

Volume Three

'In' Place: Heteronormative Feminine Bodies in Underwear Shops

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Abstract [1]

This paper examines the gendered spaces of underwear shops in Hamilton, New Zealand. I explore material, discursive and embodied spaces. Three underwear shops in Hamilton – Bendon Lingerie Outlet, Bras N Things and the underwear section of Farmers department store, and various visual representations depicting contemporary notions of normative femininity, are under investigation.

Feminist poststructuralist theories and methodologies provide the framework for this research. One focus group and three semi-structured interviews were conducted with young women who purchase and wear underwear. Participant observations of shoppers in Bendon Lingerie Outlet, Te Rapa, The Base in Hamilton and autobiographical journal entries of my experiences as a retailer and consumer of underwear continued throughout the research. Advertising and promotional material in underwear shops and a DVD of a *Victoria's Secret* lingerie show are also examined.

Three points frame the analysis. First, I argue that underwear consumption spaces are discursively constructed as feminine. The socio-political structures governing these spaces construct particular types of bodies. Second, I suggest that underwear shops can be understood as feminised, young and thin embodied spaces. Female bodies that fit this description are positioned as 'in' place. Third, I conceptualise Bendon as a space that requires its employees to engage in a gendered bodily workplace performance. This process also positions them as 'in' place.

Introduction

In this paper I illustrate the notion that space is gendered. I present a case study of the 'gendered' spaces of underwear shops in Hamilton, New Zealand. I look specifically at Bendon Lingerie Outlet, Te Rapa, The Base in Hamilton; however, to reflect the consumption patterns of some of the participants I also include two other underwear shops: Bras N Things and the underwear section of Farmers department store. These underwear shops are discursively constructed as feminine. I problematise the concept of gendered space by paying attention to corporeal specificity and the discursive meanings of places and space (Johnston, 1994). Discursive meanings are central to constructions of power and the female body.

Drawing on feminist poststructuralist frameworks, I argue that the body (female) and place (underwear shops) are mutually constitutive. The actual materiality of the body is constructed and inscribed by the environment. Heidi Nast and Steve Pile (1998 1) comment that 'we live our lives – through places, through the body'. They explain a more nuanced understanding of the interconnectedness between bodies and space is needed, because the articulations of the interconnections and relationships are political. 'Bodies and place are made up through the production of their spatial registers, through relations of power' (Nast and Pile, 1998 4). Furthermore, Elizabeth Grosz (1992) argues that the body is physically, socially, sexually, and discursively produced, and in turn, bodies re-inscribe and project themselves onto the social-cultural environment. There is a two-way linkage between bodies and cities; an interface. 'The city in its particular geographical, architectural, spatialising, municipal arrangements is one particular

ingredient in the social constitutions of the body' (Grosz, 1992 248). Bodies and spaces construct each other in complex and nuanced ways. Bodies are performed, contested and disciplined 'throughspace' (Longhurst, 2005 93).

Feminist poststructuralists also recognise that subjectivity is not fixed or absolute, but is temporally and spatially contingent. Elspeth Probyn (2003 290) makes a useful contribution to understanding the complexity of the constitution of subjectivity. She interprets subjectivity as inherently spatial: '[t]hinking about subjectivity in terms of space or necessity reworks any conception that subjectivity is hidden in private recesses'.

Elizabeth Grosz also makes important contributions to understanding bodies as constituted in and through space. Grosz (1994 22) reconceptualises subjectivity, calling for a notion of corporeality which she describes as an 'embodied subjectivity' and a 'physical corporeality'. She postulates that the body and the mind are not separate entities and whilst Cartesian thought argues that the psyche can transcend the body, she argues that the mind and body constitute each other.

Grosz's attention to the materiality of bodies that are situated and constituted within place allows for an embodied reading of young women's experiences of their bodies and space (both discursively and materially), whilst being able to situate these women's experiences within wider understandings of women in Western culture. Thus, Grosz's work is particularly relevant for social, cultural, feminist and embodied geographers as she acknowledges changes that occur to subjectivity, occur in place.

The specificity of this relationship between the (female) body and space (underwear shops) provides new opportunities to re-conceptualise the gendered body in geography and affords the opportunity for understanding further the situated experiences of bodies. Further, it allows me to document the gendering of space and bodies and aspects of performative corporeality within such spaces (Johnston, 1994).

Hamilton is located in the North Island of New Zealand, approximately 100km south of New Zealand's largest city – Auckland. It is suburban in character and surrounded by land used mainly for dairy farm production. It has an estimated population of 129,300 as at the 30 June 2004 with 33.7% of the residents aged between 15 and 34 years old. Compared to the national average – 27.6% – Hamilton's population is relatively young (Statistics New Zealand, 2001). This grouping (of which I am part) makes up a large proportion of consumers. From my own experiences I am able to suggest that this grouping is one of the highest targeted consumer audiences in Hamilton. The construction of new shopping centres such as The Base has created a new focus on consumption. The Base (which is located on the site of an old air force base) contains a variety of large commercial 'bargain' stores, such as The Warehouse, Briscoes and DressSmart. With this new focus, Hamilton is increasingly being constructed as a city of consumption for young people 18 years and over. There are a growing number of bars and restaurants in Hamilton that legally require the person to be at least 18 years old to enter. Furthermore, the University of Waikato and the Waikato Institute of Technology are central institutions in Hamilton attracting a large number of young people to the city.

Underwear consumption spaces can be understood as 'public' spaces. They are spaces in which processes of consumption occur and where social processes categorise bodies as gendered. In Hamilton there are a number of underwear shops; however, for the purposes of this paper I focus on three sites: Bendon Lingerie Outlet in DressSmart, The Base Te Rapa, Bras N Things located in Centre Place and the underwear section in Farmers department store.

Bendon Limited is a global lingerie company with offices in the United States, United Kingdom, Hong Kong and Singapore. Its resounding market, however, is in Australia and New Zealand. The brand 'Bendon' relates to a chain of retail and outlet stores throughout New Zealand which stock a range of underwear products, including Bendon Lingerie, Hey Sister, Fayreform, Bendon Men, Hickory, and the licensed Elle Macpherson and Macpherson Men brands. The name 'Bendon' was coined by brothers – Ray and Des Hurley – in 1947 and refers to lingerie that was designed to

'bend on' to the body (Bendon Limited, 2005). As an outlet store, Bendon is located in DressSmart. [2]

DressSmart in Hamilton is the fourth multi-million dollar outlet shopping centre to be opened in New Zealand (DressSmart Properties Limited, 2006). [3] DressSmart covers 4,5000 square metres and features 36 retail stores. It has a strong focus on discount fashion retailing, and offers a wide range of prominent New Zealand brands, such as Trelise Cooper, Overlands and Stevens, at reduced prices.

Centre Place is another prominent shopping centre in Hamilton. Located in the centre of the central business district, it contains over 80 stores, including a food hall, a cinema complex, a gym for women and numerous clothing retailers. Bras N Things is one of the many clothing stores located in Centre Place. Bras N Things is Australia's largest lingerie chain with 130 stores throughout Australia and 10 stores throughout New Zealand. It sells a range of products including women's lingerie, sleepwear, swimwear and lingerie accessories (Bras N Things, 2006). It is the only site in this study that does not sell men's products.

The underwear section in Farmers department store is the third and final space that I focus my research on. It is a large stand alone department store with an extensive underwear section. The company's website describes Farmers to be New Zealand's 'foremost fashion department store' (Farmers, 2006). Farmers operates over 55 department stores in rural and city locations throughout New Zealand and offers a range of women's, men's and children's clothing; appliances, and electronic equipment, to name a few. Many of Bendon's leading brands, such as Elle Macpherson, Bendon and Fayreform are stocked at Farmers.

This research draws upon three different qualitative methods. These are: focus group and semi-structured interviews with young women who purchase and wear underwear, participant observations of shoppers in Bendon Lingerie Outlet; and, autobiographical journal entries of my experiences as a retailer and consumer of underwear. The choice of qualitative methods employed in this research has been directly influenced by the feminist poststructuralist framework guiding this study.

Feminist poststructuralist methodologies are varied and operate at different paradigms. Feminist and poststructuralist theories have made the greatest contribution to qualitative research and they have been used extensively in geography. These methods and their implications have been reviewed in-depth (Moss, 1993; Reinharz, 1992; Sprague, 2005; Winchester, 2000). Geographers utilising qualitative methods in their research are concerned with clarifying human environments and experiences within a variety of conceptual frameworks (Winchester, 2000). They question the construction of knowledge and discourse in geography, paying specific attention to the position of the researcher and the power relations at work.

The interviewing component of my empirical data collection consisted of one focus group interview and three semi-structured interviews. During the interviews I assumed the role of interviewer or facilitator and directed the discussion. I prepared a set of questions which I divided into three themes: DVD questions, Underwear questions and Consumption questions. I let the participants explore issues that were of importance to them, and used my prepared questions to direct the discussion. Robyn Longhurst (2003) explains that by doing this, the discussion will unfold in a conversational manner; producing valuable information and ensuring the participants feel their perceptions are valued. At the completion of the interviews I checked my schedule to ensure that all of my questions had been covered and thanked the participants for their time. The interviews were recorded and the resulting tapes transcribed verbatim.

Participant observations took place in Bendon Lingerie Outlet. I conducted participant observations of shoppers in Bendon in order to understand how they negotiated and gendered the space. Sharma Reinharz (1992) examines the importance of understanding the experiences of women from their own points of view. She explains that female researchers conducting participant

observations corrects a major bias of non-feminist participant observation that trivialises female's activities and thoughts, or interprets them from the standpoint of men.

I recorded the observations in my autobiographical and participant observation journal. I continued to interpret the shoppers' behaviour as shaped by social context, because bodies and place shape each other (Nast and Pile, 1998). I also continued to note my interactions with, and reactions to, the shoppers being observed. I did so as I am part of the research. My embodied presence and identity influenced how I gathered and perceived the data, and how customers reacted towards me. By recording my reactions I was able to incorporate my experiences as a retailer and consumer of underwear.

To find out how Bendon consumers and Bendon employees negotiate, and are negotiated by, the gendered space, I continued my usual roles and responsibilities as a sales assistant. Participant observation provided data which in turn, framed and directed further questioning.

I recorded my experiences and thoughts in an on-going journal. It included my experiences as a consumer of lingerie and as a retailer. By keeping an on-going journal I created a space to be reflexive and 'critical' about the research process. My main aim of keeping an autobiographical journal was to be a '(co)creator of storied knowledge(s)'. By doing so I lessened the 'distance from the topic'; a disembodied distance that has traditionally categorised geographical writing (Kearns, 1997: 269). Much geographic writing in the past has been characterised by a dispassionate, distant, disembodied voice, which is devoid of emotion and dislocated from the everyday experience. The geographies that I have presented are 'radical and emancipatory', I have approached the topic with the intent of 'getting close to other people, listening to them, making way for them' (Sibley, 1995: 184).

Research can never be devoid of the power relations that shape situations in which people research. The researcher, the researched and the research are inextricably linked and influence each other. It is therefore crucial that the researcher is aware of how she/he influences and informs the research. I am aware of my position in this research and I identify as the researcher and the researched. I am also aware that my positionality is partial, fluid and changing. I am 23 years old, Pākehā, able-bodied, heterosexual woman. I am also a geography student. I perceive my position to be useful, as it allowed me to access information and people more readily, understand and empathise with participants, and draw on my knowledge as a retailer of underwear to inform this paper.

Part of my motivation for adopting a feminist poststructuralist approach is to help create a body of literature that makes women's voices and experiences heard (Reinharz, 1992). This also includes my own voice. In a geographic discipline that has been dominated by disembodied, objective researchers (Rose, 1993), the way in which I am a continual presence in the written communication is significant in furthering feminist and embodied geographies. It makes for a more inclusive geography.

My decision to focus specifically on young Pākehā women is a conscious and considered one. I have chosen not to consider older/younger women and women of different racial backgrounds because I want to be 'part' of the research and draw on my own experiences. In doing so, I am able to give young women of similar circumstances to my own, a 'voice'. Although my decision to focus on Pākehā women's experiences of underwear and space at could be read as essentialising 'Pākehā' as a homogenous group, I recognise that there is a multiplicity of experiences amongst women; identities are influenced by a variety of experiences and different socio-cultural factors. My research is *not* representative of all young women in Hamilton. Rather I offer a select, in-depth qualitative analysis of a small group in the community.

In what follows I first consider the idea that underwear shops are hegemonically gendered. I suggest that they are spaces in which bodies may be influenced, controlled and repressed. I use a case study of Bendon Lingerie Outlet to explore the claim that the environments of underwear shops are gendered by the female bodies inhabiting them. I then use discourse analysis of billboards and promotional material in Bendon, Bras N Things and the underwear section in

Farmers to examine contemporary notions of heteronormative femininity produced within and by the spaces. The discursive power (produced by the visual representation and the presence of embodied identities) positions bodies as either 'in' place or 'out' of place. [4] For the purposes of this article I will focus on those (heteronormative feminine) bodies that are located as being 'in' place. Underwear shops privilege thin, young and tanned embodied spatialities. Finally, drawing extensively from personal experience, I discuss the mutually constitutive relationship between the space of Bendon and Bendon employees. Bendon employees have a gendered bodily workplace performance written onto their bodies and consequently they are also understood as being 'in' place.

Gendered Space: A Case Study of Bendon Lingerie Outlet

Bendon at The Base, Te Rapa is a large, open space that is divided into areas based on underwear brands and price. New, expensive stock from Bendon, Fayreform and Elle Macpherson are located on three of the outer walls. The men's wear section is considerably smaller and is situated on the fourth outer wall. It is distinctly separate from women's wear and the changing rooms. The changing rooms are located behind the Fayreform wall and are hidden from the shop-floor view. There are patterns of consumption and patterns of consumers.

Female shoppers generally talk and mingle with one another at the five dollar bins, whereas female consumers in the other, more expensive areas tend to shop alone. Men, with their female partners, generally stand awkwardly in the men's area or follow closely behind their partner throughout the shop. The middle of the shop has the cheaper ranges. This is constantly full of shoppers. Female shoppers tend to buy more men's wear than men do, and men rarely try garments on (Participant Observation Notes, 17-18/06/06).

For the majority of the time it is mostly women who occupy Bendon, as shown in figure one on page 13. In the absence of men, the space enables female shoppers to move freely and negotiate their bodies and resulting spatial relations. Certain female bodies are thus 'in' place whilst many male bodies are 'out' of place. Through the presence of female consumers and a pervasive gendered discourse, spaces and practices of feminine 'bonding' are (re)produced. In a similar fashion to beauty salons, underwear shops are the 'attainments of femininity ... where the secret routines of femininity are commodified and exemplified' (Black and Sharma, 2001 1). The 'feminised' activities that female shoppers and retailers engage in within the space – talking, laughing, trying on and purchasing (or not purchasing) underwear – work to establish and confirm Bendon as a feminised space. It also continues to construct bodies within the space as either female or male. Underwear consumption spaces produce an environment where corporeality is socially, sexually and discursively constructed.

It is significant that all of the visual representations within Bendon feature women. Popular visual representations in the form of promotional billboards and advertising catalogues, not only constructs but reinforces notions of normative femininity.



Figure One: The Space of Bendon and its Consumers

Source: Author

Many 'rules' of femininity are culturally transmitted through visual representations. People are no longer directly told what 'a lady is' or what femininity consists of. Rather, as Bordo (1989) explains, people learn the 'rules' through bodily discourse: through images which portray certain clothes, body shapes, movements and behaviours as appropriate. The socio-political structures in feminised underwear shops produce particular types of bodies. Bendon's visual representations articulate this normative femininity.

The physical attributes of contemporary ideologies of femininity are present in my observations of underwear shops. The socio-political structures of underwear shops construct and confirm particular kinds of stereotypical feminine bodies. The 'cultural' environment inscribes and constructs the 'natural' materiality of the body (Johnston, 1994 59).

"Tall, Skinny, with Big Boobs" – Heteronormative Femininity

The normative femininity articulated in Bendon privileges a specific physical appearance.

Carey-Ann: And what types of bodies do they [the lingerie models] have?

Toni: [They are] skinny with big boobs, pretty much [laugh].

Lisa: Tall, skinny with big boobs (Joint Semi-structured Interview, 10/06/06).

Lisa's comment – 'tall, skinny with big boobs' – encapsulates contemporary Western notions of normative femininity. Bendon is constructed as, and actively constructing a, thin embodied space. The promotional booklet for the brand Bendon reinforces this form of normative femininity (see figure two, page 15).

The 'rules' of femininity produced through bodily discourse, as illustrated in figure two, also construct female bodies as submissive. Phil Hubbard (2000 193) explains that imaginings of men as reasoned, rational and modern are intimately bound with heterosexual male desires to conquer, subdue and suppress the 'natural' sexuality of women. Bendon uses subtle yet effective means to 'soften' the model's sexual power and agency. The model's passive facial expression, the submissive and suggestive way her body is positioned, the neutral tones of the underwear and

architecture all moderate her feminine sexuality. Another important point to make here is that the spatial setting in figure two challenges many traditional representations of women positioned in space.

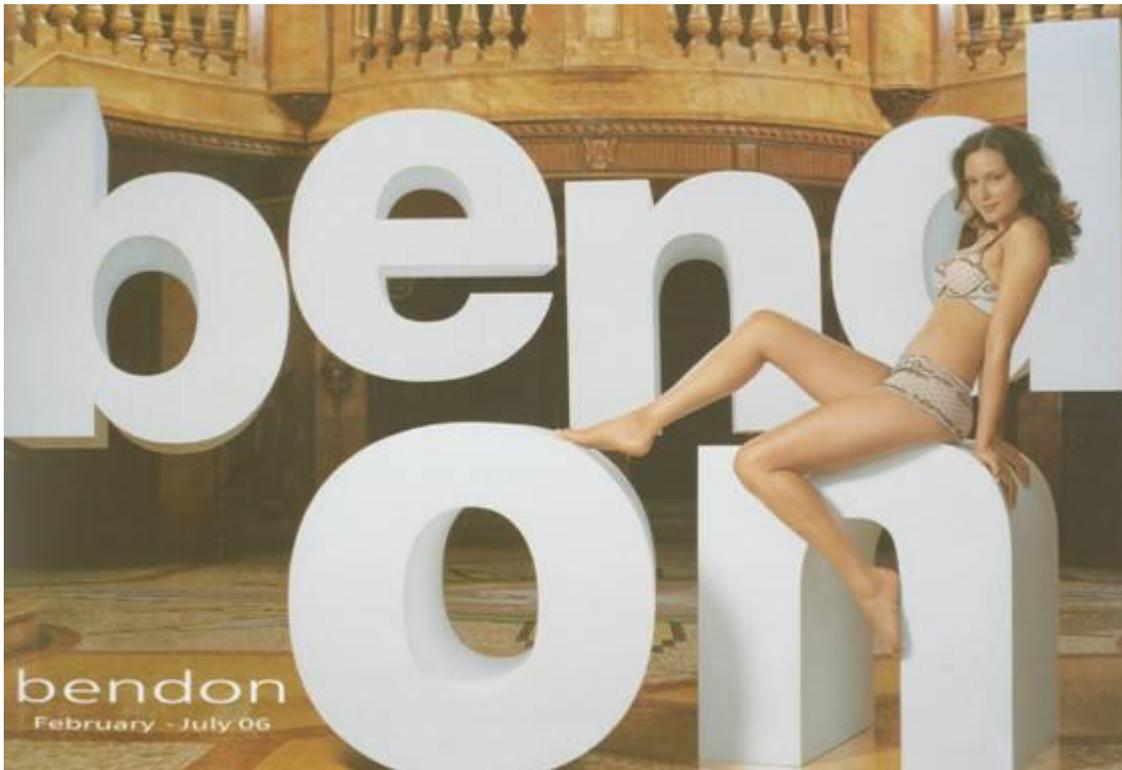


Figure Two: Bendon's Catalogue
Source: Author

McDowell and Court (1994), in their study on the representations of merchant bank workers, suggest that conventional pictures of women portray them as passive and domestic; as private rather than public. The model in figure two is pictured in a public space – the entrance of a hotel. Further, McDowell and Court (1994) observe that in many pictures, women do not look straight at the camera. The observer of the image, therefore, is constructed as the voyeur, watching the women. In figure two the model is looking directly at the camera. She still retains bodily compartments associated with feminine desirability and submissiveness such as her sideways glance, but by looking directly at the camera she owns and activates the 'male gaze' (Kaplan, 1984).

The participants are aware of and discuss the physical similarities between the Bendon models and the *Victoria's Secret* models. [5] As well as referring to the models' body size and shape as a constituent of normative femininity; the participants discuss the age, ethnicity, skin colour and hair of the models.

Joanne: They were all young women (//)

Liv: (//) Um, quite young.

Anna: Really, really slim.

Joanne: Yeah like 16/14 [years old].

Liv: And tall, yeah really tall.

Joanne: All different nationalities, European (//)

Carey-Ann: (//) Yeah that's what I thought was interesting. I thought there would be lots of blonde models, but they've there is actually a lot [with] brown hair (//)

Cassie: (//) And, they all had long curly hair. It made it look all flowing (Sally agrees). None of them had short [hair], it was all like (//)

Liv: (//) [The models were] all really tanned.

Elizabeth: Yeah they all had the same kind of tan, even though they probably weren't all from Brazil or South America. So I mean they're almost trying to make them look all the same – they don't want any differences. They want them all to have long hair that looks like this [indicates long hair].

Joanne: Yeah and pouty, big lips [laugh] (Focus Group Interview, 01/06/06).

I argue that the references to tanned skin in the exchange above point to a constructed association between tanned bodies and physical attractiveness. In her work on sun-tanning and New Zealand women's gendered and racialised subjectivities, Johnston (2005 113) suggests that the female desire to be tanned reflects a particular form of 'white', 'unflawed' femininity. In this instance 'flaws' or I suggest the 'abject', is how Johnston's participants describe the cellulite on their thighs. The somewhat considered procedure of tanning acts to discipline and mediate this abject body area. Bendon constructs an image of 'unflawed' femininity by using visual representations that positions tanned skin as a requirement of contemporary femininity. All of the visual representations in the Bendon shop feature models that are tanned and one of the implications of this can be seen in the following observation.

A pretty, young, white, medium sized lady tried on several bras. She brought them all out of the changing room and said 'none of them looked any good'. I replied 'how about that one, it usually looks gorgeous on?' She said 'yeah, maybe with a tan!' (Participant Observation Notes, 17-18/06/06).

In each interview, the participants discuss the billboards and advertising catalogues in Bras N Things (see figure three, page 18). In addition to highlighting similarities between the participants' consumption patterns, it gives an indication of the profound impact the billboards and catalogues have in producing particular types of spaces (material, discursive and embodied.) All of the participants were affected, to a greater or lesser extent, by the images.



Figure Three: Bras N Things' Promotional Material
Source: Author

The models featured in Bras N Things' visual representations embody the physical characteristics – tall, thin, large breasts, and tanned – associated with contemporary Western notions of normative femininity.

Joanne: Yeah the big posters. The girls are really hot [laughs].

Sally: Yeah, the girls are really hot.

Elizabeth: And it's [Bras N Things] really colourful. It's all lacy and stuff.

Carey-Ann: Yeah and it's also got all those sex toys type of things, like the edible chocolate (Sally agrees).

Anna: It's a full on shop for it all.

Joanne: Where's that?

Group: Bras N Things.

Joanne: Yeah, cause my boyfriend took me there for Valentines Day. We got this catalogue of this *real pretty girl* – she's got really big boobs.

Carey-Ann: I know the catalogue you're talking about.

Joanne: And, her waist is this big [indicates small waist size].

Carey-Ann: Yeah she's on the posters and stuff aye?

Joanne: My boyfriend was like 'let's go there, let's go there!' and he brought me the same outfit that she was wearing [laugh] and I was like [sarcastically] 'oh cool' [laugh] (Focus Group Interview, 01/06/06).

There are several points to be made from this exchange. First, it is interesting to note Joanne's reference to the catalogue with a 'real pretty girl' who has 'got really big boobs' and a small waist. Again, this reinforces that type of embodied space underwear shops are constructing. Bras N Things is hence a thin embodied space. Second, although Joanne fits many contemporary requirements of heteronormative femininity (she is tall, thin and tanned); her sarcastic response – 'oh cool' – suggests that she still feels marginalised by the representations within the space.

Bendon employees' bodies and identities are also socially, sexually and discursively inscribed by the space they work in. Workplaces are 'institutions which attempt to shape the bodies and identities of those who work in them, and which develop specific gendered and sexualised cultures' (Valentine, 2001 150). Bendon constructs its employees' identities by writing a gendered bodily performance onto their bodies. This articulation is temporally and spatially specific. In the final section of this paper I will describe and discuss their embodied performance.

Gendered Bodily Workplace Performances

In this section I draw on the work of Judith Butler (1990; 1993), Deborah Leslie (2002), Robin Leidner (1991; 1993) Linda McDowell and Gillian Court (1994); and, Joanne Tyler and Paula Abbott (1998) to challenge and destabilise the apparent fixity or ontological status of the feminine body and gendered space. I draw extensively on semi-structured interviews with Bendon employees and personal experience as an employee of Bendon.

Within geographies of economies there has been a substantial amount of literature produced on what Leidner (1991; 1993) terms as 'interactive service occupations'. These are jobs in which the presentation and the appearance of the person is part of the production and sale of a service. Interactive jobs (this is particularly relevant for customer service roles) make use of their 'workers looks, personalities, and emotions, as well as their physical and intellectual capacities' (Leidner, 1991 155-156). Leidner, using the examples of insurance selling and fast food outlets, demonstrates how bodily normalisation is often achieved by regulations, codes and required behaviours, as well as by mechanisms of self-surveillance. Workers in interactive jobs are often explicitly trained in techniques of self-presentation. In some workplaces staff members are required to wear special clothes or uniforms, and are governed by prohibitions, including restrictions on facial hair and jewellery, in order to produce a specific, usually explicit heterosexual identity. Bendon, for example, requires all staff to wear a uniform.

Carey-Ann: What are management's expectations of your appearance? It can be physical appearance, as well as, obviously we have to wear a uniform.

Toni: Tidy and presentable.

Lisa: Yeah, just to be tidy (Joint Semi-structured interview, 10/06/06).

Repeated performances of expected appearances establish regulatory practices for women and their bodies (Butler, 1990; 1993). The regulatory practices governing Bendon employees are established and maintained through a uniform. Leslie (2002) explains that often retail workers' uniforms are desexualised and professionalised.

Carey-Ann: I remember when I first started at Bendon, and Lily used to say 'No cleavage! No midriff!' It's kind of odd when we're there to sell, not sell cleavage, but ...

Rachael: Being comfortable with it (Semi-structured interview, 30/05/06).

Staff members are required to wear a blue shirt, black pants or knee-length skirt and black shoes. The shirts are loose fitting and are 'unflattering' (Rachael, Semi-structured Interview,

30/05/06). On numerous occasions I have discussed with the manager of Bendon the reasons for 'desexualising' the uniform. In line with Gill Valentine's (2001) discussion on the reasons why workplaces strive to control employees' identities, Bendon desexualises its uniform in order to make the employees more approachable and less likely to alienate the consumer. The result is the creation of a positive relationship with clients which produces a successful transaction. This management strategy suggests that physical signifiers commonly associated with feminine sexuality (cleavage and midriff) are, ironically, inappropriate for the space. Paradoxically, representations explicitly depicting these signifiers are acceptable. In this context, the (real) fleshy, feminine body is 'out' of place in Bendon.

Valentine (2001) contends that within contemporary Western economies aesthetic and emotional components of labour are increasingly more important than technological capabilities. Furthermore, 'workers' identities are not incidental to the work but are an integral part of it' (Leidner, 1991 155-156). The significance of the manipulation of sexuality in many of these interactive service occupations has been documented. Tyler and Abbott (1998) study the recruitment, training and work of flight attendants in two airlines and found that the organisations considered the employees' bodies to be a material embodiment of the airlines personality and consequently they were expected to maintain the airline's desired look – poised and elegant. Tyler and Abbott (1998 440) observe applicants being rejected based on 'undesirable' physical attributes such as bad skin, messy hair and being too 'old'. Store policies, similar to those described above, also dictate aspects of Bendon employees' physical appearance.

Carey-Ann: What about your, um, your physical appearance?

Rachael: I've like, been straightening my hair more for work and wearing it down. I've also been wearing more make-up. Now I actually make the extra effort to do my hair and wear make-up and stuff (Semi-structured interview, 30/05/06).

Bendon encourages Rachael to practice self-surveillance in order to embody the physical norms and standards of productivity and success (McDowell, 1995). This is not surprising given that an integral part of many organisations' employment strategies is to gain control over workers' corporeal capacities in order to develop certain aspects of their identity (Valentine, 2001). Bendon gains control over Rachael's corporeal identity and doing so, Rachael internalises the disciplinary measures produced by, and thus becomes, a construct of the space.

Rachael's preoccupation with her physical appearance – to utilise Michael Foucault's (1980) concept – renders her docile. Her acceptance and compliance with the gendered bodily performance that requires her to manage her appearance both (re)produces and (re)constructs spatialised cultural discourses of femininity, beauty and the female body (Bordo, 1989). By choosing to 'make the extra effort', Rachael highlights the intersecting discourses that produce specific gendered subjectivities, whilst articulating individual agency and power. It is also interesting to note what Rachael constitutes as making 'the extra effort' – wearing make-up, straightening her hair and wearing it down. By encouraging Rachael to engage in these processes of normalisation, the space of Bendon continues to write a specific gendered bodily workplace performance onto her body.

Retail employees are trained how to position their bodies in space (Leslie, 2002). They are not allowed to sit, slouch or lean on counters. The disciplinary practices within Bendon produce a body in gesture, comportment and posture that is feminine (Bordo, 1989; Bartky, 1988). In the following dialogue Lisa highlights a correlation between being 'approachable' and body position.

Carey-Ann: What about how you position yourself in the shop?

Lisa: Well just like you're approachable and looking busy.

Carey-Ann: Yeah, looking busy [laugh] (Joint semi-structured interview, 10/06/06).

Lisa does not explicitly discuss the required feminine posture, gesture and comportment of her body. However, 'looking busy' denotes the control Bendon has over her bodily movement. She has to retain a bodily comportment that is active, even if she is not engaged in 'work'. I know as a Bendon employee that we are not allowed to sit, slouch or lean on counters; we have to be positioned amongst the customers. It is useful to understand the structuring of Bendon by drawing on Iris Marion Young's (1990a; 1990b) work on the spatiality of embodiment. In her essay 'Throwing like a girl', Young (1990b) clarifies a link between women's awareness of embodiment and space. She suggests that the threat of a masculine gaze leads women to experience an intense self-awareness about being seen in and taking up space. Young notes that the threat of being seen and evaluated is one of the most objectifying processes that the body is submitted, and argues that the constitution of women's bodies as objects to be gazed upon encourages women to experience their embodiment as located in space. Read in this light Bendon employees are confined in the space, and are hence unable to freely express their intentionality because they are required to manage their bodies in a certain way. Furthermore, the spatiality of their bodies can also act to confine them. Often, Bendon employees' bodies are used as a sizing guide by customers. They become embodied objects to be looked at (Young, 1990).

Leslie (2002 69) suggests that many retail employees feel like 'walking advertisements for the store'. Although Bendon employees do not explicitly model the product for sale, their embodied spatiality is often used as a guide by consumers to measure and compare against. [6]

Carey-Ann: So and do you think that the shoppers watch you and evaluate your body?

Lisa: Well some of them do. Especially guys when they come in [Toni laughs] and they're clueless of – it hasn't happened in ages – but when they're clueless of their girlfriends size and they're like 'oh bit bigger than you' (Toni agrees) or 'bit smaller than you'.

Toni: And they kind of look at your bum and they'll be like, 'yep that size knickers'. It's like 'oh God!!

Carey-Ann: I remember last year, Ruth was helping a man and she was asking him what size she [his girlfriend] was and she said 'come over here Carey he needs to see what size you are' [group laughs].

Toni: It's horrible aye because they're really *looking*.

Lisa: They are aye and you can't really say 'don't do that!' (Joint Semi-structured Interview, 10/06/06).

This is another example of the power of the objectifying masculine gaze. Despite working in a 'desexualised' and 'professionalised' embodied space, Bendon employees may still be subjected to processes of objectification. The spatiality of employees' bodies can still act to confine them even in a space designed with the latent intent of providing an unobtrusive space for women.

Elizabeth highlights similarities between using the spatiality of Bendon employees' bodies and the bodies of models featured in brochures as a method of size comparison.

Elizabeth: Cause when my guy went to buy my bra, the lady gave him the catalogue and he just had to point to what he thought looked the same [Joanne laughs]. He was like 'that one looks the same' and so the lady gave the same size 'cause she was like 'the lady in that one is a size such and such' [group laugh] (Focus group interview, 01/06/06).

Retail assistants and models use their bodies as part of their workplace performance in similar ways (Leslie, 2002). Both construct norms of femininity with their bodies. Bendon employees construct feminine norm, such as round, full breasts, which are specific to the space. Clothes that are simply displayed on hangers are lifeless and disembodied. Consequently, I suggest that the fleshy, materiality of employees' bodies provide consumers with a seemingly more substantial or

'real' form of measurement than simply looking at the size of underwear as it is displayed on hangers.

Some of the Bendon employees subvert the repressive masculine gaze of others by reversing the process.

Carey-Ann: What about girls, 'cause you know how girls can be critical?

Lisa: Well some of them, if they don't know their brief size – if they're a small or medium – and they say 'well what are you, what size do you wear in this?'

Toni: Sometimes though, I find it easier if the person is gonna try on something that is too small and they're being a bit in denial and I say 'well I wear the medium' (Lisa agrees) to imply that 'well that's not gonna fit you!' (Carey-Ann agrees).

Carey-Ann: It's funny how you learn little things to get around [awkward situations] (Toni agrees).

Lisa: Yeah you're like 'well I've got those and I wear a medium' and they're like 'oh well I'll get a large in them' [laugh] (Joint Semi-structured Interview, 10/06/06).

Using the spatiality of their bodies to assist in sales demonstrate the employees' involvement in continuing processes of female objectification. This sales method highlights the tension between theorising female objectification and the feminised space of Bendon as obtrusive as employees are not passive victims in the process.

The gendered bodily performance of Bendon employees also requires extensive knowledge of stock. This includes being aware of bodily differences and the diverse requirements of consumers.

Carey-Ann: In comparison to other shops, I think that we – as employees of Bendon – generally have to do a lot more work than other retail assistants (Rachael agrees). You know because fitting someone is such a personal thing...

Rachael: Yeah, like at our store we are expected to deal with all types of customers, well, like from breast-age up. We have to deal with people that are 24Gs [bra size] and people that are 10As [bra size] and we have to know how to fit everyone in between; and what we should be sensitive about; and what we should look for; and what they want; and we have to recognise their needs and go find something that is going to work for them. There are so many different bras that could work for so many different people.

Carey-Ann: We need to know the stock really well.

Rachael: Yeah and you have to know that different people like different things; and different [breast] sizes need different products for support; and um, you need to know the little things about the bra that makes it more supportive, like the wider shoulder straps or wider back or the extra side-slings in the side of the cup. You have to be able to tell them so that they know that you know what you're talking about and what they're buying is actually worth it (Semi-structured interview, 30/05/06).

Acquiring the knowledge needed to successfully fit and ultimately sell underwear is time consuming. Bendon employees are expected to update their knowledge on current stock by constantly reviewing in-store garments and attending workshops outside usual work hours. Part of successfully fitting a garment is being able to impart this knowledge to customers. Bendon employees have to be vigilant about communicating product information to shoppers as Bendon management continually monitor employees' sales routines (including appearance, dress code and attitude.)

Through employee dress codes, appraisals and performance reviews workers are encouraged or forced to be self reflexive (Lash and Urry, 1994). Techniques of control manage the gendered bodily workplace performance of Bendon employees. Bendon is located in a mall and as such is spatially compact. This allows for direct surveillance and gazing by management in order to regulate employees' identities. Moreover, Bendon uses a secondary means of surveillance – 'secret shoppers' – to pervasively encourage self monitoring and discipline.

Secret shoppers are hired by stores to pose as customers and to evaluate the work performance and appearance of employees. Secret shoppers enter Bendon approximately once a month and then deliver a report on their 'findings'. I suggest that secret shopping is similar to forms of surveillance inherent in the architecture of Bentham's panopticon. The possibility of being surveyed encourages employees to practice self-surveillance (Foucault, 1979). The possibility of having my performance evaluated by a secret shopper motivated me to practice self-surveillance.

A couple of weeks ago Bendon received its secret shopper report for May. The report is divided into a series of sections with specific criteria for each. Although we didn't get 100 percent for overall performance, I received 100 percent for my changing room etiquette. I was rewarded with a 20 dollar gift voucher and will definitely continue to be nice to every customer (Autobiographical journal, 26/06/06 original emphasis).

The above entry highlights one way in which Bendon shapes employees' identities. Bendon uses both positive and negative reinforcement to discipline workers in order to produce a corporeal identity specific to the space. Negative disciplinary repercussions are the main motivator for Bendon employees to practice self-surveillance. A subsidiary effect of receiving a 'poor' secret shopper report is the public shame of failing to meet Bendon's standards and of 'letting down the team'. All staff read the reports; and names, standard of appearance and attitude are explicitly recorded and discussed by staff. Disciplinary meetings are sometimes held to discuss poor results and the embarrassment this causes encourages staff to practice further self-surveillance and discipline.

Conclusions

In this paper, I have shown how bodies are constituted in and through underwear shops. The gendered spaces of underwear shops are an integral aspect in the construction of embodied (gendered) subjectivities in specific ways. Discursive power operating within feminised underwear shops positions bodies as either 'in' place or 'out' of place. For the purposes of this article I have focused on those (heteronormative feminine) bodies that are understood as being 'in' place.

By conducting one focus group and three semi-structured interviews; participant observations and keeping an autobiographical journal, I have gathered a wealth of qualitative data. Using a feminist poststructural approach I have attempted to destabilise the apparent fixity or ontological status of the feminine body and gendered spaces. I have remained emotionally engaged throughout the research process; acknowledging my position as a 22 year old, Pākehā, able-bodied, heterosexual woman in an attempt to destabilise the notion of the researcher as a detached observer.

Underwear shops are gendered spaces. The socio-political structures and discursive power organising such spaces work to establish and confirm Bendon, Bras N Things and the underwear section of Farmers department store as feminised spaces. Furthermore, underwear shops are thin and young embodied spaces. Bodies that fit this description are therefore positioned as 'in' place. This idealised notion is (re)produced through visual representations featuring icons of normative femininity. Bendon employees are also constructed as being 'in' place. They have a gendered bodily workplace performance written onto their bodies and they are expected to maintain an identity that is specific to the space.

In this article I have discussed observations made by myself and by the participants. Such observations problematise current understandings of gendered space and bodies as natural or fixed, and offer new ways to re-conceptualise space and bodies.

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[1] The theoretically informed empirical data used in this paper is part of wider research I have conducted for my masters thesis. In my thesis, titled: *Intimate Geographies: Bodies, Underwear and Space in Hamilton, New Zealand*, I use the subject of underwear to understand further the relationship between identity and space.

[2] Although I discuss both the brand 'Bendon' and 'Bendon' as a space of underwear consumption, unless specifically stated the term 'Bendon' will refer to the space of consumption.

[3] Retailers use 'outlet' stores to sell large quantities of last season's stock at reduced prices.

[4] Geographers have theorised bodies as 'in' place and/or 'out' of place in a variety of social, cultural, spatial and temporal contexts. Rob Kitchen (1998) explores the marginalisation and exclusion of disabled people in 'mainstream' society. He argues that space, as well as time, are instrumental in (re)producing and sustaining disablist practice. 'Spaces are currently organised to keep disabled people "in their place" and "written" to convey to disabled people that they are "out of place"' (Kitchen, 1998 343). And, Tim Cresswell (1999) documents the exclusion and 'othering' of female tramps and hobos in the United States between 1869 and 1940. Focussing on issues of gender, mobility, power, exclusion and resistance, Cresswell (1999 176) argues that female tramps produced a social crisis as American people attempted to make sense of these 'bodies-out-of-place'.

[5] As part of the focus group and semi-structured interviews I showed a DVD of a *Victoria's Secret Lingerie Show* (CBS Broadcasting Inc., 6 December 2005). I showed the DVD to provide an initial point of discussion. The DVD featured lingerie models such as Heidi Klum and Tyra Banks, women who are often deemed the ideal embodiments of femininity.

[6] Although, as part of a DressSmart store promotion, Bendon was required to be involved in a fashion parade. Lisa and I modeled garments from Bendon in the fashion parade and in this instance our bodies were explicitly used to model the product.

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