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### Multi - girl - culture : an ethnography of doing identity

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## Chapter 3

# Doing Identity

### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I unfold the theoretical framework for this study, which is built around the concept of identity. Working from an understanding of identity as a narrative of self that must be reflexively made (§3.2), I argue that identities are constituted through repetitious performances. Section 3.3 introduces the concepts of performance and performativity. In section 3.4, I explain how these performances, through practices of citation and identification, produce subject-positions. Having outlined these analytical tools, in section 3.5 I then establish that these concepts can be studied empirically, by investigating performance practices. The subsequent sections address these practices, focusing on appearance and media. The chapter ends, in section 3.8, with an overview of the research questions. Let us start, however, by addressing the usefulness of identity as an analytical tool.

### 3.2 Identity in crisis

'Identity' is everywhere. One might even claim that it is the most widely used concept in social sciences and humanities today (Callero, 2003: 7; Jenkins, 1996; Wrong, 2000: 10). Initially, identity was a philosophical concept, found in the works of Aristotle and Hobbes. It gained popularity in sociology and psychology in the 1950s and 60s, through the works of Goffman (1958; 1963) and Erikson (1968) respectively. The popularity of identity in social science reflected in its usage in government policy and, subsequently, everyday life (Frijhoff, 1993). In addition, the advertising

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industry “has long understood that selling things to people often means selling them an identity too” (Jenkins, 1996: 7-8). In his classic work on identity, Erikson (1968: 15) notes how identity is in need of unequivocal definition. Since then, the amount of literature on identity has continued to grow. Several authors contend that in these times of high or post-modernity, people experience a crisis in identity (Giddens, 1991; Woodward, 1997a). In addition, or as a result, scholars have argued that the concept of identity itself is in crisis (Bendle, 2002; Gilroy, 1996; Hall, 1996). In this section, I elaborate on the notion of identity. In light of the above, a prior question arises: if identity is such an ill-defined and all-encompassing concept, why use it as an analytical tool with which to understand contemporary girl culture? Why identity?

### *Why identity?*

Frijhoff argues that identity’s usefulness as an analytical tool precisely explains its popularity. Identity unites the psychic and the social, and thus allows there to be a productive cross-pollination across social sciences (1993: 18). Likewise, Woodward (1997b: 1) argues that “identity matters” because it offers “explanations of social and cultural changes” (see also Gilroy, 1996: 36). For instance, processes of globalisation can be understood by investigating national and ethnic identities, and changes in sexual politics by looking at personal identities (Woodward, 1997a: 13). To Foucault, the self<sup>1</sup> is connected to power. In Foucaultian theory, “regimes of power do not simply control a bounded, rational subject, but rather they bring the self into existence by imposing disciplinary practices on the body” (Callero, 2003: 117). Thus, another reason why identity is a useful analytical tool is the relationship between the self and power.

Stuart Hall (1996) explicitly addresses the usefulness of identity. First, scholars need the concept for want of a better one. Identity has been subjected to extensive critique, but after this deconstruction the concept has not been supplanted with a “truer” one. Therefore, “there is nothing to do but to continue to think with [identity]” (p. 1), albeit now in deconstructed form. Hall locates identity “in the interval between reversal and emergence; an idea which cannot be thought in the old way, but without which certain key questions cannot be thought at all” (p. 2). These key questions are part of his second response to the need for identity. He argues that identity is central to questions of agency and politics. Following Foucault in his understanding of these terms, Hall states:

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It seems to be in the attempt to rearticulate the relationship between subjects and discursive practices that the question of identity recurs – or rather, if one prefers to stress the process of subjectification to discursive practices, and the politics of exclusion which all subjectification appears to entail, the question of *identification* (Hall, 1996: 2).

I return to the notion of identification in section 3.3. Here, I want to point out that Hall, through the notion of discursive practices, connects identity to cultural and political questions.

Deconstructive critique and “a veritable discursive explosion” (Hall, 1996: 1) have thus left the concept of identity in crisis, but since the concept has not been replaced with a better one, we are stuck with it. Having established the usefulness of identity as an inter-disciplinary analytical tool with which to study relationships between the individual and society, we can now face the crisis. I first address definitional problems and different approaches to identity. In the subsection on reflexivity, I discuss the other element of identity in crisis: identity in high or post-modern times.

### *A definition of identity*

Although ‘identity’ is used in different disciplines, each discipline seems to hold its own contradictory definitions (Gilroy, 1996), which are often diverse and descriptive (Fearon, 1999). Hogg, Terry and White argue that different identity theories “occupy parallel but separate universes, with virtually no cross-referencing” (1995: 255). In coming to a definition, several authors (Fearon, 1999; Goffman, 1963; Nunner-Winkler, 2001) first distinguish social identity from personal identity. Social identity refers to membership of a particular category or group: X is a PhD student. Personal identity identifies a certain individual: based on this description and these fingerprints, we can determine that X is Linda Duits (Nunner-Winkler, 2001). Intuitively, or from an internal perspective, these meanings do not suffice. To answer the question ‘who am I’ with ‘Linda Duits, PhD student’ feels unsatisfactory: I am more than my fingerprints and social position.

Consider this example: at the start of many television quizzes, the host asks candidates to ‘tell something about themselves’. Usually, candidates respond by stating their name and profession. They often also state their hobbies and possibly say something about the composition of their family. Benhabib similarly argues that the question, “who I am,” cannot be approached separately from the community of which “I” am

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a part. She therefore argues that identity “is constituted by narrative unity, which integrates what ‘I’ can do, have done and will accomplish with what you expect of ‘me’” (Benhabib, 1992: 5). In line with Benhabib, we can then define identity as a narrative of the self (cf. Finnegan, 1997; Giddens, 1991; Hall, 1996). Defining identity as a narrative has several advantages. It allows the incorporation of several ideas that are central to different identity theories, such as identity as a question of sameness and difference; as a situational, multifaceted, and relative construct; as a site of struggle; and as a performance (Finnegan, 1997: 68). To further explore the idea of identity as a narrative, I now turn to Giddens’ (1991) work on the reflexive project of the self.

### *Identity in crisis and the reflexive project of the self*

Although the concept of identity dates from ancient times, several authors contend that identity mattered differently throughout history. Kellner argues that in traditional times, thus before the rise of modernity, identities were stable. Tradition prescribed choice, individual actions, and social roles. Everyone knew their place and role: “One was a hunter and a member of the tribe and that was that” (Kellner, 1992: 141). People did not experience identity crises or modify their identities; such actions are characteristic of late modernity. Late modernity (i.e. the period starting in the twentieth century) involved several changes, like the rise of phenomena like psychoanalysis, secularism, and the welfare state. These have, as Bendle (2002) asserts, put identity in crisis: the self needs to be ‘explored’ and ‘realised’, and new identities have become accessible. Additionally, the idea of “a subsisting self-sameness” of identity further exacerbates this crisis for identity, because “models that emphasize an almost unlimited degree of fragmentation [and] fluidity ... are in tension with this core notion” (Bendle, 2002: 6). Even those without identity anxiety “will inevitably have been compelled to make significant choices throughout their lives, from everyday questions about clothing, appearance and leisure to high-impact decisions about relationships, beliefs and occupations” (Gauntlett, 2002: 96).

Giddens argues that the current period of late modernity, “the self, like the broader institutional contexts in which it exists, has to be reflexively made” (Giddens, 1991: 3)<sup>2</sup>. He labels this idea ‘the reflexive project of the self’. Giddens defines identity as that “what the individual is conscious ‘of’ in the term ‘self-consciousness’” (1991: 52). Identity is no longer a given, but it is “something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual” (1991: 52). Giddens

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also understands identity as a narrative, a biography of one's life. Individuals create, maintain, and revise a story of who they are. This does not mean the story can be fictional. Instead, it must have coherence through a past, present and projected future.

The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the on-going 'story' about the self (Giddens, 1991: 54).

This biography is a person's identity, his/her sense of self. Giddens argues that identity under late modernity has become a project. Everyday events and life changing moments need to be continuously integrated and sorted into the story of the self. In that sense, one's identity is never finished or complete, hence the idea of a project. This integrating and sorting is a matter of reflection. A person's understanding of him/herself derives from constant reflection of 'I'. Identity as a reflexive project of the self thus means that the narrative of the self (= identity) is produced through continuous self-observation and self-reflection.

### 3.3 Identity performance

The idea of identity as a project suggests that identity is something that you do. To investigate this idea of doing identity, I start by exploring identity in terms of social roles. According to Hogg et al. (1995: 256), identity is "a product of social interaction, in that people come to know who they are through their interactions with others". This idea of identity as roles is appealing. Van Zoonen (2003: 10), for instance, introduces identity by reflecting on her own simultaneous roles as a mother and a university professor. From this introduction, she explains how these self-understandings can only come about in relation to larger ideals about motherhood and professorship. Furthermore, she argues, these understandings are firmly tied to existing discourses about femininity. Identities emerge in interaction with others, or, put differently: through "an ongoing and, in practice simultaneous, synthesis of (internal) self-definition and the (external) definitions of oneself offered by others" (Jenkins, 1996: 20). Jenkins argues that the process of identity formation is an internal-external dialectic of identification. Identification is addressed in section 3.4; this section focuses on identity as a role, and identity in relation to dominant discourses. The concept of performance, originally introduced to sociology by Goffman, incorporates these notions.

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### *Everyday performance and impression management*

Goffman (1958) analyses everyday social life from a theatrical perspective. He defines a performance as “all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers” (p. 22). Following the theatrical metaphor, he calls the set of observers the audience. In every social situations, participants seek information about the others present to define the situation and to know what to expect from each participant. An individual will thus – intentionally or unintentionally – try to present himself “in such a way as to give them the kind of impression that will lead them to act voluntarily in accordance with his own plan” (p. 4). Goffman calls this impression management: the mobilisation of behaviour “so that it will convey an impression to others which it is in his interests to convey” (p. 4). Although individuals try to produce an idealised performance, this does not mean that performance is premeditated. Each new performance is based on what the individual has learned before: “he already has in his repertoire a large number of bits and pieces of performances that will be required in [a] new setting” (p. 72-73). Socialisation means learning enough “pieces of expression to be able to ‘fill in’ and manage, more or less, any part that he is likely to be given” (p. 73).

Goffman argues that a “status, a position, a social place is not a material thing (...); it is a pattern of appropriate conduct, coherent, embellished, and well articulated”. “To be a given kind of person” means “to sustain the standards of conduct and appearance that one’s social grouping attaches thereto” (p. 75). Goffman states that a fundamental dialectic underlies all social interaction. Since complete information about the situation and its participants is lacking, the individual performer is forced to go by appearances, “substitutes – cues, tests, hints, expressive gestures, status symbols, etc. – as predictive devices” (p. 249). The members of the audience are aware that their appearances are judged and therefore, in turn, they manage the impressions they exude. The audience then becomes a performer. The dialectic lies with efficient impression management: “the very obligation and profitability of always appearing in a steady moral light, of being a socialized character, forces one to be the sort of person who is practiced in the ways of the stage” (p. 251). Although Goffman does not use this term, this dialectic points towards performativity.

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### *Performativity*

Austin's *How to do things with words* is often credited as the origin of performativity (Parker & Sedgwick, 1995; Pels, 1999; Scannell, 2007; Schechner, 2002). Austin argues that certain utterances do not reflect or represent a reality, but create a reality of their own. These utterances are acts: the situation does not exist until the utterance is made. 'I now pronounce you husband and wife' and 'I declare this meeting open' are often-quoted examples (Pels, 1999: 102). Performative then means that the utterance performs – achieves – something.

A performative act is a "self-confirming action" (Pels, 1999: 96), or put differently, a "discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names" (Butler, 1993: 12). Thus, in Goffman's example: if one acts like a moral and socialised character, one becomes a moral and socialised character. Pels explains the notion of performativity through Santa Claus. UFOs, leprechauns, and Santa Claus might not 'exist', but they exist because people believe in them, and their beliefs have 'real' consequences in the material world.

The traumatic realisation that Santa Claus 'actually' does not exist is a perception that exactly grows so slowly because all the words and actions of everyone around you are conspiring to perpetuate that fiction (Pels, 1999: 94, my translation).

Thus, "all the words and actions of everyone around you" make Santa Claus 'true'. Likewise, Pels argues, certain aspects of social reality, like 'the state' or 'socialism' exist because we all believe in them and their 'existence' is constantly confirmed and reified.

The notions of performance and performativity are central to an interdisciplinary field labelled performance studies. The notion of performance has been used in anthropology in relation to ritual, and the work of Goffman inspired further sociological use of performance. A collaboration between the anthropologist Turner and the theatre scholar Schechner, led to further cross-fertilisation between social sciences and humanities in the early 1980s (Schechner, 2002: 11). A performance perspective allows the exploration of the relationship between performer and audience. This perspective is particularly appealing to scholars of identity, because, as I argued in the previous section, identities arise in interaction, or negotiation between individuals, others and society.

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### *Identity as a performance*

Simone de Beauvoir wrote the famous lines “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (De Beauvoir, 1952: 249). Further on she states:

It is not only that girdle, brassiere, hair-dye, make-up disguise body and face; but that the least sophisticated of women, once she is ‘dressed’, does not present *herself* to observation; she is, like the picture or the statue, or the actor on the stage, an agent through whom is suggested someone not there - that is, the character she represents, but is not. It is this identification with something unreal, fixed, perfect as the hero of a novel, as a portrait or a bust, that gratifies her; she strives to identify herself with this figure and thus to seem to herself to be stabilized, justified in her splendor (De Beauvoir, 1952: 502).

The idea that ‘woman’ is not a natural identity, but that women are socialised into woman is a central theme within feminism. Second wave feminists distinguished sex from gender “to differentiate the socio-cultural meanings (‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’) from the base of biological sex differences (‘male’ and ‘female’) on which they were erected” (Andermahr, Lovell, & Wolkowitz, 2000: 102). The deconstruction of the category of woman remains at the heart of the feminist project. Some radical feminists, most notably Butler, even critique the need for a distinction between sex and gender at all.

Butler (1990; 1993) challenges this distinction by arguing that the biological binary of sex is socially constructed as well. To Butler, the notion of gender as a social construction has led to the view of sex as a biological given. By conceptualising sex as the basis on which gender is socialised, gender is still in a conceptual relationship to the biological body. ‘Gender’ thus still upholds and enables biologically based feminine and masculine identities. Put conversely: “the discourse of gender hides sex’ discursivity by constituting gender as culturally produced and sex as naturally (biologically) produced” (Rodino, 1997: 5).

It is the ‘heterosexual matrix’ that requires ‘intelligible’ genders, “a causal relation among sex, gender, and desire” (Butler, 1990: 22).

The heterosexualization of desire requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between “feminine” and “masculine”, where these are understood as expressive attributes of “male” and “female”. The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of “identities” cannot “exist” – that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not “follow” from either sex or gender (Butler, 1990: 17).

Butler argues that discourse requires sex to be ‘known’ at the time of birth, and this knowing can only be done in a binary way: a newborn

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needs to be labelled male or female. The very existence of people that cannot be categorised as either male or female (i.e. hermaphrodites) shows that this binary is 'false' (see Fausto-Sterling, 2000 for an analysis of 'sexing').

"Sex" is, thus, not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is: it will be one of the norms by which the "one" becomes viable at all, that which qual-ifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility" (Butler, 1993: 2).

Thus, at birth one is labelled male or female, in order to be known in the heterosexual matrix. However, the existence of hermaphrodites reveals a "dissonant play of [gender] attributes that fail to conform to sequential or causal models of intelligibility" (Butler, 1990: 24).

Butler then argues that the claim of 'being a woman' has no substance. An individual incorporates her gender and continuously opposes that gender with the other gender<sup>3</sup>. Gender then becomes so incorporated – such a part of one's identity – that the person feels she "is a gender" (Butler, 1990: 21). Gender in the embodied self is again confused with sex, meaning the incorporation of a feminine gender gets confused with being female. Someone *is* a specific gender, because she is not the other gender. This idea, which Butler argues is false, presupposes that gender is binary. It also forces each individual to restrict her thinking about gender within that binary (Butler, 1990: 22). So if the binaries of sex and gender are false, how should we then understand gender?

Gender identity is performative: it only exists because it is done. Gender constitutes "the identity it is purported to be". Gender identity is not a fixed part of oneself, nor are gender 'expressions' the result of stable, universal parts of the self. Instead, gender 'expressions' performatively constitute gender. To sum up in Butler's words:

[G]ender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed. ... There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; ... identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (1990: 25).

I started this subsection with De Beauvoir's famous quote. To Butler, this quote would read 'one is not born, but rather makes woman'. By performing 'woman', one not only becomes woman (on an individual level), but through repetition of this performance, one also enables, produces, and regulates the discursive notion of woman. Butler's ideas of gender performance can and have been transferred to other identities, such as ethnicity (e.g. Ehlers, 2006) and age (e.g. Duits, 2007).

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### *Criticism of identity as a role or performance*

The applicability of theatrical metaphors to daily life has been well criticised. One point of criticism is the absence of a division between on-stage and off-stage in daily life, whereas in the theatre, the performance on stage is clearly distinct from the performance off-stage (Wilshire, 1982: 45). This distinction means that in the theatre, a performance ends and a role can be 'taken off'. In the theatre there is a difference between when an individual is performing, and when, after the performance, an actor 'returns' to his/her 'real' self. Identity, on the other hand, is not something that can be cast aside when away from an audience.

A second point of criticism involves the relationship of "the self being performed to the self performing" (Carlson, 1996: 42). Nietzsche and Sartre spoke of an empty self behind the mask of a social role. What is left of the self when all behaviour is nothing but a performance, a part one plays? The idea of identity as a performance then intuitively feels wrong. I argued previously that meanings of social and personal identity do not do justice to our sense of uniqueness. Similarly, a theory that reduces who we are to an empty shell conflicts with our sense of internal coherence and continuity.

Goffman makes no claims about an underlying self, and focuses solely on the ways in which performance function in society. Whether the performer is aware of his performance is besides his point. Likewise, Butler received much critique for *Gender trouble*. People wondered if she really meant to say gender is like a theatrical performance, thereby implying that an individual can change or end that performance. *Bodies that matter* (1993) is a clarification, in response to such accusations.

For if I were to argue that genders are performative, that could mean that I thought that one woke in the morning, perused the closet or some more open space for the gender of choice, donned that gender for the day, then restored the garment to its place at night (Butler, 1993: x).

What follows is a concise argument to emphasise the materiality of the body and its articulation with performance. At the core of this critique is the structure versus agency debate, which I addressed in the first chapter. Following Butler, I want to stress here that identity as a performance by no means implies that identity is radically free, nor does it exist in isolation of the body. In the next section, I discuss how dominant discourse disables performance from being free.

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### 3.4 Citation and identification

A performance succeeds only because an action “echoes prior actions” (Butler, 1993: 227). One is not free to just perform anything. Performances involve citation and identification, and both concepts involve ‘subject-positions’. In this section, I describe these three concepts.

#### *Citation*

Most ‘original’ performative utterances imply a binding power, some form of authority. Anyone can say ‘I now pronounce you husband and wife’, but the utterance is only effective when the speaker has authority. Thus, this utterance is preceded by ‘by the power vested in me’. As such, the utterance is citational – it is in a way a citation – because it calls upon conventions of authority.

[T]he judge who authorizes and installs the situation he names invariably cites the law that he applies, and it is the power of this citation that gives the performative its binding or conferring power. ... Indeed, it is through the invocation of convention that the speech act of the judge derives its binding power; that binding power is to be found neither in the subject of the judge nor his will, but in the citational legacy by which a contemporary ‘act’ emerges in the context of a chain of binding conventions (Butler, 1993: 225).

‘I now pronounce you husband and wife’ has authority because it “emerges in the context of a chain of binding conventions”. A performance can only be successful when it refers back to other actions (‘echoes’ other actions), and repetition is therefore crucial. As Butler states, “no term or statement can function performatively without accumulating and dissimulating historicity of force” (p. 227).

A performance, then, is more a singular act (i.e. Goffman, 1958), whereas performativity refers to the producing effects of power (i.e. Foucault, 1983; 1995). Although ‘sex’ has no real, true substance, it exists because it is constantly cited (remember Santa Claus). Butler argues that the sex is, in Foucaultian terms, a regulatory ideal: a normative practice “that produces the bodies it governs” (Butler, 1993: 1). At birth, one is named male or female, and thus, one is subjected to the norms of sex. This implies that one must live up to these norms. This ‘living up’ is the performance of male/female, and it is done through citing the known norms of masculinity/femininity. Through citing these norms, they are performatively produced and reproduced. Thus, a performance is not

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“an act by which a subject brings into being what she/he names” (p. 2). Instead, performance is an effect of assuming or identifying with cultural norms through a reiterative and citational practice. After one is named male or female, the subject is sexed and is summoned to assume this given sex. Discourse, “the heterosexual imperative”, “enables certain sexed identifications and forecloses and/or disavows other identifications” (p. 2).

### *Identification*

Hall classifies identification as “one of the least well-understood concepts – almost as tricky as, though preferable to, ‘identity’ itself” (1996: 2). He understands identification as a process of construction and articulation<sup>4</sup>. This process is continuous and identification is never complete, as there “is always an over-determination or a lack, but never a proper fit, a totality” (p. 3). The connection of identity to identification emphasises that identity is not a static concept, but “fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions” (p. 4).

Identities have a discursive, material, and political effectiveness, but the process of identification is fictional nonetheless. Hall argues that one always ‘knows’ that the identity is only a representation “constructed across a ‘lack’, across a division, from the place of the Other” (p. 6). Likewise, Butler maintains that identification is “phantasmatic”:

Significantly, [identification] never can be said to have taken place; identification does not belong to the world of events. Identification is constantly figured as a desired event or accomplishment, but one which is never achieved; identification is the phantasmatic staging of the event. In this sense, identifications belong to the imaginary; they are phantasmatic efforts of alignment, loyalty, ambiguous and cross-corporeal cohabitation (Butler, 1993: 105).

Full identification is thus something one strives for, but can never achieve. This highlights process over product, and provides an incentive to investigate identities not as results, but as processes – as performances. Hall defines identities therefore as “points of temporary attachment to the subject positions” (1996: 6). Put differently, identities are points of identification, and identification is ‘temporary attachment to subject-positions’. Citation, in turn, is ‘appealing to known norms or conventions associated with subject-positions’. I now discuss this newly introduced term.

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### *Subject-positions*

To Foucault, the subject is created within discourse. Foucault historicises the subject: he traces the genealogies of discourses which created the subject (Foucault, 1983). For instance, the way we have spoken and thought about sexuality (= the discourse of sexuality), has created specific sexual subjects (Foucault, 1990). Subjects then, are:

figures who personify the particular forms of knowledge which the discourse produces. These subjects have the attributes we would expect as these are defined by the discourse: the madman, the hysterical woman, the homosexual, the individualized criminal, and so on. These figures are specific to specific discursive regimes and historical periods (Hall, 1997: 56).

This is the first sense in which discourse produces the subject. Second, discourse creates a *place* for the subject. Corey and Peterson explain:

For Foucault, discourse is a regulated way of speaking and acting within a system that offers "subject positions" to speaking persons. By assuming a subject position (which is both a personal and social feat) a person takes a place in the social order, making sense of the world from this vantage point while also being subjected to discourses common to it (e.g., expectations, normative performances) (2003: 407).

Subjects must thus *position* themselves in discourse, hence the construct 'subject-positions'. By taking up this position, a subject then 'subjects' itself to the "meanings, power and regulation" of that discourse (Hall, 1997: 56). Such a position contains information about who the subject is supposed to be and how the subject is supposed to act. For instance, by looking at their position in discourse, Crone (2007: 26) analyses the discourse around television and finds 'viewers', 'parents', 'experts' et cetera. These positions all come with expected behaviours. To Butler, discourse (the heterosexual matrix) offers the positions 'man' and 'woman', which the subject must then adopt.

The notion of subject-positions, unlike identity, underscores that who we think we are, or what we know about our self, is the result of power. We cannot think of man/woman, lower class/upper class, or allochthonous/autochthonous without taking account of the power relationships (i.e. the discourses) behind these constructions and oppositions. As such, subject-positions can be understood as locations (Braidotti, 1994; Edley, 2001). The term encompasses a tension between 'subject' (connotations of active agency) and 'subjection'. Bringing the notions of

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location, discourse, and subject together, I define a subject-position as 'a discursively created location a person can take up, which implies directions for living' (see also Staunæs, 2003:104).

### 3.5 Operationalising performance: style

In the first part of the chapter, I laid the first foundations for the theoretical framework. After discussing theory on identity and identity performance, I introduced citation, identification and subject-position as analytical tools with which to study identity (see the glossary of terms at the end of this chapter for working definitions). In this second part, I discuss how we can study doing identity in an empirical context.

Butler's book calls for 'gender trouble', to render genders "thoroughly and radically incredible" (Butler, 1990: 141) through subversive bodily acts. One of the criticisms of *Gender trouble* was Butler's imprecision in explaining how such gender parody can be achieved (e.g. Kaplan, 1992). Similarly, I want to add that Butler does not elaborate on how performances and performativity can be analysed empirically. Indeed, Butler is brief about actual practices:

The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding self (Butler, 1990: 140).

Butler thus locates identity performance in the "stylization of the body", describing gender as a "corporeal style" (p.139) and a "stylized repetition of acts" (p.140). A subject can use "styles of various kinds" which, ultimately, realise a subject-position.

'Style'<sup>5</sup> is a concept closely associated with subcultural research, mostly through Hebdige's (1979) *Subculture: The meaning of style*. This title is deceptive, as Hebdige fails to provide a definition of style. Style is central in his argument nonetheless, and he states "[t]he communication of a significant *difference*, then (and the parallel communication of a group identity), is the 'point' behind the style of all spectacular subcultures" (Hebdige, 1979: 102). His contemporary CCCS researchers understood style as "the materials available to the group for the construction of subcultural identities", a usage resembling Butler's. Within parentheses they added "dress, music, talk" (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, & Roberts, 1976: 53). Adapting these definitions, I understand style as 'materials used in the distinction of one person or group from the other'<sup>6</sup>.

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I specifically look not only at the suggested dress, music, and talk, but I also expand dress to include appearance, and music to include popular media in general. Talk can take many forms and would justify an entire study in its own right. Instead, I only focus on talk about appearance or popular media.

### *Performance practices*

We now have a definition and an operationalisation of style. Following the performance framework laid-out above, I focus on style to study identity performance. I define a performance practice as ‘a distinctive act (involving style), which performatively constitutes a subject-position’. Let us go through this definition using the example of a girl wearing a skirt. A skirt is a stylistic element and wearing the skirt is an act. This act is distinctive, because a skirt cites known conventions of femininity and thus opposes masculine styles. Furthermore, the practice is performative, because through the action, femininity is effectuated and produced. Wearing the skirt is a practice that performs a feminine identity.

This idea can be transformed to other subject-positions as well. For instance, girls often borrow each other’s clothes. Putting on a girl’s sweater can be read as an expression of friendship. A reading in terms of performance interprets this act as *performative* of friendship. By itself, a sweater has nothing to do with the position of the friend. Through the larger practice and in a specific context, the sweater becomes meaningful.

The word ‘act’ suggests functionalism and voluntarism, but this is deceptive. Butler never intended gender to be understood as a voluntary project, and any such reading of her work is a misapprehension. Butler argues that gender is a construction, but:

it is not necessarily constructed by an “I” or a “we” who stands before that construction in any spatial or temporal sense of “before” ... Subjected to gender, but subjectivated by gender, the “I” neither precedes nor follows the process of this gendering, but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves (1993: 7).

Gender is not a construction of the subject, but instead an effect of discourse. Our own need for a sense of agency motivates this misreading. Unlike what we tend to think and feel, style cannot be deployed at one’s own disposition to ‘create’ a chosen identity. Thus, a skirt is instrumental in the construction of gender; however, this construction is not consciously done by the girl who wears it. Nonetheless, by wearing the

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skirt the girl reiterates the norms of gender and as such, makes these norms 'true'. It does not imply that the girl purposefully wanted to construct the notion of gender, or to perform gender intentionally. Comparably, although the friends probably did not intend to give off a performance of friendship by wearing each other's sweaters, the act is performative in the friendship nonetheless. I operationalised style into appearance and media use and talk, which are addressed in the following sections.

### 3.6 Appearance

I use appearance as an umbrella term for observable features of the body, observable items of clothing, and other observable objects attached to the body, such as makeup, hairstyle, jewellery etc. Although the observable nature of appearance suggests a straightforward analysis, in this section I problematize both the body and clothing as self-evident systems of meanings. The two are discussed in separate subsections and with different theories, but it should be noted that they cannot be separated: "human bodies are *dressed* bodies" (Entwistle, 2000: 6). Clothing is a frame for the body.

#### *The body*

Under the Cartesian legacy, the body has long been ignored in social science and philosophy. Feminism, Foucault, and post-modernism increased social scientific interest in the body (Frank, 1990; Oinas, 2001), leading to a discursive explosion of body theorising. Since Descartes, academic thinking considered mind and body to be distinct. When feminists entered academia, they fought this dualism, as they found themselves living in a world in which differences between men and women were essentialized and considered to be biologically determined. Furthermore, they argued that the neglect of the body was not accidental, but the result of the dualisms of this Cartesian legacy and the centrality of rationalism in modernist science. Western thought distinguishes mind and body, and separates human experience in a spiritual and a bodily realm. According to feminist theorists, this dualism works against women:

The female body becomes a metaphor for the corporeal pole of this dualism, representing nature, emotionality, irrationality and sensuality. Images of the dangerous, appetitive female body, ruled precariously by her emotions, stand in contrast to the masterful, masculine will, the locus of social power, rationality and self-control. The female body is always the 'other': mysterious, unruly, threatening to erupt and challenge the patriarchal order (K. Davis, 1997: 5).

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Bordo further argues that this dualism is effectively an instrument with which to retain patriarchal power, by associating the masculine with objectivity and reason, and the feminine with nature and emotion:

The cost ... to women is obvious. For if, whatever the specific historical duality, the body is the negative term, and if woman is the body, then women are that negativity, whatever it may be: distraction from knowledge, seduction away from God, capitulation to sexual desire, violence or aggression, failure of will, even death (Bordo, 1993: 5).

Feminist theory on the body is more than a critique of modernist Cartesian thought; it is a political project that addresses the inscription of power on the body. Here, feminism borrowed strongly from Foucault's work on the body and power.

Foucault argues that the body can only be understood by disentangling the discourses surrounding it. Although the body is central to all his work, *Discipline and punish* ([1975], 1995) provides a strong entry point into his thinking. The book is a genealogy of the modern legal system. In traditional times, Foucault writes, power was centralised and the ruler had direct physical power over his citizens. The ruler established power by the use of public punishments with which to remind the citizenry to be obedient. Urbanisation, population growth, and industrialisation changed the nature of power, and discipline was substituted for the physical exercise of power. In lieu of physical imprisonment and torture came a system of constant surveillance and fear of the state. The same societal trends increased the need for disease control and sexuality restraints. To deal with these concerns, new disciplines emerged: psychology, criminology, and sociology.

The historical moment of the disciplines was the moment when an art of the human body was born, which was directed not only at the growth of its skills, or at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful, and conversely (Foucault, 1995: 137-138).

A system of discipline appeared, where the concern was not with repression or obedience, but with self-discipline. Here, Foucault introduces the term 'docile bodies', bodies which effectively function in factories, the military, and in classrooms. Discourse disciplines the body, not by an excessive display of power, but in small steps and through details. The nice girl construct that I described in chapter 2 is an example of such a disciplinary discourse. This is what Foucault calls biopower:

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“the management of life and the government of populations through technologies of surveillance, specialized knowledges and corrective measures” (Howson, 2004: 165). The emphasis is on self-discipline. Instead of state coercion, systems of surveillance ensure that individuals discipline their own behaviour. Biopower is a productive power, as all power is to Foucault. For instance, people believe that disease control is in their best interests and therefore take the necessary measures. We bath each day, brush our teeth, take vitamins – all without thinking about it. Biopower thus shows control through mundane activities.

Descartes argued that alteration or damage to bodies would not alter the sense that a person has of him/herself. As such, he approached identity in a disembodied manner. Conversely, identities are now thought to have a very material basis, and the physical body “is one site which might both set the boundaries of who we are and provide the basis of identity” (Woodward, 1997a: 13). Gender, sexuality and ethnicity, as well as identities related to disability (Aapola, Gonick, & Harris, 2005; Howard, 2000), all have some (discursive) relationship to the body. In addition, in our consumer society, the body has become a form of physical capital, a commodity (Bourdieu, 1984). The body has become the object of maintenance and work, and the shape, size and appearance of bodies can be influenced – from dieting to cosmetic surgery, from exercise to tattooing (Howson, 2004). The body is a site of identity and of performance. This does not mean that anything is possible and that we can simply turn our bodies into the desired form. Butler argues for the materiality of bodies, and following Foucault, she states that bodies are always-already inscribed by discourse (Butler, 1993). The pain and suffering that transgender people go through indicates how body manipulation is only acceptable to a certain degree. Dyeing one’s hair from dark to light blond cannot be analysed in a similar way to the act of bleaching one’s skin.

### *Clothing*

In the first chapter, I argued how different opinion leaders ascribe different meanings to the headscarf, meanings that are probably not shared by the girls who wear it. The idea that clothes communicate is common sense, but how does this actually work and which meanings are communicated? Hebdige (1979) argues that style is intentional communication, a visible construction that exists to be read. However, Hebdige’s analysis of style in the punk subculture was not conducted within this subculture, meaning he never spoke to any punks about their inten-

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tional communication. Therefore, Entwistle (2000: 70) criticises his approach as 'armchair ethnography'. A structuralist reading like Hebdige's presumes an objective meaning, which can be retrieved through analysis; a misconception that is further enabled by the idea of clothes as a language, i.e. as a form of communication with its own vocabulary (e.g. Barnard, 2002; Lurie, 1981).

Clothes clearly contain codes that can be read. When we see someone running through the park in a tracksuit, we assume it is a jogger. However, when we see a girl in a club in an oversized, yet similar tracksuit, we assume she is into hip-hop music. The question then is: is it possible to conjure up an inventory containing all possible clothing codes? Davis (1992) discusses three characteristics of the fashion code that make such a model impossible. First, the meaning of fashion depends highly on the context, as the example of the tracksuit makes clear: who wears it, in what mood, on what occasion, in which place, in which company? Second, there is a high social variability in the signifier-signified relationship. Thus, "the universe of meanings attaching to clothes, cosmetics, hairstyles, and jewelry ... is highly differentiated in terms of taste, social identity, and persons' access to the symbolic wares of a society" (p. 9). It is difficult to have people interpret clothing codes in the same way. Third, in clothing, undercoding is also important. Some clothing codes are meant to communicate an impression, or a subtlety. Furthermore, "as soon as an aesthetic code comes to be generally perceived as a code (as a way of expressing notions which have already been articulated), then works of art tend to move beyond it" (Culler, 1976: 100 in F. Davis, 1992: 11)<sup>7</sup>.

A further problem hinders the reading of clothes as codes. In a critique on what he labels the 'clothing as communication hypothesis', Campbell argues that not everyone intends to communicate meaning.

The critically important point is that ... since consumers cannot avoid wearing clothes they are unable to prevent others from 'reading' meanings into the clothes they wear. Now they may be well aware of this: that is to say, they may anticipate that the wearing of an old, worn suit is likely to lead others to assume that they are relatively poor. But it does not follow from this that because they wear it they therefore *intend* to send such a message (Campbell, 1999: 349).

This example is problematic. Although the wearer is aware of a possible interpretation of his outfit and does not intend to send out that possible meaning, he still wears the outfit. The intentional element is crucial:

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is he or is he not communicating? Is he playing with the message? Does he want to show role distance? Furthermore, amongst young people, appearance is deemed a conscious choice of an active subject. De Waal (1989) argues that girls who lack the means or power to dress expectedly, are 'out'. She describes 'Netty' who claims to look down on her classmates for trying to fit in. Her classmates do not believe her. Netty does not get much allowance and her parents do not allow her to have a part-time job. Her classmates pick on her:

One of her classmates says: 'You can tell from her clothes that she has no opinion of her own'. Netty's defence is that her parents don't give her the chance to dress the ways she wants. Her classmates brush this aside: she should not let herself be bossed around by her parents (De Waal, 1989: 157, my translation).

Netty is made responsible for her appearance, and the meaning of her clothes can only be understood by taking both Netty and her classmates into account.

Instead of approaching clothes as codes comparable to texts, a performance approach is more useful. When Netty's clothes are seen as a performance practice, the analysis of the meaning of her performance would logically consider not only performer *and* audience (her classmates), but also the process and the context. In section 3.3, I discussed impression management and how audience and performer are aware of the other's impression management. Netty not only failed to wear the right clothes, she also failed to convincingly perform role distance.

### 3.7 Media

The study of youth cultures in the post-war era has focused strongly on popular music (Frith, 1984; Wulff, 1995). As Ter Bogt, Hibbel and Sikkema argue:

Music is often the crystallisation point of a certain style. In the interplay between artists and their audience, there gradually develops a more or less coherent code regarding clothes, hairdo, expression, posture, jargon and manners. A style characterises itself in behaviour, symbols and objects (2000: 24, my translation).

Young people use different popular music genres to create boundaries between themselves and other groups. Christenson and Roberts state that music allows the making of territorial claims:

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Popular music at once expresses, creates, and perpetuates the essential 'us-them' distinctions that develop between groups, and not just symbolically. Whether played by groups in public places or by individual teens in upstairs bedrooms, music stakes a powerful territorial claim. Indeed, it may be the most highly charged 'No trespassing' sign in adolescent society (Christenson & Roberts, 1998: 58-59).

The most fundamental boundary here is the distinction between young people and adults (Frith, 1984), but music also distinguishes different youth cultures. Christenson and Roberts (1998: 59) claim that most cliques in American and Canadian high schools are organised around musical preferences, an idea confirmed by (older) Dutch research as well (De Waal, 1989). Popular music offers identity packages. For instance, goths – people who like gothic music – dress similarly, have similar consumption patterns, spend their leisure time in a comparable way and share the same norms and values (Hodkinson, 2002: 195; North & Hargreaves, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c). Two important points of criticism should be considered though. First, self-categorisation of youngsters into groups tends to be unreliable, as most claim to be 'unique' (Ter Bogt et al., 2000: 20-21). Second, the media often create the distinctions between groups, as Thornton concludes:

[S]ubcultures are best defined as social groups that have been labeled as such. ... Communications media create subcultures in the process of naming them and draw boundaries around them in the act of describing them (Thornton, 1995: 162).

Despite further critiques of subcultural research (e.g. Muggleton, 2000; Weinzierl & Muggleton, 2003), the connection between popular music and youthful identities is persistent.

The relationship between media and youth culture is theorised in youth research in two ways. First, media play an important role in the dissemination of style (Hebdige, 1979; Kellner, 1995; Thornton, 1995; Weinzierl & Muggleton, 2003). Thus, goths in the Netherlands learn how to be a goth through, for instance, representations of American goths in popular media. Second, media offer ways of expressing identity (Bovill & Livingstone, 2001; Christenson & Roberts, 1998; Hebdige, 1979; Ter Bogt et al., 2000; Weinzierl & Muggleton, 2003). It is this second relationship that is central to this research. Common sense holds that one's musical collection says something about a person. From a performance perspective, I argue that music – and other media use – is

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not expressive of identity, but is performative in identity. Thus, listening to goth music is not an expression of identity; instead, listening to goth performatively brings about 'the goth'. Frith makes this argument as he states that "our experience of music ... is best understood as an experience of this *self-in-process* (Frith, 1996: 109). He continues:

What I want to suggest ... is not that social groups agree on values which are then expressed in their cultural activities (the assumption of the homology models) but that they only get to know themselves *as groups* (as a particular organization of individual and social interests, of sameness and difference) *through* cultural activity, through aesthetic judgement (Frith, 1996: 111).

Expanding this argument from popular music to popular media in general, in the next two subsections, I discuss performative media use and performative media talk.

### *Media use*

Sarah Louise Baker (2004) argues that popular music offers a way of enacting and representing different subject-positions. Based on ethnographic fieldwork with girls aged eight to eleven, Baker explored the bedroom as a site for 'serious play'. As a dramaturgical concept, play "invites the exploration of Otherness, a stretching of the boundaries between the familiar, a testing of the new" (Baker, 2004: 83). Her informants imitated their idols, but they also 'played radio', i.e. they created their own fictional radio show. Such media play allowed the girls in Baker's research to 'test' different subject-positions: playing with them, but ultimately making it one's own, thus performatively bringing about a certain subject-position.

Dancing and singing to celebrities and playing radio-host are clear examples of play through media use. Watching television or reading a magazine provide fewer opportunities for play, however, television programmes and magazines titles often have strong target groups, around which a clear image is built (e.g. *Sex & the City*, Dutch girls' magazine *Tina*). Media use is a way of citing the values (the images, connotations, and norms) attached to such titles.

### *Media talk: discursive identity construction*

McKinley studied the ways in which the viewers of the 1990s teen drama *Beverly Hills 90210* talked about their favourite show. She suggests that

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such talk leads to 'us versus them' moralities. The viewers mocked and criticised the text, and gave alternative meanings to it. Furthermore, she argues that much of this talk focuses on appearances, where the viewers are ruthless in their judgments. McKinley calls this type of talk 'identity talk': "talk that presents the speaker as a particular kind of person, within a particular community, subject to certain constraints and alive to certain possibilities" (McKinley, 1997: 7). Following this work, research on soap opera talk similarly argues that soaps invite discursive identity construction (Barker, 1997, 1998; Costera Meijer & De Bruin, 2003; De Bruin, 2005). Comparably, Hermes' (1993) study of women's magazines revealed that readers formed "imagined 'new' selves" (p. 199) based on these magazines. Through reading women's magazines and/or talking about them with friends, readers appeal to morality and thus create shared moral standards, ranging from understanding to disapproval:

Gossip brings together by creating an intimate common world in which (private) standards of morality apply to what is and what isn't acceptable behaviour, about basic human values and emotions ... [R]eading gossip magazines does not evolve around fantasies of perfect selves but around fantasies of belonging: to an extended family or to a moral community. Moreover interpreting the gossip magazine text, readers use and validate their own personal knowledge and experiences (Hermes, 1993: 184).

These studies show how media talk plays a part in the reflexive project of the self. Furthermore, discursive identity construction can be turned around: identity then is not constructed, but performed through media talk. Although these studies do not address identity performance as such<sup>8</sup>, they do suggest that media talk can be a performance practice.

### 3.8 Summary

I have established that identity is a narrative of the self. Individuals believe this identity to be stable and unique, even though it is an ongoing project. These identities have no real inner core; instead, they are performatively constituted through repetitions of performances in performance practices. Identities can never be fully embodied, and I therefore prefer to speak of identification, thus of temporary attachment to a subject-position. To take the headscarf as an example: wearing the headscarf is approached as a performance practice, instead approaching the scarf as a text with a fixed meaning. The scarf is performative for a

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religious identity, as it cites conventions of a Muslim subject-position. The performance approach allows one to look at the processes of meaning negotiation between performer and audience. It allows asking the girl about her intended meanings, whilst at the same time acknowledging that this process of making meaning is dynamic. It is shaped in interaction with the audience and with discourse. Since audiences change (at school one confronts a different audience than at home), performances should be studied in context.

### *Research questions*

Now that I have discussed the analytical tools necessary to study the doing of identity, I am able to specify the research question as a second set of sub-questions to add to the first set formulated in chapter 1. To study identity performance empirically, one can investigate the narratives that girls maintain and produce about themselves. One can analyse the identifications that girls express by examining various performance practices. This translates into the following sub-questions:

- Which subject-positions do girls take up?
- How do girls use appearance and media to perform these subject positions?
- Which restraints do they face in their performance practices?
- Under which influences do these positions arise?
- What are the criteria governing their performances?

Before we can turn to a discussion of the answers to these questions in the results chapters, chapter 4 describes the methods and methodology employed.