THE CONSTRUCTION OF MULTIPLE IDENTITIES IN THE DISPLAY OF WOMEN AS OBJECTS OF DESIRE AND SUBMISSION

by

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Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature:..................

Date:..........................
Abstract

As manufacturing jewellery artist, I have found that it is now most often women rather than men who commission or purchase jewellery. These women often earn substantial salaries and therefore they are in a position to indulge freely in what traditionally was considered the frivolous pursuit of beauty. Consequently, women are challenging expectations that they be submissive and desirable display objects, thereby signifying their dependence on male economical power. The aim of this research is to encourage transformation and the development of an individual and independent feminine identity by exposing the pressures placed on women to construct their identities as prescribed by patriarchal institutions, dress codes, fashion, science and therefore also gender stereotyping and gender inequalities. The three chapters of my thesis are titled Restriction, Change and Liberation?, which is followed by a discussion of my practical work in the addendum. The thesis and practical work were developed in support of one another.
Opsomming

As vervaardigende juweliers kunstenaar, het ek gevind dat dit vandag meestal vroue, eerder as mans, is wat juweliersware bestel en koop. Hierdie vroue verdien dikwels aansienlike salarisse en is gevolglik in `n posisie om vrylik betrokke te wees by die neiging wat tradisioneel gesien is as `n spandabelrige en lighartige strewe na skoonheid. Hierdie vroue daag gevolglik die verwagting om dienlike en begeerbare vertoon objekte van manlike ekonomiese mag, uit. Die doel van hierdie navorsing is om transformasie aan te moedig asook die ontwikkeling van individuele en onafhanklike vroulike identiteite deur die druk wat op vroue geplaas word om hul identiteite na wense van `n patriarchiese samelewing, dragkodes, mode, wetenskap, asook geslag stereotipering en ongelykhede te skep, te ontbloot. Die drie hoofstukke se titels is Beperking, Verandering en Bevryding? (Restriction, Change and Liberation?) en word gevolg deur `n bespreking van my praktiese werk in die addendum. Die tesis en praktiese werk het gesamentlik ontwikkel.
Contents

Preface
Acknowledgements
List of Illustrations
Introduction
Chapter 1: Restriction
  Introduction
  1.1 Dress and adornment
  1.2 The corset
  1.3 The role of fashion in the creation of social difference
  Conclusion
Chapter 2: Change
  Introduction
  2.1 Fashioning identities
  2.2 Women and labour
  2.3 Beautiful women
  2.4 The case of Estée Lauder
  Conclusion
Chapter 3: Liberation?
Conclusion
Addendum
  Practical Work
List of Illustrations
  Illustrations: Chapters
  Illustrations: Addendum
Bibliography
Preface

As manufacturing jewellery artist, I have found that it is now most often women rather than men who commission or purchase jewellery. These women often earn substantial salaries and therefore they are in a position to indulge freely in what traditionally was considered the frivolous pursuit of beauty. Consequently, women are challenging expectations that they be submissive and desirable display objects, thereby signifying their dependence on male economical power. The aim of this research is to encourage transformation and the development of an individual and independent feminine identity by exposing the pressures placed on women to construct their identities as prescribed by patriarchal institutions, dress codes, fashion, science and therefore also gender stereotyping and gender inequalities. The three chapters of my thesis are titled Restriction, Change and Liberation?, which is followed by a discussion of the artists’ practical work in the addendum. The thesis and practical work were developed in support of one another.

This thesis presents the reader with concise discussions of a variety of subject matters that have influenced the construction of multiple female identities and the creation of women as desirable and submissive objects. The first chapter discusses the objectification of women through dress and adornment and the important interplay between the body, dress and the Other. A brief overview of both the history and social implications of the Victorian corset is included in this chapter along with a section focusing on the role of fashion in the creation of social difference. In the second chapter, the section on Fashioning Identities explores the notion of identity construction in contemporary fashion. The case studies provided by Walby (1986), in her book Patriarchy at Work, provide significant information regarding gender divisions of labour in the discussion on Women and Labour. The third section, on Beautiful Women, briefly explores the status and power of women in the workplace and the significance of a fashionable appearance in this context. A discussion of “one of America’s wealthiest self-made women” (Koehn 2001:245), Estee Lauder, provides evidence of independent, successful women. Chapter Three introduces the reader to notions of sex differentiation presented in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries through medical investigations and illustrations. The purpose of
these scientific investigations were to create a powerful knowledge of the superior-inferior relations between men and women, thereby “empowering the viewer (who is defined as masculine) and disempowering the object of the look (defined as feminine)” (Cronje 2001:5). Although one can argue that these relations have since changed, Cronje (2001:12-13) points out that the “…disciplining medical gaze of the nineteenth century was replaced with a digitalized, technologised view in the late twentieth century”. In the twentieth century, techno-science encouraged the reinvention of the Self, thereby making it more possible to achieve the ideals of Western beauty.

The aim of this research is to equip the reader with information that must be interpreted and processed critically and thereafter applied to encourage transformation, by both men and women.

A discussion of my own work is available in the addendum. Although the theoretical and practical components of the investigation developed hand in hand, informing and influencing one another, it has been decided to present a brief discussion of the practical work separately from the theory. With regard to the practical work I am, however, of the opinion that the artworks must “do the talking”. I therefore encourage viewers to form their own opinions, rather than basing these opinions on my writings or my personal expectations. In other words, I do not want to overpower the viewer with my own thoughts, opinions and experiences; instead, my aim is to encourage individuality. Accordingly, the reader/viewer may choose to interpret the theory and practical work separately, thus drawing their own conclusion regarding the relationship between these two components of my research. I agree with Anthea Callen (1995 ix) who states that images are often treated as “adjuncts, as mere ‘illustrations’ of a given history or theory”. She therefore developed ways of “…theorizing the visual which start from the object itself and then deploy histories and theories to help illuminate its specific cultural meaning” (Callen 1995:ix)
Acknowledgements

Firstly I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to my supervisors, Prof Sandra Klopper and Mr. Errico Cassar for their guidance, support and contribution to the development of my work. Thank you also to other relevant members of staff and students of the Visual Arts department for their involvement and interest in my work and my family and friends for continuous support, encouragement and confidence in me.
List of illustrations

Illustrations: Chapters

Ferris Good Sense Corset Shapes. (Summers 2001:65) 63
The Good Sense (Healthy Children). (Summers 2001:66)
Parisian Doll, front view (1865). (Summers 2001:66)
Parisian Doll, back view (1865). (Summers 2001:66)
Typical eighteenth century French dress. (Suoh 2002:71) 64
Detail and decoration of a man’s suit, eighteenth century. (Suoh 2002:73)

_Ah! What relics!!! Oh! What a foolish new fashion...(1979). (Suoh 2002: 34-135)

_Man’s Ensemble_ 1830’s. (Iwagami 2001 :212) 65
Musee d’Orsey. _The reception_ (detail), (1878). (Suoh 2002:245)
Tango Knicker 1910s. (http://vintagevicctorian.com/10_underwear.html)

Tennis suit, 1890. (Suoh 2002:321)
Corset (1820) (Suoh 2002:133) 66
Corsets in the second half of the nineteenth century. (Suoh 2002:279)
Corset-cover of steel worn in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. (Lord 1993:72)
Figures with fifteen to twenty inches of hipspring, nineteenth century. (http://www.geocities.com/ther_over/19thcent.htm)
Changes to the internal organs and skeletal frame caused by cosetry as shown in 1890s-1900 (http://www.fashion-era.com/edwardian_corsetry.htm) 67
Compressing of the waist due to tightlacing, increasing the size of bust and hip. (Horn and Gurel 1981:189)
Renaming corsets as girdles. _Women’s and Infants’ Furnisher_ (1921). (Fields 2001:120) 68
The pendulum that fashion swings from one extreme to the other, 1860-1910. (Horn and Gurel 1981:25)
Marlene Dietrich in her archetypal man’s suit in the 30s. (Cawthorne, N 1999:29)                69
“City Pants” Pantsuit by Yves Saint Lauren, 1967. (Nii 2001:562)
A uni-sex outfit, but a man’s suit from the sixties. (Cawthorne, N 1999:29)                70
Power dressing in television program Dynasty. (Cawthorne, N 1999:29)
Jackets by Thierry Mugler PARIS 1990. (Nii 2001:624-625)
Pantsuit by Giorgio Armani 1985-1089. (Nii 2001:624-625)
Andreas Versailius, male and female reproductive organs, Tabulae Sex. From The Anatomical Drawings of Andreas Versalius.
(Lacquer 1987 :8)                71
Samuel Thomas von Soemmering, Effect of the corset. (1785)
(Schiebinger 1987 :59)
Cowper, male and female nudes, in Andrew Bell, Anatomia Brittanica A System of Anatomy (Lacquer 1987 : 50)               72
John Barclay, Skeleton family. (1829). (Schiebinger 1987 :63)
Andreas Versalius, male and female nudes, in The Epitome. (1543).
(Schiebinger 1987 :8)                73
John Barclay, male skeleton compared to th horse and Female skeleton compared to the ostrich (1829) (Schiebinger 1987 : 60-61)
Anatomical Statue. (1600) Plaster. Dimensions unknown. (Cronje 2000: 80)                74
W. Hunter. Anatomia Uteri Humani Gravidi. (Cronje 2000:82)
Italian anatomical model.(1800) Wax, hair and pigment. Dimensions unknown. (Cronje 2000:89)
Dr. Galtier-Bossiere. Female flap-anatomy from *La Femme*. (1905). (Cronje 2000:84)

Advertisement for the Liposuction Institute and the Vein Specialists, Sunday *Chicago Tribune* (May 10, 1987). (Balsamo 1996:7) 75

Yellow pages advertisement for cosmetic surgery, showing “before” and “after” images produced by video imaging program. (Balsamo 1996:7)


Coat by Issey Miyake 1995. (Nii 2001:646)

Illustrations: Addendum

Martelizé du Preez, *Restriction 1.* (2003). Objects. Aluminium, Steel, ±18cmx10cmx10cm (Selection) 76

Martelizé du Preez, *Restriction 1.* (2003). Objects. Aluminium, Steel, Fabriano, Blanket, Batting and cotton thread, ±18cmx10cmx10cm (Selection)

Martelizé du Preez, *Restriction 1.* (2003). Objects. Fabriano, Steel, Plastic and Ink Thinners Transfer. ±18cmx10cmx10cm

Martelizé du Preez, *Restriction: Left Right, Left.* (2003). Objects. Aluminium, Steel and Fabriano, ±18cmx10cm each


Martelizé du Preez, *Untitled* (2003). Objects. Batting, needles, zip, hooks and eyes and cotton thread, ±18cmx8cm each 79


Martelizé du Preez, *Progress* (2004). Objects. Copper, Aluminium and Ribbon, ± 10cmx 3cm and corsets ±14cmx9cmx6cm (selection)


Martelizé du Preez, *Liberated swarm (series 1-12)* (2004). Drawing. Fabriano and Charcoal, 80cmx60cm

Martelizé du Preez, *Liberation* (2004). Objects and brooches. Fine Silver, Nickel Silver and Steel, various sizes of approximately 5cmx3cmx3cm (selection)
Introduction

Restrictive conventions determined by social and cultural expectations and stereotypical gender roles have prevented women from becoming economically and socially empowered. This research discusses contemporary urban women who no longer fulfill traditional roles, i.e. as homemakers and mothers who in the past relied on the income generated by their husbands. Specific reference to the construction of appearance through dress and adornment will be used to demonstrate that women have nevertheless been under pressure to define themselves in accordance with these expectations, thus denying them opportunities more commonly associated with men.

The construction of a sense of Self is influenced by and defined through dress, society, culture and gender expectations. These external factors have a significant impact on identity construction. This discussion will start by asking a very basic question¹ : Where do identities come from?

Social constructionists argue that identity is formed through exposure to the expectations and opinions of others. (Ivanic cited in Sunderland and Litosseliti 2002:6-7) In other words, these expectations and aspirations influence the identity of the Self and can lead to the projection of multiple identities that may also change over time, depending on how relationships develop. (Sunderland and Litosseliti 2002:7) Because these individual identities emerge through the relationship between the Self and the Other, they are also socially and culturally determined. (Roach and Eicher (1979:7) point out in this regard that the distinctiveness of a society can be defined through personal adornment.)

Lazar² argues that feminine identity, in particular, is grounded in the principle of ‘other-centeredness’, which alludes to the pressure personal relationships exercise on the sense of Self. Otherness can therefore be defined in terms of gender. Stereotypically, the gender

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¹ “We have not just failed to return to basic questions – we have forgotten what they were.” (Murphy 1971:71)
attributes associated with femininity have resulted in the exclusion of women from various domains historically controlled by men.

Some researchers suggest that identity formation involves the appearance and reappearance of the Self, which may change depending on the environment in which the person finds him/herself. (Sunderland & Litosseliti 2002:7) As Sunderland and Litosseliti (2002:8) note “an individual’s multiple identities are unlikely to be equally salient at any particular moment in time: rather, one or more may be foreground at different times.” They point out further that “an individual may not be conscious of a particular identity until it becomes prominent within a certain context, such as a white woman who may not experience a sense of ‘whiteness’, indeed ‘otherness’, until she attends a meeting in which every other woman is black” (Sunderland & Litosseliti 2002:8). Particular aspects of identity are consequently foregrounded at different times and in different contexts.

Context may also lead to the foregrounding of contradictory aspects of a person’s identity. (Sunderland & Litosseliti 2002:8) For example, a married businesswoman may be assertive at work but passive in the home environment. In her interactions with her family, she may assume the role of a loving and caring mother and submissive wife, even though at other times it would be essential for her to play a more dominant role in her relations with her colleagues. As Lazar (2002:112) points out in this regard, the achievement of feminine self-identity is still rooted in a discourse of conservative gender relations. She describes this discourse as one that “…keeps women singularly focused and emotionally dependant on personal relationships with men and children” (Lazar 2002:112). She notes further that men “thrive upon the other-centeredness of women as it helps men further their own personal career(s) and goals” (Lazar 2002:113). This other-centeredness continues to disadvantage married women because they still tend to fulfill the expectation that they dress and act in ways prescribed by established social conventions.

In contrast to married women, therefore, “men’s involvement with women and children does not entail a suppression of their own self-interests” (Colebrook 2002:113). This
implies that men tend to further their own needs and careers, and are still inclined to form partnerships with women who are willing to reinforce the status, economic power, and public reputations of their husbands. In other words, they continue to uphold and reinforce patriarchal social and family relations.

At least today, the social contexts single women (heterosexual as well as lesbian) encounter in their interactions with people in both the private and public sphere differ from those encountered by most married women. These women generally have greater social mobility, and are in most cases economically more independent than their married counterparts.

The powerful impact of social expectations, especially on married women, has encouraged Balsamo (1996:25) to argue that “gender identity can be redefined as a body attribute that is assigned, organized, and acquired through the process of social perception: in short, it can no longer be considered a “natural fact” of the human body. Rather we must consider how the human body is “gendered” through a series of social acts…” In Natural Symbols Douglas (Balsamo 1996:24-25) asserts likewise that “…social perceptions of the human body are never free from determining cultural influences…there can be no natural way of considering the body…that does not involve at the same time a social dimension”.

It is important to note, however, that the female body “is not an essentially unchanging, given-in-nature, biological entity” (Suleiman cited in Balsamo 1996:22). Instead, it is structured, symbolically as well as socially, through particular historical conditions and experiences. In other words, notions of what might or might not be considered ‘feminine’ differ from one cultural context to another. Cultural representations of the ‘feminine’ body are thus constructed through different interpretative frameworks. (Balsamo 1996:23)

To cite one recent example, Balsamo (1996:4) considers how the body became ‘gendered’ in American culture during the 1980’s and early 1990’s through plastic
surgery, “…bodybuilding, colored contact lenses, liposuction and other technological innovations have subtly altered the dimensions and markers of what counts as a ‘natural’ body. Even as techno-science provides the realistic possibility of replacement body parts, it also enables a fantastic dream of immortality and control over life and death…”

Despite the general agreement that gender identities are constructed, Silverman (1988:145-146) quotes Irigaray as saying: “Without any interference or special manipulation, you are a woman already. How can I say it? That we are women from the start. That we don’t have to be turned into women by them, made holy and profaned by them”. In keeping with this assertion, she defines two types of bodies, the real body and the discursive body. These two bodies, she claims, represent the identity of womanhood in two ways: natural and ‘actual’ internal self-identity; and idealized and reconstructed external other Identity. According to her, external other identities “manipulate”, “interfere” and “turn” the female body into a socially acceptable and perfect ideal and role model. Accordingly, the only way for women to be socially and culturally acceptable is to follow and obey these expectations.

In this investigation I will consider the ways women have nevertheless begun to take control over the construction of their identities, challenging the powerful role men have played in this history – both physically (through items like the corset) and psychologically. As Sunderland and Litosseliti (2001:31) point out in this regard:

…gender can be seen as profoundly variable, and, even within an individual multi-faceted and shifting. Gender study in linguistics has accordingly undergone a radical shift of focus from ‘gender roles’ to ‘gender differences’ to a focus on variable identities (femininities and masculinities) and on gender not only as an individual, or even social attribute, but also a contextualized, changing set of practices.
Chapter 1: Restriction

Introduction

A discussion of dress and adornment, the corset and the role that fashion plays in the creation of social difference reminds the reader of the physical and social restrictions placed on the female body. The first section of this chapter explores the function of dress and adornment in the creation of identity through the tradition of viewing the female body as an object of display, thereby fulfilling the demands of fashion, society and cultural expectations. This section is followed by a brief overview of the history of corsetry and its ideology, demonstrating the changes that took place between the 1800s and a time when wearing these restrictive garments was no longer obligatory. Leigh Summers (2001), the author of *Bound to Please, A History of the Victorian Corset*, provides important insights with regard to the role that this item of dress played in the construction of so-called ideal and socially acceptable female identities, its role in the sexual objectification and submission of women as well as its function in creating class differentiation. Texts by Kathy Peiss and Vicky Howard, in *Beauty and Business: Commerce, Gender, and Culture in Modern America* (2001), offers information with regard to the clever business strategies employed to keep women in corsets. The argument concerning the role of fashion in the creation of social difference is investigated in the third part of this chapter. Here reference is made to the construction of social differences as upheld through exclusive, fashionable dress. The role of the mass media in creating unattainable feminine ideals and the creation of superior-inferior relationships between men and women forms part of this discussion. The aim of this research is to create an awareness of the history and implications of the above-mentioned factor with a view to encouraging transformations in gender relations.
1.1 Dress and Adornment

Because the body is so rarely observed without clothing, dress and the body are closely connected; hence the need to address the body in a discussion about dress. (Miller1999:13)

The body is the starting point, the basis or framework from which identity is constructed. In this research, focus is placed on the body as an object of display and on the fact that dress and the body are therefore inseparable. As Warwick and Cavallaro (1979: xvii) ask, "Where does the body end and where does dress begin?" A consideration of dress raises questions such as “is it part of the body; a mere extension of; or a supplement to it?” (Warwick & Cavallaro 1998: xv) Wilson (1989:2-3) observes further that “dress is the frontier between the self and the non-self”. There is thus an important interplay between the body, dress and the Other.

According to Damhorst (1999:2), quoting Brumberg, “…the dressed (or undressed) body is very much a project under continual construction”. The changing body is transformed by fashion and society. Dress is consequently the medium through which change is effected, controlled and modified. (Damhorst 1999:2) It is partly through this process that the body becomes socialized.

Adornment and dress are non-verbal mediums for representing and expressing identity. (Roach-Higgins & Eicher 1995:9) Clothing therefore plays a major role in society’s perception of us, and of our aspirations and passions. (Seydoa 1949-1994:8) But these perceptions are never uniform, since each viewer evaluates and perceive identity differently. As Sunderland and Litosseliti (2002:17-18) point out in reference to the way we read texts, interpretation is highly subjective:

…some will like it, some will not; some will interpret it in the way that the writer perhaps intended and hoped; some – the ‘resisting reader’… will recognize the presuppositions and reject them; some will ‘appropriate’ the text for their own ends, to the point of ‘reading against the grain’.

The same can be said about the way we ‘read’ bodies. Especially in the contemporary world, where post-modern conceptions have become commonplace, this multiple ‘reading’ of the body has encouraged new ways of defining identity as fragmented rather
than whole. As Wilson (1992:7) points out, for some theorists fragmentation “…seems to mean that identity is always to some extend a fiction; drawing on psychoanalysis, they have argued that the concept of identity is an ideology of false wholeness, a repression of unconscious impulses”. She goes on to argue that:

Dress could play the part, for example, either to glue the false identity together on the surface, or to lend a theatrical and play-acting aspect to the hallucinatory experience of the contemporary world; we become actors, inventing our costumes for each successive appearance, disguising the recalcitrant body we can never entirely transform. (Wilson 1992:8-9)

My premise that the body is an object of display finds support in Cassam (1996:12) who argues that “Since human beings are substances in space and time, they are ‘objects’ in the world”. Quoting Ayers, he further states that “…we are aware of ourselves as abiding material substances, as physical objects among physical objects” (Cassam 1996:2). Viewed from this perspective the body is an object that serves as a ‘mannequin’ fulfilling the demands of fashion and society.

According to Warwick & Cavallaro (1979:xvi), dress defines but also challenges boundaries. As they argue:

It frames the body and insulates private fantasies from the Other, yet it simultaneously connects the individual self and the collective Other and the fashions of those fantasies on the model of a public spectacle, thus questioning the myth of self-contained identity. The integrity of the body as a personal possession is questioned and the vulnerability of all liminal states is accordingly exposed. This vulnerability may be envisaged either as contamination – as an image of the body ‘assaulted’ by the external other – or as self-dissemination – here, the body ‘disperses’ itself into the outside world. Dress then both defines and de-individualizes us. (Warwick & Cavallaro question 1979:xvi)

Dress thus plays a major role in defining bodily boundaries and relations between people.

If, as Roach-Higgins & Eicher (1995:5) point out, “Dress must be understood within social and cultural environments as well as within the natural”, then one can argue that the social and cultural is the public view and the natural the private. However, this begs the question whether the natural actually exists. Gender, dress, society and culture are important factors to consider in addressing this issue. As Silverman (1988:146) points
out, “Even if we could manage to strip away the discursive veil that separates the subject from his or her ‘actual’ body, that body would itself bear the unmistakable stamp of culture. There is consequently no possibility of ever recovering an ‘authentic’ female body, either inside or outside language”.

Pressure to conform plays a significant role in the maintenance of specific norms of dress. This is clearly borne out by Roach and Eicher (1979:18) in *The Fabrics of Culture* in which they discuss adornment as reinforcement of belief, custom and values. According to them dress as “agreement on bodily adornment reinforces common consciousness and a common course of action that holds people together in a closely knit group” (Roach and Eicher 1979:18). But diverse associations and expectations of dress and the creation of social values are visible in different cultures. In Western society, before the twentieth century, for example, “People [were] simply used to distinctions - they expect[ed] men to dress in one way, women in another; they experience[d] shock and social unease if their expectations were not fulfilled” (Roach 1979:416). This is evidenced in Weeks’ (1986:21) observation that “within the wide parameters of general cultural attitudes each culture labels different practices as appropriate or inappropriate, moral or immoral, healthy or perverted”. Consequently, accepted dress codes are created with the purpose of identifying specific social and cultural roles. These identities are created through particular dress codes.

According to Roach and Eicher (1979:7) “The form of what is *most* or *least* ‘fine’ also depends upon the social group from which the standards for judging ‘fineness’ emerge”. But while cultural norms for judging that which is beautiful therefore tend to exert a powerful influence over people, the visual dialect of a certain sub-group within society often differ from that of the group as a whole. This highlights the importance of individuality, but it does not exclude the influences of and expectations to conform to norms of beauty set by dominant cultures or social groups. Sub-group and counter-cultural phenomena nevertheless “forces us to recognize that individuals and groups use dress in subtle ways to create meaning, to locate themselves in a society in a variety of ways” (Sunderland and Litosseliti 2002:9)
Each culture uses different set of values to create its view of the ideal body even when it relies on forms of dress that are also commonly found in other contexts. For example, although corsets were worn by Persian dancers and women from the orient, in Mythology, by royalty like Queen Elizabeth of England, the Empress of Austria and Catherine de Medici of France, they contributed to the creation of different definitions of female beauty in each of these contexts. Moreover, what was achieved through the use of corsetry in the nineteenth century is now done through plastic surgery. Often, norms of beauty established by social elites through these transformations of the body were accepted by others, leading to the spread of beauty trends across large sections of society. But as Wilson (1992:9) also notes “Women and men do not just imitate those above them in the social ranking order; on the contrary they may use dress to reinforce class barriers and other forms of difference…”

The aim of this research is not to recover the idea of a personal and private authentic female body, which is an impossible undertaking, but to encourage a “…transformation of the discursive conditions under which women live their corporeality” (Silverman 1988:146).

1.2 The Corset

While a deluge of material exists that trivializes or sensationalizes the corset in simplistic sexual terms, there has been no sustained feminist criticism of the corset’s role in constructing and enforcing the private realm of womanhood. (Summers 2001:2)

In this section my aim is to give a brief overview of the history of corsetry and its ideology and to demonstrate the changes that have taken place in the use of corsetry from the 1800s until a time when wearing these restrictive garments was no longer obligatory.

3 “The women wear a corset made of ‘morocco’, and furnished with two plates of wood placed on the chest, … their anter i es were clasped from the throat downwards by silver plates.” (Lord 1993:13-14)
4 “Homer the first ethnic writer who speaks of an article of dress allied to the corset…The poet attributes most potent magical virtues to the cestus…” (Lord 1993:30)
5 “Queen Elizabeth of England…thirteen inches waist measure being the standard fashionable elegance…” (Lord 1993:72) “…the much admired Empress of Austria has been long celebrated for possessing a waist of sixteen inches in circumference…” (Lord 1993:165)
As Summers points out, “the corset remains profoundly under-theorized, though it is potentially the most illuminating icon of the Victorian era, heavily pregnant with feminine metaphors and associations, unavoidably steeped in and expressive of Victorian female sexuality and subordination” (Summers 2001:2).

The role of the corset in the construction of so-called ideal and socially acceptable feminine identities in 19th century European communities raises a number of questions regarding the psychological, social and physical restrictions placed on women at that time. The corset is a clear example of an item of dress that may at first appear to have an aesthetic origin, but that also “…carries a number of messages…of social and psychological significance” (Roach and Eicher 1979:8). Even though there were “objections to corsetry on ‘rational’ grounds, these being that corsetry was uncomfortable, restrictive and dangerous to well-being…many Victorian women wore corsets, despite the personal experience of their discomfort and knowledge of the garment’s role in sexual objectification” (Summers 2001:6).

Like the corset, medical illustrations of the female body played an important role in maintaining gender stereotypes. As Gallagher and Lacqueur (1986:vii) point out in the introduction of The Making of the Modern Body:

Scholars have only recently discovered that the human body itself has a history. Not only has it been perceived, interpreted, and represented differently in different epochs, but it has also been lived differently, brought into being within widely dissimilar material cultures, subjected to various technologies and means of control, and incorporated into different rhythms of production and consumption, pleasure and pain.

Until 1733, there were no published illustrations of the female skeleton. When these illustrations were first introduced, the treatment of the female skeleton emphasized child-bearing attributes. Consequently, while female skulls as illustrated in figures 30 – 33, were shown as small, their pelvises were depicted as large: “…women were in the depths of their bones regarded as unsuitable for intellectual labor (especially for science) and were thus unable to gain access to the dominant discourse of their subjugation”

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6 Refer to figure 16 and 17 for illustrations on the changes to the internal organs and skeletal frame caused by corsetry and tightlacing.
(Gallagher and Lacqueur 1986:ix). This stereotyping was supported by "the well-organized corset industry [which] continued to benefit from their persistent interventions in fashion changes and the construction of women's desires for ‘ideal figures’" (Fields 2001:134). Here, as in other contexts, powerful business interests promoted and exploited ideals of feminine beauty that pressurized women to observe, visualize and understand their bodies accordingly. (Fields 2001:110).

The gender stereotypes preserved through corsetry forced even young girls to dress, behave and move about in a way considered appropriately feminine. This premature fashioning of the body required prepubescent girls to cultivate petite “feminine” waists. The garments worn by these girls were therefore smaller versions of the impractical and restrictive clothes worn by their mothers. Even the dolls that girls played with were dressed in corsets as illustrated in figures 3 and 4. Advertisements also played an important role, such as those in figures 1 and 2. As Summers (2004:68) notes, this tendency of dressing young girls like adults “can be read as a mechanism to ensure the reiteration and perpetuation of a particular female ideology, an ideology that reasserted traditional female role models”.

Like the corset, other aspects of Victorian dress, “…reflected social anxieties and imperatives to reinforce traditional separate spheres and preserve gender specifications” (Summers 2004:68), by radically differentiating male from female clothing. Figures 5 and 6 indicate the type of dress of men and women before the radical changes as indicated in figures 7 – 9. During the 1800s, women’s fashion changed, becoming fixated on decorative details that have been described as “…visual orgies of ribbons, bows, ruffles, lace, flowers, fur and feathers that were completely unsuited for any practical purpose” (Summers 2004:68). In contrast to this, male clothing became increasingly neutral and austere with the prime intention being to increase comfort and ease of movement. While this dress encouraged a greater sense of freedom, corsets and fussy accessories like ribbons helped to keep women out of the domain of business, effectively restricting them to the private realm of the home.
Writing in 1925, Veblen\textsuperscript{7} gave a very good overview of the social and gender relations underlying the Victorian history of the corset. As he argued:

But the women’s apparel not only goes beyond that of the modern man in the degree in which it argues exemption from labour; it also adds a peculiar and highly characteristic feature which differs in kind from anything habitually practiced by men. This feature is the class of contrivances of which the corset is the typical example. The corset is, in economic theory, substantially a mutilation, undergone for the purpose of lowering the subject’s vitality and rendering her permanently and obviously unfit for work. (Veblen 1925:121)

The powerful impact the corset had on women’s lives is borne out by the fact that it remained a crucial item of dress for seventy years. In fact “while skirts, sleeves and decorative accessories of nineteenth century gowns altered significantly in the period between 1830 and 1900, the bodice did not” (2001:20). In contrast to contemporary fashions, which change from one season to another, women thus wore corsets and long dresses for three generations, preventing them from participating in so-called masculine activities. The photograph in figure 13 indicates that the corset did not change much during the second half of the nineteenth century.

A truly fashionable appearance, which was signified by a tightly laced-up waist, depended to a large extent on access to capital, and the leisure afforded by a middle class life. During the early 1800’s women from the working classes wore jumps, which were designed to fit more loosely than corsets, allowing the occupant enough mobility to work. The tightly laced up bodies of middle-class women, on the other hand, signified that they were beyond physical work. As Summers states, corsetry did not only construct femininity, but also “class-based identity and subjectivity” (2001:9). Corsetry was cherished by fashion-conscious, middle-class women primarily because “it crafted the flesh into class-appropriate contours” (Summers 2001:9).

Occasionally, some corsetry firms catering to middle class women also advertised their products to working class women, claiming that it would “transform” (Summers 2001:13) their lives. An advertisement by the corset company, William Pretty and Sons,

\textsuperscript{7}The Theory of the Leisure Class (1925)
maintained that “…the occupant would ‘look a better woman, (would) feel a better woman (and would) be a better woman” (Women’s Life January 1899:291 in Summers 2001:13). Middle class values and norms were therefore promoted among working women. The development and rapid acceptance of the sewing machine and patterns for making your own stay, jump or corset made it increasingly easy for every woman to wear some sort of restrictive garment. Middle class women however had their corsets made and fitted by professional corsetieres, placing them on a different, i.e. so-called higher social level.

With the exception of Martha Gibbon, the corsets that were patented and manufactured during the first half of the nineteenth century were all designed by men. This changed during the second half of the nineteenth century when women entered “the male-dominated world of business” (Summers 2001:24). In 1899 eleven of the twenty-four corset patents submitted to the patent office were by women. With few exceptions, these female patents were mostly concerned to improve comfort rather than strengthening the corset. Thus, for example, Fanny Gibson’s corsets were designed to fit over the body, rather than compress it into a fashionably contracted contour. Anna Maria Hatchman, however, followed the example of male designers, who produced restrictive corsets with no concern to comfort. (Summers 2001:22-25).

In most cases, men who proposed designs for the corset to the patent office were involved in professions that were entirely unrelated to the clothing industry. Warehousemen, mechanical engineers, real estate agents and even dentists became involved in this industry. Summers asserts that their “…patents can be read as documents in which male fears of female sexuality or female ‘escape’ might be detected” (2001:27). For this reason, she argues that male corset designs sought to suppress and managed the female body. The ideology underlying these designs was realized through the incorporation of durable materials such as horsehair, felting, metal, wood, leather and wire and techniques

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8 As Roach and Eicher asserts consumerism played a significant role in the construction of identity through dress.
such as steam\(^9\) and heat moulding. These materials and techniques confirmed the male desire to “resculpt, restrain and regulate female flesh” (Summers 2001:27). The corset thus “…functioned as a steel jail around a tightly laced up body” (Lord 1993:75). One example was made from thin steel plates with hinges and a box fastening made from a hasp and pin. Figure 14 shows a corset made of steel worn during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Summers uses the apt term ‘physical imprisonment’ in reference to garments like these. (2001:27)

Quoting contemporary accounts, Lord noted in his 1868 book, *The Corset and the Crinoline*, that women often attributed fainting and illnesses to wearing corsets. Hooping-cough, obliquity of vision, polypus, apoplexy, stoppage of the nose, pain in the eyes and earache were all laid at the door of the stays. Given these assertions, he quotes one commentator who suggested sarcastically that it was surprising “…that large ears and wooden legs were not added to the category, as they might have been with an equal show of reason" (Lord 1993:153). A female correspondent to the *Queen* magazine claimed that "...if the various organs are prevented from taking a certain form or direction they will accommodate themselves with perfect ease" (Lord 1993:162). This change in the positions of the organs can be seen in figure 17. As this suggests, women tended to accept rather than challenge the impact – both real and imaginary – that corsets had on their health.

Opinions regarding the effect corsets had on women’s health nevertheless varied significantly. A male correspondent to the *Englishwomen’s Magazine* in November 1867 expounded the advantages and benefits of wearing corsets as follows:

> From personal experience I beg to express a decided and unqualified approval of corsets. I was early sent to school in Austria, where lacing is not

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\(^9\) This extremely successful stiffening method was conceived and patented by Edwin Izod – manufacturer of moulds and corsets. Summers describes it as follows: “His quickly pirated steam molding process involved designing a desirable female form by packing sawdust or bran into a corset until he was satisfied its shape was perfect, and then setting the ‘torso’ in a solution of plaster of Paris or other suitable cement. The corset was then removed and the ‘anatomically perfect’ form was used to cast models of glass, china, earthenware or cast metal. Into which were fitted a series of copper pipes. Corsets were designed to fit over these models. The garments were then covered in a solution of a glue/starch mixture that was baked into fibers of the corset by steam forces through copper pipes in the moulds. The heat molding effectively set the corset into a hard, shell-like construction.” (2001:27)
considered ridiculous in a gentleman as in England, and I objected in a thorough English way when the doctor’s wife required me to be laced. I was not allowed any choice, however. A sturdy mädchen was stoically deaf to my remonstrances, and speedily laced me up in a fashionable Viennese corset. I presume my impressions were not very different from those of our lady correspondents. I felt ill at ease and awkward, and the daily lacing tighter and tighter produces inconvenience and absolute pain. In a few months however, I was as anxious as any of my ten or twelve companions to have my corset laced as tightly as a pair of strong arms could draw them. It is from no feeling of vanity that I have ever since continued to wear them, for, not caring to incur ridicule, I take good care that my dress shall not betray me, but I am practically convinced of the comfort and pleasantness of tight-lacing, and thoroughly agree with Staylace that the sensation of being tightly laced in an elegant well-made, tightly-fitting pair of corsets is superb. There is no other word for it. I have dared this avowal because I am thoroughly ashamed of the idle nonsense that is being constantly uttered on this subject… and further that the ladies themselves who have given tight-lacing a fair trial, and myself and schoolfellows converted against our will, are the only jury entitled to pronounce authoritatively on the subject, and that the comfortable support and enjoyment afforded by a well-laced corset quite overbalances the theoretical evils that are so confidently prophesized by outsiders. (Lord 1993:137-138)

On the other hand, Fields (2001:110) notes that from the mid-nineteenth century onward heated debates was generated by the purpose and the meaning of the corset among physicians, ministers, couturiers, feminist dress reformers, health and hygiene activists, and advocates of tight lacing. Their arguments highlighted the fact that efforts to keep women in corsets were an ongoing project. These corset debates intensified in the early twentieth century. As Fields (2001:109) points out:

"Turn-of-the-century corset styles became even more constricting, and so protests against their use gained ground. In addition, young women in the 1910s began to reject the Victorian moral sensibilities – and the fashions inspired by them – which symbolically and literally restricted women’s mobility in private and public spheres. Women’s claims to wage work, to academic and physical education, to public protest over access to suffrage and birth control, and to pleasurable leisure activities such as dancing at tango parties all brought daily corset wearing into question. Arguments towards corset use changed as a result. And though most women continued to wear corsets, demands for more comfort in clothing and the rising appeal of “modernity” as a sales tool changed their shape."

Regardless of mounting concerns about issues of health, women were motivated to continue wearing restrictive garments partly because of the pressures placed on them by
men. This is evident from the following contemporary opinions quoted by Lord (1993:163):

Many times in fashionable assemblies I heard gentlemen criticizing the young ladies in such terms as these: ‘What a clumsy figure Miss _____ is! It completely spoils her.’ ‘What a pity Miss _____ is not a neater figure!’ and so on, and I believe there is not one young man in a thousand who does not admire a graceful slenderness of the waist.

Commercial companies exploited female insecurities by identifying problematic figures and bodily imperfections. Gossard’s early twentieth-century chart defined nine figure types; Warner had eight classifications in 1921; and Berlei’s 1926 study of Australian women described five figure types. (Fields 2001:128) In 1929 the company, Bon Tom, marketed a series of nine corset shapes titled "What figure type are you?" (Fields 2001:128) This new development encouraged the identification of the female body into either one of the nine different ideally constructed categories. Fields (2001:128) describes this reconstruction of the female body as follows:

The greater public presence and freedom in body display and movement achieved by women in the 1920s were attenuated by this reformed and internalized emphasis on female imperfection. Marketing corsets on their ability to solve “figure faults” meant that the identification of faults assumed greater importance as persuasive means of guiding women into corsets that resolved their defects.

The powerful private and commercial interests underlying efforts to shape female conceptions of beauty finds expression in the notion of women as object of the male ‘gaze’, which was first theorized by Mulvey, who points out that even today:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. (1989:19)

Writing as early as the 1820’s, Madame La Sante observed that the power of the male ‘gaze’ forced women to conform to a very particular notion of femininity:

We have seen for many hundred years a slender figure has been considered a most attractive female charm and there is nothing to lead us to suppose that a taste which appears to be implanted in a man’s very nature will ever cease to render the acquisition of a small
waist and anxious solicitude with those who have the care of the young. (Lord 1993:144)

Even in the early twentieth century, when the corset was beginning to undergo several drastic changes, it continued to play a role in shaping conceptions of female beauty. Since this later history of the corset raises interesting issues regarding the way in which female roles were defined through dress, it is worth recounting. From 1900 to 1905, the S-curved corsets became popular. As Fields writes: “The S-curve blunted the athleticism and mobility of the Gibson\textsuperscript{10} girl” (2001:112). The manipulation of the body necessary to create the S-curve silhouette was therefore an easy target for anti-corset agitation “…which defended the “natural” body” (Fields 2001:112). After the S-curve corset, the straight-front corset, which stretched low over the thighs, came into fashion in support of the slimmer line of skirts worn then. Dressing in this skirt hindered women from bending in their legs. Inhibitions like these became even more apparent with the introduction of the “hobble skirt”, which made walking almost impossible.

The growing popularity of the bicycle and access to sport and physical exercise resulted in the invention of the sports corset. Figure 11 shows an example of the type of dress worn while playing tennis. This garment was made of lighter and more flexible materials. The dance corset first appeared in 1914 because of the popularity of the tango\textsuperscript{11}, which encouraged women to remove their stiff corsets at parties in order to dance. Corsets companies responded to this development by marketing dance corsets. An advertisement in The Designer (October 1914) for corset manufactured by NUFORM, for example, offered consumers the possibility of ordering an illustrated dance book guide in what was clearly an attempt to increase sales. (http://www.vintagevictorian.com/10_underwear.html) Slowly, the corset consequently developed from a rigid structure to accommodate changing female needs and roles. With reference to the sports corset, Fields (2001:113) notes that in the early twentieth century there was a growing “…measure of give and take between women’s demands for greater comfort and freedom of movement and manufacturer’s needs for profits from continuous corset sales”.

\textsuperscript{10} This refers to the corsets designed by Fanny Gibson. They improved comfort.

\textsuperscript{11} Refer to figure 10 for the underwear worn with this type of dress.
Professional corset fitters were trained at corset schools with specifically required curricula pertaining to medical conditions, anatomy, modern merchandising, retail advertising and “scientific salesmanship” (Fields 2001:125). Through these courses, companies were able to differentiate their products from one another by displaying their apparently sincere interests in the importance of women’s medical health, which was guaranteed through reliance on so-called scientific methods. (Fields 2001:125) In 1921, the Warner Brother’s corset manufacturing company, for example, sent pamphlets to corset departments to assist saleswomen in promoting the benefits of wearing Warner’s corsets. This specialized training in corset fitting, as well as business psychology, increased the status of businesses and the marketing skills of saleswomen. Writing in the 1920’s, Ethel Allen, the supervisor of the Cabo School of Corsetry observed that "...women seek the services of a thoroughly competent and trained professional corsetiere, one who understands all the alluring intricacies of the human form divine" (Fields 2001:131).

Despite the popularity of these restrictive corsets, especially in the first two decades of the twentieth century, the fashion statement of the corsetless look was first introduced by Paul Poiret in 1908. A French couturier, Poiret designed dresses that could be worn without corsets, but ironically these slim line garments made walking quite difficult. Fields (2001:113) quotes Poiret, who wrote in his autobiography *My First 50 Years* (1931) as follows: “Yes, I freed the bust but I shackled the legs”.

New fashions like these contributed to the declining interest in corsetry especially after 1920. Corset manufacturers and department store buyers nevertheless initiated several strategies to regain control over the female body, which included debates based on medicine, politics, and the culture of beauty and fashion. As Fields argues, trade journal articles, such as ‘Evils of the No-Corset Fad’, ‘Flappers Are Responsible for Corsetless

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12 “Contrary to popular opinion, all ladies did not shed their corset during the 1910’s. The brassiere also came into use at this time, as the corset was now often cut low enough that it did not fully support the bust” [http://www.vintagevictorian.com/10_underwear.html](http://www.vintagevictorian.com/10_underwear.html)

13 Ironically, Thomas however notes that a longer straighter corset that almost reached the knees had to be worn to achieve the desired look. [http://www.fashion-era.com/orientalism_in_dress.html](http://www.fashion-era.com/orientalism_in_dress.html)
Craze’ and ‘Eminent Surgeons Endorse the Corset’, implied that corsetlessness was a threatening menace. These pro-corset arguments, “…culled from the discourses of professionalized medicine, the eugenics movement, and Victorian constructions of femininity, and their circulation through mass media and the marketplace, reveal how manufacturers constructed the corset as an instrument of cultural hegemony” (Fields 2001:118). In fear of complete rejection of corsetry, new names, for example those in the advertisement in figure 18, and forms were invented, such as the girdle, which was offered as a lighter and more flexible alternative. Against this background older corset types were blamed for bodily imperfections that could be corrected through the use of these newer forms. (Fields 2001:119)

The history of the corset did not end there, however. In 1947 Christian Dior introduced the fashion of the New Look, dressing femininity with rounded shoulders, full busts and narrow waists above wide hips created through a voluminous long-hemmed skirt as illustrated in figure 22. Because the body could not conform to this ideal figure type, restrictive undergarments were reintroduced. Maureen Turin called this fashion "a form of gilded bondage" (Howard 2001:200). Undergarments like the "Tric-O-Lastic", "Twice Over", "Semi-Acccentuated", "Hold Tite" and "Green Sheen" turned the body into an ideal, hourglass shape. (Howard 2001:200)

It was only in the postwar years that advertisers consistently “…celebrated female sexual allure and desire, positing them as key attributes of ‘the normal female psyche’" (Howard 2001:199). New tendencies towards the advertising of female sexuality found expression in a national Maidenform campaign called "I Dreamed", which ran from 1949 to1969. This campaign challenged the conventions of the private versus the public. The campaign can be described as follows:

… [It] reflected the new trends in advertising’s representation of female sexuality. Advertisements pictured models, clothed from the waist down and wearing a brassier only on top, doing very public things in their dreams, such as directing traffic or doing shopping. Each ad was accompanied by the phrase, “I Dreamed”, and a brief description of the activity performed in a Maidenform bra. The campaigns appeal thus derived from its successful transformation of the private into the public. (Howard 2001:199)
Equally importantly, the message of advertisements like these highlighted the idea of freedom of movement, the very opposite of what women endured through wearing corsets.

1.3 The role of fashion in the creation of social difference

For many people, dressing oneself can be an aesthetic act, and all aesthetic acts are acts of speaking, through which an individual may speak as an individual, what is said having meaning only because of relationships with other people. Aesthetic acts do not grow out of a vacuum, but from what is learned from others (Roach and Eicher 1979:7)

Like Lazar (2002:125), several theorists have argued that “the formation of one’s self-identity is by no means an autonomous project divorced from relationships with others”. Reflecting on contemporary social relations, Christopher Lasch notes that “…our culture of mass consumption encourages narcissism, a new kind of self-consciousness or vanity through which people have learned to judge themselves not merely against others but through others’ eyes” (Garner 2000:36). In this section, my aim is to explore, very briefly, the ways in which social differences are constructed and upheld through dress both historically and in contemporary Western contexts.

In her essay Identity, Post modernity, and the Global Apparel Marketplace, Kaiser (2000:112) quotes the clothing historian Rachel Pannabecker (1997), who observes that contemporary fashion can be defined as consisting of more than one look. According to her, this “…seems to represent a shift toward a greater plurality of popular styles, perhaps to parallel an increasing awareness of what it means to live in a multicultural society”. In contrast to this contemporary development, a study of historical fashions, especially in the West, suggests a very different relationship to dress. In the past, styles were more prescriptive, upholding social hierarchies and gender relations. Quoting Chartier, Breward (1995:3-4) notes, however, that “it is necessary to recognize the fluid circulation

\[14\] “concepts are defined by what they are not, by their ‘other’” (Hawkes 1996:5)
and shared practices that cross social boundaries”. Fashion therefore requires a method of analysis that takes account of multiple meanings and interpretations. (Breward 1995:4)

This is especially evident when looking at the notions of femininity, which today depend in part on the construction of a glorified, ideal figure presented in the mass media through fashion shows and shoots. While ‘ordinary’ women are encouraged to aspire to this ideal, in many cases they also react against it. Powerful and often emotive business strategies and promotional tactics nevertheless play an important role in upholding unattainable feminine ideals. In The Face of Fashion Jennifer Craik (1994:46)) states that “[w]omen are constrained by representational codes which position them as passive vehicles of display and the object of the look. In turn, the look is structured by the normative male gaze, as objects of desire and repositories of pleasure (e.g. Berger 1972; Pollock 1977)”. She argues that:

[f]ashion has been singled out as a domain of representation and practice in which exploitative relations are central. Because femininity is defined in terms of how the female body is perceived and represented, ‘a woman’s character and status are frequently judged by her appearance’ (Bettermen 1987:7). The body ‘is the site on which feminine cultural ideals can be literally manufactured’ (ibid.:8): ‘ Paintings, advertisements, pornography, and fashion are all practices which produce particular ways of seeing the feminine body’ (ibid.:9). (Craik 1994:46)

According to Wilson (1992:5) feminists are suspicious of fashionable clothing because:

… it reinforces the sexual objectification of women; for its associations with conspicuous consumption and the positioning of women as economic chattels, as property and because it is held to be uncomfortable and to render women helpless (high heels and pinched-in waists, for example can impede movement).

Despite these objections, a 1977 body image survey revealed that:

The media play an important role as a cultural gatekeeper, framing standards of beauty for all of us by the models they choose … forty-three percent of

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15 Breward (1995:182-183) observes that “The twentieth century has repeatedly been characterized by cultural, social, design and art historians as the age of ‘mass’. ‘Mass production’, mass-consumption’ and ‘mass-media’ have all been quoted as the defining characteristics of Western society since 1900, and from the perspective of fashion historians claims have been made that the specific nature of mass society has been unavoidably, if problematically, imprinted upon its clothing and its attitudes to dress and identity”. Breward (1995:183) also notes that today more comfortable, cheaper and attractive items of dress are available to a “larger proportion of the population.”
women report that “very thin or muscular” models make them feel insecure about their weight…make them want to lose weight to look like them… (Garner 2000:34-35)

On the other hand, “…34 percent of women declare they are angry and resentful at these presumed paragons of beauty…” (Garner 2000:34-35) On this issue, one thirty-year-old woman noted that:

The media portray an image of the perfect woman that is unattainable for somewhere between 98 to 99 percent of the female population. How are we supposed to live up to that standard that is shoved into our faces constantly – I hate it. (Garner 2000:36)

The ambivalent role fashion plays in contemporary society has been discussed by Baudrillard (1981:51) who points out that “It is one of those institutions that best restores cultural inequality and social discrimination, establishing it under the pretence of abolishing it”. According to Baudrillard (1981:51), however, it was above all class relations that were upheld through fashion in the past. Wilson (1992:5) notes likewise that fashion “…has an association with privilege and wealth and hence unacceptable class” and racial connotations.

As this suggests, the fashion system creates superior-inferior relationships that go beyond unattainable notions of femininity promoted through fashion models in contemporary society. As Veblen (1925:12) points out with regard to the Victorian era, for example, the clothing of the rich not only had to be expensive:

…but it should also make plain to all observers that the wearer is not engaged in any kind of productive labour… It goes without saying that no apparel can be considered elegant, or even decent, if it shows the effect of manual labour on the part of the wearer, in the way of soil or wear. The pleasing effect of neat and spotless garments is chiefly, if not altogether, due to their carrying the suggestion of leisure…

In medieval Europe, fine dress was reserved for certain social classes through sumptuary laws. Thus, for example, the sumptuary law of 1365 required grooms, servants and the employees of urban craftsmen to wear cheap woolen cloth costing no more than 1s 1d per yard. Knights worth £1000, on the other hand, “…could dress at their pleasure…” (Breward 1995:26-27) According to Breward (1995:27), sumptuary laws illustrate a recognition within medieval society “…of the power of dress as a communicator of rank
and a longing for that power to be manifested through a clearly defined system of priorities based on social position rather than wealth”.

In contrast to the social security afforded by these sumptuary laws, contemporary advertisements\(^\text{16}\) for new trends often have logos that encourage the development of a unique self. Yet these advertisements promote standardized ideals of beauty. Thus, for example, a recent American Swiss advertisement encourages individuality and the expression of personal opinions that paradoxically are associated with wearing the advertised jewellery. In 2002, there were 183\(^\text{17}\) American Swiss jewellery retailers in SA selling mass-produced jewellery. According to the advertisement, these so-called unique jewellery pieces, which, ironically, are worn by countless women, reveal the wearer’s individuality\(^\text{18}\).

It must nevertheless be acknowledged that fashion often successfully suggests a sense of exclusivity. This is confirmed by Baudrillard (1981:48) who points out that “audacious” forms are often consumed by those who can afford to pay for innovative or unusual designs. As he suggest, “Technical - real - innovation does not have at its heart the goal of genuine economy, but the game of social distinction” (Baudrillard 1981:48). In many societies, both contemporary and historical, expensive clothing has played an important role in differentiating through rarity, which usually commands social admiration. (Roach & Eicher 1979:9) In most cases, such differentiations reinforce binary opposites within a society: rich vs. poor, powerful vs. weak, hero vs. outcast, conformer vs. non-conformer, religious vs. irreligious, leader from the follower. (Roach & Eicher 1979:10)

\(^{16}\) According to Wilson (1992:10) "…some women found the corset to be reassuring and in it’s own way comfortable, a supportive shell or armor placed between the individual and the world". A more contemporary point of view is expressed in an advertisement by Lace Embrace Atelier “At Lace Embrace we believe that the corset is an extension of the self…We are dedicated to offering corsets that will achieve a well-proportioned figure. We are dedicated to the time honored traditions of corsetry, actively working with historical and modern designs…” http://laceembrace.com/

\(^{17}\) www.americanswiss.durban.co.za

\(^{18}\) “American Swiss is the leading contemporary jewellery retailer offering new and exciting merchandise for the aspirational confident individual.” (www.americanswiss.durban.co.za)
Conclusion

This chapter exposed the physical and social restrictions placed on the female body through a discussion of dress and adornment, the corset and the role that fashion has played in the creation of social difference. As I have demonstrated, issues such as gender, dress, society and culture played an important role in the objectification of women and the creation of a so-called ideal body. The brief overview on the history of the corset indicated that keeping women in corsets secured men’s power over women. A discussion of the role of fashion in creating and upholding social difference through fashionable dress serve to create an understanding of the multiple meanings and interpretations required when raising important issues regarding dress. Together with the above-mentioned research, the influences and expectations set by the mass media through fashion shows and shoots, and the creation of superior-inferior relationships, establish the importance of change. This indication of change will be addressed in Chapter Two.
Chapter 2: Change

Introduction

This chapter addresses the idea of changing relations of power and feminine identity through an exploration of the notion of contemporary fashion, the creation of identity as ‘performativity’ in the context of gender politics and the opposition of beauty to business in the section Fashioning Identities. The case studies by Walby (1986), in her book Patriarchy at Work, provide significant information regarding gender divisions of labour in the discussion of Women and Labour. The third section on Beautiful Women briefly explores the status and power of women in the workplace and the significance of a fashionable appearance in this context. The case of Estee Lauder offer valuable insights into the business of beauty and proves that change has taken place from the traditional role of women as submissive homemakers and mothers to successful business women.

2.1 Fashioning Identities

It is difficult to discuss fashion in relation to the feminism of today, because the ideologies about dress that have circulated within the women’s movement seem never to have been made explicit. This may be one reason for the intense irritation and confusion that the subject provoked from the beginning…and still provokes. (Wilson 1984: 230)

Especially in the West, female roles have changed significantly in the course of the 20th century. Whereas, previously, women were in most cases confined to their homes, where they fulfilled important, but limited roles as homemakers and mothers, today, many women have successful careers in the business sector. This helps to explain why the tendency to define the work or business environment in opposition to the culture of beauty continues to survive in the popular imagination and in the media. As Peiss (2001:7) points out, traditionally, beauty was defined as “…seemingly frivolous, superficial and female, the subject of aesthetics, art, poetry, and most recently feminist criticism. Business, in contrast, connotes serious, consequential, indeed manly activity, the intellectual domain of economists and social scientists”. As Peiss (2001:7) also notes, however, “beauty is big business, with large-scale production, international distribution networks, media-saturation advertising, scientific marketing, and sales in the billions of
dollars”. In many situations it is therefore women who earn substantial salaries who are in a position to indulge in what traditionally was considered the frivolous pursuit of beauty. In keeping with this trend, I have found, as a manufacturing jewellery artist, that it is now most often women rather than men who commission or purchase the jewellery these women wear.

According to Peiss (2001:14), the perception that ‘beauty sells’ first became commonplace in business after the 1920s. Yet, to this today, the relationship between fashion and feminism remains ambivalent, mainly because, as Gibson (2000: 350) points out in quoting Coward’s Our Treacherous Hearts, feminists continue to object to the “female obsession with rendering oneself the aesthetic sex, with making oneself sexually attractive”. (Coward 1992: 154-5) In the 1970s, when feminists first began to question the male tendency to objectify women, this anti-fashion rhetoric led Germaine Greer to condemn the impact on young women of fashion spreads in Vogue and other up-market magazines, which, according to her, stereotyped the ‘Eternal Feminine’. (Greer 1971:58-59)

Although Gibson (2000:350) acknowledges Greer’s importance in giving expression to key questions regarding dress and self-presentation, she also questions what she calls the current ‘fallacy’ around fashion. Rather than rejecting the world of fashion as trivial and superficial, she asserts the importance of a postmodern reading of contemporary fashion as suggested by Craik (1994:8), who highlights the ‘slipperiness’ of fashion, which she considers to be marked by ambivalence, polyvalence and excess. As Gibson notes, this reading of contemporary fashion is consistent with Butler’s notion of ‘performativity’ in the context of gender politics. Evoking the notion of a ‘surface politics of the body’ (Butler 1990:134-4), Butler (Gibson 2000:356) opens up the idea that in our contemporary experience “Fashion itself supplies the constituent elements of an indeterminate number and range of social performances and self-constructions.”

Quoting Hume (1978:252), Cassam (1997:1) describes this post-modern understanding of identity as follows “… when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I
always stumble on some particular perception or other…I can never catch myself without a perception and can never observe anything but the perception”. She therefore argues that “…the self is nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions and that the identity which we ascribe to the mind of man (sic) is only a fictitious one” (Hume cited in Cassam 1997:1).

2.2 Women and labor
While Gibson (2000:315) cautions that certain kinds of feminist activity have been co-opted and even hijacked by patriarchy, citing the ‘power suit’ of the 1980s as an example of female dress that signifies the opposite of real empowerment, several researchers have shown that, in the course of the 20th century, women have gradually succeeded in resisting exploitation and co-optation in the workplace. Notable in this regard is Walby (1986:1-2), who argues in her book Patriarchy at Work, that women became significant actors in resisting their exploitation in gender divisions of labour in Britain in the course of the 20th century. Drawing on case studies from the cotton textile industry, engineering and clerical work, Walby (1986:1) questions “the dominant view of women acquiescing in their fate”, arguing instead that studies of labour relations need to take account not only of conventional class theory, but also of gender relations.

Of interest to this discussion on women’s changing roles in 20th century Western communities is Walby’s critique of existing theories of gender inequality. According to her, “[w]hile these critics note the empirical evidence of systematic social inequality between men and women they fail to incorporate this adequately into their conceptual and theoretical schemes” (Walby 1986:15). As she also points out, although some theorists insist on the primary relevance of class analysis in an assessment of historical inequalities between men and women, others, like Eichler (1980:114), question the significance of class in assessing gender relations. (Walby 1986:15) The latter view is supported by Barrett (1980:249), who argues that the oppression of women is not a functional necessity for capitalism. (Walby 1986:21) Barrett nevertheless refuses to accept the analytical independence of patriarchal domination. According to Walby (1986:22), because she therefore fails to recognize the importance of men’s interests in
women’s subordination, she also fails to provide “a framework which can adequately analyze the conflicting interests of patriarchy and capital over …women’s labour”. In Walby’s (1986:22) view, this leads Barrett (1980:157) seriously to underestimate “the significance of patriarchal forces in the workplace”, which accounts to a large extent for the comparatively poor pay women were forced to accept when they moved from the domestic sphere of unpaid labour into the public sphere of wage labour.

As Walby demonstrates through her carefully researched case studies, in the workplace men have repeatedly organized against women, “primarily, though not exclusively, through the device of job segregation by sex” (Walby 1986:43). She concurs with Hartmann (1979b:11), who argues that the effect of this exclusion has been far-reaching, for in many situations it has effectively pressurized women into remaining financially dependent on men. According to Hartmann (1979b:11), “[t]he material base upon which patriarchy rests lies most fundamentally in men’s control over women’s labour power” (Walby 1986:43).

Building on this and other analyses of gender relations in contemporary western societies, Walby (1986:50) argues that the two most significant dimensions of patriarchal relations of power and domination are to be found in domestic work and paid labour. Historically, the work women did (and still do) in domestic environments affords them no independent income and is therefore viewed as insignificant when compared to the ‘real’ work men do for financial remuneration. Yet, ironically, the exploitation, or expropriation of women’s domestic labour characteristically involves women working longer hours than men. For this, they generally receive a relatively low proportion of the income their husbands earn in the workplace.

When women enter situations of wage labour, disadvantage often remains a major dimension of their experience. The forms of control through which they are marginalized include non-admittance to formal training, non-admittance to certain occupations, restrictions on the kind of occupations they are given access to, discrimination in hiring practices, the ejection of women from particular occupations (or the reduction of their
right to remain on after marriage), and the sacking particularly of married women when redundancies are proposed by employers. (Walby 1986:55-56) As Hartmann notes, this patriarchal division of labour existed long before the advent of capitalism, but was “was …perpetuated by male workers in industrial capitalism and exploited by capitalist employers for their own benefit” (Walby 1986:85). According to Walby (1986:38), an understanding of patriarchal relations in paid work is therefore “essential for understanding why women have not more widely entered the labour market, why conditions and pay are so poor relative to those of men, and thus crucial for the explanation of why women remain in the household”.

In recent years, the issue of women’s unemployment and discriminatory employment practices in the workplace has become less intense. Especially in Western democracies, legislation has been passed to facilitate the entry of women to paid employment. In keeping with these changes, the British labour and trade union movement has sought greater equality between men and women since the Second World War. As Walby (1986:245) notes, however “The political struggles of women were important in changing this policy of the state, and these improvements should not be seen as the result of some inevitable drift to progress”. She points out further that women have never:

…docilely withdraw from paid work when men wanted them to, on marriage, or at the end of wars, or during depression. They were pushed vigorously, and vigorously resisted. Many social historians, sociologists and economists write as if such patriarchal practices as the marriage bar never existed. Yet, almost universally in the better jobs, before World War Two women had no option; on marriage they were sacked. The dropping of the marriage bar during the war was the single most important effect of the war on gender relations. (Walby 1986:247-248)

Viewed against the background of this struggle for equality, it is not surprising that some critics have argued that women who, to this day, are often financially dependent on men, have in many situations been forced to conform to patriarchal needs by being ‘sexual’. In the book *Tearing the veil: essays on femininity*, edited by Susan Lipshitz, Arnold (1978:57) notes in this regard that:
…in a society in which women and children depend economically upon men for economic support and the inheritance of position or status, men are concerned with the legitimacy and are able to require women to be sexual… There are implied assumptions behind these systems of control of women’s sexuality which cannot be understood in social terms. For instance women are not seen as able or willing to control themselves. They are suspected of harboring desires which are inimical to the smooth functioning of patriarchal society.

2.3 Beautiful women

According to Roach and Eicher (1979:13):

In America, women’s dress is generally more ambiguous in its symbolism of occupational role than is men’s. This ambiguity stems partly from the tendency of industrial societies to recognize only occupational roles that produce money income and partly from traditions established during the nineteenth century. Thus, because they do not receive money income for the work, the large number of women who are exclusively homemakers, performing many productive tasks within their households and communities, do not have clearly perceived positions within the American occupational structure, and correspondingly no form of dress that clearly distinguishes them as belonging to a particular occupational structure.

As Roach and Eicher (1979:19) acknowledge, historically men and women have been differentiated through dress. This is still apparent today, even though women increasingly do work that was traditionally done by men. Despite this on-going tendency to foreground gender through dress, Roach (1979:422) also note that at the height of the Feminist movement in 1979 that “Currently some changes in men’s and women’s fashion suggest that accommodations to a changing role structure are being made”.

The relationship between dress and changing female occupations was observed as early as 1929 by Jordan, who suggested that

The pants suit can be used as an example of our women’s desire and ability to do any man’s job. This trend toward women wearing pants…would indicate that women wish to take over more of man’s role. Women now has left her happy home in full pursuit of demeaning the superiority of her husband by endeavoring to support the family. (Roach 1979:421)
While this growing tendency to wear more manly\(^{19}\) and comfortable clothes became increasingly popular among professional women, “…men express(ed) no similar kind of desire to wear skirts”. (Roach 1979:421) Like Veblen, who reflected on the role dress played in reflecting “… the ability of the male provider… to pay (Veblen:1953:87-131)” at the turn of the 20\(^{\text{th}}\) century, Roach suggests that low status explains the tendency for men to avoid wearing clothing historically associated with women.

As Miller (1999:15) notes, the deeply entrenched symbolism associated with gendered dress codes extends to other aspects of women’s appearance:

Typically, women are viewed as powerful if they are attractive and fit the cultural ideal. Men are deemed powerful if they have high earning ability or potential. Clearly one is based more on the physical body while the other is based on skills/abilities. And since we know that physical bodies are likely to decline with age, and skills and earning power are likely to increase with age, we begin to notice some interesting gender differences. Susan Kaiser (1997) regarded these gender differences as an artificial dichotomy between agonic and hedonic power or ‘doing versus being’.

In other words, the status and power of women in the workplace (and in society as a whole) is based in large part on physical appearance: for women to succeed in the public domain, they must also be attractive. As Howard (2001:199) also notes, however, "…the pursuit of a fashionable appearance has not wholly oppressed or victimized women.". Like the factory workers who played an active role in transforming conditions in the workplace, women who entered the world of business in the course of the 20\(^{\text{th}}\) century helped to shape the criteria through which they were judged as fashionable or attractive.

2.4 The case of Estée Lauder

As Peiss (2001:7) observes, “beauty is big business, with large scale production, international distribution networks, media-saturation advertising, scientific marketing, and sales in the billions of dollars”. Almost invariably, the promotion strategies and

\(^{19}\) Marlene Dietrich was known for dressing in a man’s suit as early as the 1930s. (refer to figure 21) Unisex dress however was introduced in the sixties (refer to figure 24 and 23 for an example by Yves Saint Laurent). Television programs such as *Dynasty* introduced power dressing. (refer to figure 25 and figures 26 and 27 for examples by fashion designers in the 1980s)
techniques used by the beauty industry to control women’s appearance build on women’s perceived need to conform to society’s ideas of what is considered fashionable. But these strategies are also influenced by changing ideals of beauty, notions of fashion, and attitudes towards the body. (Peiss 2001:8)

Because the pursuit of beauty has until very recently been an almost exclusively female occupation, women remain the primary consumers of commercially produced beauty products. Historically, the production of these goods was controlled by men, who have not only been the merchant of beauty, but also the providers of money for the consumption of beauty products and fashionable dress by women confined to the domestic sphere. In the course of the 20th century, however, some women also started playing an increasingly significant role in the production of goods for the beauty industry. Working initially as seamstresses, they slowly began to dominate other aspects of this industry, training as hairdressers, beauticians, department store buyers, and cosmetic saleswomen. (Peiss 2001:11) Referring to this history, Peiss (2001:11) notes that, “As Wendy Gamber shows, dressmakers and milliners were ambitious and were soon going to take over. A skill and ability that may be seen as inferior has great importance within consumer society”.

Estée Lauder, who began to market make-up and perfume products under her own name in the late 1920s is an interesting example of the changing roles women began to play in the beauty industry in the course of the 20th century. Chosen in 1998 by Time magazine as one of the twentieth century’s hundred most influential business geniuses, she became “one of America’s wealthiest self-made women” (Koehn 2001:245). To achieve this status, Lauder used several very successful promotion techniques and business strategies to construct her own identity as a woman. The first of these strategies was to brand her products as both ‘feminine’ and ‘worldly’ through their association with Lauder’s name. As Koehn (2001:222) points out, these were “…important attributes that she was creating for her offerings and perhaps for herself”. Lauder wanted her products to “…construct a meaningful identity…one that women associated with quality, self-expression, reinvention, elegance and control” (Koehn 2001:222).
In the conviction that women had to be given something for nothing, Estée Lauder started issuing samples of her products as well as applying make-up to customers in stores. The initiative of free samples was the first of its kind as a selling technique. It encouraged women to try out new products before committing themselves to purchasing them and it offered Lauder an opportunity to gauge the opinions of her customers with a view to adjusting her products to suit their needs. Free applications of make-up entailed a three to four minute makeover. The intention was to overwhelm women, leaving them with an absolute desire to acquire a product that sought to build their confidence in their own beauty and their capacity to re-invent themselves.

In the 1930s and 1940s, the cosmetics industry was actively promoted through the growing popularity of movies. During this period, women began to take some of their fashion cues from glamorous stars such as Bette Davis, Carole Lombard and Claudette Colbert. But Lauder also knew that most consumers in the 1930s had less money to spend than in the 1920s. Recognizing that consumers were nevertheless prepared to purchase small luxuries such as movie tickets, candy and alcohol - “moments of enjoyment, an escape from everyday problems, or just a means to pass time” (Koehn 222) - she actively built on this idea by using her free gifts to entice women to indulge themselves. This strategy became increasingly important in the 1940s, when competition intensified through the emergence of new cosmetic firms such as Helena Rubinstein, Elizabeth Arden, Max Factor and Coty.

Lauders’ products were sold in department stores at counters positioned in the best possible space on the sales floor, to the right of the entrance in the consumers’ line of vision. She employed sales representatives whom she herself trained. In the early years, when the company could not afford large, mass media campaigns, Lauder gave charge-account customers at Saks Fifth Avenue a small white card with gold lettering that read: “Saks Fifth Avenue is proud to present the Estée Lauder line of cosmetics: now available at our cosmetics department” (Koehn 2001:231 60 ibid, 45). She also continued distributing samples, believing it was “the most honest way to do business”. This was
intended not only to motivate women to buy her products, but also to enhance the marketing of the product by word-of-mouth.

During the 1950s, Estée Lauder began experimenting with fragrances to expand her market and enhance her brands. She developed the first perfume to be marketed as a bath-oil rather than a perfume and named it Youth Dew. This sweet, diffusive, long lasting scent was more affordable than perfume and packaged in an unsealed bottle which, when opened up, left a hint of scent on the hands for quite a while. Scented blotters were also inserted into monthly accounts, thereby encouraging women to try out new fragrances. By 1985, Youth Dew accounted for 30 million dollars in annual sales. During the three decades after the debut of this bath oil scent, the company introduced seven additional scents: Estée, Azurée, Akiage, Private Collection, Cinnabar, White Linen, and Beautiful. The same strategies of sampling, in-store events, trained sales representatives, and national advertising campaigns were used to promote these products.

Against this background, the company’s sales expanded from one million dollars in 1958 to fourteen million dollars in 1965, and the headquarters grew from eight to two hundred and twenty five people. By the early 1970s, millions of “consumers associated the Estée Lauder name with elegance and femininity” (Koehn 2001:239), and the company expanded its market through new brand names such as Aramis, Clinique, Prescriptives and Origins. Each of these had their own qualities and targeted different consumer interests, while at the same time deepening the company’s “associations with female identity and self-worth...extending Estée Lauder Inc.’s reputation as a purveyor of elegant, fashionable cosmetics” (Koehn 2001:240-241).

During this period, the company also embarked on an ambitious campaign, selecting a model “who would ‘personify our products’ and be ‘the Estée Lauder woman’ for consumers” (Koehn 2001:241). These models were chosen very carefully, with each model being the sole ‘spokeswoman’ for the company during her term of employment. Koehn (2001:241) quotes Lauder as follows on the third model chosen to promote the
company in this way as having been ‘selected from a thousand faces’ because she epitomized:

- a young, sophisticated woman with charm and éclat. She was sensual rather than sexy. She was strong and smart. She seemed in charge of her life, which was perceived as the good life by millions of women who identified with her.

Since then, the marketing executives have tried to keep ‘the Estée Lauder woman’ relevant to changing consumer priorities. Thus, according to Lauder, while in the early advertisements the woman ‘was more formal, more involved in dressed-up elegance’, by 1995 when Elizabeth Hurley was employed, she had achieved ‘a more relaxed richness that reflects today’s world. She’s become less status-conscious. Our Estée Lauder woman is within reach’” (Koehn 2001:241).

These marketing strategies were so successful that Lauder’s products are now distributed in more than a hundred countries, including Germany, Japan, Russia, Australia, Canada, Singapore, Mexico, the Ukraine, Malaysia, and Venezuela.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the effects on gender relations and gender politics of contemporary fashion, thus paving the way for a consideration, in Chapter Three, of the liberation of gender inequalities and stereotypes by exposing the misconceptions and misrepresentations of the female body in medical science since the 1800s.
Chapter 3: Liberation?

...we can see that the relationship picked out by ‘women’ or ‘men’ is always a historically situated one. It is not constructed by relations between men and women in general, for there are no such persons and therefore no such relations. Nor are the gender relations between men and women in any particular group shaped only by the men and women in that group, for those relations too are always shaped by how men and women are defined in every other race, class, or culture in the environment. Gender relations in any particular historical situation are always constructed by the entire array of hierarchical social relations in which ‘women’ or ‘man’ participates. (Harding 1991: 13-14)

Feminist writers have repeatedly argued for the decentering of masculinity in society’s thoughts and practices: no longer should masculinity (regardless of how it might be defined) be considered the standard or norm or the preoccupation of everyone’s anxious attention. (Harding 1991:13) The centering of men’s needs, interests, desires, and views ensures only partial and distorted understandings of social practices. Yet those needs, interests, desires and views continue to dominate social and political discourses to this day. Thus although attempts have been made to “reclaim and reposition the female body” (Cronje 2001:10), and various researchers have argued for the emergence of a new, androgynous identity that transcends accepted notions of masculinity and femininity, in reality women still have to contend with gender stereotypes that favour an hierarchical understanding of the relationship between male and female attributes and identities.

Because these hierarchies are based on sex, it is interesting to note how, in the West, the physical differences between men and women have been used to uphold and perpetuate gender differences and, through them, the oppression of women, particularly since the 18th century. As Lacquer notes (1987:3), however, “For several thousand years it had been a commonplace that women have the same genitals as men”. Thus, for example, as Nemesius, bishop of Emesa put it in the sixth century: “Theirs are inside the body and not outside it”. The illustration in figure 28 supports this perception.

The homologous nature of male and female reproductive organs was discussed by the Greek physician, Galen, as early as the second century A.D., citing Herophilus (third
century B.C.) in support of his claim that men and women are essentially similar in origin and therefore in nature. Yet for “two millennia the organ that by the early nineteenth century had become virtually a synecdoche for women had no name” (Lacquer 1987:2). Lacquer (1987:3) notes that:

The fact that at one time male and female bodies were regarded as hierarchically, that is vertically, ordered and that at another time they came to be regarded as horizontally ordered, as opposites, must depend on something other than one or even a set of real or supposed ‘discoveries’. In addition, nineteenth-century advances in developmental anatomy … pointed to the common origins of both sexes in a morphologically androgynous embryo and thus not to their intrinsic difference.

As he points out in this regard, it was only when the differentiation between male and female became politically important that an interest arose in the anatomical and concrete physiological differences between the sexes20. (Lacquer 1987:3-4)

During the eighteenth century, attempts were made to define and redefine sexual differences in every part of the human body. (Schiebinger 1987:42) By the 1750s, the research priority of anatomical science in France and Germany consequently centered on efforts to discover, describe and define sex differences in every bone, muscle, nerve and vein of the human body. Even so, while various drawings of the female skeleton appeared in England, France and Germany between 1730 and 1790, it was only in 1797 that the first detailed female skeleton was depicted in an anatomy book that sought to illustrate differences between men and women. According to Lacquer (1987:4), this scientific knowledge played a crucial role in the development of new ways of representing and constituting social21 realities.

Schiebinger (1987:42) suggests that the scientific community’s interest in the female skeleton was “not arbitrary: anatomists focused attention on those parts of the body that were to become politically significant”. For example, the purpose of a series of drawings of the female skeleton published in 1759 was to prove that women were intellectually incapable and inferior to men. This was illustrated through depictions of the female skull

20 “If the female is a replica of the male, with the same organs inside rather than outside the body, why then, one might ask, are women not men?” (Lacquer 1987:5)
21 “Serious talk about sexuality is inevitable about society” (Lacquer 1978:4)
as smaller than that of men, and the female pelvis as larger than the male pelvis. Figures 29 – 33 indicate the differences between men and women. In nude drawings, men are illustrated as muscular while women appear passive. As Schiebinger (1987:43) points out, this was not “simply the product of the growth of realism in anatomy”, but played an integral role in arguments favouring women’s confinement to the private realm of the home as a caring mother and wife (the large pelvis), keeping her from participation in the public spheres of government and commerce, science and scholarship (the small skull).

During the nineteenth century, medicine aimed to reveal the “…construction of femininity as different to the norm of masculinity…” with the prime intention being to reveal the “…‘otherness’ of women, particularly as located in her productive physiology which was accordingly visualized, thus satisfying a widespread curiosity about the female body” (Cronje 2001:18). Needless to say, the doctors who performed medical examinations during this period were predominantly male22. (One can argue accordingly that decisions concerning the health implications of corsetry were subject to the invasive explorations of the male gaze.)

As Schiebinger (1987:43) notes, the absence of female voices in this discourse on their own bodies meant that there was no space from which women could successfully “revise or refute the emerging claims about the nature of women”. During this time, scientific evidence played a very important role in debates regarding social and political issues, the ongoing exclusion of women from science and the very different roles of men and women in social hierarchies. Citing Jordanova, Cronje (2001:3) explains the reasons for this patriarchal structure as follows: “Medicine and science, controlled by men, held privileged epistemological positions, mainly because their methods and findings appeared to be rooted in empirically based knowledge, truth and scientific objectivity”.

The female body was dissected as if it formed part of a science project – opened up by an analytical, active and invasive male investigator, it revealed the inner, invisible, passive

22 However, in 1849, Elizabeth Blackwell became the world’s first trained and registered female doctor. She received her degree at the Medical College in New York.
female form. (Cronje 2001:25) This growing distinction between the ‘active’ male and the apparently inherently ‘passive’ female played an important role in the discourse surrounding the adoption of the corset, which led to the arguably miraculous achievement of confining women’s organs into thirteen to eighteen inch waistlines as indicated in figure 29. Like medical investigations, the corset played an important role in the multiple and “…complex tasks of developing gender-specific attributes…” (Summers 2004:6) It is interesting to note in this regard that Schiebinger (1987:59) quotes the physician Barclay, who claimed that the German anatomist, Samuel Thomas von Soemmering’s depictions of the effects of corsetry on the body were incorrect. According to Barclay:

Women’s rib cage is much smaller than that shown by Soemmerring, because it is well known that women’s restricted life style requires that they breathe less vigorously…The pelvis, and it is here alone that we perceive the strongly-marked and peculiar characteristics of the female skeleton, is shown by Soemmerring as improperly small.

Schiebinger (1987:62) compares illustrations by anatomists to that of painters, pointing out that:

In their illustrations of the female body, anatomists followed the example of those painters who ‘draw a handsome face, and if there happens to be any blemish in it, they mend it in the picture.’ Anatomists of the eighteenth century ‘mended’ nature to fit emerging ideals of masculinity and femininity.

In the process of doing so, the private was made public through a so-called scientific discourse that sought to prove the existence of fundamental differences between men and women. This differentiation subjectively supported the establishment of forms of ‘knowledge’ that upheld gender-based superior-inferior distinctions, thus “empowering the viewer (who is defined as masculine) and disempowering the object of the look (defined as feminine)” (Cronje 2001:5). Citing Braidotti, Cronje (2001:4) argues that the scientific gaze is one that claims to be “…characterized by detached observation, which creates an idea of objectivity and neutrality.” As she notes, however, “…a body that is open to scrutiny and observation is one that can be manipulated” (Cronje 2001:4) to produce dubious subjective information. For this reason, she argues that “The scientific gaze…is highly selective, and is only as objective as the observer can be” (Cronje 2001:4). Cronje (2001:17) consequently characterizes the nineteenth century as “…a
period of medical and aesthetic objectification of the female body…[,]…the construction of sexual difference and the legitimization of gender roles”.

From the late eighteenth century onwards, when sex came to define social worth, and science became the model for superiority and excellence (Schiebinger 1987:64), medical manuals for women began to appear in France and Germany. Not only did these health manuals highlight the physical differences between men and women, which had to be taken into account when treating their illnesses, but they also emphasized that “…the well-being of each sex depended on establishing a lifestyle appropriate to its particular physiology” (Schiebinger 1987:69). Wax models were used to displayed muscular (male) attributes that were positioned upright and in motion. Female models, as illustrated in figure 34, 36 and 37, on the other hand were placed in a reclining position. These models could be opened up to display and reveal viscera and reproductive systems, which could be looked at through the removal of successive layers of organs and bodily tissues as illustrated in figure 35. This highly differentiated visual evidence was used to reinforce the idea of the female body as reproductive. As Colebrook (2004:2) notes, the female body was invariably portrayed as passive and receptive, her reclining position therefore revealing her reproductive nature.

Although it might seem likely that modern technologies and the training of female doctors would have changed the previously aggressive and destructive dissection and exploration of the female body, in actual fact the principle of analysis have remained the same to this day. Indeed, as Cronje (2001:8) points out, “Modern bodies are under as much scrutiny as their nineteenth century counterparts. New medical technologies and new visualization techniques have intensified the medical gaze, and bodies are subjected to an intense, penetrative scrutiny”. Although she also notes that perceptions of the female body changed considerably in the course of the twentieth century, she point out that both nineteenth and twentieth century scientists evaluated “sexual difference in

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23 “…where machines assume organic functions and the body is materially redesigned through the application of newly developed technologies.” (Balsamo 1996:3)
highly visual terms. The disciplining medical gaze of the nineteenth century was replaced with a digitalized, technologised view in the late twentieth century” (Cronje 2001:12-13).

Despite this pessimistic reading of the role medical science continues to play in the objectification of women, there has undoubtedly been a shift towards individual, self-constructed ideals of femininity that undermine patriarchal and technological expectations, creating an awareness of “…the way in which the body is produced, inscribed, replicated and often disciplined in post-modernity” (Balsamo 1996:3). In support of this assertion, Balsamo (1996:3) quotes Michel Feher in pointing out that the body is constantly produced and that it is only by tracing these modes of its construction that one can arrive at a thick perception of the present ‘state of the body’.

According to Balsamo, once one thinks of the body as a social construct rather than a natural object, it follows logically that one needs to ask how the body as a ‘thing of nature’ is transformed into a ‘sign of culture’ (1996:3). Focusing on the body as a social, cultural, and historical production, and noting that this reference to production encompasses the notions both of product and process, she argues that:

As a product, it is the material embodiment of ethnic, racial, and gender identities, as well as a staged performance of personal identity, of beauty, of health (among other things). As a process, it is a way of knowing and marking the world, as well as a way of knowing and marking a ‘self’. (Balsamo 1996:3)

Increasingly, this staging or performance of the self has come to rely on medical science to achieve its own aims. As Cronje (2001:14) notes in this regard, “In the twentieth century plastic surgery emerges as a technology allowing the reinvention of the self, and making the ideals of Western beauty more and easily attainable”. Today, the popular media (newspapers, advertisements such as those in figures 38 and 39, television, programs, and magazines), repeatedly “signal ways in which the ‘natural’ body has been dramatically refashioned through the application of new technologies of corporeality.

24 My practical work demonstrates this statement – the process of experimentation and exploration towards creativity and technical solutions is as important as the end product - the jewelry pieces are part of and manufactured from the process. The process and the product of the process are displayed with equal importance.
These examples announce the collapse of the temporal distance between the present and a science fictional future in which bionic bodies are commonplace” (Balsamo 1996:5).

Balsamo (1996:5) points out, however, that while these “New technologies are often promoted and rationalized as life-enhancing and even life-saving”, they tend to obscure “the disciplining and surveylant consequences of these technologies - in short, the biopolitics of technological formations”. In keeping with this cautioning note on the apparent ability of people to perform new notions of self through recent developments in the medical sciences, Cronje (2001:25) argues that “Modern medical visualization technologies continue reading and visualization of the hidden interior of the body through non-invasive techniques such as x-ray imaging, ultrasound and various other computer generated image techniques.”

Even when the so-called body of the future is at stake, it often reaffirms existing gender stereotypes. Balsamo discusses the advertisement in figure 40 from LIFE magazine illustrating the ‘future body’ as a body that may have replaceable parts or limbs. It includes body prostheses “that are neither implanted (an arm-hand device, for example), nor functional (the plastic testical), the exclusion of the artificial breast form, which is also not implanted and non-functional”, but that:

subtly reveals the intended gender of the future body. Obliquely referred to in the article, but not pictured in the LIFE photograph, the female body is signified through a reference to the development of an artificial uterus. This association between the female body and the uterus or womb signals the dominant cultural definition of the female body as a merely reproductive body. (Balsamo 1996:6-9)

According to Balsamo, this vision offers “…an ominous warning about the imaginary place of women in the technological future. The question becomes, though, how do we interpret the meaning of such cultural projections?” (1996:9)

In Tearing the Veil, Susan Lipshitz (1978:9) argues that “…the association of femininity with strength is not part of the accepted cultural meaning of femininity” and that “Men
are not categorized and restricted socially by their sexual behaviour to the same extend as women” (1978:57). She points out in this regard that:

…the location of the meaning of femininity in the unconscious makes it part of the cultural construction of sex difference and female sexuality, thus indicating why it is not simply dissoluble by changes in social and economic circumstances, nor can be expected to vary with women’s social power.

According to her, such structures must be taken into account in women’s ideological struggles and in the further development of theory. (Lipshitz 1978:50)

Most theorists argue that the struggle for female power must by-pass and ultimately undermine existing patriarchal structures. Quoting Rich, Merck (1978:95) points out in reference to this struggle to transcend the norms and values of patriarchal practices that:

Today, one quest of women is a search for models or blueprints of female power which shall neither be replications of male power, nor carbon-copies of the male stereotype of the powerful, controlling destructive women…the response generated by E.G. Davis’s ‘The First Sex’, has been in part a search for vindication of the believe that patriarchy is in some ways a degeneration, that women exerting power would use it differently from men: nonpossessively, nonviolently, nondestructively.

The fact that gendered identities are discursively constructed also means that they are in a continual process of negotiation and modification. (See, for example, Sunderland and Litosseliti 2002:25). Moreover, as Barett (1999:315) point out that “gender displays do not necessarily correlate with anatomical sex” (Sunderland and Litosseliti 2002:25).

Balsamo (2002:9) argues that gender is a boundary concept that is “ripe for reconstruction” through the widespread technological refashioning of the “natural” human body. Placing the natural body in a binary relationship to the technological body, she suggests that technology provides a means to refashion “our thinking about theoretical construction of the body as both material entity and a discursive process” (Balsamo 2002:11). But current notions regarding the technological body raises several questions, notably whether the male body is becoming the ideal model for artificially reconstructing the natural body? Put differently, is the notion of the cyborg - a shorthand term for “cybernetic organism”, which usually describes a human-machine combination
that most often is a *man*-machine hybrid - the likely form of the future artificial body? (Balsamo 2002:18) This possibility is interesting not least because, more often than not, cyborgs are “products of fears and desires that run deep with our cultural imaginary” (Balsamo 2002:32).

With regards to the female body in this mechanical reconstruction of the gendered body, Balsamo (2002:12) suggests that “women’s bodies remain a privileged site for the cultural reinscription of the ‘natural’”. She argues further that because of:

- the way in which the male gaze of the cosmetic surgeon has been transformed into a technological perspective, with the attendant consequence that the female body is itself transformed into a surface for the inscription of cultural ideals of Western beauty...cosmetic surgery *literally* transform the material body into a sign of culture (Balsamo 2002:13).

In a similar vein, Cronje (2001:8) maintains that:

- Through the use of new interventative medical technologies such as reproductive technology and cosmetic surgery in particular, the female body is a spectacle placed under constant surveillance – the body is fractured and fragmented into isolated parts to be studied and examined.
- In offering to redesign or reinvent the female body according to changing notions of feminine beauty, cosmetic surgery is implicated in the processes of idealization and manipulation and the female body is subject to a medical, technologised gaze, which objectifies and fragments the body, effectively containing and regulating it.

As indicated in my earlier discussion regarding the corset, dress shaped the body into socially and culturally acceptable norms and ideals, whereas today the body is literally transformed through surgery. Quoting Foucault, Balsamo (2002:28) points out in this regard that “the discourse of modernity redefined the body as a machine; in post-modernity what we discover is that technology now transforms the body into nothing more than discourse.”

Laparoscopy and computer tomography are some of the new medical imaging technologies that make the internal body observable even before it is subjected to surgery. One can therefore argue that these techniques provided scientists with even more
power in the objectification of the female body, not only externally anymore, but also internally through these new visualization processes.

The consumerism of late capitalist society is central to the construction of this new body. As Kroker suggests, the conspicuous forms of consumption that are increasingly commonplace today

    turns all bodies into sign vehicles for fetishistic commodities…Even when the body is reduced to a discursive effect, notes Kroker, the female body functions as the privileged sign of the ‘body debased, humiliated, and inscribed to excess by all the signs of consumer culture’ (33) (Balsamo 2002:29)

Despite on-going efforts to reframe current notions of gender and gender identities, the female body also continues to “functions as an ideological marker of ‘natural sexuality’ and ‘reproduction’”. (Balsamo 2002:34) It therefore remains to be seen to what extent women will ultimately succeed in escaping this and other stereotypes, and whether, as they gain positions of power in the public domain, they will manage to reshape and redefine the meaning of power in accordance with the principles of non-violence and non-possession that are arguably at the root of feminist challenges to existing patriarchal structures.
Conclusion

...people are being removed from the constraints of gender...men and women are released from traditional forms and ascribed roles. (Beck 1992:105)

Quoting Heidi Hartman, Williams (1989:9) argues that “…men in our society dominate and oppress women out of a power-seeking drive to control resources and to gain important household services that they themselves do not wish to perform”. Viewed from a feminist perspective, this suggests that it is the “rational self-interest of the dominant group in society (men) to allocate such tasks to women” (Williams 1989:9). Increasingly, however, the social is being constituted by and through the individual, rather than through traditional forms and ascribed roles, thus opening up new avenues for women to take control of their own lives.

In a discussion of academic and career achievement in contemporary Western society, Money (1995:46) notes that differences between men and women based on educational and vocational achievement, indicates on average that male scores on tests of mathematics and sciences are higher than that of women, whereas the scores of women are higher in verbal and related humanistic issues. It is important to note in this regard that, until the nineteenth century in Europe, women were prohibited from entering (male) academic institutions, and generally had not formal access to education. (Money 1995:47) This entrenched gendered differences that were:

...carried over into the curriculum of the twentieth-century classroom from kindergarten to college. In professional schools the vested male interest in excluding female competition still dies a lingering death and curtails the possibility of equality of competition and achievement. Boys and girls themselves assimilate and perpetuate the popular platitudes about the disparity between them regarding their prospects in respectively, mathematics and science versus language and humanities. (Money 1995:47-48)

In view of this on-going reality, Money (1995:48) concludes that “Irrespective of their origins, manifest differences between males and females in academic and vocational achievement, and in aspirations as well, do exist today, and on an individual basis, they cannot be abolished by edict.” As he also indicates, however, these differences “are not
universal…Some boys are in the girls’ league and some girls in the boys’ league. For them it would be democratically fair-minded if they encounter no competitive barriers to membership in the highest echelons of all types of achievement, academically, vocationally, and otherwise” (Money 1995:48).

Williams (1989:3) points out that gender differences are encouraged among workers in a variety of ways, of which ‘internal stratification’ is mainly the most pervasive. This is especially evident in occupations where both men and women are present, though often performing different tasks and functions. Because, to this day, men and women seldom take on similar activities in the job, “…certain specialties can be feminine-identified and others masculine-identified—thus helping to preserve gender differences.” (Williams 1989:3) Although these comments date to 1989, it remains true to this day that:

Most jobs in our economy are thought of as either ‘men’s work’ or ‘women’s work.’ This assumption is so powerful that the few individuals of the ‘wrong’ sex who cross over into highly sex-segregated occupations are commonly viewed as masculine women or feminine men. Think for a moment of the images that ‘male librarian’ and ‘feminine truck driver’ bring to mind. (Williams 1989:2)

Williams provides other examples of hospitals denying male nurses assignments to obstetrics and gynecology wards and women in the Marine Corps, for whom only 20 percent of the positions are ever open, but who are overrepresented in traditionally ‘feminine’ specialties- such as clerical work – that present no challenge to their feminine identity.

According to Williams (1989:4), “[b]y thus distinguishing ‘men’s work’ from ‘women’s work’, these occupations highlights and reproduces gender differences”. Etiquette rules and dress codes further underline and maintain gender difference. As such, they “are a constant symbolic reaffirmation of sex differences that accentuate the femininity of female marines and the masculinity of male nurses” (Williams 1989:4). Money (1995:36) supports this assertion, noting that “there is no denying that some aspects of masculine and feminine roles, such as the styles of apparel and fashions in personal adornment, are not essential and not universal, but are socially and regionally variable”.
According to Adkins (2000:261), changes are taking place, however, partly because increasingly “…labour market positions are constituted less by determinants such as gender and class location and more by self-design, self-creation and individual performances (Beck 1992)”. As this suggests, the boundaries between ‘men’s work’ and women’s work’ are in the process of collapsing:

…rather than being segregated within a limited range of jobs, women are now found in a wider range of occupations, are increasingly working in the same jobs as men, and are moving into high status occupations…. These forms of de-segregation are of some significance since processes of gendered occupational structuring have long been understood to be key in the creation of the sexual division of labour, that is, in constituting men’s advantage at work in terms of wages, workplace status and other workplace resources. (Adkins 2000:260)

As a result, occupational structuring is gradually unraveling, and the traditional structures of the modern workplaces are being destabilized, thus freeing individuals, not only from rules, expectations and norms in relation to gender, but also from a range of social categories and identifications. According to Adkins (2000:261), these processes create a variety of interesting developments at work, such as the breaking down of traditional workplace hierarchies. She noted that men were “…increasingly being rewarded for acts traditionally associated with femininity and women for acts associated with masculinity…”, therefore indicating “…how such ‘reversals’ are increasingly being called for in today’s business environment”, which indicates that:

…there seems to be evidence that the undoing of traditional workplace structures means that gender is increasingly constituted as a matter of flexibility at work. Rather than being a marker of essential sexes (or a fixed characteristic workers posses by virtue of ‘social’ determination) gender is now established as mobile, fluid, and indeterminate. Furthermore, gender may now be performed, mobilized and contested by workers in a variety of ways in order to innovate and succeed at work. (Adkins 2000:260-261)

As further evidence of this shift in gender roles and difference, Adkins (2000:262) cites McDowell’s report on a study of professional financial sector workers in the City of London which suggests that recent workplace restructuring (including the entry of less elite men and more women into financial sector jobs, and a recognition of embodied
performances as workplace resources) “is leading to ‘the disruption of conventional
dichotomized gender divisions and the acceptance, albeit limited, of “complex and
generative subject positions” for men and for women’ (McDowell 1997:207)”. Adkins
goes on to note that:

McDowell reports on how men are increasingly more performing various
forms of body work and argues that such bodily performances may
transgress conventional gender divisions. Following Grace (1991),
McDowell suggests that men may now be the same new sex-objects at work
with desire and pleasure being displaced from women to men workers, thus
disrupting the longstanding ideal of a disembodied, rational male worker.
Similarly, she argues that women financial traders who perform traditionally
masculine acts such as authoritative, empathic gestures ‘challenge
traditional images of feminine passivity’ and create anxiety, in that they
disrupt the traditional representation of women as objects of male desire and
pleasure. (Adkins 2000:262)

According to Adkins (2000:262) the present de-stabilization of traditional gender roles
has become “so strong that [the] vision of establishing women’s rights to be choosing
subjects, rather than over determined objects, at work appears to becoming rapidly
realized (Pringle 1989:100)”.

The aim of this research has been to create an awareness of the socially and physically
restrictive roles women are forced to assume in a patriarchal society and how this has
shaped their lives and their worlds. Starting off with a discussion of identity, thereafter
dress and adornment and the corset - the item of clothing that most clearly signifies
female desire and submission – I go on to explore some of the ways in which women
have tried to renegotiate the roles to which they were confined before the twentieth
century. Throughout this discussion, I nevertheless acknowledge the powerful role
fashion, business and men have continued to play in the construction of female identity.

Proving that female identity has changed was not as straightforward as I initially thought,
however. Thus, for example, it became clear from an investigation of medical issues
relating to the illustration and reconstruction of the female body in Chapter Three, that
although gender roles and differences have loosened up, the body is still under pressure
to conform to a social and culturally created ideal. In effect, the reconstruction of the
body achieved through tight lacing in the nineteenth century is now achieved through cosmetics and plastic surgery. Ultimately, therefore, this research is as much a plea for change as a demonstration that women are beginning to take control of their lives and their bodies.
Addendum

Practical Work

It is required that a discussion of the practical work is either included in the main text of the thesis or given separately in the Addendum. The aim of my research is to encourage transformation and the development of an individual and independent feminine identity through a critique of determining and influencing factors such as fashion, the construction of identities, beauty and business, medical illustrations and science, etc. With regard to my practical work, I therefore encourage viewers to form their own opinions, rather than basing these opinions on my writings or my personal expectations. In other words, I do not want to overpower the viewer with my own thoughts, opinions and experiences; instead, my aim is to encourage individuality. Accordingly, the reader/viewer may choose to interpret the theory and practical work separately, thus drawing their own conclusion regarding the relationship between these two components of my research. I agree with Anthea Callen (1995 ix) who states that images are often treated as “adjuncts, as mere ‘illustrations’ of a given history or theory”. She therefore developed ways of “…theorizing the visual which start from the object itself and then deploy histories and theories to help illuminate its specific cultural meaning” (Callen 1995:ix)

The theoretical and practical components of the investigation developed hand in hand, informing and influencing one another. The theoretical investigation started with the idea of female identity, the female body as an object of display and the role of fashion. This research developed along with the first chapter and content regarding the corset and was informed through a practical exploration of forms that cover, restrict and deform the body. The objects that I built are based on the corset in figure 12 on the left. This item of clothing included a combination of materials such as wood and silver mounts for the upper body and steel, whalebone and fabric25. My practical work developed into an

25 “…for the first few months the uneasiness by the continued compression was very considerable, but after a time they became so accustomed to it that they felt reluctant to discontinue the practice. " (Lord 1993:153)
investigation of the corset, the manufacturing thereof and the materials and patterns used to gain the perfect hourglass\textsuperscript{26} silhouette of the body.

Accordingly, I built stiff aluminium and steel structures from original corset patterns, displaying the negative shape of the body as shown in figures 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6. The dotted lines on patterns followed when cutting material and the stitching thereof were recreated in metal by drilling holes in the aluminium. These holes were then rolled into fabriano and/or metal. The objects shown in figure 4 that have both right and left components. This was done to create a relationship between them and to show their dependence upon each other.

Amongst other reasons, fabriano\textsuperscript{27} was used in some of the forms as this is the paper used in printmaking and embossing. The aluminium was then rolled into the paper to create the embossed effect. Aluminium here plays a powerful role in shaping the paper, which is comparable to the effects of restrictive clothing on the body. In the object in figure 6, the aluminium covers the fabriano and therefore creates a structure, which the paper is forced into, as is the corseted body. The drawings in figures 5 and 7 and some of the objects have thinners transfers of the original corset patterns used to build the objects from. Once again this relates to the way that corset left traces of restriction on the body, both internally with the reorganization of the organs, marks or prints on the skin, but also the social implications of shaping female identity.

What is important to note from this art making process, is that I had specific ideas and expectations as to the outcome of the objects, they were made to look like a corset. These objects are built to be viewed from the right (or left) seeing that the missing part could visually be filled in by the viewer as symmetrical to the existing part. This is an attempt to engage the viewer more actively, the viewer has to fill that space by looking and possibly investigating what is seen, rather than be given complete visual information. The

\textsuperscript{26} Figure 15 (Chapter illustrations) indicates the hip springs achieved through corsetry.

\textsuperscript{27} Batting was also used in some of the corsets as it is a soft material which contrasts the aluminium. An aluminium structure would have held the batting in place, signifying the effect of the corset on the body, but now they lie flat in a passive position. Refer to figure 9.
objects are independent and freestanding, contrasting the powerful role that the corset played in forcing the body into an upright, rigid and restricted structure, shaping the wearer into a passive object of desire and submission.  

I was only able to carry on with this restrictive and inhibiting way of working for a short while and therefore started to develop shapes that were only inspired by the corset, but not equivalent as illustrated in figure 10. The development of these objects through more spontaneous experimentation and free forming of metal signifies the changing processes of the creation of the analogous restricted bodies in Victorian corsets. A comparison is drawn between the work process and the change in female identity, as it also underwent changes from restricted methods to spontaneous free forming. The objects produced from this process, however, did not reveal this process of change successfully and I adopted a new approach. 

The change in female identity and subordination of women, noteworthy since World War Two, becomes more significant in the second part of the work. Aiming to reinvent and challenge the corset, I filled a book with repetitive contour sketches developing new proportions and shapes. Figure 11 shows a selection of drawings from this book. These shapes still refer to the corset as it focuses on the pulled in waist, accentuating the release to the bottom and top, almost ridiculing these absurd expectations. The proportions of these drawings would almost be unattainable as the waist circumference here exists of material only, indicating no space for the body. These forms were then built from copper as illustrated in figure 12, which is a far more giving, compliant and malleable material than aluminium. The corset patterns, the objects in aluminium and fabriano and the drawings thereof were packed away and I started to work with no reference to these except for the memories and impressions that nonetheless still were in mind as is evident from the work produced. Building from these sketches at first resulted in rather two-dimensional objects in wire, which were later combined with metal sheet. The parts and pieces of wire and sheet that these objects were built from, were randomly and

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28 "...the corset continues in use where ever and so long as it serves it’s purpose as evidence of honorific leisure by arguing physical disability in the wearer" (Veblen 1925:130).
individually shaped and then organized and soldered together. Thereafter they were passed through the roller. These panels were then shaped and soldered together to form a three-dimensional interpretation of the sketches. These forms however still carry with them the shape of the corset and the negative spaces, the corseted body. I therefore started drawing these objects as shown in figure 13, allowing time to investigate them carefully and finding out what my intentions with them were. Realizing that they actually were maquettes of dresses, I intended to make them look like just that by trying to create pleats from metal, transforming the sheet into a more significant surface. These pleats were created by folding metal and then rolling it so that it curved and compressed to create sharp lines, after which it was opened up and combined with wire. This investigation into pleats freed me from constant reference and dependence on the shape of the corset.

I would say that the third part of my practical exploration, in part, started here. I began to assemble small pleated objects from this foldforming and rolling technique, which developed into bigger forms, as wide as the roller. Examples of these forms can be seen in figures 14 - 17. These were made individually and allowed to spontaneously take on any shapes that may follow in the process – the outcome was not planned and they are not made with set expectations in mind as was the case with the previous work – the outcome was a surprise. The forms started as an open piece of rectangular plate, which was then tightly folded up and restricted, compressed even further by rolling them through the electric roller. I only had control over the form when I folded it up and pushed it through the roller, tightening it until it did not want to close any further. This process has reference to the continuous restrictive effects of corsetry. I can to a certain extent manipulate what the roller does by first putting it through vertically and then horizontally. In between the process of flattening and compressing the metal it must be annealed (heated to soften) to release the tension and make it workable/malleable again. After the final rolling, I anneal once more and open up, release the form in a way that I wish. These forms have no ascribed meaning or function – they can be held, carried around and put down in any way and whenever the carrier wishes to. They are not

29 Here I investigated the work of fashion designer Issey Miyake who became famous for his work Pleats Please. Refer to figure 41 (Chapter illustrations).
associated with restricted female bodies or any prescription made to gender. What is most important, is that they are comfortable and free. In *Appearance for Gender and Sexuality* Susan O. Michelman (2000:169) quotes Paul Gauguin from his journal kept while painting in Tahiti in 1891 with regard to his observation to the fashion of the 19th century when women wore tightly laced corsets:

> ‘Among peoples that go naked, as among animals, the difference between the sexes is less accentuated in our climates. Thanks to the cinctures and corsets we have succeeded in making an artificial being out of women…We carefully keep her in state of nervous weakness and muscular inferiority, and guarding her from fatigue, we take away from her the possibilities of development. Thus modeled on a bizarre ideal of slenderness…our women have nothing in common with us [men], and this, perhaps, may be without grave moral and social disadvantages. On Tahiti, the breezes from the forest and sea strengthen the lungs, they broaden the shoulders and hips. Neither men nor women are sheltered from the rays of the sun nor the pebbles of the sea-shore. Together they engage in the same tasks with the same activities…There is something virile about the women and something feminine about the men. (Gauguin[1919] 1985, pp.19-20)

These pleated objects can be compared to the inter-related gender qualities of the women and men in Tahiti as described by Gauguin. These forms have no reference to the corset and therefore no prescribed association with gender. I therefore would go as far as saying that they are genderless or androgynous objects.

With this process of art making, I developed an investigation into the changing qualities of fashion. Kaiser (:106) describes fashion as follows: “The term fashion implies change; it also implies processes of imitation and differentiation”. With reference to fashion in the 1970s, Wilson (Wilson and Ash 1992:6) stated that “…there was no longer one ‘line’, no longer fashion, but fashions, a kind of compulsory pluralism of styles”. The objects in figure 14 shows an experiment conducted where I attempted to make six of the same pleat objects and forty in another size that look alike. This, to my joy, was not successful and therefore silenced my concern that man is machine. Although Miller (2000:20) however points out that “One unfortunate consequence of globalization of the female body is that one day (if not already) all women may look alike and we will lose the

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30 Figures 19 and 20 (chapter illustrations) gives an interesting view of the changes that occurred in fashion.
diversity of the past”, I aim to indicate or create an awareness of individuality in an attempt to prolong diversity.

After finally being satisfied that my art making process was free and spontaneous, I went back to working on a smaller scale building similar forms still made from copper, adding wire that was related to the shape of each individual pleated object. These objects can be seen in figure 18. The working process was completely spontaneous and free and I also had no aim as to when the creation of these objects would finally stop. I think they will always be in the production process, as they are so fragile and compliant properties, which will possibly result in them always changing shape.

I intended to make a mass of these forms based on the idea of a city filled with people, all dressed individually with the body being the starting point. Damhorst (2000:80) states that currently we “…have more freedom in putting unique looks together…to ‘produce identity’”. She further argues that:

Questioning of traditions and rules seems to be a given during the current times (Featherstone, 1991). We see this in dress in fashionable combinations of masculine and feminine symbols, casual combined or formal, and interesting mixes of fabrics that challenge old rules about not mixing patterns in one look. During a time when many traditional aspects of culture such as gender roles, sexuality, bases of economic power distribution, and ethnic hegemony are questioned, it is no wonder that questioning of traditional rules for dress should occur. (Damhorst 2000:80)

It is this notion of challenging traditionally prescribed gender roles and gender identities that I wish to challenge and therefore created objects that all have a similar starting point, but not one of them is the same.

Whilst making these objects, I made a series of twelve drawings (figure 19), very different to those I made before. They are all from the same view of the objects. Once again, this indicates that even though I looked at the same still life of objects, I was unable to make twelve exactly similar drawings. The process was free and spontaneous with no expectations of an aim to copy them on a two-dimensional surface. The drawing process was unconventional and not technically prescribed.
Up to this point, I have only concentrated on making objects that are freestanding or wearable by chance, which means that if they are picked up the possibility exists that they can take on the shape of the body or fit onto the body. Therefore I produced some in fine silver\textsuperscript{31} with the intention being to combine the freestanding and wearable qualities. (Refer to figure 20) Here comfort was the prime intention as well as the possibility that if they are not worn they must be independent freestanding objects. The functional part, the pin, must therefore be as inconspicuous as possible to be successful. The bigger forms can be picked up and if you do not want to hold it any more it can be put down – the same with the brooch. It will not do what fashion according to Elizabeth Wilson\textsuperscript{32} does which is to be uncomfortable and to render you helpless. I want these forms to be both wearable and functional as an object of display. Reference to my chapter divisions can describe these forms that I make – at first they are restricted, but then they go through a process of change which then frees them up – expanded and liberated.

\textsuperscript{31} When I started to make the pleated objects, I also tried to use sterling silver. This metal did not react as spontaneous and compliant as the copper resulting in sharp and stiff models.

\textsuperscript{32} "…many feminists reject fashion because it reinforces the sexual objectification of women; for its associations with conspicuous consumption and the positioning of women as economic chattels, as property and because it is held to be uncomfortable and to render women helpless (high heels and pinched-in waists, for example can impede movement)." (Wilson 1992:5)
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Illustrations: Chapters

Fig. 1 Ferris Good Sense Corset shapes (Summers 2001:65)

Fig. 2 The Good Sense (Healthy Children). (Summers 2001:66)

Fig. 3 Parisian Doll, front view (1865). (Summers 2001:66)

Fig. 4 Parisian Doll, back view 1865) (Summers 2001:66)
Fig. 5 Typical eighteenth century French dress. (Suoh 2002:71)

Fig. 6 Detail and decoration of a man’s suit. (Suoh 2002:73)

Fig. 7 *Ah! What relics!!! Oh! What a foolish new fashion*…(1979). (Suoh 2002:134-135)
Fig. 8  *Man’s Ensemble* 1830’s. (Iwagami 2001:212)

Fig. 9  Musee d’Orsey. *The reception* (detail), (1878). (Suoh 2002:245)

Fig. 10  Tango Knicker 1910s. (http://vintagevictorian.com/10_underwear.html)

Fig. 11  Tennis suit, 1890. (Suoh 2002:279)
Fig. 12 Corset (1820) (Suoh 2002:133)

Fig. 13 Corsets in the second half of the nineteenth century. (Suoh 2002:279)

Fig. 14 Corset-cover of steel worn in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. (Lord 1993:72)

Fig. 15 Figures with fifteen to twenty inches of hipspring, nineteenth century. (http://www.geocities.com/ther_over/19thcent.htm)
Fig. 16 Changes to the internal organs and skeletal frame caused by corsetry as shown in 1890s-1900 (http://www.fashion-era.com/edwardian_corsetry.htm)

Fig. 17 Compressing of the waist due to tightlacing, increasing the size of bust and hip. (Horn and Gurel 1981:189)
Fig. 18 Renaming corsets as girdles. *Women’s and Infants’ Furnisher* (1921). (Fields 2001:120)

Fig. 19 The pendulum that fashion swings from one extreme to the other, 1860 - 1910. (Horn and Gurel 1981:25)

Fig. 20 The recurring cycle in skirt lengths, 1913-1980. (Horn & Gurel 1981:224-225)
Fig. 21 Marlene Dietrich in her archetypal man’s suit in the 30s. (Cawthorne, N 1999:29)

Fig. 22 Milly Maywald, New Look, Christian Dior, 1947. (Nii 2001:516)

Fig. 23 “City Pants” Pantsuit by Yves Saint Lauren, 1967. (Nii 2001:562)

Fig. 24 A uni-sex outfit, but a man’s suit from the sixties. (Cawthorne, Nii 1999:29)
Fig. 25 Power dressing *Dynasty*. (Cawthorne, Nii 1999:29)

Fig. 26 Jackets by Thierry Mugler, PARIS 1990. (Nii 2001:624-625)

Fig. 27 Pantsuit by Giorgio Armani 1985-1089 (Nii 2001:624-625)
**Fig. 28** Andreas Versalius, male and female reproductive organs, *Tabulae Sex*. From *The Anatomical Drawings of Andreas Versalius*. (Lacquer 1987:8)

**Fig. 29** Samuel Thomas von Soemmering, *Effect of the corset*. (1785) (Schiebinger 1987:59)
Fig. 30 Cowper, male and female nudes, in Andrew Bell, *Anatomia Brittanica: A System of Anatomy* (Lacquer 1987: 50)

Fig. 31 John Barclay, *Skeleton family*. (1829). (Schiebinger 1987:63)
Fig. 32 Andreas Versalilus, male and female nudes, in The Epitome. (1543). (Schiebinger 1987:8)

Fig. 33 John Barclay, male skeleton compared to th horse and Female skeleton compared to the ostrich (1829) (Schiebinger 1987: 60-61)
Fig.34 Anatomical Statue. (1600) Plaster. Dimensions unknown. (Cronje 2000:80)

Fig.35 W. Hunter. *Anatomia Uteri Humani Gravid.* (Cronje 2001:82)

Fig.36 Italian anatomical model. (1800) Wax, hair and pigment. Dimensions unknown. (Cronje 2000:89)

Fig.37 Dr Galtier-Bossiere. Female flap-anatomy from *La Femme.* (1905). (Cronje 2000:84)
Fig. 38 Advertisement for the Liposuction Institute and the Vein Specialists, Sunday Chicago Tribune (May, 1987). (Balsamo 1996:7)

Fig. 39 Yellow pages advertisement for cosmetic surgery, showing “before” and “after” images produced by video imaging program. (Balsamo 1996:7)

Fig. 40 Henry Groskinsky, “Replaceable You” from LIFE Magazine’s special report “Visions of Tomorrow”, February 1989, (Balsamo 1996:7)

Fig. 41 Coat by Issey Miyake, 1995. (Nii 2001:646)
Illustrations: Addendum

**Fig. 1** Martelizé du Preez, *Restriction 1* (2003) Aluminium and Steel, ±18 cm x 10 cm x 10 cm (Selection)

**Fig. 2** Martelizé du Preez, *Restriction 1* (2003). Aluminium, Steel, Fabriano, Blanket, Batting and cotton thread, ±18 cm x 10 cm x 10 cm (Selection)

**Fig. 3** Martelizé du Preez, *Restriction 1* (2003). Fabriano, Steel, Plastic and Ink Thinners Transfer. ±18 cm x 10 cm x 10 cm

**Fig. 4** Martelizé du Preez, *Restriction: Left Right, Left* (2003). Aluminium, Steel and Fabriano, ±18 cm x 10 cm x 10 cm each
Fig. 5 Martelizé du Preez, *Restriction 1 (1-4)* (2003). Newsprint, Charcoal, Acrylic Paint, Ink and Thinners Transfer, 86cmx62cm
Fig. 6 Martelizé du Preez, *Restriction: Untitled* (2003). Objetes. Aluminium, Steel and Fabriano and Ink Thinners Transfer, ±18cm x 12cm x 14cm

Fig. 7 Martelizé du Preez, *Restriction: Untitled* (2003). Drawing Fabriano, Charcoal, Acrylic Paint and Ink Thinners Transfer, 57cm x 48cm
Fig.8 Martelizé du Preez, *Restriction* (2003). Objects. Batting, needles, zip, hooks and eyes and cotton thread, ± 18cmx8cmx8cm each

Fig.9 Martelizé du Preez, *Restriction* (2003). Objects. Compressed batting, Batting and cotton thread, ± 20cmx10cmx12cm

Fig.10 Martelizé du Preez, *Restriction* 2 (2003). Objects. Fabriano, ribbon, needle, cotton thread and ink thinners transfer, ± 18cmx10cm each
Fig.11 Martelizé du Preez, *Process of Change* (2004). Drawing. Cartridge, 6B Pencil and Fineliner, 20cmx30cm (selection)
Fig. 12 Martelizé du Preez, *Progress* (2004). Objects. Copper, Aluminium and Ribbon, ± 10cm x 3cm and corsets ±14cm x 9cm x 6cm (selection)
Fig.13 Martelize du Preez, *Untitled: Progress.* (2004) Drawing. Cartridge, Acrylic paint and charcoal. ±60cmx44cm and 30cmx44cm (selection)
Fig. 14 Martelizé du Preez, *Liberation: six pleated objects* (2005). Objects. Copper. Various sizes of approximately 12 cm³

Fig. 15 Martelizé du Preez, *Liberation: pleated objects* (2004) Series of Large Pleated Objects. Copper. Size: various of approximately 12 cm³ (Selection)

Fig. 16 Martelizé du Preez, *Liberation: pleated objects* (2004) Single large pleated object. Copper. ±12 cm³

Fig. 17 Martelizé du Preez, *Liberation: Untitled Objects.* (2004) Development of large pleated objects. Copper. Approximately 12 cm x 6 cm
Fig. 18 Martelizé du Preez, *Liberated Swarm* (2004) Series of Small Pleat Objects. Copper. Various sizes of approximately 5cmx5cm (selection)
Fig.19 Martelizé du Preez, *Liberation (series 1-12)* (2004). Fabriano and Charcoal,
Fig. 20 Martelizé du Preez, *Liberation* (2004). Fine Silver, Nickel Silver and Steel, various sizes of approximately 5cm x 3cm (selection)