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

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# **Part III**

## **Mapping Performances**







## Chapter 7

# Subject-Positions

### 7.1 Introduction

Part II sketched the contexts in which I investigate young girls' identity performances. The four chapters in part III map these performances. In this first chapter in part III, I describe who these girls 'were' by analysing the different subject-positions they took up. In chapter 3, I defined a subject-position as 'a discursively created location a person can take up, which implies directions for living'. Put differently, discourse offers certain subject-positions, and these subject-positions contain information about who someone is, and how that person is supposed to act. An individual can take up (perform) such a position, but this is always a temporary attachment. Theory about subject-positions is abstract. How discourse creates exactly which positions remains unclear. Furthermore, such theory argues that subject-positions are complex, contradictory, and coinciding, but fails to show what this looks like or how this functions in everyday practice.

This chapter aims to bridge the gap between abstract theory and concrete practices by investigating the ways in which subject-positions work on a micro level. I propose to visualise the idea of discourse and subject-positions as a web. Discourse 'spins' a web of possible subject-positions. An individual is like a spider, moving from one node on the web to another, taking up different positions on it. Different parts of the web refer to different identities. For instance, the upper-left corner consists of a variety of subject-positions related to class, and the bottom-right contains positions referring to ethnicity. A girl can take up the position of the preppy girl. This position is an attachment to a middle-

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class identity. However, such a girl is not always a preppy girl; it is not her essence. Instead, she might also take up a Hindoestaanse subject-position. At that moment, she attaches herself to an ethnicity. Navigating the web is not a matter of choice. Discourse impedes the spider from moving to certain parts of the web, and instead points the spider in certain directions. Each spider has its specific web, depending on its historical localisation. For instance, girls with Turkish parents are restricted in their ability to take up a Dutch subject-position. Although that part of the web is not accessible to them now, this does not mean it will be the same in fifty years.

The sub-question central to this chapter is ‘which subject-positions do girls take up?’ The conventional identity categories of gender, age, ethnicity, and class (Aapola, Gonick, & Harris, 2005; Howard, 2000; Stau-naes, 2003; Woodward, 1997; Wrong, 2000) directed my attention in observing and listening to the girls. Thus, I asked myself which subject-positions I could reconstruct in the realms of gender, age, ethnicity and class. I focus on girls’ *experience* of these positions, and I emphasise the connections between various subject-positions (known as intersectionality (Yuval-Davis, 2006)).

### 7.2 Gender

Prior to anything else, the girls in this study performed ‘the girl’. This implies identification with a certain age and a certain gender. The age dimension is discussed in section 7.3; here I focus on gender. To some girls, gender was clear-cut. They understood femininity as a given, a notion beyond questioning. Other girls had a more complex understanding of gender, and they distinguished a variety of possible attachments to femininity. This section starts with the girls’ understandings of femininity. I then examine two specific subject-positions in more detail: the tomboy and the girly-girl. To demonstrate the complexity further, I discuss two intersecting subject-positions: the good girl and the sexual subject.

#### *Understandings of femininity*

In this subsection, I analyse the narratives the girls produced in response to my questions about femininity and masculinity<sup>1</sup>. To some girls, these questions were difficult to answer.

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Linda: Do you feel you look typically like a girl?

Gülen: Yes, I think so.

Linda: You think so? And why?

Gülen: Yes normal, I don't dress like a boy.

Linda: Yes, so what is typically like a boy?

Gülen: Yes normal. Clothes that are suitable for boys. [Interview Gülen, 9 June 2006]

Gülen's circular reasoning, and her use of the word "normal" demonstrate how deeply lived the notion of gender can be. From an early age, one learns to identify with and invest in one gender or the other. This identification becomes so self-evident that thinking beyond it becomes nearly impossible. Nonetheless, the answers from the girls show different conceptualisations of gender. To the girls, gender was a matter of behaviour, of clothes, and of the body<sup>2</sup>.

Some girls described characteristic boy behaviour as generally more adventurous, daring, boisterous or tough [stoer]. Boys also engage in different sports to girls, like football or rugby. Other girls could not explain what exactly constituted male or female behaviour; they merely stated that boys and girls 'acted' differently.

Many girls described clothing as a way of recognising gender. Most obviously, they said boys and girls wore different items of clothing. The girlish items named were skirts, fancy dresses, tank tops, bikinis, high heels and boots. The girls typified boyish items as trousers, tracksuits, football jerseys, suits, hooded sweaters, swimming trunks and football trainers. It was not just different items of clothing; the girls also saw gendered ways of wearing clothes. Loose fitting and oversized clothes were seen as male, and tight fitting clothes as female. Low-hanging trousers were also mentioned as being typical of boys. Furthermore, they said that girls sometimes show skin by wearing, for instance, low-cut tops, whereas boys can get away with wearing no shirt at all. Expensive brand clothing was something the girls coded as masculine, especially in relation to trainers. Prints were a way of telling boys and girls apart as well: floral prints are feminine, cartoon prints masculine. The girls also understood colour as gendered. Several girls mentioned pink as typical for girls, followed by baby blue and lilac. Male colours were not bright, and instead some girls said that black and brown were masculine colours, with orange as a possible exception. Finally, the girls told gender by looking at jewellery and accessories. Earrings, bracelets, handbags and decorated belts are accessories for girls, whereas one girl volunteered "large necklaces with dollar and marijuana signs" for boys.

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Fewer girls connected gender to the body. As I explicitly wanted to avoid talking about genitalia<sup>3</sup>, I formulated my questions carefully to discourage the girls from going in that direction. Six girls described gender in terms of hair length: short hair is more for boys and long hair more for girls. However, they all realised this was a generalisation and not necessarily the best way to tell boys and girls apart. One girl volunteered a beard as typical for boys. Another girl answered smelly feet as typical for boys. In addition, some girls mentioned the ways one treats one's body as gendered. Manicures and frequent visits to the hairdresser were for girls, as well as using makeup. One girl mentioned bodily behaviour:

Consolacion: A girl that sits with her legs crossed, who doesn't sit sort of like this. I sit like this when I feel like it, but my mother says 'you just need to sit like this, with your legs together'. [Interview Consolacion, 8 June 2006]

Consolacion indicated that her own behaviour did not live up to the standard of being a girl and that her mother corrected this behaviour.

The girls' understanding of typical girl and boy behaviour and clothing shows a tension commonly acknowledged within feminism: there are clear norms of what constitutes masculinity and femininity. Yet at the same time, most girls indicated they did not fully achieve these norms, meaning that they sometimes dressed and behaved in ways they considered to be more 'boyish'. The girls understood different gender norms, whilst indicating space for diverging from them. One girl mentioned gym class as a transgressional space, where girls could wear shorts and be more loud and wild than was normally accepted. Several aspects the girls mentioned seemed out of place for a primary school context: suits and beards are not commonly found amongst twelve-year-old boys, nor did any of the girls wear high heels or fancy dresses. This shows the difficulties in describing such an embodied and deeply rooted concept as gender.

### *The tomboy*

Linda: Do you feel you look typically like a girl?

Katia: Er, yes I think that I do... I don't think I'm really girlish-girl, completely girl, but that I'm sort of... You have girlish-boy or boyish-girl, but then I sort of have... [laughs] Really complicated.... Girlish-boy and then... No, girlish-girl and then half... And quarter boy, so three quarters of me is sort of boy, because I really like adventurous stuff and all, bungee jumping I want to do especially, and skydiving. [Interview Katia, 19 June 2006]

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Katia's answer shows her inability to think about gender outside a dichotomy. She says she likes adventurous stuff, and she can only represent this part of herself as 'sort of boy'. Such a 'boyish girl' is known as a tomboy.

A tomboy can be defined as someone who prefers less feminine clothes, games, and toys, and plays with boys on a regular basis (Burn, O'Neil, & Nederend, 1996: 421). Tomboys existed amongst the girls from both schools, but were not as visible and were fewer in number amongst the Gunning-girls. Several girls from the Kantlijn identified Mette and Esther as tomboys in the interviews, meaning that they termed them as 'boyish girls'.

Noa: Mette, she really does boy things sometimes. Then I know myself that she is a girl. But I don't think she looks like a boy, but that's because I know her really well. [Interview Noa, 20 June 2006]

On occasions, for instance by the school photographer, Mette and Sarah were mistaken for boys. Noa said Mette dressed like a boy, but since she knew Mette really well, she always knew Mette is a girl.

Sophie even used the English tomboy (not a common term in Dutch) to designate herself at a younger age. She also used it to label Mette and Esther. Both Mette and Esther indeed dressed in boyish clothes and preferred to be friends with boys. Both girls successfully played football in the junior leagues. They expressed an attachment to the tomboy position during the interviews, but did not understand themselves as boyish girls. Instead, when asked to describe their style, they both said "sporty":

Esther: Sporty, but not too boyish or something.

Linda: Okay, those were my next questions: Do you feel you look typically like a girl?

Esther: No.

Linda: Why not?

Esther: Because I always wear sports clothes and that's not really girlish.

Linda: What's typical girlish then?

Esther: Skirt or a dress or tight jeans or a tight T-shirt. And I don't wear that.

[Interview Esther, 12 June 2006]

Mette: Er, sporty.

Linda: Yes.

Mette: And yeah a bit large and loose fitting.

Linda: Large and loose fitting, yeah.

Mette: Yes and er, yes.

Linda: Okay. And do you feel you look typically like a girl?



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Mette: No.

Linda: No? What is that then, typical girlish?

Mette: Er, skirts and a bit tight things actually. [Interview Mette, 12 June 2006]

Esther specifically added she did not feel she looked like a boy. When asked to describe typical boy clothes, they answered:

Esther: Well, really like, skate trousers and then for instance with a sweater or a T-shirt with a lot of text. And gangster clothes.

Linda: What are gangster clothes?

Esther: Like, Daan has these trousers and this shirt and that's really baggy then. And Lars has that too and Niels has a New York Yankees suit, that's typically boyish. [Interview Esther, 12 June 2006]

Mette: These low-hanging trousers. I don't think that's normal. Actually, it depends on how low you put them. Also these big T-shirts and all, er, trainers. Yeah, that's it. [Interview Mette, 12 June 2006]

Thus, Mette and Esther made a distinction between themselves and boys. They were not girls who wanted to be boys, or girls performing masculinity. Instead they took up the position of the tomboy, which is (simply) a different attachment to gender (see also Burn et al., 1996; Carr, 1998; Reay, 2001).

In talking about Mette, one girl quickly added that Mette was changing and was becoming more girlish. When Mette had entered secondary school, she still dressed as a tomboy, but she also told me she was more attentive to appearances now. Sophie said in the interview she used to be a tomboy, but that had changed. She said:

Sophie: Well yes. Now I'm not really much of a tomboy. First I was. First, I had... Now I also have a couple of skirts, but in 6th formor something I have no skirts at all, was it really special when I bought a skirt. Now not so much anymore, but sometimes still.

Linda: Why do you think that is, that that's changed?

Sophie: Well I think that you grow older. I don't know really. At a certain moment you see people wearing a really nice skirt indeed and then you think: 'Yes, that's actually nice as well'. First it was also that I kind of didn't dare, then you think like: 'Hmm, that bare'. I don't know, the older you get, or something I think. I haven't a clue actually. [Interview Sophie, 27 June 2006]

The literature states that tomboyism usually fades when girls enter adolescence (Hyde, Rosenberg, & Behrman, 1977). This was visible for Mette, and Sophie confirmed this in the interview. However, she found it difficult to explain such a change. Again, as I concluded in the previous chap-

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ter, the girls stressed continuance over abrupt change. In 8<sup>th</sup> form, Sophie dressed quite femininely, but still often played football with the boys. Thus, she no longer took up the tomboy position, but she still performed a different attachment to femininity than most girls in her class.

### *The girly-girl*

Tomboys thus identified with 'boyish' behaviour and clothes, but they did distinguish themselves from boys. There were also girls who had a very strong attachment to everything traditionally coded as feminine: they principally dressed in pink, had impeccable nails and hair, wore skirts and feminine shoes, giggled continuously, and exclusively discussed 'girl' topics like clothes and soap operas. Roos exemplarily took up this position of the girly-girl. Her movements were always elegant and feminine, and she often touched her face and shook her long hair. Likewise, Caruna and Vanessa also performed girly-girls and their classmates identified them as the 'girliest' girls in class. For instance, when I asked who looked most typically like a girl, Madelief and Jenna answered respectively:

Madelief: Vanessa does wear a lot of pink. I find that really like, really such a girl, really.... Really such a girl, but she also has a lot of handbags, she has like twenty or something... [Interview Madelief, 13 June 2006]

Jenna: I think that Vanessa looks girly. Regarding face and hairstyle I think she's a little tougher, but regarding clothes I think she is the most girly I believe. [Interview Jenna, 26 June 2006]

Vanessa also described herself as typically girly. She said:

Linda: Can you describe your style?

Vanessa: I don't know. Just normal. I like pink, a lot of pink. Pink yes [laughs].

Linda: Okay, and do you feel you look typically like a girl?

Vanessa: Yes, because some children look kind of boyish.

(...)

Linda: Okay, and you say you don't... that you look very different...

Vanessa: Yes, because they don't want makeup, I find that very girly. And yeah, just nail polish or a little bit girly clothes. They never wear pink or something.

Linda: And do you wear a lot of makeup?

Vanessa: Well in the weekend almost always and sometimes to school and other than that at parties or after school also sometimes. [Interview Vanessa, 3 July 2006]

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Vanessa thus cited femininity by appealing to colour and makeup. She opposed herself to girls who never wore makeup or pink clothes, making them less feminine and herself “just normal”.

### *The good girl/the virtuous subject*

The girls not only had varying attachments to femininity, they also approached ‘doing gender’ in different ways. At certain times, certain girls performed the ‘good girl’. Earlier I mentioned how Consolacion’s mother instructed her about how a proper girl sits. By the good girl, I mean a girl that is virtuous, and follows the ‘conventional’ rules of gender.

One aspect of the good girl is paying attention to appearance. All the girls found it extremely important that they (and other girls) kept a clean, well-groomed appearance. Most of them believed it was an essential part of being a girl. Furthermore, they understood attention to appearance as an active and continuous act (something one must always do), in which the idea of a project resonates. Some girls argued attention to appearance was equally important to boys, but that, for instance, this was less visible in public. Most girls, however, stated it was more important to girls. First, simply because boys have less to perfect. The girls connected this to differences in hair length. If boys have any hair to begin with it, it needs less work. In addition, girls dispose of makeup and boys do not. Second, the girls’ answers show different goals for girls and boys. Several girls pointed out that girls feel they need to look pretty in order to meet boys, with the intention of getting a boyfriend. This does not mean that girls are solely responsible for the romantic process; it just implies that girls have different means in this project than boys:

Odecia: Maybe because [do] more with their eyes... Like seductively glancing up, you know? And boys more with their... with their doing and girls more with their appearance and all, you know? When girls want to make a pass at a boy they usually do that with the outside and the eyelashes and all, you know? When the boys want to make a pass at a girl they usually do it with tough and bla bla bla, so that has less to do with appearance than girls.  
[Interview Odecia, 27 June 2006]

According to Odecia, girls depend on their appearance and boys depend on their behaviour. It is important to note that the girls held each other accountable for their appearance. Thus, they did not experience attention to appearance as something they did in order to meet boys; instead, they knew they were being scrutinised by other girls. The girls

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understood certain aspects of appearance as *makeable*: looks can be manipulated (see Duits & Van Romondt Vis, 2006 for an extensive discussion).

Maud: About the shapes in your face and all, you can't do anything about that. But if you just, like yeah, comb your hair and all, and that you not never wash it and all, yeah that you don't have stains on your clothes and all, yeah those kind of people I don't hang out with. But those are also often those types that think about the world 'I don't care' and all. I just don't like that.  
[Focus group 2, 21 February 2007]

Maud distinguished between essential facial features, which are beyond one's control, and attention to appearance.

### *The sexual subject*

As Butler asserts (1993: 4), dominant discourse comprises a heterosexual imperative. This is the governing criterion behind gender positions, but it also obviously implies a sexual positioning. The sexual subject is a subject performing sexuality, where sexuality is understood as sexual interest and sexual preference (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 2000: 313). Contrary to societal concern about the sexualisation of society, none of the girls engaged in sexual acts at the time of research. Several girls at the Kantlijn had boyfriends. Odecia and Lars 'went out' for a long time. Odecia told me they had been on and off since the 6<sup>th</sup> form. I asked her what going out means:

Linda: What does that mean, going out?  
Odecia: Well it is... I mean I really feel so comfortable and special with Lars. He really makes me, he can like... make me feel special, you know? And then... I just really like that. He's just really nice and pretty and handsome and very funny and I feel really good and all around him you know. [Interview Odecia, 27 June 2006]

Odecia shows a deep affection for her boyfriend Lars. In explaining going out, she started with love. When I pressed her about what that meant in terms of behaviour, she explained the physical part:

Linda: Okay, and then what are things that you like do together?  
Odecia: Kissing of course, and holding hands...  
Linda: Kissing-kissing...?  
Odecia: Not kissing-kissing, because Lars and I are very affectionate of course, but we're also like... Yeah, I don't really want to kiss every five seconds. We're still just like a normal couple, like we kiss often but... Well now often, very often, and we hold each other's hand and I often sit on his lap.

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Linda: And does kissing mean French kissing or just like...

Odecia: Well we have done that a couple of times, but I really have something like: 'Okay, I still have my whole life ahead of me to do that, so maybe now I can just go and enjoy my youth'. You know? So I really had something like let's just do a long, long kiss instead of with tongue. [Interview Odecia, 27 June 2006]

Nothing in Odecia's answer warrants the worries described in chapter 1. Conversely, the girls from the Kantlijn gossiped heavily about Priscilla's behaviour. Priscilla had problems at home and stopped coming to school in the last months of the 8<sup>th</sup> form. Her classmates told me she had once said she was pregnant, and they speculated about sexual acts she had supposedly undertaken. Such gossip allowed the girls to define appropriate behaviour for themselves. In the 8<sup>th</sup> form, 'going out' [verkering] was usually not as serious as Odecia and Lars' relationship. At the Kantlijn, the girls often 'asked' boys out, sometimes together with a friend. Usually, they only went out with a boy for a short time, and the girls often switched boys.

In secondary school, going out with boys happened more often. Still, my questions about boys and dating in the focus groups always resulted in hysterical laughter. Dating (e.g. going to the movies with a boy) was seen as something American, and the girls told me that boys and girls usually went out in groups. Going out with boys was not something the Gunning-girls did, and they said fifteen was an appropriate age to start having boyfriends. Several girls from the Kantlijn had, by then, some experience of French kissing. When I probed one group about whether more than kissing happened, one girl responded "Come on, we're twelve!" suggesting that the idea itself was ridiculous. Instead, several groups turned the questions around and interrogated us<sup>4</sup> about our experiences with boys during secondary school. The majority of girls argued that seventeen was the best age to start exploring sex. All girls identified with heterosexuality.

The sexual subject is a position that the girls not so much took up but rather rehearsed. An example of trying on the sexual subject is dancing to favourite artists. Although most girls had not developed breasts in the 8<sup>th</sup> form, they tried 'shaking' them in their dances. Furthermore, mainly in secondary school, the girls tried on the sexual subject during parties. These special occasions allowed more makeup and sexier clothes. In the focus groups, the girls stressed they did not dress sexily for boys, but to look 'nice' for themselves; or, as one girl stated, "because everybody else does that too. Everybody else looks nice". The girls connected

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looking nice to dressing sexily, although not explicitly. All the outfits described as more special (and thus more appropriate for a party) were sexier: short skirts, short dresses, makeup, tight blouses, and so on and so forth. Sexy dress is thus a norm for such parties, but to these girls, this had nothing to do with sex or boys. Comparably: for the (hypothetical) first date with a boy, the girls stated they would dress 'normally' to avoid putting ideas in the boy's head.

### 7.3 Age

Age is the second axis of 'girl'. The girls in this study were at an in-between age. At the Gunningschool it often struck me how their appearance differed from their behaviour. Some girls dressed quite maturely in hip clothes, but enjoyed handicrafts, drawing and other more 'childish' activities. I reconstructed three subject-positions involving age: the child, the mature subject and the knowing subject. These subject-positions appear to be more voluntary than those related to gender and ethnicity. The girls could decide whether and when they took up the child or the mature subject. At the same time, their factual age and their bodily development restrained them from performing any age. In other words, they could choose between child and teenager, but not between toddler and middle-aged.

#### *The child*

What constitutes a child is a discursive construction and, throughout the ages, children have been approached in different ways. Ariès (1962) argues that differentiation in age groups started with the emergence of schools. Primary school, then, is the domain of children and secondary school the domain of youth. In primary school, the girls still saw themselves as children and preferred 'child' over 'young person' or 'teenager' in designating themselves and others. They engaged in play, like skipping, playing tag and shooting marbles. When there was spare time or a celebration in class, they played board games or enjoyed handicrafts and drawing. In secondary school, all the girls stopped such behaviour. At the Gunningschool, halfway through the year, I noticed an almost sudden change amongst the girls. They played less harmoniously, interfered more with the boys and started to talk in the playground instead of skipping. They were clearly entering puberty.

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At the Kantlijn, Maud and Jenna were sentimental about leaving primary school. They wanted a last chance at being a kid: they wanted to do what the infants did and ride on infant bikes. On one of their last afternoons, the 8<sup>th</sup> formers played in the infant playground, riding around on the little bikes. All the pupils played along, they played nicely and acted childishly (i.e. whining and giggling). Luck had never encountered this before and the whole event was hilarious. Maud and Jenna showed great reflexivity about abandoning their childhood period and created one last performance of the child.

### *The mature subject*

Since the 8<sup>th</sup> form is the final form, 8<sup>th</sup> formers are the oldest in their schools. At that time, they need not distinguish themselves from older youths at school, but they do want to mark themselves from the younger ones. The position of the mature subject is an opposition to that of the child. The mature subject is, therefore, not so much mature, as it is non-childish. The girls performed the mature subject by either distancing themselves from children, or by citing maturity.

The girls at times distanced themselves from younger children. In section 5.3, I described how the teacher, Luck, 'punished' the Kantlijn-girls with a silly hat when they violated the rules for toilet use. The girls' responses to the toilet hat demonstrate how these girls were at an in-between age. The boys had made a long, conical hat out of pink cardboard. On the side were strings of toilet paper. On top was a cut out pink pig with the text "I am Miss Piggy". The boys, further, added a brown turd and the text "I am a toilet princess". When the boys were making the hat, the girls felt awful about the prospect of wearing it, saying they definitely did not want to be seen in it. However, when the hat was finished, Nursen volunteered to wear it and joked about it. She showed it to her seven-year-old sister and made fun of herself. She thus took away a sense of shame connected to the hat and reappropriated its meaning. After that, the girls made a complete show out of wearing the hat to the toilets. One girl waited especially until right before school ended, so that the parents and pupils in the hallways could have, in her words, "the time of their life". Thus, initially the girls collectively feared looking childish, but later they were able to move beyond that, to stand above childishness and turn it around.

Other examples of distancing themselves from younger children appeared in the ways they discussed children's media genres. For instance,

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one girl remarked about cartoon network Jetix that “it has become really childish”. Another girl stated that cartoon magazine *Donald Duck* “lately has become boring”. Effectively, such utterances create a distinction between what is considered to be childish and what is more mature. Note how the comments about Jetix and *Donald Duck* are not presented as personal opinions, but as facts. These girls did not perceive cartoons as something you outgrow: they had not changed; Jetix had. With such utterances, the notion of ‘the child’ is established yet, at the same time, abandoned. They also suggest that the girls were not aware of their transition into an older age group.

The girls also performed the mature subject by citing genres they associated with maturity. Coded as more mature, were shows on MTV, teenage dramas or anything with a 16+ rating. For instance, Mette once loudly announced, “I got a 16+ movie for my birthday”. She did not mention the title, only the 16+. Her remark intended to show how mature she was. The video game *GTA San Andreas* was also used to perform the mature subject, since all pupils – unlike most parents – were aware of the Pan-European Game Information (PEGI) age rating of eighteen.

Mickey and Ramin are discussing *GTA San Andreas*, for about fifteen minutes. They find the violence in the game funny. I ask Mickey how she feels about the sex: she says she hasn’t noticed it. Ramin says he doesn’t pay attention to that. [Field notes Kantlijn, March 6 2006]

The game’s PEGI-rating is due to its violent and sexually explicit content. Mickey and Ramin cite the violent content to perform the mature subject. In the game, the protagonist can ‘visit’ prostitutes. This kind of sex was not something they discussed or that produced maturity. As I argued above, the girls found themselves too young to engage in sexual activities. Nonetheless, some girls with boyfriends (only at the Kantlijn) cited maturity by displaying ‘mature’ books on their tables. Titles having to do with boys, sexual exploration, and other adolescent issues<sup>5</sup> were ‘safe’ enough to perform a sexually exploring and therefore mature subject.

The headscarf was also a performance practice that cited maturity. Nazli started to wear the headscarf in the summer between primary and secondary school. When I visited her at her new school, I asked her how wearing it for the first time felt. She replied, “I felt a bit big and all. I felt like a woman”. Likewise, Amisha told me that at the Islamic school she attended before transferring to the Gunningschool, girls started wearing the headscarf in the 4<sup>th</sup> form. She was excited then, because it



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made her feel part of the older girls, (I return to this in chapter 10). These girls saw the headscarf as a practice that belonged to older girls, and wearing it thus cited maturity.

### *The knowing subject*

Knowing more is one aspect of growing older, of disassociating with younger girls. The knowing subject occurred in three areas: educational knowledge, knowledge of popular culture, and social knowledge. First, the girls performed their difference from younger children by showing educational knowledge. At the Gunningschool, the group was divided into three levels of arithmetic. The lowest level used books they knew were aimed at lower years, and they tried to escape this level by performing the knowing subject. This meant keeping one's hand up so high the girl sometimes stood up to place her hand even higher in the air. It involved sighing, moaning and angry reactions when not allowed to give the answer. Here, the performance of the knowing subject demonstrates a tension between being positioned by the teacher and the girls' own positioning. The teacher assigned the girls to levels, and their performance of the knowing subject is a way of fighting this positioning: 'look, I know the answer; I do belong in the 8<sup>th</sup> form'.

Second, knowledge of popular culture in general and television in particular provides status within the peer group. Media use adds to cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Thornton, 1995). It relates to maturity, because the girls associated most popular culture with older teens. Knowing your facts about *Idols* or the World Cup was an important asset in the performance of the knowing subject. Being able to identify certain shows, or lecturing about the difference between music channels TMF and the Box, were performances of knowing what was happening. In one game the pupils at the Kantlijn played, knowledge of popular culture was the key to winning. The person designated as 'it' provided a letter of the alphabet, to which the other participants have to shout out a movie title starting with that letter before being allowed to cross.

Knowledge about street and hip-hop culture is a special form of knowledge of popular culture. Such knowledge points to being streetwise. Some girls were the first to introduce new slang words or music. This position was rarely performed and only by three girls: Consolacion and Naoul from the Gunningschool and Priscilla from the Kantlijn. It is tied in with social class, because the street has been seen as a lower-class domain (e.g. Cohen, 1972).

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Third and related to maturity, the knowing subject referred to social knowledge. This social side of the knowing subject relates to friendship and to the reflexive project. To the girls, it was important to know what was going on in class and with all classmates. In primary school, they looked around, gossiped and were very attentive. For instance, if two girls passed on notes, other girls wanted to know what was in them and who was passing what to whom. Since I took notes on everything happening in class, the girls often wanted to read what I wrote down, using me as asset. As mentioned, the focus groups at points turned into gossip sessions, where they would specifically want to know who had done what, with whom and why. It seemed the girls constantly needed each other, and that knowledge about what was happening supplied them with a sense of security and reassurance.

### 7.4 Ethnicity

Although the girls in this study came from different ethnic backgrounds, ethnicity was not a prevalent, performed identity. At the Gunningschool, most girls shared the same religion. Identity is marked by difference, by opposing us versus them. In a group where religion is shared, one marks other differences than religion. The faculty at the Gunningschool marked themselves from the pupils and positioned the pupils as religious and ethnic others. The girls thus shared their status as Other and focused on other differences (for instance cliques and popularity). At the Kantlijn, the dominant ethnic background was Dutch, although a few girls differed. Before I discuss ethnicity performances, I investigate the girls' ethnic backgrounds and the girls' ethnic self-perception.

#### *Ethnic descent*

Saharso (1992: 58) distinguishes an objective and a subjective component in ethnicity. Religion, history and descent are more or less objective determinants in the assessment of ethnic belonging. These characteristics thus need to be subjectively processed into an ethnic identity. Appendix II lists the descent of both mother and father, the ethnic experience of the girl and her experienced religion, based on self-report during the interviews. This table is problematic, because it reduces complex understandings to either/or. The following subsections provide the complex constructions behind the table. In appendix I, I explained the Dutch classification system for autochthonous and allochthonous inhabitants.

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I argued that descent is the major categorization criterion in the assessment of ethnicity in the Netherlands. Descent is also central in the objective component of Saharso's understanding of ethnicity. I therefore start my inquiry into ethnicity by looking at the girls' ethnic descent.

All the girls, except Katia, were born in the Netherlands. Katia had moved to the Netherlands from Russia when she was six months old. All the girls of Turkish and Moroccan parents had parents from the same native country (e.g. both were Turkish or both were Moroccan). All these girls were so-called *second-generation immigrants*, a term used to designate someone who was born in the Netherlands, but whose parents were born elsewhere. Most parents had come to the Netherlands in their twenties, but Beyhan and Laila's parents migrated during childhood. Many girls were unclear about their parents' pasts before they were born, and they did not know the exact age when or reasons why their parents migrated. This lack of knowledge suggests the story of their parents' migration was not part of the girls' identities (i.e. not incorporated in their narrative of the self). Hence, to term these girls second-generation *immigrants* does not resonate in their understandings of their positions.

To some girls, their descent required a complex answer.

Consolacion: My mother is Columbian and my father is Argentinean. My father then has a father who's Irish and my mother then has a mother who's... a father who's Indonesian, so I'm just... I can't describe my looks. I can't say where I'm from. I just say 'I'm Spanish... I'm Columbian', because in fact that's the same language, Argentinean and Columbian. That's actually all one thing. [Interview Consolacion, 8 June 2006]

Comparably:

Betty: My father is from Angola, but he grew up in Portugal. My mother is from Cape Verdean island, and she is... They met each other in the Netherlands and my... My grandma and grandpa they have [been] there together, my grandma she's now here in the Netherlands, in Rotterdam, but my... From my mother's side and my grandpa he's just there in Cape Verdean island. They're in contact, you know, that they talk to each other, but not that they live together.

Linda: And your other grandma and grandpa are in Portugal?

Betty: That's the same story, from my father's side.

Linda: And when someone asks 'where are you from', what do you say?

Betty: I just say Portugal, because if I explain the whole... I just don't like that, you know, to tell the whole story then, then I just say once 'I'm from Portugal', done. [Interview Betty, 9 June 2006]

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Consolacion and Betty did not enjoy explaining this complex story to others and therefore resorted to a simplified version of their descent. The girls whose parents migrated to the Netherlands as guest workers from Turkey or Morocco had a simple story that was more recognisable to each other. Maud, on the other hand, wished she had more to tell:

Maud: Er, well, you mean like where I'm from? Well, I think that even the great-great-great-great-grandfather of my father, and mother of my father, of me, they are Dutch. And also at my mother like that [laughs]. That's really bad. I'm completely Dutch and I think that's really very stupid.

Linda: Why is that stupid?

Maud: Well, I think it's more interesting if you're also for a little bit from another country. [Interview Maud, 12 June 2006]

Maud said her descent story would be interesting if she was "for a little bit" of mixed descent. She did not express a wish to be different; she merely wanted more to tell. Indeed some of her white classmates had mixed parents, like Esther whose mother was French, or Sophie, whose father was Russian. The girls with Dutch parents answered my question about descent by describing in which cities their parents had lived before coming to Amsterdam.

### *Experienced ethnicity*

The girls' objective identity, determined by their parents' descent, did not always coincide with their experienced ethnicity. Not all girls identified with the country or culture from which their parents stemmed. Noa's father migrated to the Netherlands from the United States to marry her mother. She did not feel American:

Noa: Well, not really. I don't really get the feeling that I am that... Because I never speak American. I also don't really do things that belong with there. I just actually do more Dutch things. [Interview Noa, 20 June 2006]

Noa used the verb 'to do': she did not 'feel' she is American, because she did not 'do' anything coded as American. Her understanding of ethnicity was thus coherent with performance theory, where acts produce identity instead of reflecting intrinsic, inner feelings.

The other girls stressed language and location as determinants of their ethnic feelings. Several girls sometimes 'felt' Dutch and sometimes something else. When they spoke Dutch or Turkish, they felt Dutch or Turkish respectively. Katia did not identify with any country, because, as she explained, she spoke four languages. In the end, she identified

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most with the Netherlands, because she was most adept at Dutch. Likewise, Amisha did not identify with her parents' Surinamese descent, because she did not know any of the "words of Suriname". Her family is originally from India and since she did know Indian words, she identified more with India. To several girls with parents from Turkey, speaking Turkish was decisive in their sense of ethnicity.

Some girls experienced themselves as more Dutch when they were in the country of their parents' origin, so for instance when on holiday in Morocco.

For Chemaë it was the opposite:

Linda: When I ask, where are you from? What do you say?

Chemaë: Not from Morocco. Well, no, yes, no. I'm not from Morocco [laughs]. I live here, I was born here and yeah, I was born here and I didn't come here from Morocco.

Linda: But do you also feel Dutch?

Chemaë: A little.

(...)

Linda: Can you describe a moment when you feel Dutch?

Chemaë: Just here. Look, Morocco, I don't really go there often. Once every...

Once every year, like in the summer holiday, just that. But here, I work... I work... [laughs] I live here, done. I live here, every day I'm here. That's why.

[Interview Chemaë, 29 June 2006]

Chemaë mostly felt Moroccan, yet her location also made her feel Dutch. Her construction of Moroccanness was complex, because – as she stated – she was not 'from' Morocco. The girls often took questions very literally (see §4.5). Likewise, Jenna's parents were from England and Ghana. Since she had lived in the Netherlands all her life, she mostly felt Dutch.

Ethnicity, like gender, is not something one can choose. It is inscribed on the body and, next to language and location, attachment to an ethnicity also related to skin colour<sup>6</sup>. For instance, Amisha never felt Dutch because she felt people stared at her because of her darker skin colour. To both Aliye and Beyhan their lighter skins affected their experience of their Turkish heritage. Aliye answered she was from Turkey, but she was born in the Netherlands. She felt more Dutch than Turkish, because she was positioned as Dutch based on her looks:

Aliye: [I feel] [m]ore Dutch, and everybody says 'are you Dutch or are you Turkish? Let me guess, you're Dutch?' 'No, I'm Turkish.'

Linda: Yes.

Aliye: 'Oh, because you look like a Dutch person', you see?

Linda: And what does a Dutch person look like? Do you feel you look like a Dutch person?

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Aliye: No actually not.

Linda: Why not?

Aliye: Don't know.

Linda: What does a Turkish person looks like then?

Aliye: A Turkish girls often looks like, sometimes, just, or headscarf, that can be the case, or, you don't have blue eyes, because I have green-brown eyes, that's why. And that's why they immediately think: yeah, you're Dutch. That's why. [Interview Aliye, 8 June 2006]

Conversely, Beyhan wished she had a darker skin, so she could be more Turkish. Amisha was a Muslim part of the minority group of *Hindoestanen*<sup>7</sup>. Her skin had a colour common amongst Indian people, but her parents had come to the Netherlands from Suriname. This caused confusion:

Amisha: My descent. I'm from Suriname, but actually I have nothing to do with that, so I'm not Surinamese or something, but someone from me does live there, my uncle and my aunt. (...) My descent something... So actually then I'm from... My ancestors are from India, so actually I'm Indian. Sort of Hindoestaan, let's say Hindoestaan. But our descent is Suriname, so most of the time they immediately think 'oh you're Suriname, but you don't look like it'. But I am it. No actually it's not. No, actually I don't understand what I am either, because then I think I'm also a bit Indian, done. Indian, Surinamers, Dutch people, done. [Interview Amisha, 9 June 2006]

The majority of contemporary Surinamese people descend from African slaves and thus have a different appearance. One boy, Tony, was of such descent. Once, I witnessed this confusion in class. For a project, Laila needed to find things common to Suriname. She asked both Tony and Amisha, to which Tony replied that Amisha was not Surinamese. Amisha snarled back "am too!" Amisha was confused about her background, because she did not look 'Surinamese'. She thus ascribed more authenticity to Surinamese of African descent, even though, like the *Hindoestanen*, they were not 'originally' from there either.

One girl mixed religion into her sense of ethnic belonging. Radia replied "Islamic" to my question about descent. When I asked her if she was of Moroccan descent and what that meant, she said:

Radia: that you speak Arabic, Berber<sup>8</sup>. Er, that you're not allowed to do many things. That you... We believe in Allah. [Interview Radia, 8 June 2006]

To make things more complicated, Radia then argued she feels more Dutch than Moroccan. Although an inhabitant of Amsterdam, she did not feel she belonged to this group, because 'they' speak differently and "believe in Jesus".

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### *Performed ethnicity*

In the previous subsection, I described the different ways the girls constructed their ethnicity in the interviews. I argued the girls constructed their sense of ethnicity based on language, location, skin colour and religion, next to the official understanding of ethnicity primarily based on descent. At the beginning of this section on ethnicity, I stated that ethnicity was hardly ever performed at the Gunningschool. The girls rarely discussed their different backgrounds or referred to Morocco or Turkey amongst themselves. Close friends Gülen and Dilara were an exception and they did perform Turkishness. When speaking to each other, they always spoke Turkish. Although this was, officially, not allowed at the Gunningschool, the teacher, Thomas, never corrected them, probably because Gülen and Dilara were quiet, obedient girls. Speaking Turkish set them apart from their non-Turkish friends in class, who often reacted with annoyance. As I argued before, the lack of ethnicity performances was related to the homogeneous religious background in class. When we went to Amsterdam's city centre for a museum visit, the population differences between the Gunningschool neighbourhood and Amsterdam's centre showed. Nazli could not stop staring at the ordinary commuters near Central Station. She poked me and remarked "what weird people". This further demonstrates the homogeneity of the Gunningschool's neighbourhood.

For the celebration of Sinterklaas<sup>9</sup>, each pupil had been assigned a letter of the alphabet and s/he needed to handcraft a representation of a country of choice starting with that letter. At Sinterklaas, presents are ingeniously wrapped in homemade boxes, which represent existing objects. These are called *surprises*. This provided the pupils with an opportunity to show off their knowledge of their homelands. Aliye, whose parents were from Turkey, had 'T', yet she had a hard time thinking up what to make. In the end, she decided to go with Turkish pizza. The example from the previous subsection, where Amisha snapped at Tony, is another example of ethnicity performance evoked by this project. Note that Sinterklaas is a typical Dutch festivity and thus a performance of Dutchness. A second occasion on which ethnicity mattered, was when the pupils had to paint self-portraits. They spent most of their time and effort on creating a colour that matched their skin colour. Here, the girls paid great attention to subtle differences in tone. Likewise, Radia was once – in passing – called "too white" for a Moroccan. Again, notice the importance of skin colour in ethnicity perception.

At the Kantlijn, most girls were of Dutch descent. Only Jenna often

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performed her Otherness. Jenna's father came from Ghana and Jenna had a brown skin colour. However, her Otherness had nothing to do with her partial African descent; instead, she performed Britishness. She often talked about shows she watched on the BBC and presented herself as an expert on everything British. She dressed in clothes bought in England and often pointed this out to the other girls. Odecia, who had a Surinamese (Hindoestaanse) father and a French mother, experienced her ethnicity as Dutch with some French. Her parents had divorced when she was one and she rarely saw her father. Odecia once performed a dance with many Indian influences, thus performing her Hindoestaanse background. Dutchness was never clearly marked, instead most girls identified, to some extent, with an Amsterdam identity.

### *The Amsterdammer*

Recently, scholars on ethnicity have suggested the global city as a new, more inclusive basis for identity in the multicultural society (see Müller, 2008 for an overview). Amsterdam, as capital of the Netherlands, evokes a sense of pride in most of its inhabitants (as do other capitals like New York and Paris). The city also encourages this sense of belonging, for instance through school projects like the *Museumles* and *Kunstschooldag* (see §5.3). Most girls from the Kantlijn said in the interviews that they identified with Amsterdam, whereas the majority of the Gunning-girls, like Radia above, did not. They could not explain why they did not feel like an Amsterdammer, even though they defined an Amsterdammer as someone born in that city. Perhaps this was also to do with the lack of mobility of the Gunning-girls: they mostly stayed inside their neighbourhood and inside Amsterdam, thus lacking the essential Other to which to oppose their Amsterdammerness.

Several girls from the Kantlijn took up the position of the Amsterdammer. They opposed themselves to non-Amsterdammers, who they labelled 'provincials'. Mickey especially felt this tension, as in the future she was to say goodbye to Amsterdam when she had to move outside of the city. In the 8<sup>th</sup> form, she often talked about differences between children from Amsterdam and those from outside. Other girls remarked about such differences after visiting places outside Amsterdam. The Amsterdammer was also performed by fandom of Ajax, Amsterdam's football team. Although it was mostly boys who did this, girls like Mette and Esther often remarked that had attended games and they discussed the football league. The Amsterdammer was also cited through language. Although most girls from the Gunningschool



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did not identify with Amsterdam, they did speak with a distinct Amsterdam dialect, mixing Moroccan sounds with it.

### *The (non)-Muslim*

During the celebration of Sinterklaas, the boys trashed *surprises* that they knew were made by girls. Amisha's *surprise* (a palm tree representing Yemen) was completely torn apart. Amisha had used dates (i.e. the fruits of the date palm) to make the palm tree look real. I was sitting next to Aliye and she explained to me that in Islam, one is not allowed to play with food. The pupils, apparently collectively, interpreted this rule as applying to *surprises* as well. Amisha was an outsider in class and the class attacked her so hard because she – in their eyes – failed to perform the good Muslim. The Muslim is connected to the good girl. To the Muslim girls, Islam implied a number of rules surrounding proper behaviour. They often connected these rules to gender. Radia explained her Islamic descent as follows:

Radia: I have Islamic descent.

Linda: An Islamic descent?

Radia: Yes. With Sacrifice Feast [Eid ul-Adha] we eat sheep.

Linda: Yes.

Radia: And with Sugar Feast [Eid ul-Fitr] we eat biscuits, then they make biscuits, then we eat biscuits. With sugar. And, you're not allowed to depilate your eyebrows.

Linda: You're not allowed to depilate your eyebrows?

Radia: No. And, you're not allowed with, like when you have a partner and a man walks next to you, then he's not to smell the perfume you're wearing.

[Interview Radia, 8 June 2006]

Radia described acts that bring the Muslim into being, notably two Islamic feasts. Furthermore, she described non-acts. Mullaney (2001) argues that researchers need to pay attention to the ways identities are brought about by not-doing things. The virgin, she maintains, is an identity constructed by the absence of certain acts. Radia's description of the Muslim likewise incorporates not-doing things. I found several other references to not-doing things. For instance, Nazli explained to me Muslims must have short nails (so the devil cannot get under them) and Beyhan informed me only non-smokers go to heaven. Such non-acts are difficult to observe and interpret as performative of an identity for an outsider. However, Amisha's example shows the repercussions of border crossing.

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Most girls at the Gunningschool identified with Islam. To Chemaë, this made her feel happy she was Muslim:

Linda: Are you Muslim?

Chemaë: Yes.

Linda: And is that important to you?

Chemaë: Yes, because if I wasn't Muslim, I was Christian. And then they'd say to me 'ooh you're not Muslim'. Like with Bianca, she is the only one with Betty. If I was her, I wouldn't like it either. She doesn't like it. [Interview Chemaë, 29 June 2006]

Chemaë got a sense of belonging, showing how dominant Islam was in this classroom. Christianity was the proverbial religion that is not one, and when religion was performed, it was thus the non-Muslim that sprang into view. However, only Consolacion could take up the non-Muslim position, as I show in chapter 8. Interestingly, Chemaë was good friends with Consolacion but did not mention her as being non-Muslim. Part of performing the Muslim was wearing 'closed clothing', an umbrella term the Muslim girls used for items that are the opposite of revealing clothing: high tops, long sleeves, long skirts et cetera. At the Gunningschool, all Muslim girls wore closed clothing and some commented on Christian Betty's revealing clothes. Finally, the Muslim was performed in the interviews. Talking to me as an outsider, the girls for instance argued how prayer structured their day outside school.

Amsterdam's secondary schools are more heterogeneous than the primary schools, and the Muslim girls there found themselves with a new instrument in their performance of religion: the headscarf, which had been forbidden at the Christian Gunningschool. Two girls decided to wear the scarf in secondary school, Nazli and Dilara (both of Turkish parents). Both named religion as the primary reason for wearing the scarf, but, as I mentioned in section 7.3 and further argue in chapter 10, other motivations were involved as well.

### 7.5 Class

The Netherlands is a more classless society than, for instance, the UK, and the elaborate welfare state ensures class relations are less outspoken. Notwithstanding a lack of class-consciousness, class does exist and class differences were visible. The girls from the Gunningschool all had low-income parents. At the Kantlijn, social-economic class was mixed, with parents who were judges, artists or plumbers. Class positions mattered

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to the extent that no one from either school wanted to be labelled poor, and girls displayed financial capital to avoid this. Thus, when it comes to performing class, the performed positions were mostly middle-class related. The discussion of the weekend at the Kantlijn provided an excellent opportunity to do so, as the girls with well-off parents told how they had gone out to dinner, or to an amusement park or a museum. This position, like most, must be balanced. For instance, the girls of the Gunning-school considered Aliye to be spoiled, because they felt she flaunted her parents' better-off financial situation. Two specific subject-positions are related to the middle-class: the preppy girl and the horse-crazy girl.

### *The preppy girl [kakker]*

'Kakker' is a well-known Dutch style label, which translates best as posh or preppy. This group marks itself through conspicuous consumption: the acquirement of leisure and goods in order to better one's social status (Veblen, 1926 in Ilmonen, 2001). The conspicuous consumption that sets the preppies apart from the rest is usually expensive. Furthermore, this position can only be performed if one has access to the cultural codes of the middle class (see next chapter).

None of the girls took up this position in primary school, however, once in secondary school some girls clearly performed this position. These girls wore branded clothes, although the fashion was not showing the name of the brand conspicuously. In her 1989 ethnography, De Waal described multiple layers of polo shirts as one of the characteristics of this group (p. 162). Although other characteristics she mentioned (e.g. culottes, chequered knee socks) have gone out of fashion, the polo shirts were again fashionable amongst this group. A posh accent (in Dutch: *bekakt*) was another performance practice. Not all girls with posh accents were preppy, but all preppy girls had a posh accent. Some girls already spoke with a posh accent in primary school, and 'turned' preppy in secondary school. This suggests there was already an attachment to this position, but it was not fully taken up until secondary school, when the girls aligned themselves to new friends.

### *The horse-crazy girl [paardenmeisje]*

Although quite common in the Netherlands and the rest of Europe, the girl subculture of the paardenmeisjes [horse-crazy girls] has been – to my knowledge – undocumented in academic research. Usually confined to pre-adolescence, horsey girls spend much of their free time at a rid-

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ing-school, grooming and riding horses. Holidays are spent at so-called pony-camps and bedrooms are decorated with posters of horses. Maud, Marisol, Mickey, and Thirza (Kantlijn) took up the horse-crazy position. They talked continuously about riding-school and horses. Their shared adoration for horses was a constitutive force in their friendship. Media also played a role in the performance of this identity. These girls all subscribed to the magazine *Penny*, and in the classroom they all read books like *Black beauty* and *De vergeten pony* [The forgotten pony].

The position of the horse-crazy girl requires financial capital. Subscriptions to magazines, membership of a riding school, and stays at pony-camps are expensive. At the Gunningschool, several girls obsessed over other animals, like cats, hamsters and parakeets. These featured prominently in several girls' photo narratives and websites, and these girls often talked about their pets. Love for such pets is not easily recognised as a subject-position, as the performance practices are less manifest. This suggests that the horse-crazy girl is reserved to the middle-class. This might explain the absence of this position amongst the Gunning-girls. Furthermore, I expect that the performance of the horse-crazy girl is also tied in with whiteness. However, these remain empirical questions, which require more elaborate research amongst horse-crazy girls<sup>10</sup>.

### 7.6 Conclusion

This chapter investigated which subject-positions the girls took up. My task was to bridge the gap between abstract theory and concrete identity practices. I proposed the metaphor of a spider's web and discussed a variety of different subject-positions. My discussion shows great diversity amongst the girls. Some girls easily switched between subject-positions, for instance performing the streetwise subject one moment, and the good girl the next. I also showed the girls had complex and diverse understandings of, for instance, femininity and ethnicity. Although post-modernism accounts for such complex understandings, daily language does not. For instance, the girls could only talk about gender positions in terms of a dichotomy: boyish girls and girly-girls. My discussion of ethnicity showed how the official designations of autochthonous and allochthonous always-already position girls of non-Dutch descent as Others. This dichotomy is further enforced by the idea of second-generation immigrants, even though this term is not reflected in the girls' own narratives. Membership of Dutch society is based on birthright (Fennema & Tillie, 1996) and it disallows membership based

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on *experience* of ethnicity. The Muslim girls reproduced the notion that Islam is irreconcilable with Dutchness. In chapter 5, I argued that their Dutch teachers positioned these girls as Others. In this chapter, I demonstrated that girls also position themselves as opposites. Despite the promises of some post-modern identity theorists, one is not free to take up just any position. Discourse (dis)avows one identification over the other, and limits the ways the girls could understand themselves. As a result, in terms of the metaphor, not all parts of the web were available to the girls.

In addition to discursive limits, navigating the web depends on the body, not only in gender performance, but also for ethnicity and age. Several girls with 'older' bodies performed the child, which substantiates that identity performance is neither unequivocal nor conscious. The importance of skin colour in the performance of ethnicity confirms Essed's (1986) claim that essentialist elements of race have been transferred onto the allegedly race-free Dutch understanding of ethnicity. Amongst the girls from both groups, this discourse is performed, and as such, reproduced.

In chapter 6, I argued that the girls did not articulate much difference in their transition from primary to secondary school. The conclusions of chapter 6 transfer to this chapter. Thus, the transition opened up possibilities for other subject-positions, and it is indeed possible to locate certain positions in the realm of primary school (e.g. the child), and others in the realm of secondary school (e.g. the preppy girl). Nonetheless, the girls and their identity performances did not change overnight. Although subject-positions are temporary, changing and flexible, the need for a coherent and authentic narrative of the self necessitates more or less stable performances.

To sum up, conventional identity categories like 'Turk' or 'child' do not suffice in describing the lived realities of girls in contemporary society. However, the flexibility suggested by post-modern identity theory does not suffice either. My contribution lies in showing the richness and complexity of experiences of identities. Simultaneously, my analysis showed how these experiences are grounded in discourse. In the following two chapters, I further investigate the workings and limitations of identity performance.