudes of men' (Parton, 1991, p. 88).

The establishment in Western societies of the family as a place of privacy and self-sufficiency, in which governments and indeed members of the community only 'interfere' as a very last resort (Parton, 1991), allows that the power relations which establish women's sexuality as subordinate to men can be pushed to extremes without check.

That childhood sexual abuse has a direct link with self-harming behaviour generally is now well-established (Bifulco and Moran, 1998). Direct experience seems to support this. The staff group at the adolescent psychiatric unit from which girls were interviewed for this text were clear from their own observations that at least half of girls attending the unit, whose self-harming was severe, had been damaged in this way, and further speculated that it may be many more but by no means all young women had been able to make their experiences known.

That the extreme expressions of self-hatred are believed to connect to the extreme expression of female passivity and male sexual control, reflects structural inequalities of power in relation to gender and age within the contemporary family. Opportunities to leave home may be severely limited by lack of benefits and the current scale of teenage homelessness – recent estimates suggest 156 000 homeless young people (Hill, 1995, cited in Cartmel, p. 48). Extreme behaviours, the 'sick-role' and the psychiatric ward may be the only available 'place', both physically and in relation to subjective positioning, to escape to.

Even if actual abuse has not occurred, it has also been suggested that a less extreme ordinary exercise of familial and institutional power over teenage girls can be a determining feature in eating disorders. Boskind-Lodahl, a doctor writing from clinical experience, notes that 'Most of the women in my study had been rewarded for their physical attractiveness and submissive "goodness", while characteristics such as independence, self-reliance, and assertiveness were generally punished by parents, grandparents, teachers and peers' (Boskind-Lodahl, 1976, p. 347).

The structure of power relations reflected in Western families in themselves and in relation to early twenty-first century social trends is such that teenage girls may have little chance of developing autonomy or assertiveness, and indeed may be steered towards a compliant femininity which links with both an 'everyday' experience of body-hatred and its extremes. The subjection to parental controls can, as seen above, lead to passivity and over-conformism which will then make resistance *per se* alien to the identities of young women.

This lack of resistance would include resistance to dominant social meanings defining what a young woman may and may not be. The ambivalent attitudes in families towards young women's sexuality would tend to foster discomfort and unease, rather than confidence and pleasure.

Summary

The chapter, then, has given consideration to social features of young girls' lives: school, heterosexual relations with boys, and the family primarily, in an attempt to understand what kinds of constraints and encouragements their identities are forming under. Some central themes repeated themselves and interwove themselves with the structural aspects of all these institutions. That girls must be sexually alluring but chaste, seems to recur in various ways, as does the equally impossible expectation that girls will be sexually in control – in the sense of responsible – but unknowing and innocent. Girls must also be good, passive, polite and pleasant, unselfish and giving, and never loud or *louche*. Ideally, they should fall in love. They should then accomplish the construction of sexual pleasure – as they had sexual attractiveness – primarily for the benefit of the male subject, and remain its mostly passive object.

This is, it has been argued here, likely to reinforce disassociative feelings from their own bodies, self-consciousness and a lack of physical pleasure. Little in respect to girls in these situations offers them opportunities to develop bodily self-confidence, self-approval or comfort.

6
Young Women's Experience of Body-Hatred: Stigma and Shame

This chapter attempts to get a little nearer to the experience of contemporary young women in relation to their bodies and their looks. The previous three chapters have considered the major themes in the construction of contemporary young femininity that contribute to the negative interpretations of their appearances which girls display. This chapter will report on conversations with young women, some of whom are diagnosed as suffering from appearance disturbance difficulties and some who are 'normal' sixth-formers.

The issue of how the young women experience their looks, especially if the body-hatred thesis has any meaning, is potentially very sensitive. Traditional, hierarchical research on people's vulnerable areas generally, and in this case specifically, can seem a somewhat callous and dehumanising activity. The suspicion that their academic reputation may be gained at the cost of inflicting disturbing questioning on interview subjects is uncomfortable for researchers attempting to be ethical. Here, only two in-depth case studies were undertaken (one from a sixth form and one from an adolescent unit). Group and individual interview material, allowing the respondents to safely hide behind pieces of paper, art projects and speculating on 'what teenagers generally think' was used more broadly. The findings from the former and the latter are presented.

What is being examined in this chapter is the direct perception of young women themselves about how they, and their contemporaries, experience their bodies. It is an exploration of some of the positions – the ideas – in relation to their bodies which young women – and some young men – circulate and inhabit.

Although this social constructionist approach in itself disrupts the binary opposition of objective versus subjective, so that the dichotomy

between, for example, what meanings society positions an individual within, and what the individual experiences, could be claimed to be redundant. Nonetheless, there seems to be a practical use here for a further theoretical framework which can encompass some distinction between *the process* of social devaluing and the *personal feelings* of shame and inferiority which are its outcome. Knowing that perhaps the meanings which constitute how young women can feel about themselves are the same sets of meanings which can be identified by research or academia does not render an examination of the girls' feelings or their beliefs redundant.

As the chapter will go on to consider, even taking a perspective which argues that all young women are subject to meanings which will render body-hatred likely, there may still be differential experiences of pain and damage to take into account. Goffman's classic social interactionist works on self-presentation and stigma (Goffman, 1959, 1963), and Taylor's analysis of shame (Taylor, 1985) have, for example, considerable analytical strengths in understanding the subjective feelings expressed by the sample of young women included here.

Stigma

Stigma, or the interactive experience of both being seen to be flawed and the subjective experience of inferiority, may offer a useful exploratory framework for understanding how, even given a general propensity for body-hatred, some young women may suffer more acute identity discomfort.

That there may be a differential experience of the 'beauty system' for certain groups of women has not always been acknowledged. Many feminist texts have ignored a vital aspect of the reality which women inhabit: that women are judged against a *scale* of deficiency and perfection. Within cultures and eras there are rules about what women must be to be considered beautiful, and *some women more nearly approximate this ideal type than others*. Within a system which potentially damages all women, some women are valued more highly, have more status and prestige, and are less reviled than others.

In the straightforward language of the teenagers themselves, they are aware of, and circulate, an evaluation of women based on whether they can be described as 'beautiful', 'pretty', 'plain' or 'ugly'. And as one of the teenage girls in Hollway's study remarks: 'there's a hell of a lot of hurt around not being attractive enough' (Hollway, 1984, p. 240).

The level of agreed standardisation is high, the appraisal is constant and the categorisation is applied by boys and girls but seemingly not

equally of boys and girls. The immediate assessment of the 'standard' of physical appearance of boys does not yet seem to be the universal criteria on which to appraise a boy, an idea which will be considered in depth in the next chapter.

There is a considerable body now of psychological literature which claims to have established that those girls and women considered beautiful or pretty have better life-chances in almost every way than those considered plain or ugly (Berscheid 1986; Adams, 1978). Some sociobiologists have argued that looks differentials play an important role in the competition within the human species to reproduce their genes (Ridley, 1993; Etcoff, 1999).

Whatever the cause of this phenomenon, as the experience of interviewing young girls indicates, the descriptive language of 'she's pretty', 'she's not very pretty' is almost casually employed. Girls appraise and rate girls: models, actresses, and television personalities, teachers, mothers and class-mates, unknown girls in city streets and on buses and trains. The scrutiny and judging of other women seems almost automatic and girls are aware of their own place in this system: they are appraised in the same way and must inevitably internalise this judgement. As the interview material demonstrates, their ability to establish their position in social groups and make friends and lovers is linked to this process. 'Attractiveness is a major factor in interpersonal relations, yielding a marked advantage for those with good looks according to prevailing notions. . . . Adolescents often worry about their looks and their physical attractiveness, and their capacity to appeal sexually. If there is a failure to meet current standards of acceptable looks, this may well become an important problem for the 'afflicted' (Furnham, 1989, quoted in Furnham, 1991).

This is one brutally basic fact of life for teenagers: that they have to exist within a hierarchical appraisal system based on fashion and appearance, a system within which they will be measured and may be found wanting. This interactive process – of an appraising system and an appraised – is fundamental to Goffman's analysis of stigma, which offers a useful analysis of how physical appearance, or other attributes, can generate identity damage.

Working within a social interactionist tradition, Goffman's central concern was the issue of how social identity is produced and maintained (Goffman, 1959, 1961, 1963, 1971). Within this context, he identifies the process of stigmatisation, defined by him as: 'a special discrepancy between virtual and actual social identity' from which 'he [a person] is reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discredited one' (Goffman, 1963, p. 12).

Within a dynamic relational context, not just as the passive product of some feature owned by a person, the normative expectations of one person or one group of people of the initially presented social identity of another are not met.

Expectations of 'normal' presentation of self are not universal, of course, though Goffman suggests that 'there are important attributes that almost everywhere in our society are discrediting' (ibid., p. 14). Goffman also makes the point, perhaps even more universally accepted now than in the 1960s, that the actual standards of what a 'normal' social identity is, especially the physical appearance aspect, is becoming far more hegemenous (ibid., p. 17).

As this volume argued in Chapters 1 and 4, the growth of global communications and visual media means virtually all young women have blond, thin American/European models and actresses as icons and role models. The growth of world markets for cosmetics and other products for physical enhancement has also shrunk the category of 'normal'. Featherstone makes the point, for example, that 'Advertising thus helped create a world in which individuals are made to feel emotionally vulnerable, constantly monitoring themselves for bodily imperfections which could no longer be regarded as natural' (Featherstone, 1991, p. 175).

Any imperfection may be seen as 'unnatural'. 'Normal' may well be a diminishing category with many different new forms of 'deviant' created as an effect of this. Perhaps for teenage girls only a height 5ft 7 inches–5ft 8, a weight of 45–55 kilos, a flawless skin and long straight fair hair, are taken as 'normal'. Anything else can be subject to the process of stigmatisation.

Importantly for this examination of the impact on teenage girls of not 'measuring up', Goffman also theorised that there is an emotional dimension in failing to live up to expectations. The experience of the individual who cannot produce the 'normal' social identity required, and is aware that they do not come up to standard, is that of being discredited; of a personal failure to 'pass'. Because the opinion formed by those making the judgements does not stop at immediate presentation, but inevitably imputes certain characteristics and personality features on the basis of initial presentation, the discrediting of the person is not limited to the superficial but takes in the whole identity.

The stigmatised individual experiences their whole self as not good enough. Even though, Goffman suggests, this is not inevitably the case: 'it seems possible for an individual to fail to live up to what we effectively demand of him, and yet be relatively untouched by this

failure; insulated by his alienation, protected by identity beliefs of his own . . . ' (Goffman, 1968, p. 17), he also makes it clear that in the shared, increasingly hegemonic belief system inhabited by all participants of this interaction, then: 'The stigmatised individual tends to share the same beliefs about identity that we do . . . ' (ibid. p. 17) and 'the standards he has incorporated from the wider society equip him to be intimately alive to what others see as his failing, inevitably causing him, if only for moments, to agree that he does fall short of what he really ought to be' (ibid., p. 18).

'Shame becomes a central possibility . . . ' (ibid., p. 18). And because that sense of inadequacy is not momentary within a specific social interaction, but is internalised within the individual's own meaning system, shame can also become an identity issue, experienced privately and personally: ' . . . self-hatred and self-derogation can also occur when only he and a mirror are about' (ibid., p. 18).

It may be useful to illustrate Goffman's theme with an example. It has been much argued that to be fat in our society is socially unacceptable now: stigmatising, in fact (Chernin, 1981; Garner and Garfinkel, 1980). In a social interaction, an overweight person may be judged not just as aesthetically unpleasing, but also as having a range of undesirable psychological attributes: greedy, lazy, lacking self control, and so on. Malson, for example, comments that:

> 'The fat body' is constructed as ugly, unattractive, disgusting and shameful. It signifies gluttony and uncontrolled sexual activity. The 'fat self' is unhappy and lacking in self-control and self-confidence. (Malson, 1998, p. 105)

These negative meanings connected to 'fat' are ones which the 'heavy' person is also affected by. They will also see themselves in these terms, as 'falling short' of 'normal' standards, and are likely, then, following Goffman's argument, to experience a deep sense of personal shame. Bartky cites a woman whose description of herself illustrates this painfully:

> I can no longer bear to look at myself whenever I have to stand in front of a mirror to comb my hair. I tie a large towel round my neck. Even at night I slip my night-gown on before I take off my blouse and pants. But all this has only made it worse and worse. It has been so long since I really looked at my body. (Bartky, 1990, p. 76)

Shame

Goffman, as quoted above, conceptualises the subjective experience of being stigmatised as producing strong personal feelings of shame. It may be worth briefly clarifying 'Shame', though. Given a popular and psychoanalytical usage, shame can be a difficult concept, which it may be useful to explore a little.

Giddens, in 'Modernity and Self-Identity', offers a useful synthesis of psychoanalytical and social explanations of the concept, within his overall thesis on the ontological insecurity of identity in the late modern era. 'Shame', Giddens suggests, 'is a negative side of the motivational system of the agent. The other side is *pride*, or self-esteem: confidence in the integrity and value of the narrative of self-identity' (Giddens, 1991, p. 66, italics in the text).

Similarly to Goffman's symbolic interactionist orientation, Giddens argues that both pride and shame are dynamically produced within social relationships, and that therefore the physical self is likely to constitute a significant part of the establishment of these states: 'The experience of shame often focuses on that visible aspect of self, the body' (ibid., p. 66). However, also similarly to Goffman, Gidden's concept of shame is not usually a fleeting feeling circumscribed within the social interaction. Shame becomes part of the individual's self identity: 'Shame depends on feelings of personal insufficiency, and these can comprise a basic element of an individual's psychological make-up from an early age' (ibid., p. 65).

Shame, then, is serious identity damage with ramifications for various aspects of selfhood. Drawing on Gidden's psychoanalytically influenced schema, then, 'concern with the overall tissue of self-identity . . . concern about the body in relation to the mechanisms of self-identity, feeling that one is inadequate for a respected or loved other . . . [and] trust based on being 'known to the other', where self-revelation does not incur anxieties over exposure' (ibid., p. 67) are helpful exploratory strands to enlighten the quest to get closer to young people's sense of themselves. What also seem integral to the notion, and will be considered in more depth below, is that to experience shame one must have a sense of being watched. 'It [shame] introduces first of all a notion of an audience, for feeling shame is connected with the thought that eyes are upon one' (Taylor, 1988, p. 53).

Stigma and the female body

Goffman, quoted above, uses the notion of self-hatred as the subjectively experienced dimension of being stigmatised, an interpretation which

links his argument closely to the overall theme of body-hatred in this volume. His work has been widely drawn on to explicate the complex set of dynamic relationships between physical appearance and the internalised experience of discontent emanating from this, and the impact this has on overall identity. He does not, however, extend this to a particular consideration of how a generalised standard of beauty may lead to some women being stigmatised. Goffman's focus is far more on such appearance and social identity issues as disability and other 'abominations of the body', as well as character 'blemishes' (Goffman, 196, p. 14).

Some feminist writers have, however, drawn on the notions of stigma and shame to consider both the general experience of women in relation to their appearance and the differential impact on various 'groups' of women whose physicality means they are seen as especially unacceptable, and the damage that both these parts of this patriarchal system of values do to women's subjectivity.

Initially, the first of these may seem a surprising usage; after all, more-or-less half the world is female, so how can the general experience of having and presenting a woman's face and body be stigmatising? Tseelon's sustained application of Goffman's work is concerned to address this point. For her, the issue is not only the most obvious use of the concept: that in a world where beauty is valued, lacking beauty is stigmatising – but also that '*women are stigmatised by the very expectation to be beautiful*…[even though] the experience of being or becoming beautiful can be very rewarding' (Tseelon, 1995, p. 88, original italics).

Goffman's work, she argues, offers a framework in which women's *attractiveness* (by whatever measure) can be seen as stigma because of both women's constant visibility – the notion of femininity as a constant and ongoing public performance in which self-conscious presentation is a necessary part – and 'the fact that uncertainty is built into the construction of beauty as defining social and self-worth, followed by permanent insecurity of becoming ugliness unless rigorous discipline is exercised' (Tseelon, 1992, p. 301).

The knowledge that attractiveness must be publicly performed but can only ever be a temporary state, a fleeting moment boundaried by insecurity, leads her to conclude, using Goffman's designations, that '…beauty for women…would be more appropriately considered a *stigma symbol* than a *prestige symbol'* (ibid., p. 301).

Whereas much of central argument of this book does substantiate Tseelon's assertion that women are permanently on show and must

present themselves to the world as on a stage at all times – in Goffman's terminology, their appearance is their 'master status' – this does not necessarily lead to a conclusion that women's attractiveness *per se* is stigmatising. Borrowing for a moment from 'Presentation of Self in Everyday Life' (1971), it seems quite clear that Goffman believes that the stage metaphor – positing that social identity is a performance which includes the construction of physical appearance as part of that act – can be usefully applied to understand the interactions between all humans. Within this overall perspective, stigma theory considers the part played by expectations and socially defined standards in these performances. In a patriarchal society, then, all women are expected to display sexual attractiveness in many contexts (for reasons argued earlier) like all school-teachers are expected to be sober and have correct grammar, and all young African–Caribbean men are expected to be good at sport. The difficult issue to then ignore here, and within feminist sociology this is frequently side-stepped, is that surely many women *are able to be sexually attractive*, for part of their lives or for part of the week or even just for Saturday night.

It becomes impossible to look at the particular issues for some groups of women without recognising that this is a differential experience. For example, many black women express a clear view that black skin and black features are stigmatised in women, because white skin and European ethnic features are the 'norm' or standard. As Kaw's research on Asian–American women and cosmetic surgery leads her to argue: 'Racial minorities may internalise a body image produced by the dominant culture's racial ideology and because of it, begin to loathe, mutilate and revise parts of their bodies' (Kaw, 1998, p. 168). They are made to see themselves as different and inferior: the essence of stigma. The distress expressed by women who are seriously overweight connects to their self-perceived failure to fit into an expected female norm of slimness. They also are seen as, and see themselves as, deviant. But there *are* white, slim women. There has to be a standard of 'normal' in operation to understand stigma and even if the standard of normal is based on fantasy – women from carefully constructed photo-images and film angles – some women will still more nearly approximate it, even if only briefly.

This is not to argue that any of the divisive terminology of the beauty system exists as absolutes. 'Attractive', 'beautiful' and 'pretty' (or their opposites) do not describe essential, immutable personal features, but states available to attempt to approximate – that women *must* attempt to approximate, it could be argued. The extent to which this is achievable

will depend on some physical givens – skin colour and smoothness, hair colour and texture, shape and size and arrangement of features – and, more importantly, resources (which of course can, via cosmetic surgery, alter many of the 'givens') and their application. It is precisely for this reason that, as this volume has argued strongly, the system is particularly damaging for young women, who as a group are frequently lacking the resources and confidence to achieve the requisite standard.

Tseelon criticises mainstream psychology for being unable to theorise beauty as a positive experience and simultaneously as a discrediting perspective, and turns to Goffman for his ability to underpin the notion that: '. . . allow[s] for treating women who appear attractive as occupying the normal and the deviant perspective' (Tseelon, 1992, p. 301).

This seems a very particular reading of Goffman. Certainly it is highly significant to Goffman's work on stigma that, as Tseelon argues, stigma is not simply about essential characteristics but is about human interactions, and that most people will have, throughout their lives, experience of stigma from both sides of this relationship. What is stigmatised in some cultural groups, at some times in our lives, or in some social milieu, is in flux.

However, it does not seem possible to stay in any way faithful to this concept without accepting some tenets of Goffman's modernist, dichotomising sensibility. He illustrates a position which does argue that at a given point in time, within an interaction, there are dualistic notions at work of 'normal and deviant', 'congruity and incongruity', 'acceptance and rejection'. Within an interaction there are those who are, and those who are not, stigmatised. Post-structuralist work may well have conceptually dissolved such oppositions, and therefore can suggest women occupy deviant and normal positions at once, but this also, it could be argued, seriously uncouples the debate from the fundamental theoretical stance of Goffman's work.

Tseelon's work fits, however, into an honourable tradition of productive compromise which feminist academia has pragmatically agreed for the purposes of accommodating 'malestream' sociological theory without which the discipline would be impoverished. The advantages and disadvantages of this strategy is a debate too broad to pursue further here.

Shame and the female body

That shame as an identity state may have a close correlation with female selfhood *per se* has been a central theme to this text. The notion

of body-hatred itself might be argued, for example, as the angry projection of shameful feelings of inadequacy. A further strand in the connection between 'female' and 'shame' has also been developed in relation to women's visuality. Shame, as was suggested above, hinges on a notion of being seen:

> Shame is the distressed apprehension of the self as inadequate or diminished; it requires if not an actual audience before whom my deficiencies are paraded, then an internalised audience with the capacity to judge me, hence internalised standards of judgement. (Bartky, 1990, p. 86)

That women may be conceptualised as constantly seen – always visible, always the object of the male gaze – was explored in Chapters 3 and 4. Berger's classic assertion of absolute female self-consciousness, for example, still passes without substantial challenge:

> Men look at Women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women, but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of women in herself is male, the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight. (Berger, 1972, p. 47)

Women are under constant observation, and shame hinges on being, or feeling as if one is being, observed. The potential observer may be either the 'other' of a social interaction, or an internalised observer to whose viewpoint one shifts, an idea explored in Taylor's analysis of this state of mind. Using the example of shame in relation to a craftsman who fails to live up to his standards, she makes the important point that:

> He need not imagine an actual observer, and that there is such an observer need not be part of the content of his thought. All that seems necessary is that he shift his viewpoint from that of the creator of his work to that of the critical assessor, and he himself can fulfil both of these functions. (Taylor, 1985, p. 58)

Shame and being observed and assessed, are tightly bound up together, even if the appraiser exists as an internalised standpoint.

For the constantly observed woman, as Berger points out, there is an identificatory process in taking up the view of the (male) assessor at

work here: the women identifies herself with her appraiser, and appraises herself. Given the difficult-to-attain version of female beauty against which this appraisal is made, quite often she will fail the inspection: 'we have the identification of agent with audience: they both see the situation alike and judge it to be a deviation from the accepted norm' (Taylor, 1985, p. 57). This 'deviation' is experienced as shameful.

The 'hurt' and identity damage, referred to directly by the girls in the case-studies, can be understood as the manifestation of shame, of either literally or metaphorically being *seen* to be wanting. Sociological and philosophical explications of the 'emotions of self-assessment' can, as illustrated, offer a framework for understanding this process, and, by incorporating post-structuralist stances, extend this further. As Chapter 2 considered, feminist uses of Foucault's notion of 'disciplinary power' can also offer an analysis of the internalisation of the patriarchal, capitalist gaze and the damage this does to women's psyche. Self-surveillance, Bartky asserts: 'is a form of obedience to patriarchy'. 'It is also', she continues, 'the reflection in women's consciousness that *she* is under surveillance in ways that *he* is not'. This process in itself, she goes on to argue, may lead to a woman living 'much of her life with a pervasive feeling of bodily deficiency' (Bartky, 1990, p. 81, original italics). This, too, is stigma and shame.

As this text suggests in previous chapters, women's bodies are in themselves inferiorised – stigmatised in other words – by a whole variety of discourses within an overarching patriarchal ideology. For example, biologically and physiologically, women's bodies are seen as both disgusting in their natural state and inferior to men's: '. . . men position women as both inferior and dangerous because of their perception of women's lack of emotional and bodily containment' (Lupton, 1998, p. 121). In the West, within the majority of religious belief frameworks, women's bodies are seen to threaten the moral order with their incitement to sexual pleasures and forbidden temptations (Clack, 1999). The right and duty of men to control women's sexuality is enshrined in social custom and the law, because women's bodies clearly cannot be controlled by women. The volume has already considered in a variety of ways that women's bodies, and in particular young women's bodies, *will not do*.

Conversations with teenagers

The logic of using a primarily social constructionist perspective is, as referred to at the beginning of this chapter, that meanings circulating

within the literature of a subject area and the autobiographical statements made by the 'objects' of study in relation to a specific field may be expected to have similarities. This does frequently seem to be the case. In a study comparing autobiographical accounts and sociological perspectives on eating disorders, for example, it was found that self-explanatory accounts linked in terms of time trends to theoretical texts about this particular problem (Crosby, 1999). Many first-person accounts in the early 1980s reflected beliefs that being fat linked to suppressing unmet needs and desires through 'feeding' oneself, or that self-starvation was a rejection of the sexual requirements of womanhood (Orbach, 1979; Bruch, 1973). However, current autobiographical material published both on the Internet and in conventional forms frequently considers the expression of control and power over the body as the key explanatory factor (Bordo, 1993). Personal voices reflect trends in theory; they circulate many of the same explanations. However, this does not render pointless attempts to listen to what young women themselves have to say about their bodies and their appearances. Even if, as this volume argues, body-hatred is a theme running through contemporary teenage-girl identity, the lived experiences of this will differ.

As Bordo argues convincingly, even though all women are exposed to 'homogenizing and normalizing images concerning femininity and female beauty', it is not *only these* that women are exposed to. 'The unique configurations (of ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, religion, genetics, education, family age and so forth) that make up each person's life will determine how each *actual* woman is affected by our culture' (Bordo, 1993, p. 62).

Stigma and shame will be experienced differently, and differentially, which is not to suggest that this volume endorses a division into notions of pathological and normal.

These interviews, listening to what each individual young women had to say, and hearing that some did show more signs of stigma, shame and identity damage than others, were undertaken in a spirit of respectful acknowledgement of difference, rather than dehumanising demarcation into the categories of 'well' and 'sick' or 'normal' and 'deviant'. Clearly though, in relation to the girls recorded here, just such categorisation had already been made elsewhere: some girls were interviewed at the adolescent psychiatric inpatient facility where they are currently 'patients' and some in a quiet room at the local comprehensive school. This fact in itself however had so little impact on the kinds of views they came up with that their responses in terms of the general questioning have not been categorised along these lines.

Material from both sets is included below in the section entitled 'Young women speak'. In terms of the two in-depth studies, which girl was in the sixth form and which in the psychiatric unit, is made clear to the reader. It may be important to note that in the latter instant, disordered eating is diagnosed within the unit as a secondary, not the primary, problem.

The interview and questionnaire material

The introduction describes the self-portraiture project at the local comprehensive school, and the follow up to this, and also the involvement with the adolescent psychiatric unit, which set the contexts for the interview material. In the main, questions were focused around the general issues this text has explored as central to the theme of body-hatred.

The interview and questionnaire material explored the general experience of young women in relation to their appearance, and the impact of the media, friends and families on this. Whether girls thought it was different for boys is also part of this schedule, as was a non-intrusive level of enquiry about how they see their own looks. For the sake of accessibility, the material has been divided under three rough groupings of appearance issues: 'what is it like for girls?', 'what is it like for boys?', and 'what is it like for you?'.

The personal issues which may demonstrate feelings of shame and stigma are only more directly explored in the case-study interviews, which were conducted far more gradually and carefully, using supportive techniques drawn from counselling approaches.

Young women speak

1. 'What is it like for girls?'

That for their age groups appearance is a very important issue was endorsed unequivocally by the young women I spoke to. In terms of an initial response to what kinds of reasons were behind this, at least half of the young women identified the effect of friends, gangs and groups – mainly experienced as a pressure – as having a potent determining impact on the constant engagement with appearance issues. In response to 'do young people today spend a lot of time on their appearance?', one girl comments:

> Yes, to put it bluntly. I was in a mainstream school and everybody was concerned with what they looked like, what they were wearing and

> generally how they see themselves. If you are part of a group of friends, and like, they are all skinny, everyone else wants to be, like, the same.

That 'doing appearance' was seen by some as a by-product of wanting to be part of the group, either in a co-operative or competitive way, was reflected in several responses:

> Yeh, I boarded at a school for a while, and everybody was so competitive about their weight, and how they looked, and quite a lot of people in my boarding house had, like, eating disorders, and competed to get like lower and lower . . . .

Another interviewee felt that the pecking order itself in groups, and which one you are allowed into – 'the cool group or the sad group' – is determined by your looks, an issue which is explored in the second case-study further on in this chapter.

Pressure to 'do looks' was not, however, always experienced as straightforward and clearly indentifiable. The somewhat lengthy response quoted below demonstrates an attempt to extrapolate the elements of pressure she felt on her age-group to engage with appearance issues. It acknowledges outside forces and the important impact they have on the conscious process of self-production, and unconsciously reflects Goffmanesque concerns with social identity, social interaction and the potential for stigmatisation.

> There is constant pressure to look a certain way, so personal appearance falls between quite strict boundaries, just like behaviour does. There's the pressure of society (media especially) and peers – 'if you fail to conform then . . . ' young people feel being individual isn't worth the hassle. It's necessary to spend time on appearances whether you want to fool people into thinking you're a certain 'type' and try to deliberately influence the way they see you, or whether you try to defy categorisation and express yourself. Whatever anyone says, first 'physical' impressions make a huge difference to how people behave towards/see you and what they think about you. Society is able to reject you on the basis of your appearance and everyone, especially young people (who tend to be more insecure) want/need to be accepted.

However, even though there were no exceptions to the view that their age-group both cared about and spent much time and effort on their

appearance, not everyone interpreted this as the outcome of primarily interactive social forces. About one-third of the young women privileged individual agency as the primary determining factor. They reasoned that 'doing looks' was a conscious choice in relation to achievable self improvement, influenced by personal psychological decisions. For example:

> I think young people spend time on and care about their appearance because if they feel like they look better then often they feel better.

and

> . . . it's nice to look good and I think it gives you more confidence and makes you feel good.

Only one young person's answer demonstrated a loosely biological understanding of looks as a function of mating behaviour:

> . . . younger people spend more time trying to look attractive because they're trying to find a partner.

The potential causal role of the family in producing the need to 'do looks' was barely referred to in these schedules, though both case studies touch on family impact. One young woman, however, did underline the power-control dimension of eating disturbances propounded by, for example, Bordo (1993), in suggesting that a struggle for control in a powerless situation may be a feature of teenage engagement with their bodies:

> . . . parents take most of the control [over what you do] like teachers, and like, that is the only control you can have, like about your own body.

The young women interviewed were asked to further speculate on whether spending time, energy and concern on their appearance was 'good for them' or not, and in what ways. Several had a notion of 'up to a point'. They spoke of not going beyond some recognisable limit into what was variously named as 'obsession', 'insecurity', 'anorexia and bulimia', 'misery' or simply some unnamed 'too far'. Their 'harmless' pursuit, then, was boundaried by an insecurity that danger awaited should a loss of control be experienced. One young women felt that

crossing into the extremes of appearance production could reflect badly on overall identity. Being re-evaluated as intellectually and morally diminished, was a possible outcome:

> . . . it's all too easy to become obsessed with what's outside of yourself as well as others. No one wants to appear shallow but many people inadvertently do, cue 'beauty is only skin deep' and other clichés.

The thesis of mind/body dualism, discussed in Chapter 3, which awards moral superiority to inside (or mind) over outside, or body, can also be seen at work here. It is less worthy to focus on the outside and more likely to invite ridicule or condemnation. It is also, as noted previously, a defining meaning within gendered subjectivity; women *are* their appearances, though being this will render than susceptible to criticism. These girls experienced the contradictions in relation to focusing on their appearances without naming its basis. They recognised what rewards were available to those who were successful in this pursuit – it could bring success in competition, for example, in job interviews; it could make unhappy people happy; and could express the essence of identity. However, as the above demonstrates, they were also aware that there are dangers inherent in this. It is a suspect activity of little moral worth in a patriarchal society. It must be kept under strict control.

The role of the Western capitalist media in generating body discontent in all age-groups of women was considered in Chapter 4, and much feminist literature has focused on this. However, not all young women mentioned this, though some saw it as an additional pressure in the looks arena. The feelings generated by, for example, the media, were identified as manufacturing desires for perfect looks or designer clothes. One girl described this as adding to 'the feeling that you have to conform to fashion and idealisms [meaning, probably, being perfect] to succeed in life.

Much of the feminist literature on women and the body argues that women are constantly visible as the object of the male gaze. It was therefore of interest to ask the young women if they felt there were any circumstances in which they could forget all about their appearances. Families were given some importance in offering relief from the pressure. About half the girls saw home as a refuge from such pressures, and within this group about half said 'with friends and family'. Not everyone was quite so sure about this:

> . . . and your looks *should* be irrelevant to friends . . . .

and one introduced an important proviso in relation to home:

> . . . only when you have no older sister or brother to be as good as or better than.

The competitive aspect of looks, then, might even infiltrate home.

That conforming to the successful production of 'appropriate' feminine identity was the only space in which the issue temporarily ceased to be a problem seemed to underpin one young woman's comments. More nearly fitting the limited recipe for what women must look like can offer the reward of feeling good about your looks which might give you the space to then ignore it for a while:

> . . . if recently they have noticed an improvement in their appearance (e.g. lost weight, had a hair cut) which can temporarily boost confidence.

Confidence, a word which the girls used regularly in relation to looks issues (see case-study B, for example), can be interpreted as an approximate opposite of shame, and is the potential outcome of 'getting it right'. Many girls, however, did not recognise that possibility. Roughly half of the girls showed considerable pessimism about the notion of a space outside the need to constantly produce the right appearance. When could they be 'off duty' and forget it?

> 'in bed', 'asleep', 'in the dark', 'when totally wrecked', 'never, truly'.
> I sometimes think if I was the last person on the earth, what would I do, and I don't think I would like myself anymore than I do. [in context here, self meant body]

To pursue this further, the girls were then asked to speculate about what kinds of people seemed to be happy about their looks, who was likely to be miserable and whether they perceived a gender difference. Several of them voiced complete cynicism at the idea of anybody being happy with their looks. They perceived discontent as the normal state of self-perception at that stage in life. For example:

> I think every young person wants to look better, or like someone else. I don't think any young person deep down feels content. Some deal with it better than others.

The notion that all women are damaged by their indissoluble identification with their appearance, considered in various places within this text, is also one understanding voiced by teenagers themselves. However, there was also a recognition that there is some kind of understood standard of looks, an 'ideal' – against which young people are compared and compare themselves, and that approximation to it can offer relative satisfaction, and distance from it can add additional misery. Following the Goffmanesque argument earlier in this chapter, to be satisfied and shame-free is seen as at least a theoretical possibility, because girls can be nearer or further away from the ideal.

For example, one girl suggested:

> I think people who are more like the ideal image are slightly more confident . . . .

and a different interviewee commented that those who are discontent with their appearance are:

> All kinds of young people at some time, but especially those whose appearance doesn't conform to society's ideal.

The specifics in the prescription of 'ideal' and 'undesirable' are clearly well-known to all. There were no secrets about what they have to be to 'pass' or 'fail'. Weight was identified by more than half the interviewees as the make-or-break issue, and the punishment for lack of conformity to the ideal was also highlighted:

> people who are over-weight get picked on a lot

And in the list of unacceptable deviation from the standard, spots, acne, the 'wrong' nose and wearing glasses were specifically named.

Individual psychology, however, was given an important role as the key protective factor from damage in relation to appearance. More than half the girls voiced strong beliefs that if you were confident, happy and secure, and loved and respected by your family and friends, that you would feel good about yourself, including your looks. One young woman suggested that discontented young people are only those who are:

> depressed or lonely people with bad backgrounds, e.g. parents who have split up.

That there is an element of 'wishful thinking' at work here, and the person with all this love and security might be something of a fantasy model, was, however, implied by one respondent speaking of who might be happy about their looks:

> those with a positive self-image – accepted themselves for what they are and surrounded by others who respect them for it. Also those with a really secure and contented family who have bought them up . . . anyone?

The only other important determining factor raised again in relation to which teenagers are happy with their appearance and which not, was seen to be the media.

Unhappy young people, then, were:

> those who have been manipulated by the media to make them feel inferior

whereas taking your ideal from real life was likely to produce much more satisfaction:

> People who based their ideal image on a flexible and realistic image, rather than trying to live up to impossibility, are more happy.

As Chapter 4 considered, there was some awareness that what they are being offered as images of female beauty from a patriarchal, capitalist media, is not achievable. As was suggested the 'manufacture of discontent' may have severe ramifications for women, to whom this creation of impossible desires is mainly aimed. Even though the political context was not recognised, it was understood that if girls do compare themselves with representations of perfection, without recognising them as such, they will inevitably experience the discrepancy as a personal inadequacy. One teenager specifically cited this as 'girl behaviour' which boys did not do:

> girls, I think are more susceptible to models, magazines etc. showing images of perfect women . . . .

The connection between images, perfection and self-criticism was made by approximately one-third of the girls, however, with far more young women looking to individual and/or family determined psychology as

the root of contentment or not: positive self-image, confidence, being outgoing, popularity' were repeated terms. The possible circular relationship between these personality factors and appearance was not explored systematically, although it was noticeable that the two who suggested that being confident and happy people prevented discontentment in relation to appearance also expressed very little discontent with their own looks.

2. 'What is it like for boys?'

The girl's observations on whether boys think about their appearance in the same way as girls, and what the similarities and differences are, produced some complex, contradictory and even humorous responses. The next chapter in this volume considers the current theoretical work on the construction of young masculinity, and whether changes such as the use in advertising of young men as objects of desire, or the obvious rise in marketing designer label sportswear and clothes to boys, have produced body-hatred states in boys similar to those of girls. In this group of girls there was certainly a perception that it was different for boys. Even if there were similar activities it is not seen as such an over-riding aspect of self:

[What about boys, is it the same for them?]

> I think with their friends there is a lot of competition . . . they have to have the right clothes and stuff. . . . I know boys who easily say, yeh, I don't mind the way I look. I can't see them all saying I hate the way I look, they are much more confident, they don't care, they don't think about it.

and

> With clothes, definitely but, I don't know, I think it is around for boys, but I don't think, I don't know, it obviously does hurt them, but I think it is easier for them . . . [my brother] . . . he seems to care what people think about his clothes, but not so much about what he looks like.

A third respondent simply summarised this view as 'lads tend to be very influenced by their friends'.

The perception that boys use clothes and other consumer goods as capital and in group situations, to identify with others, to impress, to compete and to establish position in the group, will be developed,

then, in Chapter 7. There is considerable overlap between the young women's views and that of those youth researchers who have worked intensively with young men. Both, for example, see the importance of gangs and groups in setting norms and as sites of struggle to establish masculinity. Another common theme in relation to 'how is it for boys?' is that of boys being subject to less strict 'rules' about what it is acceptable to look like, a situation which one young woman put down to girl's greater tolerance of imperfection in boys than boys of girls:

> I think in general boys don't have as much pressure on them as girls. Boys tend to be more critical of girls (increasing their insecurities) whereas girls are more prepared to tolerate boys' physical inadequacies, placing more importance on personality. Boys don't have the problem of their figures changing so much and if they do put on weight the effects on their figures are less dramatic. It is seen as less of a problem, though I do think men suffer from insecurities – but they don't get as hooked up on them as girls. Personally, I tend to blame everything that goes wrong on what I hate about my appearance.

Some of the girl's perceptions of boy's concerns about appearance drew parallels with their own worries. Boys were identified as equally:

> self conscious,

with a tendency to worry specifically about:

> . . . their hair, whether or not they have many spots; are they overweight. . . .

And one girl felt that although boys have this similar range of concerns, self-improvement was less of a possibility:

> . . . obviously there is a limit to what [they] can do to alter their appearance which is socially acceptable.

Overall, though, there was a sense that for boys it is not such a continuous all-pervasive and resonant issue. For boys it is more about what they put on and how their mates see them, whereas for girls it was more about their bodies and their looks.

> Boys don't want to look stupid in front of their mates.

Whereas some of the girls gave indications that they experienced these issues very personally, deeply and unhappily, and in that sense give some credibility to the stigma and shame thesis, their perception of boys was that it was less damaging.

3. 'What is it like for you?

How the girls felt specifically about themselves was made explicit in the next question, where they identified sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with their own looks. Most of the answers demonstrated a precise knowledge of every aspect of their appearance; the impression was that they had given the matter much thought. However, in the couple of cases when a dismissive or unconsidered response was offered, the issue was not then pursued in the interview. Given the indications in, for example, Hollway's work that these can be very painful issues for girls (Hollway, 1986); and the potential impact on their sense of self that being stigmatised or feeling shamed or ashamed may inflict, the young women's own judgements about levels of personal or emotional engagement with the issues were respected.

About a quarter of the girls said they were not unhappy with their appearance, though two qualified this with expressing a constant desire to lose weight and a wish to be taller. Those who felt that they were happy about how they looked usually mentioned that personality was more a focus for them. There were few specific features or factors of appearance mentioned as sources of pleasure or even satisfaction, which does tend to support the speculation made earlier in the volume that it may be very hard for girls to extract any pride from their efforts towards 'doing looks'.

When the young women were able to say anything good about themselves it had to be qualified. For example:

> When my nails are neat I like my hands, and my lips, but that is about all. I suppose my stomach is OK and my hair if I make an effort with it.

> When I put make-up on I like my appearance. I like my eyes, when I put make-up on to widen them.

Only one girl could almost make a direct statement of self-praise, and somewhat predictably that hinged on weight:

> I'm lucky with the way I look because I have a fast metabolism and am very slim despite the amount I eat. I can be reasonably pretty when I make the effort, but often look younger than I want to because of my height and size.

Most, however, had lists of criticisms, which were both almost clinically specific and emotionally expressive:

> My skin is awful though I am hopeful it will clear up when I am older. I am bordering on overweight which is particularly noticeable to me as I was very underweight as an early teen. I am quite hairy! My hair is getting frizzier and I am trying to grow it longer but it always looks lank: no volume. But even if all these problems weren't there I'm sure I would still want to change my appearance in another way.

and

> My legs are too short, breasts too small, hair too frizzy, skin too pale (I can't ever tan) my feet are too big (don't you hate the way shoe shops always put the tiny sizes on display and never have pretty shoes in sizes larger than 7?) . . . I'd like to look older and not have gaps between my teeth.

Skin and weight discontents are repeated themes: half the girls wanted to be thinner, a finding in keeping with contemporary statistic on the numbers of young women dieting (British Youth Council, 1999). Glasses were mentioned by those who wear them. Overall, looks were seen as more a source of misery than happiness:

> there is always something to be unhappy about.

The girls were given the opportunity to comment on any other issues to do with appearance, but few took the opportunity to add anything new at this stage of the interviews. However, two girls attempted to sum-up their views, which are quoted here in full:

> It's a horrible time because you are experiencing all sorts of changes physically as well as mentally. The extra pressure to look perfect can obsess teenagers and the attempts to look better can get blown out of all proportion – we can't see that we won't look this way for

> ever – everyone's still changing. I think people will always be critical of themselves but it may help if less importance was placed on appearance in the media.
>
> I think young people have a lot of images and stories around them all the time. I also think fashion is changing all the time and young people are always pushed towards keeping up with the times, which costs a lot of money. Some young people are more influenced than others because they want to be like others. I always feel sorry for people who try and change themselves to look like others.

Fashion, the media and money, friends, identification, obsession, attempting perfection and self-criticism, then, were picked out as key issues, and quite specifically contextualised by age and life-stage. The young women clearly do see the issue of appearances as having particular dimensions, particularly considerable potency, because of youth itself. And as quotes above have suggested, they feel that it is harder to negotiate the present, than what is to come. Are there *any* young women who are happy with their looks?:

> Well if there is I don't know them!.

Moving closer to girls: two case-studies

To try to take some of the themes suggested by the young women interviewed above further, and to get closer to their personal, subjective experience, protracted interviews were undertaken with two of them to produce case-study material. What follows is the product of two recorded thematic interviews, one with an 18-year-old from the local comprehensive school, and the other with a 16-year-old from the adolescent psychiatric unit. In them they discuss their feelings in relation to their appearance, and the impact this has had on how they can be as people.

Their primary understanding of what has caused them to feel bad about themselves is very different: 'A' sees her difficulties with looks mediated in terms of herself and her family, whereas 'B' sees school and groups within that environment as the most important factor. However, that they have been changed by their experience of their looks, and not just changed but damaged, is a common theme in both. The case material is presented here with little additional analysis, although some of the questions and prompts have been included. This

section is intended primarily, though, to allow the young women speak for themselves.

Case-study 'A' (school context): 'A sense of disappointment, inside'

[When I met you before you told me that you were not very happy about yourself – can you tell me the history of that – when it started, that kind of thing.]

I think early puberty is when it starts, you look at everyone else and everyone is changing at different rates, some girls are wearing their bras and some are flat chested, it's just a really horrible state, the last year of primary school.

Then you go to senior school, and that is a difficult time. I had to go out of the area and I only knew about two people when I started.

You fit in after a while, but . . . .

Appearance wise it is, um, all the changes you make are quite difficult. But what first happened, what really has made most difference, is my skin. I wouldn't say I have ever had full blown acne, but I have always had, like a steady flow of spots, I suppose, but, um, that is what makes you feel the worst.

It always feels so unfair that some people get it and some don't. You always feel, like, what have I done to deserve this?

. . . If that was the only thing I felt was wrong, I could cope with that, but when I was 16 my parents split up, and I think, I don't know really how I've dealt with that. I haven't spoke to my Mum since then, and I don't know, . . . my Dad always says he doesn't think that helps with my self-image.

Since then I have been a lot less confident, and over the last few years I have started to comfort eat a lot, so I have put on weight. When I look at old pictures of myself I can't believe how thin I was, Well I don't think I'm over-weight really, I'm not actually over-weight, but I have put on a lot more, and I think that is because of comfort eating, and I think it is a result of changes in your body and how you go through it: it's difficult, it isn't really in your control.

[Is that a problem in itself, that it's not in your control?]

Yeh, I think that is what they say about anorexia, girls trying to control what happens because they can't control anything else in their lives.

[Is it like that for you, you can't control your skin, or your weight?]

Yes, and that doesn't make you feel good about yourself. You can try and think 'I'll grow out of that, it won't still happen', like I can remember when I was 15 I could think, 'oh, by the time I'm 18 I won't have this anymore.' Well, now I'm 18 and I still have, and now I'm thinking, well, by the time I'm 21, you know. . . .

[But you don't really have skin problems now?]

Yeh, it has got better. I think it is a bit scarred. When I stop getting spots you can have like pills and stuff to get rid of scarring, so I think it will be fine, but at the moment it really gets you down, and overwhelms you.

Like when I was 15, like I remember my best friend never used to clean her face at all. I don't mean she was dirty, she like showered, but she never took her make-up off before she went to bed, never cleansed or anything, and there would be, like me, scrubbing my face, and using face masks, and she never got a single spot, whereas me! That's what I mean it seemed so unfair, what had I done to deserve this?

I think sometimes your state of mind really effects how you see yourself, like sometimes I will say something really bad about myself and someone will say, like, don't be silly, it is just, like, all in your head, I don't know, sometimes I think, if only . . . , I wish it was . . . I don't know, it's really strange, you tend to get things out of perspective, sometimes like, you tend to look at all your shortcomings and blame everything on how you look. I always criticise myself, and think, oh I wish I was that person, or I wish I was this person, it's ridiculous. . . .

[What kind of people do you wish you were?]

I don't know, like really attractive people, it's so superficial when you think about it. I see somebody like in the media and I think, oh I wish I looked like her, but you don't know, like they could be a really nasty person, but you don't care. It is really silly when you think about it.

[But how do your age group judge girls?]

I know girls in my year who I think are really attractive and my friend doesn't, so, I don't know.

When I look at my friends I don't look at what they look like I see them as people, and I don't understand why I can't see myself like that, you know. It's a bit strange, I am sure they see me as a person, not just as how I look, but myself, I can only see myself as what I look like.

[When people meet for the first time how do they judge each other?]

People do tend to be, well, they see somebody who looks nice and they think, oh, they must be a nice person, because they look attractive, people can be very prejudiced, like, oh, he's ugly, I bet he can't be a very nice person, which is usually quite far from the truth, and um, people tend to be biased towards what people look like, they make a judgement . . . .

[Are you talking about real prejudice, not dissimilar to how something like racism works? If you are not pretty you may be treated as a lesser person? Do people take on that view themselves, do you think?]

It has a lot to do with the media, they force this impression on people, especially teenagers, who are at a very impressionable age, and you kind of absorb what everybody presents you. When there are all these pictures of these stunning couples on magazines, like you know, David Beckham and Posh Spice, who are, like, rich, pretty, and seem like they are really happy people, well we don't know what they are like in themselves, they just give off this image of being perfect people, and like you think, oh I really want to be them.

[So what does it make you think, inside?]

I did used to think, myself, like if I don't look like. . . . I don't feel valuable as a person, which is really sad. I'm not as insecure as I used to be, gradually you learn to accept yourself. I am not happy with myself, but perhaps I am coming to realise that appearances are not as important as I used to think.

[If you are judged on your appearance, does it make you behave differently?]

Yeh, I think so, I was always very quiet, I was never an extrovert or anything; I didn't want to be the sort of person who was so quiet that people thought that I had nothing to say for myself, but I didn't want to be obtrusive, I didn't want to draw attention to myself. I wanted to blend in, so people know who you are, but . . . .

Quiet people stick out because they are so quiet, I just wanted to fit in and not be noticed.

[So then do you think it has made a difference to your character at all?]

I think it has made me . . . maybe in a few years I can look back and say it made me stronger, but I don't know . . . it feels like a kind of weakness.

If somebody were to say to me, like you are really unattractive, I could get really unhappy about it, like it is something that is always there, just under the surface, it makes me vulnerable, it is something that is always at the back of my mind. . . .

People make assumptions about the way you look, the sort of image you portray.

I feel like it is always something I worry about, that people can hurt me with, like if someone was to . . . well it doesn't happen now, people aren't immature enough to call you ugly, but that could have happened, I think to most people it has happened in their life, but if I thought that could happen now, I would be really upset.

I think if you have an experience like that [being called ugly] it is something you will never forget, and it is always there: that somebody is going to say something like that to you, and it is, it is just so humiliating.

[You mentioned earlier that you think the media has got a lot to do with it, what else do you think keeps the bad feelings going, and what protects you from them?]

Sometimes boys make it worse, I think. You look at couples and think, oh they look really happy. I can remember, like I will go for months liking someone, and then you finally go out with them, and it is just not how you expect it, you think, oh I'll be happy, and then you are not. I think before you can be comfortable with someone you have to be comfortable with yourself. But it can boost your self esteem.

I can remember when I was about 15, I went out with someone, and then I liked him for about two and a half years after that, and that was as low as my confidence has ever been. It didn't work out, he didn't show any interest in me after I had gone out with him. I thought if I could get him back, and he just wasn't interested, and that made me feel really low, because that made me feel, I don't know, bad about my looks. But having liked him for such a long time, it was no fault of mine that he didn't like me back, but because he never responded that was what made me feel bad. Maybe if I had liked other people. . . .

[Have you ever tried to change your appearance?]

Yes, several times. My biggest, um, habit, because of my skin, is, I wouldn't leave the house without make-up, I don't think people have ever seen me without make-up, not for ages, only when my skin gets as clear as it gets, and then it is just slouching round the house that I don't wear make-up. And I have been like that for a good few years now.

[When did you start doing that, then?]

When I was about 14, and ever since, then it makes me feel much more confident. I don't know, it could make me look worse but it makes me feel better. I used to be a lot worse, like concealer everywhere, but make-up looks better when you've got clear skin. I was neurotic about it, definitely. I would go into the loos every break time, put some more make-up on.

[You referred earlier to scrubbing your face . . . ?]

Yeh, I'm sure it made it worse, but it seemed logical at the time – if your skin is clean then you won't get spots. I have been to the doctors lots of times, which is sort of frustrating, but he can't send me to a dermatologist, because it is not bad enough.

I have tried loads of prescription things and it is really disappointing when you have tried, and nothing seems to do the job. When I went back a couple of months ago he said: 'well, you have tried everything I can offer you now . . . ', that is frustrating,

And I diet a lot. I have always had a large appetite. I think it started when I was about 11. We used to go out for family meals and I would

always order adult portions, just to impress my Dad and Granddad, who used to like egg me on, they used to think it was really funny. I used to eat to get their attention, and over the years when I get depressed I eat, and when I get bored I eat, so, like I joined Slimming World for a while.

I am ten and a half stone, which is not exactly overweight for my height, 5 feet 6 inches. No, not overweight, but I could have done with losing two stone, or one and a half stone, and I would have been happy, although God knows when I would have got down to that. I never stick at it long enough.

I used to do a lot of cycling, like to work but now Dad takes me down, to be honest I am too busy, I never have time. Since new year I have been saying, oh, I will do this and do that: it is on my new year resolution list. . . .

[So the main thing you have been worried about are your skin and weight. Do you think you have ever become obsessional about this?]

Definitely, about both of them, really. I think about it so much, I know it is unhealthy but I can't help it.

Every time I wake up in the morning I think about my skin. I go to the bathroom and put my make-up on, like I have done every-day for the last few years, and I think about, well, that one has nearly gone, oh, there's another one. Then I think about my skin constantly through the day, not when I am busy, but like when I am at home it constantly niggles at me.

And my weight, is something that like is always there, like it doesn't vary. With your skin you have like good days, but your weight is always the same. In some clothes you think, I look really tubby in this, and then in other things you feel more confident. When you are going out with your friends, you think, oh, skimpy things: stay away from that.

[You were saying you think your weight a lot, and like your skin, you think about it an awful lot, yeh, what do you think?]

I don't know, um, you just think, you get a sort of sinking feeling. You don't think exactly, oh my skin's bad, I don't know, I hadn't thought of that. It is like a sense of disappointment, inside, unhappiness, you know, specially my skin; with my weight it is like oh, I've got to do something about it; I've got to go to the gym, or I've got to

stop eating this or that, and then it is a disappointment with yourself that you haven't stuck with it, and I think, if I were thin I would be like this or . . . I think I would be a bit more confident, but maybe I would just think more about my skin.

I think it is unhealthy to be like this. One of my friends is quite overweight, she is a big girl, but she is really confident, she just doesn't seem to care, and I wish I could be like that, really. But on some days when my skin is a bit more clear, and I don't feel so big, then I think, oh the future is bright: if I can just knock off a few more pounds, and keep my skin clear, then, you know. . . .

[Is that what for you makes it feel like the future is bright or hell – whether the frock fits and the skin's OK?]

Yeh, yeh definitely, if my skin and weight were OK I feel life would be much better.

That is . . . once I went to the doctors and I mentioned how much it controls everything, and it does, it really does. If my skin is bad I won't leave the house, and if I really have to I will spend three-quarters of an hour putting my make-up on, and I won't like look at anyone, won't look anyone in the face, it is really ridiculous, but it seems rational at the time. I asked if there were like, anti-depressants, but he said there were only really powerful ones, and he wouldn't give them to me.

[The body-hatred thesis is explained and her comments are solicited.]

Yeh, it's true. There are times when I look in the mirror and I am really pleased I am short-sighted, I can, like, get in the shower and not see myself at all.

Case-study 'B' (psychiatric context): 'The sad group and the cool group'

[Earlier you said you were not very happy about your appearance – what is the history of that?]

I was all right as a child. It was only from when I got turned into a teenager. I was fine as a child living in the countryside; it didn't matter at all, not until I was about 13, then it started to matter. There is a lot of bullying, and you know if you get bullied that you have to 'up' your standard a bit so that you don't get bullied. 'Cause that is

what they pick on, appearances and things, just anything they can find, so you try to make yourself look good, so that you don't get picked on as much.

Some girls do loads of stuff to their hair, and wear loads of make-up, so they don't get picked on, me and my friends just try and make ourselves look OK, don't bother with make-up.

When I first went to my new school they didn't know me well enough to pick on me, I started in year seven, and up until half way through, it was OK, then half way through year seven to year ten it was, 'four-eyes', and 'goggles', and things like that, but after a while you try to learn to ignore it. It does dent your confidence a lot, I thought about contact lenses loads, but I don't know. . . . You have to be really strong, and get support, and think, well, it is them being stupid, not you, it isn't your fault you wear glasses.

[So you managed to do puberty without any problems?]

It has come a lot later, more than it did when I was 13 or 14. I was quite thin when I was younger, and so just putting on a bit of weight has made me think, oh I don't like that at all, because I was always thin. Putting on a little bit of weight has made me really self-conscious. If I had been a little bit chubby when I was younger, it I would feel OK now, but I've always been thin, and I don't like it.

[What are the other issues now?]

My weight, um, my grin, my teeth, my hair as well, but if it has been cut well I like it. It is when you do something to yourself, to change it that you get confidence, unless it is something really stupid. You look at what other people have got, like the cool people, and think, oh so it's OK to get your hair cut like that.

[But when you were younger, the group thing at school was important?]

If you have got a lot of self-confidence it doesn't matter, you can just shrug it off, but if you haven't you get more and more bullied, so your self-confidence gets dented, so you have to do something about it, that is why a lot of girls wear make-up, so they don't get picked on, so if they look, kind of, spotty, or tired they hide it, it is like a mask, they hide behind it.

[Who does the bullying?]

Usually the boys start it off, then the girls, if they think they have a lot of confidence and are pretty themselves, they will start picking on other people, saying, oh, she's really ugly, or she's really spotty, but the boys start it off, yeh, it is hard to explain. It is definitely a lot to do with peer-pressure, also keeping up to date with your friends. If they look really good and you are in with that group, then you have got to as well, like if they all wear make-up, if you don't you start, like, getting pushed out.

[So it makes the connection – 'I'm like you?']

Yeh, it definitely decides different gangs, and it is weird how you become the sad group and the cool group, it is all about the latest fashion. My group at school, like I was in the sad group really, well not in my eyes, because I knew everyone, I didn't think I was sad, but I didn't wear the trendy clothes, or make-up, but I don't think you have to be, that is not cool at all.

Sometimes you become the cool group yourself, and you start to think, oh, they're really sad and stupid because her trousers are turned up, or her jumper is too short, and after a while you begin to become the enemy, because it has happened to you, you start to turn it around and do it on other people.

[You take them in, the judgements, and use it on other people?]

Yeh, that's right.

[You've said about groups and bullying, but what other things effect how you see your looks: what about the media?]

When I look through a magazine like 'Sugar', or 'Bliss', or any teenage magazines, and I see all these models posing in bikinis on the beach, it doesn't get me down.

But it doesn't help a lot of people, I mean, but being anorexic is not about trying to be a super-model, it is just about trying to be thin and not liking yourself, but it isn't trying to be like Kate Moss; it is for some people, but not others. I think some people think these days it is, anorexia is about trying to be a super-model, but it isn't, it is because of what has happened to them in the

past, and they don't like it and they've turned it into a form of self-harm.

[Anything else?]

One of my friends is very self-conscious about her weight, and because she was, someone else became it, and because *she* was, someone else became it, because if one person wants to be thin then everybody else thinks, oh, I want to be thin too.

[So this is another group effect?]

Yeh

[And boyfriends, does that have an impact?]

It depends on how close you are. With a boy friend [stress on friend] I've got I don't care what I look like, I do complain to him about it and pat my stomach and say I am really fat, but he doesn't care, it doesn't bother him. Boys do like girls with curves, not skinny rakes.

[Is that your experience of school, boys like girls with curves?]

Yeh, and with good chests.

[And your family, do they make any difference to how you feel about your looks?]

Um, it depends on what happens. My Mum's not around any more, and from what I have heard, at one point she was really skinny and really pretty, and I want to be like that, like her, but at one point she was really over-weight as well, and my sisters are more like my dad, they are larger than me, and they complain about their weight but it doesn't really bother them. They call each other fat, but they don't try to do anything about it, they are happy about it.

[Do people treat you differently because of how you look?]

Yeh, like the boys do, but the girls don't. Like if someone says to you, do I look fat, then you say no, no you don't look fat, even if they do, because you don't want to hurt their feelings.

But at parties and stuff, when you meet someone you look them up and down, and make a decision about them.

[What do they think about you?]

It depends what I am wearing. I hope they think I am just a normal person; I try and live up to how they see me.

[But getting all this negative stuff you were talking about earlier – not feeling pretty enough or cool enough – what did it make you feel like?]

To begin with it made me feel awful, I didn't want to go to school, but after a while, listening to what my Mum said: 'it's not you it is them making themselves feel better', and hearing all that did make me feel a bit better. It is getting older as well, but it made me really self-conscious. Like for a while I was really worried about wearing glasses, but then I got over it.

[So you had a bad bit and then got over it?]

Yeh, but it still . . . it has made me different, it has made me what I am now. From school, if I had met different people I would be different now. If I had gone to private school, now I wouldn't be so unhappy and wouldn't worry so much about looks, but because I went to a state school, and was picked on a lot, then it sunk in. It has hit me, and I do think a lot about my appearance. I have to check it the whole time.

[Are you linking being here to being bullied about your appearance?]

A bit.

[Did all that make you act differently?]

I used to buy the clothes that the others wore. I was quite posh, and had gone from a private school to a state school, and people used to say, oh, you speak poshly, and that changed, I had to try and speak differently. But at my private school I was the leader of the group, people would come and ask my advice and stuff, but when I went to state school I was bullied a lot, because I wasn't five foot eight, and

blond, and I wore glasses. And if you don't stand up for yourself it makes it worse.

[So was your position in the group, if you are a girl, based on being the right shape and size, and 'pretty?']

Yeh, yeh it is

[Do you still get depressed about your appearance?]

Yeh, after every meal I have to check my appearance and I have to carry these (teddy-bear type cushions) for hiding and security. Food still makes me depressed, because of my weight and because I don't like eating, I don't like feeling full up. I do worry about it now; I never used to do what I do about my weight, now, the bulimic thing.

[Have you ever tried to change your appearance?]

I had my hair cut really short; when I go out I wear make-up, bought trendy clothes, had my eyebrow pierced, to look harder, and I've been on diets. And I have been, just bingeing, and you know... which was about me having something to control, not really about weight. I used to exercise.

I used to live in a hostel which was brilliant, because it was all under my control. I had an exercise plan; I would have an apple or apple salad, then do fifty sit-ups, but it only lasted 3 days: I couldn't keep it up, oh and I did stretches, and it didn't last very long, so I couldn't have been that obsessed. You have to be so strict with yourself.

You know when you are starting to get unhappy because you don't eat at all, and it is really easy not to eat, then you know there is a problem.

It felt amazing last time, it felt really good, because I didn't eat for a week: it felt amazing, because I could just do it without wanting food, it was amazing.

Yeh, just before Christmas, and just after Christmas it was brilliant, I didn't eat, I just loved it, brilliant, there were loads of chocolates around, but I was just coming out of it, and then I started eating, it was really annoying, I hate it, it is really annoying: I really wish I was depressed again so I couldn't eat. You have to be really strict with yourself to not eat to get back down again.

[Do you mind that you can't do it?]

Yeh, 'cause I would love to be slim. I am 5ft 5 inches, and my ideal weight is 45 kilograms, eight and a half stone.

[Is that very different from what you are now?]

About a stone difference.

[Is nine and a half stone within a range of normal weight?]

No, it is overweight. I want to get down to 45 kilos and keep it there, but as soon as I start eating normally then it goes straight back up.

[How much do you think about your weight?]

A lot, it just goes through your mind.

[When you wake up?]

Yeh, 'cause breakfast is first thing, I wonder if I should eat breakfast today, or not. A lot of it is about how you feel, like when you stand up do you feel heavy, or do you not feel heavy. If I don't feel heavy I might eat something, or if I feel hungry.

[So your relationship to your weight is quite important on a day-to-day basis?]

Yeh, I do think about it a lot, and it makes me depressed, and it won't go away.

[Do you believe it would go away if you were eight and a half stone?]

No, I think I would keep on going down, it's not a worry, but it would probably happen, it is what happens to other people, they think I will go down to that weight, oh, I'll lose a little bit more, and a little bit more, then they are three and a half stone.

It wouldn't change much if I did lose weight. It wouldn't make you feel better, you just feel ill. If you are underweight, you wouldn't

> look better, just skinny – not nice. I've been thin twice now, and it didn't make me feel better at all, just skinny.

[The body-hatred thesis is explained and her comments solicited.]

> Yeh, yeh, it is really painful and can cause a lot of problems in the future. I have ended up here, and I really don't know why I have ended up here, I really don't know, because there is no reason why I should be here. There is nothing in my background, and the only thing wrong was what happened at school, and so that must be why I am in a psychiatric ward, really depressed.

[Do you mean the bit about school you were talking about earlier, about being bullied because you were not pretty enough to fit in with the cool group?]

> Yeh all that is definitely hurtful and if it doesn't hurt you at the time it is probably going to hurt you even more in the future, you can become really depressed, and then become really anorexic.

Summary

This chapter has been concerned to try and understand body-hatred from, as it were, the inside. First a theoretical framework was established, which can both offer a sociological understanding of the interactive process which can generate identify damage as a product of appearance phenomena ('stigma'), and can also explicate the subjective, emotional response ('shame') experienced by those who are stigmatised in this process. Tseelon's particular feminist social constructionist reading of Goffman was discussed, but a more 'traditional' interpretation which retains 'normal' and 'deviant' as oppositions has been retained for this discussion. How girls differentially experience stigma and shame in relation to their distance from some real or imagined ideally 'beautiful' girl comes out clearly in the case-studies and interview/questionnaire material.

The primary purpose of the chapter, though, for which the theory is intended to be only an analytical tool, is to reflect on how young women themselves understand their relationship with their bodies and their looks. The text presents in their own words what they are actually saying about their appearances, both individually and as a generation. In the 'conversations' section, elements of their discourse which have

a resonance with the arguments in earlier chapters of the book have been highlighted, and discussion has been used to reinforce, for example, the importance that friends, the media, and school can play in the pressure girls come under to 'do looks'.

In the case-studies, the girls have been left to speak almost entirely for themselves. They, far better than any theoretical text, powerfully illustrate the kinds and levels of damage – real body-hatred in practice – generated by feeling that their bodies and faces are not good enough. The reader is left to make their own connections.

7
Young Men and Body-Hatred

The theme of this chapter is the extent to which the arguments advanced in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 can also be applied to young men. That young men may be experiencing some kind of ontological difficulties in this early part of the century in capitalist societies has certainly been the subject of much popular and academic debate (Kidlon and Thomas, 1999; Biddulph, 1997, 1999). High levels of suicide in young men (Department of Health, 1999), high usage of illicit drugs and 'heavy' drinking (British Youth Council, 1999), and underachieving at school (Phillips, 1993) are taken as signs of a general 'problem' in young men, though of course the problematisation of adolescence in itself is hardly a new phenomenon (see Chapter 3). That all young people 'have to negotiate a set of risks largely unknown to their parents . . . irrespective of social background or gender . . . [leading to] stress and vulnerability' (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997) represents a very generally held belief about contemporary youth.

In keeping with the overall project of this text, this chapter will attempt to explore both the social construction of 'young man', and the likely subjectivities that this demarcates. How they are likely to experience themselves at this stage in their lives is fundamental to the enquiry. Gender, of course, is by no means a homogenous category, as Chapter 2 and a range of contemporary texts have explored (Butler, 1990; Weedon, 1987).

How gender in itself is socially constructed and differentially experienced is too broad an issue to examine here. This discussion is concerned with the sets of meanings circulating in relation to what it is to be a young man which for the purpose of this study, means from between roughly the ages of 14 years and 18 years.

The kinds of questions the chapter raises within this area, then, are: what does society prescribe in terms of ways of being? What sets of expectations define the limits and possibilities of masculine youth and do they cause the same kind of potential dissonance and discomfort that earlier chapters argued is the inevitable experience for girls?

Boys as consumers

As Chapter 2 and Chapter 4 both explored in different ways, the link between late consumer capitalism, the visual, and the tendency to elide notions of 'image' with those of 'identity', could be argued as of considerable social significance in the relatively rich Western countries. As Frosh notes: '. . . it is the *image* which is the most vibrant metaphor for modern reality' (Frosh, 1991, p. 31, his italics). And a metaphor, if indeed it can accurately be thus described, which has a profound impact on how populations look, what they see and their sense of constantly being seen: of being, themselves, an image for consumption.

As social theorists such as Giddens (1991) and Featherstone (1991) have convincingly argued, consumer capitalist ideology necessitates the subjective valorisation of the self-determining individual whose body and mind is an ongoing project of invention and reinvention, utilising market products and self-control to produce an image of everlasting youth, fitness and beauty. Young boys are as enmeshed in this meaning system as young girls, or any other social grouping.

Revisiting the arguments of Chapter 4, it was suggested that the whole notion of 'teenagers' and 'youth cultures' has strong links with the definition of a new and affluent market for goods, mainly post-second world war. Boys, though, not designated in the way girls were as incorporating 'shopper' into their gendered personalities, were earning sufficiently in a context of leaving school at 15 years, being employed but mainly living cheaply at home, to represent a market worth cultivating. Feeding an already established masculine ideology: the idea of the importance of male groupings (for example, regiments in the armed forces, 'houses' at public schools, criminal and semi-criminal gangs, teams in various sports and identifiable supporters' groups) the move towards consumer symbols of specific group identity meshed seamlessly. Certain kinds of clothes, certain kinds of music and the means for playing it and watching it live, certain forms of transport (for example, 'mod' scooters and 'rocker' motor bikes), all formed part of the creation and sustaining of group affiliation. This happened both in formal, visible ways in the high profile subcultural

movements given attention in the media and in the sociology of deviancy (Cohen, 1972; Blackman, 1995), but also in terms of a more mainstream cultural identification with the group referred to as 'mates'.

It is a commercial form of identification and 'bonding' that has not only survived but escalated. As a 14-year-old boy in Askew and Ross's study elaborates:

> In school most people are concerned with their image – most boys are expected to conform, to dress the same. . . . Anything extraordinary or unusual that you do is taken as something from another planet. . . . It's follow the leader . . . there's a lot of pressure on kids to be fashionable. It has to be a certain style. You can only dress casually or trendy or punk if you are part of these groups. (Askew and Ross, 1988, p. 16)

Whether it is conforming to the general notion of acceptability or an easily identifiable subcultural variant, careful and precise image-construction, via clothes, but also music, and social habits, is essential.

And yet, even though this process has been clearly visible since the 1950s, it seems to be relatively recently that the links between what many boys do to achieve these images, and what many girls do to achieve their various styles or images, have been recognised as similar. Shopping, self-display, deliberate cultivation of appearance – and the mostly unsubstantiated concerns (see Chapter 1) that boys are suffering from the excesses of such 'narcissism', such as eating disorders – have only relatively recently found their way into theoretical texts on masculinity. Willis' lads hanging around on street corners were not seen to shop (Willis, 1977), but recently Langham makes the point that not only do boys take part in the whole experience of 'shopping for subjectivities', but that the role in identification is more complicated than just buying the badges of affiliation to certain groups:

> Malls allow not only incorporation into the worlds of consumption based life styles and identities [but also] allow a degree of contestation, reinterpretation and often mobilisation, if not in fact in fantasy. For many youths, the school has become the world of submission to boring routine, the mall offers empowerment. . . . (Langman, 1992, p. 60)

A wider range of meanings may be available, then, than just passive consumerism. The context of shopping may allow for a sense of choice, action and agency. It may also be true that although boys and girls engage with consumer culture to directly acquire tools with which to construct an image, they also engage in social inter-relations around the sites – shopping centres or malls – of consumption.

The social meanings of these activities can simultaneously speak of gender similarity and of difference. As Langman acknowledges, going to the mall can involve girls in pre-production 'make-up and costume selection', whereas 'males practice walks, looks and hair styles of various ranks of cool in hopes of 'scoring' – one of the primary means by which adolescent boys gain self-esteem' (Langman, 1992, p. 59).

Boys, like girls, are at the shops, creating images, identifying with their friends, but the question of whether this is experienced in the same way will be of significance to the overall issue of whether this reinforces some sense of bodily inadequacy or discomfort.

In terms, for example, of the likely sense of inadequacy fostered, particularly at this group-oriented age, by the inability to participate in such a ubiquitous and pervasive feature of teenage life, then class, or more accurately poverty, may be the determining factor. Poverty in a time of consumption may render such damage as social isolation and alienation to many young people. As Jones and Wallace comment:

> During youth, access to consumer markets brings for some the possibility of new forms of freedom, independence and choice. . . . However, conversely, young people's choices in the market place, their power as consumers, are structured by their financial means. Their power is reduced when their income falls. (Jones and Wallace, 1992, p. 117)

However, this may not necessarily translate into the same kind or degree of self-esteem damage to all young men and young women, when young femininity and masculinity may have a variety of other constructions. The depth of importance of 'doing looks', as a crucial feature of personhood, may not be the same. Dinnerstein and Weitz, for example, suggest of the admonition to be slim and fit, that: 'this new ethic has had greater repercussions for women than for men, for appearance has formed a more central aspect of how women evaluate themselves and are evaluated by others' (Dinnerstein and Weitz, 1998). This debate will be returned to.

Young men and images

As Chapter 4 explored, the relations between consumer culture, 'image' and the body are complicated and multi-dimensional, and the financial inability to join in with consumption is only one dimension of difficulty. A crucial tenet of feminine subjectivity considered is the set of meanings which position woman as 'the object of the gaze'. Her position as visual object, appraised on her external physical qualities (her 'beauty'), connects to consumer capitalism via, for example, the use of the female body in advertising and the media. Women's bodies, it can be argued, are not just the target of a multi-billion pound collection of cosmetics, clothes and dieting industries' direct advertising (Chapkis, 1986). The female body, as a signifier of youth/sex/beauty/ownership – a whole loose range of meanings – becomes a focus of the actual state of desire in itself (Bordo, 1995).

Women's idealised bodies are objectified and inscribed with sets of meanings removed from any version of the identity of actual women. The image is to both represent and stimulate 'desire'. This is a version of subjectivity which young women invariably must internalise.

However, that this objectification continues to be gender specific cannot necessarily be taken for granted. That boys have also been subject to the objectification of their bodies in the last decade or so has been argued. Mort, for example, notes that:

> The rise and rise of marketing aimed at young men is part and parcel of the current enterprise boom in the service sector and the media industries. But what is going on here is more subtle than media hype and the profit motive. Young men are being sold images which rupture traditional icons of masculinity. They are stimulated to look at themselves – and other men – as objects of consumer desire. (Mort, 1988, p. 194)

Desire, in both its amorphous sense of something like 'a general longing' and perhaps, or indistinguishably, in the sexual sense, is being attached to the male body as it is the female body. Rutherford points to a parallel situation:

> Pictures of young, male models are portrayed in passive 'feminised' poses, exposed to the camera. The heterosexual male reader is confronted with a challenge, the new object of his gaze is another man. We are invited to take pleasure from these male bodies and the

> clothes they wear. There is a sensuality about the images which until now has been completely absent from publications for heterosexual men. (Rutherford, 1988, p. 38)

Young men, then, as well as young women, are learning to appraise themselves and others on their image; to sexually objectify and be sexually objectified. Whereas Mort describes this process as 'getting pleasures previously branded taboo or feminine', the 'pleasures' of sexual objectification are rarely noted by feminist commentators. This differential perception, which may link to the relative novelty of this situation for young men, or perhaps to the differential sense of compulsion, will be returned to. But that some level of objectification may now be the lived experience of young people, both male and female, in consumer capitalist societies would seem to be the case.

Boys as actual consumers, as opposed to simply style producers, have become increasingly the focus of academic study, a strand of an overall theme referred to as the 'feminisation', or indeed homogenisation, of teenage culture. Changes seem to have occurred in relation to the production of an objectified body, the actual time and energy, and the acceptability, for boys across classes and some cultures (see below) in the West to 'do looks'.

Mac an Ghaill, for example, notes from his research on young men:

> during the last decade there appears to have emerged what might be called the 'feminisation of male youth culture,' with hair, skin and clothes becoming male focal concerns on a much larger scale, which includes younger age groups. (Mac an Ghaill, 1994, p. 107)

He goes on to identify age, not gender, as the crucial demarcater in relation to the importance of appearance, finding an older generation of male teachers and fathers who 'found the imputed forms of femininity, which they ascribed to the young men's behaviours, highly problematic (ibid., p. 17). The boys themselves entirely rejected the notion that they were being girl-like, and saw the issue as both generational and male (ibid.).

Applying such an analysis, then, as the 'feminisation' of youth culture seems to ignore the meanings ascribed by these boys themselves, indeed to some extent re-writes the experience of that culture for the participants. As the chapter considers later, the suggestion that aspects of masculinity are in any way 'feminine' is understood as a highly derogatory ascription, for the purposes of inter-generational policing of

'appropriate masculinity'. In this adult criticism of the time they spent on their appearance, though, the control element was recognised by the boys as such, and resisted.

If young men are clear that they are not emulating young women, but they do set store by looking good, they are object and subject of some degree of objectification, and they do 'shop for subjectivities', what *does* 'doing appearance' mean to boys, and is it different from girls? Previous chapters have argued that the identification of girls with an objectified and idealised physical version of self causes a profound subjective dissonance and discomfort, and yet, if statistics on the extreme versions of body disorders can be taken as indicative (Chapter 1), this seems not to be the case for boys.

The differential extent to which women and men are identified primarily with their actual bodies may be part of the key. It has been suggested, in earlier chapters, that the intrinsic meaning of 'female', young and old, in this society is linked to the female body across multiple dimensions, in which philosophy, morality, science, medicine, the law and the family all reinforce that woman *is* her body, and at the same time this dyad is denigrated. The feminine is linked to the inferiorised, 'other': the body of the mind/body dualism itself. Boys may have a whole range of different subject positions to counteract the potential damage of recent physical objectification. Boys are not *just* their bodies, or not even first and foremost their bodies. Masculinity is constructed to offer a more fluid, flexible range of ways of being, from which healthier and more confident subjectivities can be constructed. They are the rational, privileged subject of the mind/body duality.

Boys and the masculine body

Inevitably, the recent work in gender studies which problematises 'the masculine' will question some established academic feminist orthodoxy, and in relation to this particular text, this seems to be the case. The assumption, immediately above, that it is specifically women for whom the body is 'inescapable', seems to be just such an argument being challenged. For: 'True masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men's bodies – to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body' (Connell, 1995, p. 45).

In terms of the inseparable dimensions of how masculinity is perceived and how it is experienced, the body and 'the man' are imbricated: 'body experience is often central in memories of our own

lives, and thus in our understanding of who and what we are', Connell goes on to argue (ibid., p. 53).

The expression of other important themes in the construction of masculinity, for example, competition, aggressiveness, bravery, independence and leadership, are frequently inseparable from the notion of physical strength and prowess, hence the historically enduring symbols epitomising masculinity: warriors, sportsmen, explorers and all-purpose heroes.

Terminology such as 'weakling', 'weed', 'nerd', 'geek' – a whole range of powerful insults alluding to lack of physical strength – is as revealing of underlying anxieties, fears and projections as the range of insults saved for women which focus on their sexuality – such as 'slag', 'tart' and 'bitch'.

Class, labour and the masculine body

Clearly, there are class and cultural variations as to who is expected, and how they are expected, to illustrate physical strength, but invariably its opposite, physical weakness, is an attribute imputed to only the most despised groups of men. Whether in fiction and folk-tales, in media narratives and the stories circulated by everyday interactions, it is invariably linked to another imperative of normative masculinity – the ability to attract the most prestigious women. It is usually James Bond, Tarzan, Joe DeMaggio or David Beckham who gets the girl, not usually the thinker or writer or artist, for example, unless their masculinity is assured at the very least by being daring and risky in their sporting habits or substance consumption.

The physical labour of traditional working-class male employment and the emulation thereof; the ability to fight individually and in gangs; the combat of some elements of warfare and all kinds of sporting prowess, form the basic elements of this *physical* masculinity on which the concept of male identity may be built.

Hollands, looking at young people and youth training schemes, found that for working-class young men, the connection between hard physical work as demonstrative of strength, and confident masculine identity was still potent, even in an age when the kinds of jobs in which this prowess is required has dwindled. He talks of one 'trainee', whose: 'definition of a good job was hard physical labour, reasonable wages and having "a laff" with the lads', and goes on to comment that 'part of his assuredness came from his assertion into the more developed male working-class cultural forms utilised in school, which effectively inverts

the mental-manual distinction (manual labour being clearly superior)' (Hollands, 1990, p. 26).

That the decline in opportunities to reinforce masculinity by such labour, as work has become more mechanised and unemployment in traditional manufacturing and mining industries soared, has led to some argument that other types of physicality have become more emphasised. This is difficult to trace; physical fighting has frequently been linked to working-class masculinity, hence connected with employment in industry – the kind of life-style depicted in mid-century social realist cinema such as Karel Reisz's 1959 film of Alan Sillitoe's 'Saturday Night and Sunday Morning': hard social conditions, hard working, hard drinking, hard man. It stands as another essential element of prescribed manhood, as Hollands found in his research:

> Whatever the case, it is clear that fighting in public is yet another example, of the affirmation of masculine identities. It contains the obvious elements of physicality and engagement with the real world (even if that world is the receiving end of a hard fist). For these lads, it wasn't so much winning a fight as being part of it. For Chris, getting beaten up or battered was a source of pride: he had survived to tell the tale. (ibid., p. 140)

Sport and the masculine body

Sport, similarly to, or even including, fighting, reflects and reinforces primary masculine ideologies of physical superiority and competitiveness. Whether this is understood as re-channelling 'natural' male aggressive/competitive drives, or as a cultural phenomenon, it clearly foregrounds the importance of the strong, active male body to the whole construction of the masculine. Connell, for example, notes that: 'In historically recent times, sport has come to be the leading definer of masculinity in mass culture' (Connell, 1995, p. 54).

The strands of the masculine definition referred to are, of course, multiple. Being 'good' at sport may be essential to playground survival and a source of self-esteem. It may confirm an acceptable persona, and raise status within the group. The image of the sportsman is a potent symbol of power, control and sexual desirability, which in itself, as was noted earlier, is the grail of the consumer capitalist *zeitgeist*.

Men's bodies in sport are in themselves expressive of the concepts of force and superiority. The body is a masculine spectacle, as Connell goes on to point out: 'The highly visual nature of contemporary sporting

competition allows sport to provide a continuous display of men's bodies in motion' (ibid., p. 54), bodies which the competitors themselves have honed and disciplined for this task. The achievement of the body is indistinguishable from the achievement of the *capacity* of the body.

Analogous to military life in historical and contemporary society, this process of acquiring the masculinised body also serves the purpose of linking the individual into the compulsory male form of the collective. Via the enforced production of the appropriate masculine body – training or 'drilling' involves the disciplining, controlling and occasional mortification of the body – 'The individual body and the self that is identified with that body are shaped into the collective body of men' (Morgan, in Brod, 1994, p. 167).

The production of the male body, as part of the transformation from uninitiated individual to part of the masculine collective of the team or regiment, applies to soldiers, as well as the training of sportsmen.

That there may be various levels of identity damage implicated in this has also been discussed. As well as the chronic insecurity and sense of inadequacy experienced by young men who may not be able to achieve sporting credibility, the damage from going to an extreme edge of 'success' (as anorexic girls may be conceptualised as going to the extreme edge of body control) has become evident. As Connell notes: 'the pressures of high level competitive sports oblige professional players to treat their bodies as instruments, even as weapons . . . the body is virtually assaulted in the name of masculinity and achievement. Ex-athletes often live with chronic pain and damaged bodies, and die early' (Connell, 1995, p. 58).

Masculinity has its expression and its experience, and indeed the construction of identity – this complex and multi-directional process of gendered subjectivity – in the body. Physical labour, fighting, sport, the military: all give the body an external surface and the individual a subjective experience of the body as a vehicle for the engagement in pleasure, as well as the body as a site of effort, will and discipline, which can lead to physical suffering and/or endurance. It is both for the expression of self and absorption into the male fraternity.

Sportsmen with 'chronic pain and damaged bodies' clearly demonstrate the physical manifestation of an extreme version of masculine ideology. Their physical strength is *more* strong, their bodies *more* worked, their competitive 'psychology' more developed, and their suffering more intense. Beauty queens and models, ballet-dancers and indeed many women who have been in life-styles where the visual

expression of femininity is foregrounded, can be, as noted earlier, seen as similar products of the physical inscription of an extreme feminine ideology. The osteoporosis and ruined digestive systems, the disordered eating patterns and obesity linked to crash dieting, the damage from leaking silicon breast implants, are the inheritance of the dedicated production of the female body, as physical strain and injury, addiction to steroids and, similarly, disordered eating patterns can be seen as the inheritance of the dedicated sportsman. The body, as the form through which gender is established, has limits, and although science and the philosophy of individual self-perfectioning would seem to be able every year to erode them, this is not without cost.

Is it useful, then, to argue that the disciplined production of the gendered body, which, at its most simplistic, means 'beautiful' for women, and 'strong' for men, is a damaging phenomenon commonly experienced? The crux of this volume is that though at the extremes this damage is pathologised and to some extent demonised, the *everyday experience* of inhabiting the contradictory and dissonant contemporary identity called 'young woman' will involve identity damage, and the merging of body and identity in the feminine is crucial to this situation.

As this chapter has been considering, boys too are defined in relation to their bodies; they must be strong and agile and 'hard', and in extreme cases the damage from this is very apparent. But that may not necessarily suggest that the *everyday experience* of inhabiting contemporary young male identity will be, as for girls, that the body will be disassociated from and experienced as 'the enemy'.

Black youth and the masculine body

In a late twentieth century context, in which the reality of boy's pastimes, like girls, is far more to do with watching than participating, whether the medium is television, film or live 'performance', is physical strength really such a normative demand of all young men? The implications of being seen as outside that construction of youth are worth exploring. Who are and are not seen as 'cool boys' (recently redesignated 'hot boys') does not just link to class and physical labour, but also to membership of ethnic minority groups and 'style'.

That physical strength is admired, and valorised, and incorporated into ideal notions of masculinity, certainly seems to be true. Weakness and lack of physical assertiveness are the hallmarks of devaluation; physical strength linked with high status.

Les Back, for example, explored how the unequal attribution of racist stereotypes within a group of young people in South London fall precisely within this categorisation. In considering racism and young male identity he discovered that both 'the most extreme manifestations of racism and some of the most profound moments of inter-racial dialogue' connect to youth styles, and which 'gendered construction of race that white young men, in particular, find attractive' (Back, 1994, p. 176).

What Back discovered, which builds on theoretical assertions from cultural commentators such as Hall (1988) and Hebdige (1979) was that young black men, with African or Caribbean ethnicity, were admired and emulated, whereas Asian men, in this case Vietnamese, were derided and excluded. Black guys were seen as embodying 'hardness and hyper-sexuality' – still a racist and constraining discourse, but in this context an admiring one, equated with extreme masculinity (Back, 1994, pp. 178–9). Roughly the same construction of young black identity of course, also gets these young men labelled volatile, violent, and sexually threatening by a different generation of white people.

The young Asian men, however, were hardly allowed to be men at all, but: '. . . typically vilified as feeble, soft and effeminate' (ibid., p. 181). Back quotes a local white boy as saying: 'My black mates wouldn't let people walk over them the way the Vietnamese do. . . . Black people have nuff respect for who they are' (ibid., p. 181).

To be accepted as one of the boys, then, 'traditional' male attributes had to be imputed – anything which could be defined as 'feminine', passive or weak was excluded and devalued. The issue of being 'cool/hot' or stylish (attributes linked with black African–Caribbean and Black British culture since the 1950s via various styles of music, clothes and life-style and now invariably essential to attract youthful admiration: the boy as consumer and self-adorner), have become imbricated with more 'traditional' (meaning physically aggressive and sexual) versions of being black and male.

At the school Mac an Ghaill studied, even the teaching staff demonstrated '. . . contradictory cultural investments, of desire and jealousy in the highly exaggerated ascription to the black macho lads of stylish resistance, sporting skills and "having a reputation with girls"' (Mac an Ghaill, 1994, p. 87).

However, what Mac an Ghaill also argues from his own research was that within the school there were various kinds of boy groupings, and that within each there were different proscriptions of appropriate masculinity, which did not split on purely racial lines. So, for example,

Mac an Ghaill identifies white, black and Asian 'macho lads' who could be vindictive and insulting towards academic students from all ethnic backgrounds (ibid., p. 87).

The different hierarchies of masculinity were formed in competition between a whole range of groupings, and consisted of contested, not static, meanings and ascriptions, even though as two black sixth-formers recognised: 'the "race" thing gets all mixed up with other things that are important to young kids' (ibid., p. 86). Sexuality, football and dancing were specifically picked-out.

Mac an Ghaill's school-based study, similarly to Blackman's and Holland's study of youth training schemes, offers access to the diversity and contradictions inherent in young male identity at this point in time, and stand as careful reminders that young men study and play, achieve and rebel, fight, flirt and form solid friendship groupings. However, they do also underline that there are certain basic tenets of masculinity, which, though clearly now contested and up for minor or major redefinition, are powerful and difficult for boys to publicly challenge, even if they will protest privately to male interviewers.

Physicality and physical strength, the ability to play sport, win fights and 'stand up for yourself' seems to be part of this package. Physical 'inadequacy' could be highly damning, as Mac an Ghaill's interviewees reveal:

> *Tony*: Me and Ashwin got the worst, picked on everyday by the yobs and then the others would start. they'd be in their gangs. It sounds funny but I think it was little things like looking small, I was tiny then, and both of us wore glasses, things like that. Some kids got much worse. there was a kid who had a limp and they persecuted him for years. (Mac an Ghaill, 1994, p. 60)

Being a disabled boy, then, attracted extreme hostility, as Back noted being an Asian boy did. Both reflect the valuing of masculinity as hard, tough and physically achieving, and the complex interweaving of the opposites of these into the construction of categories against which to define self. Kimmel suggests: we come to know what it means to be a man in our culture by setting our definitions in opposition to a set of 'others' – racial minorities, sexual minorities and above all women' (Kimmel, 1994, p. 120).

In other words 'the other' – that which is object, different to, a depository for insecurities and fears of what self might otherwise have inside – to masculinity includes all forms of difference. This is most

clearly visible perhaps in the definition of masculinity in opposition to the feminine and the homosexual.

Young men and homophobia

That strident, normative homophobia, coupled with a profound misogyny manifest in various practices, including aggressive sexuality, are equally dominant strands of the construction of masculinity, even a rather youthful masculinity, will now be considered.

Chapter 5 argued that appropriate gendering is 'policed' in girls by a variety of discourses and sources; in the same way, the policing of masculinity in boys is also apparent. This does not imply that male subjects are the passive victims of endless pressure to conform to the dominant expectations. But within a social constructionist understanding of identity and power, it may well mean that boys are positioned by certain sets of ascribed meanings, in relation to which they can offer resistance where contradictory discourses can be deployed.

Heterosexuality, for example, involving the denunciation of anything either homosexual and/or female, is a particularly powerful construction because of the issue of sexual reputation which must be defended in this realm. The imputation to a boy that he is 'a queer' is one of those all purpose put-downs like 'slag' is to a girl, both powerful and loosely applied, hard to pin-down and hence hard to refute. Curry's study of American young men's locker-room talk, for example, led him to conclude that because masculinity in itself is an expression of what is not feminine and not homosexual, then young men were careful to distance themselves from femaleness and gayness, by expressing 'dislike for femaleness and homosexuality, demonstrating to oneself and others that one is separate from it and therefore must be masculine' (Curry, 1991, p. 129).

What Curry describes as 'doing gender through homophobic talk' led to a high degree of gender assessment and imputed homosexuality (ibid., p. 129) and high levels of ridiculing anything perceived as homosexual. Fear and paranoia of homosexuality seemed to form part of the underlying culture (ibid., p. 130).

Gay guys and the 'butch shift'

The generalised imputation of homosexual to any deviation from a rather proscribed masculinity seems to form part of a culture of verbal abuse, ridicule and 'wind-ups' in schools and social and sporting contexts in which young men collect.

And of course, the imputation of homosexuality and the imputation of femininity, as part of the policing of boy's behaviour and sexuality, have traditionally been entirely interlinked. Connoll, for example, is clear that the two issues are part of the same, entwined, projection of 'difference' from the lads: 'In homophobic ideology the boundary between straight and gay is blurred with the boundary between masculine and feminine, gay men being imagined as feminized men, and lesbians as masculinised women' (Connell, 1995, p. 40).

This of course, has quite profound implications for boys who are gay, or who are uncertain of their sexual orientation, both individually and in terms of the circulation and reinforcement of general homophobia expressed in various forms in most affluent Western cultures. As Connell importantly reminds his readers: 'Homophobia is not just an attitude. Straight men's hostility to gay men involves real social practices, ranging from job discrimination through media vilification to imprisonment and sometimes murder' (ibid., p. 40).

Homophobia within boy populations is likely to silence any airing of the concept of difference, meaning that for many young men an important feature of identity must be carefully concealed. In Mac an Ghaill's school-based research, for example, none of the group of gay young men were known by anyone at school – staff or students – to be gay, and only confided in the researcher because they believed him to be anti-homophobic (Mac an Ghaill, 1994, p. 154).

However, the link between feminisation and homosexuality in itself may be being successfully challenged, and if homosexuality can be constructed as 'manly', 'virile', physically powerful and strong – demarcated, in other words, from 'womanly' – then it will be interesting to observe whether the need to reinforce masculinity by denigrating any possible indication of the homosexual will continue to be so virulent.

Forrest, for example, examines what he refers to as 'the butch shift', meaning 'the defeminization of gay culture' and detects an improvement in the US in the status of gay men. He links this, in part, to phenomena such as:

> gay men it seems are going to the city's gym's in droves. In virtually all gay erotica and in the advertising for gay chat lines, escorts bars and clubs, macho posturing, bulging biceps, sculpted pectorals and lashings of torn denim, black leather and sports gear appear to be the norm rather than the exception. (Forrest, 1994, p. 97)

He goes on to point out that the significance of this is that 'by enhancing our physical "manliness" we have done much to dilute the myth of our "womanly" inferior nature' (ibid., p. 105).

That this may link to the overall devaluing of the feminine in contemporary culture will be returned to. How and to what extent this may link to the increased status of gay men is, as he points out, highly complex. For example, the more visible formation of an active vocal 'gay community' is also significant, as is the general social shift already noted which now positions athletic, 'worked' male bodies as objects of desire and the object of the gaze in heterosexual and homosexual media.

In addition, the extent to which gay men in vocal communities in, for example, parts of urban USA, feel they have more status and more confidence, may differ wildly from the position of teenage boys in school. There are likely to be class and cultural variants intersecting these cultural constructions. For example, Mac an Ghaill's study shows that:

> 'there was a tendency for many of the working-class males to adopt a heterosexual superiority/gay inferiority couplet. While for many of the heterosexual middle-class males it was frequently expressed in a more liberal discourse of gay men as intrinsically different rather than inferior to straight men', but, tellingly, this opinion in practice meant these young men: 'combined a publicly confident discursive position in discussing homosexuality with an individual defensive stance.' (Mac an Ghaill, 1994, p. 94)

However, the work of Hollands with mainly working-class boys led him to assert that: 'The boundary lines demarcating acceptable male sexuality are so finely drawn that seemingly innocuous forms of behaviour are viewed as aberrant . . . there is little chance of loosing the reins of compulsory heterosexuality' (Hollands, 1990, p. 177)

Blackman equally found that homosexual, in its various slang forms, is employed as a generalised insult for behaviours which are in any way 'weird' (Blackman, 1995).

Male sexuality then – and correspondingly male identity, certainly within a working class context and probably more broadly than this – must not be in any way 'feminine' and/or homosexual, and deviation from aggressive heterosexuality will be policed by powerfully humiliating imputations, which on an individual level seem subject to little resistance. These verbal 'cages' can of course, equally powerfully be used

to circumscribe boys physicality, as their interlinked sexuality, in the same way as being called a 'slag' often links to a girl's physical presentation of self, as noted in Chapter 4.

That this may be changing has been noted by some contemporary cultural critics, but it still seems to be the overwhelming case that at an individual or group level, this verbal policing can be powerfully restrictive of a range of other possible modes of expression. The possibility of resistance is not, of course, deleted, but even though the world-wide media with which many young people regularly engage offers many versions of what it is to be a young man, the traditional version of dating girls, doing sports, and being 'one of the lads' is overwhelming, and the external and internal resources needed to oppose this may be unavailable to boys in their teens.

Being 'a girl': the worst insult

A teenage boy, then, similarly to a teenage girl, has to have 'a good body', but for different reasons. Lack of strength or physical ability and sporting prowess will render him 'girly' and inadequate. The ultimate achievement and accolade of masculine approval will be withheld. His body must be clothed in the right styles, groomed with the right products and 'worked' to a lean and muscular form as fat boys as well as fat girls are subject to destructive stigmatisation (De Jong and Kleck, 1986). He too is now on show to the world via advertising and the media. His body too is the object of the gaze. The chapter has considered the kinds of potential damage this may bring about, both in terms of being prevented by poverty from constructing the commercially underpinned facets of this persona; in terms of not having the physical strength, sporting skill or physical build to fit the requirements; and by the actual body damage caused by the extremes of body/performance 'enhancement'.

That the degree of emphasis on the adorned body presents some change to notions of the masculine – the kind of change that it was difficult to establish in relation to young women – seems quite clear. But that the meanings of boys 'doing looks' are mostly elided with previous dominant versions of masculinity also seems to be the case. The research tended to suggest, for example, that boys saw their interest in appearance both as an expression of sexuality (as an instrument for 'pulling' the opposite sex) and as a competitive pursuit to determine status and establish position within and between groups.

Holland *et al.*, interviewing a boy who had recently lost weight, discovered that: 'When he was fat he had far more criticism about his weight from other men than from women. As with other aspects of other male behaviour, it seems as if it is the 'male-in-the-head' surveillance of the male peer group that calls the tune' (Holland *et al.*, 1998, p. 114). They go on to make the point in this study that boys were quite resistant to the notion of being 'an object of women's desires, rather than being [themselves]' (ibid., p. 115).

Furlong and Cartmel, however, tended to interpret this more as a process of 'attempting to find self-fulfilment and ways of identifying with other young people' (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, p. 61). This latter set of meanings might, of course, be similar for young men and young women, with age, rather than gender, the likely demarcater. And, indeed, in terms of the other dominant ideologies which young people inhabit – the strict policing of their sexuality, and the link this has to their bodies, for example – the generation has similar experiences across genders.

Friendship groups, perhaps larger and looser in masculine culture than in feminine (Lees, 1986), may provide sites of resistance and opposition to the stranglehold of the kind of conformity considered throughout this chapter, but there seems to be very little evidence that any class, culture or sub-culture is substantially challenging dominant ideologies within these mainly school- and college-based age-groups, though there is evidence of this in a slightly older age range (Gutterman, 1994).

However, to argue that both sexes within an age group are similarly positioned by rigid gender delimitations does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that boys, too, invariably suffer from the kind of generalised self-hatred generated within the confusions and ambivalence of dominant feminine ideologies.

Why masculinity needs to constantly reinforce that it does not include femininity is crucial to understanding in what way the issue of self-hatred and internalised gender ambivalence may be different for boys. As Forrest noted in his work on 'the butch shift', the absolute repudiation of the female seems to have been necessary in a bid for status with men, as the devaluation of the female is intrinsic to masculine culture: an expression of unequal power relations, of misogyny itself. He argues that homosexual men had previously been seen as 'gender inverts', having the despised qualities appropriate to women: 'the "feminine" becoming synonymous not only with certain weak physical appearances, but also with a similar state of mind. And so to the homosexual man' (Forrest, 1994, p. 101).

Quoting from Pronger, Forrest goes on to suggest that all characteristics associated with women: 'gestures, concerns, dress, mannerisms, language, the like – are seen as inferior ways of behaving, regardless of whether they are taken on by a man or a woman, and regardless of whether they originate within a working-class or middle-class milieu' (Pronger, in Forrest, 1994, p. 102).

Kimmel similarly argues that the very definition of manhood includes the imperative that 'one must never do anything that remotely suggests femininity. Masculinity is the relentless repudiation of the feminine' (Kimmel, 1994, p. 125).

That one essential part of the construction of masculinity experienced intensely in young adulthood – indeed, what demarcates being a child from being a man – is the rejection of, separation from and, as part of this, devaluation of, the feminine. This seems to extend from possible feminine or feminised versions of identity or facets of identity, to an ongoing practice of devaluing girls and women.

Policing each other's behaviour to stamp out any perceived feminine tendencies seems to be an essential part of this process.

Kimmel, for example, argues that 'as adolescents we learn that our peers are a kind of gender police, constantly threatening to unmask us as sissies, a state which continues into young manhood when 'we are constantly riding those gender boundaries, checking the fences we have constructed on the perimeter, making sure that nothing even remotely feminine might show through' (Kimmel, 1994, p. 132).

And this kind of policing of identity construction, reflects a profound need to be accepted and approved by men: 'There is no strong concern for women's approval as they are in too low a place on the social ladder' (ibid., pp. 128–9).

To pursue this argument a little further, then, what is being suggested is that the rules of value – the definition of who and what has status in the world and is valuable and praiseworthy – are masculine ones. They need not be generated specifically by a group or groups of men, but are none the less clearly gendered ideologies, continually circulated and reinforced The feminine is of low worth and the masculine of high status. Men are in competition with each other, for positions in the masculine group or groups, for friendships and camaraderie, for material goods and power, and for sexual access to women. The group or gang reinforces dominant ideologies of what it is to be a man. Connoll, indeed, argues that the male group itself is the container for masculine ideology: 'It is the *group* which is the bearer of masculinity, in a basic way' (Connell, 1995, p. 107).

Boys and relationships with girls

In the atmosphere of competitiveness and in collective male situations, the issue of sexual 'conquest', or at least the ability to spin a good story of sexual conquest, is a high status attribute. Sexual relationships with girls are an essential part of establishing status within male peer groups, of impressing the lads, or, if these stories are seen through, or in some way unimpressive, rendering the teller subject to condemnation or dismissal.

Holland *et al*. argue that boasting of sexual feats – or indeed the conscious resistance to engaging in such behaviour – can be used both as a challenge to, or a way of reinforcing masculinity: 'performance stories can undermine other men while maintaining collective masculinity, and ridicule from one's peers serves as an instrument of control to ensure that the ideal of male heterosexuality is pursued' (Holland *et al*., p. 161).

As sociobiological arguments – indeed a whole variety of positions – would argue, it is gaining access to the opposite sex that is the essential purpose of all other aspects of masculinity. Having as many sexual encounters as possible with women with the correct youthful appearance and waist-hip ratio is now perceived as genetically strategic behaviour (as opposed to the old-fashioned version of the same behaviour, refered to as 'sowing wild oats') a theory which offers scientific justification for another facet of masculinity (Ridley, 1993). That men have come to believe that they must have regular, heterosexual sex, perhaps with a variety of partners can also be understood from a social constructionist perspective. It is this ideology that the practice of heterosexual sex is imbricated into the fundamental notion of 'manhood' which is, for example, what Hollway analyses as 'the male sexual drive discourse'.

What is of importance to this text, particularly in relation to man's perceived need for sex, ranging from the belief in the need for regular sex with one partner through to the 'super stud' version, is that it is not a reflective of the value and esteem in which women, even women's bodies, are held, but an ongoing proof, to other men and to self, that this fragile structure called masculine identity is properly in place.

Exploring one of her interviews with young men, Hollway suggests:

> What did having a girlfriend mean that it signified 'growing up properly'? It positioned Jim as 'a proper man'; in other words it afforded him a gender appropriate position. . . . His interest was to do

> with gender not sex. His successful masculine positioning depended on a girl being 'into him' and the proof of this would be that she let him get sexual with her. (Hollway, 1984, p. 240)

Equally, a more structuralist view of why men are sexually acquisitive still positions women as not valued for themselves, but as part of a male status system: As writers such as Forrest have argued, women become one type of currency which men use to improve their social ranking (Forrest, 1994).

The hegemonic discourse of masculinity – the organising principle or dominant meanings within masculine identity – is to do with male sexual drive. This is not to argue that therefore this is straightforward or uncontested, but that it does differ strongly from the construction of female identity, and that this is not simply difference in kind but a difference in power. In this masculine subjectivity, it is women who are the objects – as noted earlier the *only* allowable objects – of this sexuality. Female identity, as suggested in previous chapters, incorporates this objectification. Hollway's interviews with girls, for example, offer a thesis on the subordination of their sexuality to their positing as the object:

> Clare indicates that her sexuality was completely subordinated to the need to be attractive. . . . The take-up of a position as object in the discourse of male sexual drive, motivated by the interest in being attractive, constructs the practice of heterosexual sex. (Hollway, 1984, p. 242)

One of her interview subjects illustrates the experience of this in clear, and forceful terms:

> I think my understanding of my own sexuality when I was an adolescent was about zero. I mean it felt like doing this thing which meant you had to attract boys – to be attractive to them. There wasn't anything else. But even later, when I began fucking men, it was actually an extension of that.' (ibid., p. 243)

What is being argued is that the construction of masculine subjectivity, at this child through to adult stage, is based on very different prescriptions of what modes of being are available for young people to fit into. Boys are quite fundamentally identified with the need for heterosexual relations which they must, as the active agent, instigate. Girls' identity is tightly bound to the need to be the passive object of this male drive:

to be able to attract male attention, and so appeal to male versions of what an attractive women is.

It seems, then, that just the external situation in relation to boys and appearance has changed. Boys of this generation, as was argued above, are subject to consumer pressures and are far more likely to spend time and money on their appearance than previously. It may also be true that their bodies have become the repository of the creation of desire by advertising and the media. But they are not in the same position as girls as they are not primarily *identified* with their attractiveness, but with their ability to achieve heterosexual intercourse. Of course, the two things are enmeshed, but the emphasis – the imperative even – is likely to lead to very different discontents and senses of failure and inadequacy.

Different for boys? Some final thoughts

Early on in this chapter the notion of the 'feminisation' of youth culture, meaning the increasing engagement boys have with practices of body adornment, was briefly considered, and it was noted that this was an interpretation which boys themselves denied. That the construction of masculinity necessarily eliminates and/or rejects the feminine and devalues manifestations of this, makes the boys' denial entirely understandable. To acquire and maintain some sort of status, only a range of clearly masculine attributes will do.

The opposite process to 'feminisation' has been identified by men writing about the shift in gay male identity. Referred to as 'the butch shift' – it is acknowledged that the adoption of traditional male attitudes and body presentation upgrades the status of gay men, in the same way as young black men are prized and emulated by groups of white boys where the racial stereotype is that of ultra-masculinity. Groups of men who are not seen as capable of aggressive, physically active and stylistically 'cool/hot' young manhood, such as Asian boys or disabled young people are likely to be the objects of contempt, patronisation or humiliation because they are not 'manly'.

And of course, girls are not 'manly' either, but it may be worth speculating for a moment as to whether it is the internal playing out of an understanding of their inferiorised position, their desire to address this, and the deeply opposing sets of meanings of 'being a girl' that makes their subjectivities fragile and dissonant. Can girls, like gay men, be seen as having been part of an inherently contradictory and uncomfortable 'butch shift'?

This is complex; clearly one impact of feminism has been to open up areas of life traditionally considered 'male' to women. Sport, work, bars – sites of masculine pleasures and projections – have a female presence. Some women have embraced the opportunities to, for example, play or 'support' football, to engage in more risk-taking activities and even to drink, smoke and take drugs more than women traditionally were likely to do (British Youth Council, 1999).

The attempted acquisition of the lean, muscled and uncurvacious body, and the valuing of power, control and self-discipline to achieve this, resonates with the valuing of the masculine. It may be, then, that young women are behaving in response to their inferiorised social positioning as the devalued other and/or sexual object of essentially masculinist ideology, and strive – in opposition to other strands of their subjectivity – to address this. The subjectivity at war with itself – the invariable outcome of such contradictions – is entirely analogous with the kind of mind–body disassociation and self-criticism and/or self-dislike identified in previous chapters. That this has connections with a possible increasing valuation of the masculine above the feminine, is in need of further exploration.

Summary

Fears that a consumer-oriented new generation of boys have relatively less secure identities than those of their fathers are the subject of contemporary theoretical debates and youth work practice. Their 'disorders of consumption' tend to be drugs, alcohol and various forms of low level self-abuse.

Certainly the body, as an expression of masculine strength and prowess, and of agency and sexuality, is totally implicated in the construction of masculinity as it is in the construction of femininity, but this in itself need not be damaging to gendered subjectivity. This is not to suggest that boys do not feel inferior to boys who seem to fit the idealised version of male, or suffer insecurities in comparisons with, for example, exposure to images of 'perfect' male actors, or sporting heroes. There may also be some damage caused, as the chapter considered, by the extreme pursuit of ideal physical masculinity, or by being prevented by poverty, or by racism, heterosexism or disablism, from being able to compete on equal terms in the masculine arena.

The crucial facets of the construction of masculine identity, though, are still far more to do with the rejection of the feminine, not its similarities. 'Doing boy', the chapter argued, requires repudiating and

devaluing all aspects of 'womanliness'. Homophobia and misogyny are reflected in the ongoing banter and practices of young men, especially in the all-important masculine group context.

Girls are desirable, and desired though. The male 'sexual drive discourse' is fundamental to male identity. Having heterosexual sex, and being acknowledged within male groups to be having sex, is the guarantor of the full establishment of male identity and is implicated in the status and position of men within male value systems.

Existing patriarchal power relations dictate that girls are positioned as the object of, and passive 'other' of, male identity construction, both as the bearers of that femininity which must be rejected, and as the objects of male sexual discourse and practice.

Even though this is the first generation of boys in modern Western societies for whom self-adornment and image construction have become important elements of identity, then, it is not surprising that there is little evidence to suggest that they are experiencing body-hatred phenomena, either in extreme forms such as anorexia or in the fairly general 'girl' levels of self-dislike, low self-esteem and bodily disassociation. The body as ornament is only one, and a relatively unimportant one, of a whole range of meanings bodies have for boys. As such, it only occasionally seems to constitute the site of physically expressed identity conflicts. That masculinity itself is still the privileged construction of a belief system which renders men as subject and women as object may in itself serve to protect boys from body-hatred.

8
Young Women and the Body: Some Conclusions

The central concern of this volume – the questions of whether, why, and how do young women experience chronic dissatisfaction and disassociation from their bodies – has been addressed. This concluding section will not attempt to offer a summary of each specific chapter, as summaries are included in the text, but will draw together the arguments under four major themes that seem of outstanding importance to how modern girl's subjectivities are formed. They encapsulate both the kinds of social meanings which form girls' senses of how they can be, and also the unequal power relations which girls inhabit which will render their access to resistance to these prevailing ideas relatively limited.

Girls and the bodies they inhabit

There is a paradoxical relationship between women and their bodies: women are seen as synonymous with body, while experiencing their body at a distance.

The association between female and body is often considered in relation to the over-medicalisation of women's bodies (Reissman, 1998); they are positioned as inferior and in need of more medical intervention because of their 'otherness' to enlightenment grounded 'masculinist' science (Weitz, 1998). Women's bodies are pathologised generally and particularly psychiatrically (Russell, 1995). The bodies women inhabit are by definition, therefore, inferior, unstable and sick: uncomfortable sets of meanings to negotiate which militate against comfort and satisfaction, and may contribute towards the need to dissociate from ownership of this flawed container.

Young women are in transition from being relatively androgynous and invisible to taking on a female body which is debased by the

culture it inhabits. It is in early teens that having a body may start to demand far more awareness and consciousness on the part of the girl. Suddenly they have to 'manage' their bodies, and suffer humiliation if they do not do this correctly. For example, the whole issue of menstruation is problematic because of the imperative to uphold the demand of complete secrecy; shame and humiliation can be experienced if there is any failure in this (Lee, 1998; Oinas, 1998) Many young girls speak of a sense of self-disgust, horror and high anxiety when their periods start. Their body becomes the object of their own suspicion, and fears that it might become out of control. The link between psychological instability (for example, PMT), physical incapacity and menstruation has considerable currency.

Another physical change at puberty that produces a different experience is the growth of breasts, and the anxiety around this. Knowing that this is key to whether she will be considered appropriately feminine, and that this will render her suddenly highly visible and available for appraisal and commentary, again some young women record self-consciousness and shame as well as excitement in relation to such a change (Young, 1992).

Self-consciouness is also inherent in girls newly aquired position as 'the object of the gaze' (Berger, 1972); woman is 'to be looked at', and eroticised. This surveillance leads to constant self-surveillance (Foucault, 1977) in relation to appearance, but also in relation to the whole project of femininity: posture, gesture and appearance (Bartky, 1990). Linked to this, the policing and self-policing is a dominant feature of feminine subjectivity: the imperative to be controlled, moderate and containing of the emotions and needs of others.

Control is a moral issue not just a physical one, it draws on a long tradition of assumed mind/body dualism – the rational mind in control of the unruly, unreliable body (Bordo, 1993). Shame is the outcome for women who cannot, or do not, manage their bodies correctly: those whose appetites become immoderate and who, for example, become too fat or too selfish. 'Good' resists, 'bad' succumbs (a set of meanings often blatantly reinforced by, for example, the advertising of high calorie foods).

The beauty imperative

The historical, religious and philosophical meanings of women's engagement with their appearance are vanity and pride. Satisfaction and pleasure in the skills used and the achieved outcome are very hard

to ascribe to 'beautification'. Any effort taken may not be seen as legitimate at all. There are still impossible pressures to be 'artlessly' beautiful and 'natural'.

Pressures to be flawless seem to be growing and the look more hegemonic. Teen-culture reinforces the notion that power for girls and women is about sexual attractiveness. 'Girl power' is only the most recent re-statement of an ongoing situation, one which may lead to a sense of shame and stigma in girls who cannot reproduce 'the look'. Youth theorists have suggested that it is in the sphere of consumption that the current generation of teenagers make group affiliations and identify with each other. There are strong social pressures to go 'shopping for subjectivities' (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Langman, 1992). However, young women may have limited resources. There are, for example, important issues of class and poverty, and/or they may have little control over their spending. Girls' choices of television viewing and magazine reading are likely to reinforce the beauty imperative, not just in terms of the limited agenda of subjects discussed, but, importantly, that the role models are hegemonic and the images of perfect female bodies and faces are all-pervasive. The media circulate a limited set of highly normative and very seductive meanings connected to consumer capitalism. The desires they create are not just about wanting *to own* but also about wanting *to become*. It may also be that facets of 'girl culture' – 'bedroom culture' – reinforce the same appearance-orientated agenda.

Young women may experience a damaging sense of shame if they cannot reproduce the necessary version of beauty for whatever reasons: if, for example, they are not a fair-skinned, blue-eyed blonde but a young black teenager, or if they have a disability, or even a very common 'variation' of appearance, such as glasses or a brace on their teeth, or are a little too tall or too broad, then they are likely to experience the stigmatising effects of not fitting an impossibly demanding 'beauty' standard.

The thin imperative

The thin imperative has taken hold in white, Western cultures. Girls inhabit a contradictory situation; whereas in predominantly white Western cultures, women (and men) are getting bigger and heavier, models/actresses and other 'stars' are getting thinner. From the 1960s to the 1980s portrayals of the female body in the media became slimmer, and in the 1990s this trend became even more marked across Europe

and the United States (Grogan, 1999). Approximately half of all young women diet regularly (British Youth Council, 1998). Young people may be more prone to the influence of role models, who, in relation to teenage girls, are almost invariably thin (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). Girls usually develop soft curves in a culture in which the lean, hard and muscular is valued (Bordo, 1993). Lean and 'worked' is the look which does not fit with curves: girls are more prone to body-hatred when they suddenly acquire these female attributes which may render them unfashionable and too 'girlie' (Martin, 1995).

Their own bodies, especially their weight, may be the only tool of conformity that girls have easy access to; it may be the most acceptable and immediate form of 'doing looks'. This is reflected in the prevalence of dieting and eating disorders.

Issues of sexuality

Girls are 'unremittingly sexualised' and their positioning as delinquents or deviants reflects adult fears of girls' sexuality or 'promiscuity'. Research has demonstrated that when girls come in to the care system, it is more likely to be because they are seen as 'beyond parental control', than any engagement with criminal activities (the main reason for boys) (Hudson, 1989). The notion of girls 'getting into trouble' equates 'pregnant' and 'trouble'. It also seems the case that girls may use their sexuality as rebellion, for example, in school cultures.

Girls are sexually 'policed', which means very fine judgements are made about 'appropriate' images, and it is easy for them to be seen as a slag, or tart (Lees, 1986; Epstein and Johnson, 1998); the 'dog' label is applied if the girl is not seen as attractive enough. It is both shameful and painful, and some boys draw the implication that an unattractive girl will sleep with anyone.

There may also be forceful heterosexual policing: lesbian or 'lezzi' is the kind of unremitting jibe, like slag or tart, that serves the purpose of reinforcing a very limited definitely heterosexual message that women's sexuality is properly the object of male sexuality, not independent of men (Holland *et al.*, 1998).

Girls' bodies and sexuality are constructed as the object of male sexual discourse; not sites of their own pleasure and desire, but passive and contained and controlled. There may be very potent misogynous fears of lustful women: 'lust' is socially coded as 'female' (Bordo, 1993). Schools and families mostly serve to circulate the same sets of meanings about what a young woman can be, in other words: pretty, nice,

accommodating, passive, in charge of other people's needs and responsible for the containment of male sexual pleasures.

Summary

The social status of women is clearly variable, but may still be devalued: the construction of masculinity still involves the rejection of the feminine; girls may be tolerated as 'tom-boys' but boys cannot be seen to display any aspects of girlishness. In gay culture there has been a noticeable 'butch shift' as 'six-pack culture' has become more prevalent and all traces of the imputation of gays as 'feminised' are being refuted (Forrest, 1994).

Female subjectivity is heavily identified with being sexually desirable: this is a limited and highly proscribed range of possibilities – slim, usually white, able-bodied, and pretty by whatever contemporary version is prevalent. Young women may have fewer resources to reproduce this look, may feel more ashamed and stigmatised if they are unable to, and may have a smaller range of alternative strands to their identities than older women have developed.

Young women are also making the transition to inhabiting a body, by which they are identified and defined, which is pathologised, shaming inferiorised, in need of control and constantly visible. They may feel that if they can then distance/separate/disassociate their bodies from themselves, then the negative meanings ascribed to them can be avoided or at least mitigated. However, young women are invariably heavily identified with their bodies and this process offers only a disjointed and contradictory subjectivity. Young women are likely to experience their bodies as 'the enemy'.

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