

A Critical Analysis of Oppositional Discourses of the Ideal Female Body in Women's Conversations

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By

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Abstract

Socialisation agents such as the popular media and same age female peers construct and reproduce notions of what is physically ideal, feminine and beautiful in a woman (Hesse-Biber 1996). My interest lies in how a group of young women reproduce, contest and possibly transform such notions in conversations with their same age female friends. The study aims to answer the following question: What ideologies are reflected and perpetuated in the discourses associated with the ideal female body? Since notions of what is ideal and beautiful are indeterminate and in perpetual flux, I focus in particular on areas of contradiction and contestation in the body talk conversations. As such, the analysis examines three extracts in which the young women draw on oppositional discourses to construct notions of female beauty. I believe that these extracts represent discursive struggles in relation to the dominant Western ideal of the slim, toned female body, an ideal which more closely resembles a newly pubescent girl's body than the curvaceous, shapely body of an adult woman (Bartky 2003; Grogan 1998).

My analysis is based on conversational data collected from sixteen, white adolescent English-speaking women between the ages of fourteen and eighteen who attend a boarding school in Grahamstown. I elicited the body talk data using three stimulus exercises designed to encourage discussion on topics such as the overweight female body, dieting and the ideal body. I selected three extracts from the recorded conversations and used the methodological framework of Critical Discourse Analysis to analyse the data. This framework proposes three interdependent stages of analysis: 1) the *Description* of the formal features of the text, 2) the *Interpretation* of the text in terms of the participants' background assumptions, the situational context and the intertextual context and 3) an *Explanation* of the text in light of the sociocultural context and the text's contribution to the reproduction or transformation of the *status quo*.

Since I was present during the conversational recordings and contributed to the discussions, part of the interpretation stage of analysis critically evaluates how the asymmetrical power relations between myself and the participants influenced the conversations. In this regard, my findings attest to my coercive role in promoting conservative, reactionary discourses which sustain the dominance of traditional ideologies of female beauty and which stifle oppositional ideologies.

My interpretation of the extracts also reveals that, in their discussions of topics such as excess weight, female ageing and cosmetic surgery, the young women negotiate alternative conceptions of what constitutes the ideal female body. However, the articulation of an alternative beauty ideal, one which values women of different body sizes and ages is not sustained in the extracts. By discussing the relationship between these alternative constructions and dominant norms of beauty, I show how the prevailing ideal of the youthful, slim, toned female body wins out in the conversations. The interpretation of the extracts also reveals the participants' preoccupation with the pursuit of health and well-being. In this respect, the young women construct the ideal body as not only slim and youthful, but also healthy. In my explanation of the extracts, I explore the sociocultural factors which have contributed to the rise of the health ethic. In concluding, I argue that the valorisation of the healthy body in the conversations, far from challenging the imperative to be thin, actually reinforces it by constructing dieting as a necessary adjunct to the pursuit of health. From this perspective, the preoccupation with attaining the ideal thin, toned body can be justified in terms of a desire to be healthy.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Setting the scene: the rationale behind the study

As a young girl, I loved Barbie: I spent many hours brushing Barbie's silky blonde hair, dressing and re-dressing her in tailormade high-fashion outfits, fitting tiny pink high heels to her tiptoed feet. For me Barbie epitomised the archetypal feminine woman and I loved to pretend I *was* Barbie in all her blue-eyed, big-boobed, tiny-waisted 'womanliness'. It did not matter that I did not know any woman who vaguely resembled Barbie or even that, with my brown hair, green eyes and skin the colour of *café au lait*, I could not realistically hope to emulate Barbie. In retrospect, those hours spent playing with Barbie were formative in my development as a young girl: they were part of my induction into notions of femininity, female beauty and, most importantly, the ideal female body.

At the age of twelve, having outgrown Barbie, I recall reading my first teenage 'girlie' magazine, aptly entitled *Blush*. This was the guide to which I turned during early adolescence for everything from the new fashion trends to the latest 'health' diet. During those angst-ridden, pubescent years when I felt simultaneously repelled and intrigued by my new adult physical form, the airbrushed models in *Blush* were the yardstick against which I measured the attractiveness of my own body. And no, in comparison with the bodies of the slim, tanned, flawless models (many of whom *did* resemble Barbie!), my body did not measure up. I cannot pinpoint the first time that I felt dissatisfied with my appearance and embarked on one of many diets to lose weight but I think that my growing dissatisfaction coincided roughly with the onset of puberty and my avid reading of *Blush* and later, *Cosmopolitan*, *Marie Claire* and *Shape* magazines. Since the age of 12, I have dieted, fasted, taken appetite suppressants, electrically stimulated my muscles, power-walked, 'worked out' at gym, jogged and otherwise coerced my recalcitrant body into shape.

Given the context of my unshakeable sense of dissatisfaction with my body, I began, as a postgraduate student, to search for a definitive, rational explanation for my obsession with modifying my appearance, specifically my weight. While I believed that my sense of dissatisfaction was by no means anomalous, I did not reckon on finding such a wealth of literature confirming that body dissatisfaction is normative amongst Western women, from around puberty well into adulthood (see for example, Bordo 2003; Grogan 1998; Malson 1998). Feeling affirmed by the discovery that my experience was both 'normal' and worthy of scholarship, I embarked on an Honours research project on the discourse of diet in two

South African women's magazines, namely *Shape* and *The Oprah Magazine* (Pienaar 2004). The study aimed to explain the ideologies encoded in popular media discourse which promotes dieting and other forms of female body management.

This study of diet discourse raised more questions than it provided answers and it certainly did not provide the simple, definitive explanation of female body management which I had initially sought. More especially, I began to understand that the discourse of diet is not a homogeneous, static discourse which encodes a coherent set of ideologies; rather there are several heteroglossic discourses used to promote dieting, which, taken together, encode a complex mix of shifting (and sometimes conflicting) ideologies (cf. 2.3.3). I use the term *heteroglossic*, originally employed by Bakhtin (1981), to describe how one discourse contains many 'voices' or traces of other discourses such that it is always in dialogue with other discourses. For example, *The Oprah Magazine* draws on what I call a demystifying discourse, which makes intertextual reference to traditional diet myths, such as the myth that dieting effortless and quick (cf. 3.3.3.2 for a definition of intertextuality). The demystifying discourse seeks to debunk these myths. Therefore, it represents an oppositional discourse to traditional diet discourse, but yet it still promotes female thinness as desirable. So, while the aims of this demystifying discourse are ideologically compatible with traditional diet discourse, the means by which the former discourse realises these aims are different: the oppositional demystifying discourse seeks to align itself with the reader by presenting the 'truth' about dieting, while still encouraging women to lose weight. While grappling with the multiple discourses of diet, it slowly dawned on me that there is no single homogeneous ideology of female thinness, just as there is no one homogeneous discourse on which popular magazines draw to promote the ideal female body (Macdonald 1995; Pienaar 2004).

1.2 My aims and research questions

While my research on diet discourse sought to analyse the discourses of diet in two women's magazines, it did not show how women actualise their conceptions of dieting and their associated quest for the ideal body in their everyday talk. Prompted by an interest in women's *lived* experiences of their bodies (and seeking to confirm my own experience), I embarked on this study which investigates how groups of young female friends discuss and construct the notion of the ideal female body in conversation. The study has two related aims. Firstly, it aims to explain the ideologies which constitute the contemporary Western female body ideal as they are encoded in a group of women's conversations about their own and other female bodies. I focus particularly on areas of contradiction and opposition within

these ideologies. Since I contributed to the discussions, I also consider my role as the researcher in influencing the direction of the body talk discussions. In particular, I will attempt to answer the following three questions:

1. What ideologies are reflected and perpetuated in the discourses associated with the ideal female body?
 1. a) Are the young women reproducing, resisting or transforming traditional assumptions about what is beautiful and desirable in a woman?
2. What role does the researcher play in the discussions?

In keeping with my research aim of focussing on areas of contradiction and contestation, I specifically examine extracts of the body talk conversations in which the young women invoke oppositional discourses to construct notions of female beauty. Related to this, my explanation of the extracts in chapter 5 aims to describe how the participants position themselves with regard to traditional assumptions of what constitutes the ideal female body. Therefore, in answering question 1 above, I aim to answer the sub-question, 1. a), which explores the relationship between each discourse and the broader social context, in terms of whether a particular discourse reproduces, challenges or transforms the existing social order (Fairclough 1995).

1.3 The body as an object of social inquiry

When I began to review the literature on the subject of the female body, it soon became clear, from the sheer volume of contemporary literature available, that the body is in vogue as a focus of research. Within the past twenty years the body has been an increasingly popular topic of academic study in a variety of social science disciplines, including sociology, psychology and philosophy (Davis 1997). It is possible that the contemporary interest in the body represents a reaction against the traditional belief that the material body is the domain of biology, not social studies (ibid). The body has been treated as an “‘absent presence’ in the social sciences... as a symbol for something else: ‘nature’, desire or biology”, rather than as something which carries meaning in and of itself (Davis 1997: 3).

In addition to being, until recently, only of secondary interest in the social sciences, the body has had, more broadly speaking, a chequered history. This becomes clear when one considers the classic Western mind/body dualism. The mind is the positive term, representing all that is rational and enlightened, while the body represents the negative polarity, namely all that is irrational and unenlightened (Bordo 2003; Davis 1997). In Christian terms, the sexual body represents the sinful, animalistic side of human nature, that which must be contained since it

threatens to run out of control (ibid). The mind/body dualism, which is so favoured in Western science, frequently carries a gendered signification. As feminist research in this area has shown, woman is the metaphor for the body pole of the dualism, “representing nature, emotional irrationality and sensuality” (Davis 1997: 5). Man, on the other hand, represents the mind, he who transcends the limitations of the flesh to attain knowledge and enlightenment (ibid).

In the past twenty to thirty years, feminist scholars from a variety of disciplines have studied the female body as a site of social struggle. One area in which women have struggled to reclaim control over their bodies is that of sexual rights: “The body became a political issue as feminists struggled to gain control over their fertility and their right to abortion... Feminists brought the body to the forefront in their analyses of power relations under patriarchy” (Davis 1997: 4). In this domain and in the domains of beauty, reproductive technologies and sexual violence, feminist research has ‘politicised’ the body by showing how bodies (and most especially female bodies) are products of patriarchy, bearing the effects of unequal gender relations (Bordo 2003; Lloyd 1999; Wolf 1991).

A growing awareness that the female body in particular is implicated in relations of domination guided me toward the work of Foucault (1979). His study of disciplinary power and micro-practices of the body (for example, appetite control) has informed my understanding of how women act as their own overseers, policing their bodies to conform to dominant ideals of beauty and femininity. In addition to drawing on the work of Foucault on the production of docile bodies, this study will cover terrain which has been previously staked out by feminist theorists, such as Bartky (1990), Bordo (2003), Butler (1999), Chernin (1981) and Wolf (1991), all of whom have contributed valuable perspectives on the gendered body and on contemporary ideals of femininity. Of all these theorists, the one whose work has been central to my study is philosopher Susan Bordo. I found Bordo’s (2003) feminist readings of the slender female body and her work on postmodernism and cosmetic technologies of the body to be more detailed and socioculturally embedded than most contemporary studies of the female body. Drawing on an extensive knowledge of Western philosophy and cultural studies, Bordo (2003) convincingly accounts for the contemporary fixation with female slenderness and with modifying the body. Her work has been an inspirational source and one on which I have relied in my explanation of the intersecting factors which contribute to the reproduction of the contemporary female physical ideal in Western society (cf. 2.2.1).

1.4 The pilot study

Before collecting the data for the main study, I conducted a pilot study in August 2005, which aimed to assess the validity of my proposed data collection and analysis methods. For this study eight white female undergraduate students volunteered to have a conversation recorded with three of their friends. The number of participants totalled 24, all of whom had been friends for at least a year and spoke English as their first language. I recorded a conversation with each group of friends. The conversations were facilitated using pre-planned stimulus exercises, designed to encourage discussion on topics such as the female body, beauty and attaining the ideal body (cf. 3.2.4 for a detailed description of the stimulus exercises).

I recorded the conversations, transcribed the recordings in full and then reviewed the transcriptions for recurring themes. Some extracts were set aside for analysis on the basis that their thematic focus and their related lexical sets constituted a discourse. My intuitive sense that the extracts I chose contained sets of related discourses was backed up by a Critical Discourse Analysis of the features of each extract. The aim of this preliminary analysis was to alert me to the key discourses on which young women draw to construct the female body. The discourses which emerged recurrently were: a discourse of compulsory heterosexuality (Sunderland 2004), a discourse of the natural body (Bordo 2003), a discourse of dichotomous gender difference (Sheldon 1997; Sunderland 2004), a discourse of the ideal woman and a related discourse of the “anti-woman”, as well as a discourse of the female body as a sexual object (Bordo 2003; Jaworski 2004).

The pilot study was an invaluable exercise which I believe has informed the data collection methods of the main study in two ways. Firstly, it encouraged me to develop a reflexive stance towards my own contributions to the conversations i.e. to consider the role I played in constraining the participants’ contributions and in influencing the discussions. It also forced me to clarify my identity vis-à-vis the young women who participated in the study (cf. 3.2.3). For example, it forced me to consider various means of reducing the possible asymmetrical power relations between myself, as the researcher, and the young women, as the ‘researched’. Secondly, the pilot study helped me to streamline the elicitation exercises. For example, one stimulus exercise required the participants to respond to a selection of images and texts on anorexia nervosa. The images contained women who self-identified as anorexic (for an explanation of anorexia, see 2.2.2.3). The texts were taken from a pro-anorexia website. Such websites construct anorexia positively as a lifestyle choice, rather

than as a disorder (Baghail 2005). They function as online support groups which seek to reinforce anorexic behaviours through the use of, amongst other things, *Thinspiration* galleries which contain photographs of emaciated women serving as “inspiration” for viewers with eating disorders (ibid). The pro-anorexia texts contained poems written by anorexics, pieces on the perceived benefits of anorexia and the ten commandments of the anorexic woman. While this exercise was successful in stimulating discussion on the disordered female body (the opposite of the ideal body), I concluded that the use of texts promoting the rather extreme pro-anorexia ideology may have predisposed the participants to adopt an anti-anorexia position. Since the study as a whole aims to elicit a wide range of responses from the participants, rather than limiting the participants’ responses to a dichotomous pro/anti position, I decided to omit the texts on anorexia in the main study, in favour of using only images. In addition to modifying the stimulus exercises, I also omitted or amalgamated exercises which shared a common focus in order to avoid redundancy in the main study.

1.5 Collecting the data for the main study

The conversational data for the main study was collected from friendship groups comprising a total of sixteen, English first language, Western women between the ages of fourteen and eighteen who attend a school in Grahamstown (cf. 3.2.2 for a discussion of the school’s educational ethos). I attended the school (which I shall refer to as Smithson College) from Grade five to twelve so I believed that, as an “old girl”, it would be relatively easy for me to gain access to the research setting. Since the body is a face-threatening topic, the participants had to be close friends, who were sufficiently comfortable with one another to discuss the topic unselfconsciously. I chose boarding school learners to participate in the study since I believe that their close-knit friendships, characterised by regular intimate interaction, in the absence of family, would enable them to discuss the topic more easily than their day girl counterparts would.

1.5.1 Adolescence and the search for identity

My choice to use *teenage* participants derives in part from my recollection of the tumultuous years of my own adolescence, during which I grappled with the physiological and emotional changes that I was experiencing. Psycho-social research on puberty (see for example, Archer 1992; Gullotta, Adams & Markstrom 2000) confirms that adolescents experience a heightened awareness of their body as they try to cope with physiological changes and with their emerging sexuality. This increased physiological awareness translates into a

preoccupation with physical appearance, specifically with the goal of becoming sexually attractive to members of the opposite sex (Archer 1992). For Western female adolescents, sexual attractiveness is equated with slimness and thus the majority of teenage girls aspire to be slim (Danesi 1994; Grogan 1998). Presenting a desirable body image is important, not only in terms of sexual attractiveness, but in terms of being accepted by one's same-sex peers. Teenagers internalise the notion that particular body types (for example, the fat body) are socially unacceptable and this reinforces their "sensitivity to idealized body prototypes" and their preoccupation with attaining the ideal body (Danesi 1994: 49). So one of the reasons I chose to study the body talk conversations of adolescent females is that I expected them to display a heightened sensitivity to notions of the ideal body.

In terms of adolescent psycho-social development, the changes in the body are accompanied by a shifting sense of identity. During this time teenagers begin to negotiate their identity, to engage in an "ego identity struggle": they adopt various social roles as they try to construct a coherent self-image (Erikson, cited in Gullotta *et al.* 2000: 77). For young women, this identity struggle manifests itself partly in a search for "identification objects", female role models whose behaviour, appearance and style they can emulate (Ganetz 1995: 90). Research indicates that an important set of female role models is the women depicted in the popular media, particularly in magazines and on television (Macdonald 1995; Smith 1990). Therefore, the popular media not only reflects women's role in society, it actively shapes it by defining what it means to be a woman and by socialising women into this role. Moreover, images in the media of slim, seemingly perfect female models act as yardsticks against which women measure themselves unfavourably (Grogan 1998; Hesse-Biber 1996). My choice of stimulus exercises featuring images from popular South African magazines is based on the claims made in the literature (see for example, Macdonald 1995; Seid 1989) that such images play an important role in the development of young women's sense of identity. In addition, the fact that young women are regularly exposed to images of female models in the popular media means that a stimulus exercise requiring them to respond to a selection of these images simulates an everyday activity in which they engage.

Another important source of information for adolescents in their development of a coherent sense of self, is the peer group (Gullotta *et al.* 2000; Lawrence 1987). During adolescence traditional sources of wisdom, such as parents and teachers, are rejected in favour of the peer group, who become crucial in defining and regulating what is socially acceptable, what is fashionable and what is attractive (Danesi 1994; Rice 1981). Such notions of social

acceptability, style and attractiveness are constructed through a variety of semiotic codes, such as physical posturing, modes of dress, proxemics (the meanings attached to levels of interpersonal space across different social contexts) and language (Danesi 1994). Of this range of semiotic codes through which adolescents construct their social world, this study is concerned with only one, *language*. More specifically, it is concerned with the language used in the conversations of groups of teenage female friends to construct one aspect of female identity, namely the notion of the ideal body.

1.6 A critical analysis of female body talk

The study will use the theoretical framework and related methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyse the body talk data. CDA will be used to answer the first research question (and the related sub-question) which investigates the ideologies that underpin conceptions of the ideal female body. The second research question focusses on my role as the researcher in the conversations. In the reflexive spirit which CDA encourages (Fairclough 2001), I treat my contributions to the discussions as topics of analytic interest, subject to the same level of critical analysis as those of the participants. Acknowledging that the power relations operating between researcher and researched are typically asymmetrical (Wetherell & Potter 1992), I consider how this particular dynamic of power is enacted in the discourse. The analysis investigates how my contribution to the discussions may have influenced the young women's constructions of the ideal female body.

In answering the first research question, I seek to describe the varied construals of the ideal female body at this particular historical moment. The study does not aim to give a diachronic perspective on the shifting ideals of female physical attractiveness across various historical periods. Instead, it represents a snap-shot in time of a selection of Western women's constructions of the ideal body. However, in order to provide a historical context for contemporary Western ideals of the female body, I describe influential socio-historical phenomena, such as the civilising of the body and the internalisation of social control mechanisms which regulate the body (cf. 2.2.1.4).

1.7 An introduction to the study's central tenets

1.7.1 Defining discourse and ideology

Since this study focusses on the '*discourse* of the female body', a definition of this notoriously nebulous term is required. *Discourse*, as I understand it, represents sets of semiotic structures or schemas through which we perceive, express and constitute our reality. This reality includes both the "'mental world' of thoughts, feelings and beliefs...and the

social world” (Fairclough 2003: 124). This definition includes the idea that, as schemas, discourses delimit and regulate our conception of the world: they prescribe and legitimate a certain perspective from which we view knowledge, concepts and objects (Foucault 1971). Therefore, discourses have a certain agency, not only to reflect, but actively to create “the objects of which they speak” (Foucault 1972: 49). It follows that discourse is a form of social practice: when discourse is instantiated in, for example, conversation, political speeches and policy documents it has an *effect* on social formations (Fairclough 1989; Wetherell & Potter 1992). The idea that discourse provides a lens through which we view the world, presupposes that there is a relationship between discourses and particular worldviews. Thus, discourse encodes particular representations of the world or *ideologies* (Fairclough 1989; 2001). I conceptualise *ideology* from the perspective of critical linguistics as a modality of power: a means through which relations of power (often unequal relations) are sustained or challenged in a particular society (Fairclough 2003).

What is not included in the above account of discourse (and in fact, in early critical theory: see for example, Fairclough 1989; Fowler, Hodge, Kress & Trew 1979; Hodge & Kress 1988) is the notion that discourse is always in flux and contains inconsistencies and contradictions (Fairclough 2003; Wetherell & Potter 1992). As mentioned with reference to the findings of my Honours research project (cf. 1.1), the notions of inconsistency and indeterminacy were largely new to me. Moreover, they were notions which I resisted fiercely, driven as I was by a desire for a definitive answer to my questions about female body management. However, in exploring the terrain for this study, the notions of indeterminacy and ideological contradiction kept resurfacing stubbornly (cf. 2.3.3). I had to relinquish my desire to reduce the incoherencies to an elegant (though one-dimensional) account of ideology. The incoherencies and inconsistencies that we see in discourse are in fact reflective and constitutive of a fragmented, fluctuating social world (Wetherell & Potter 1992).

Part of the reason why I believe the discursive construction of the ideal female body is an intriguing issue is precisely because notions of what is ideal, what is beautiful and what is feminine are *not* well-defined. The young women in the study attempt to define notions which are inherently indefinite, to give voice to and debate various formulations of female beauty, femininity and sexual attractiveness. In the course of any one conversation they invoke a series of discourses to encode their changing perceptions (cf. 2.4.2.3). The young women’s use of conflicting discourses indicates that they do not subscribe to one

homogeneous set of ideologies (Coates 1999; Wetherell 1996). Just as discourse contains possible points of rupture and inconsistency, so too do the ideologies encoded in discourse: “...ideology ceases to be seen as an elegant coherent totality but as fragmented and contradictory, with the very stresses and variations within it being crucial to its operation” (Wetherell & Potter 1992: 61). One of the aims of this study is to account for the incoherencies across and within particular sets of ideologies associated with the ideal body. I am particularly interested in areas of contestation, where the young women resist conventional, accepted definitions of femininity and beauty and seek to formulate alternative ones from the range of culturally available discourses.

1.7.2 Interpellating identity in discourse

The analysis of body talk conversations is based on the assumption that conversation is constructive and reproductive; people do not use conversation to report their beliefs passively. Rather, they are actively making meaning and constructing and reinforcing certain conceptions of reality in conversation (Dryden 1999). It is in this sense that discourse is *constitutive* of the social world, effecting changes on the world (Butler & Salih 2004, cf. 2.2.2.1). A key notion, which is related to the constitutive power of discourse and one which I would like to introduce at this point is that of *interpellation*: *Interpellation* refers to “how subject positions are conferred and assumed through the action of ‘hailing’” (Salih 2002: 78). By describing or ‘hailing’ the subject in a particular way, one is *interpellating* an aspect of their identity. And in so doing, one is calling the subject into being, constituting them in language: “...by being called a name, one is also, paradoxically, given a certain possibility for social existence, initiated into a temporal life of language that exceeds the prior purposes that animate that call” (Butler 1997: 2). So in the context of this study, if a woman positively evaluates another woman’s body as *petite and feminine*, she is not only describing the woman’s appearance, she is also *interpellating* a particular aspect of the woman’s identity and simultaneously reproducing a traditional Western view of femininity.

In the words of Coates (1999: 123), people “do identity work” in conversation; they invoke a variety of discourses in their attempts to construct a stable, coherent sense of identity. The different discourses offer the subject a range of ways of ‘doing’ their identity, and thus of reproducing, contesting or constructing a particular ideology (Coates 1999; Fairclough 2001). In other words, one’s sense of self is “*accomplished* in the course of social interactions, reconstructed from moment to moment within specific discursive and rhetorical contexts and *distributed* across social contexts” (Edley & Wetherell 1997: 205, emphasis

original). Therefore, the proposed study analyses how female physical identity, specifically the notion of the ideal female body, is discursively constructed in conversation.

1.7.3 The order of discourse and colonisation in discourse

In the explanation of body talk discourses in chapter five, I seek to identify how the construction of the ideal female body in each of the intersecting discourses relates to the current order of discourse (cf. 1.2, research question 1. a)). By *order of discourse* I mean the way discourses are divided up and structured into “interdependent networks” (Fairclough 1989: 29). Orders of discourse are closely related to the social order (i.e. the way that society is separated into social institutions and associated social domains, situations and practices): they both reflect and constitute the social order.

To give a concrete example of the order of discourse as it relates to this study, the participants invoke, *inter alia*, the following discourses in their body talk discussions: the discourse of the sexually attractive body, the discourse of the healthy body, the discourse of the natural body and the discourse of the feminine body. As may be intuitively evident from their names, the discourses are related under the broader rubric of the ideal female body. Thus, they form an interdependent network or order of discourse. To illustrate their interdependence, consider the discourse of the *sexually attractive body* and the discourse of the *feminine body*. Notions of female sexual attractiveness within a heterosexual perspective typically rely on the gendered binary, *feminine/masculine*, where the archetypal feminine body is viewed as (hetero)sexually attractive because it complements the opposite sex partner’s masculine body (Pienaar & Bekker 2006a). By appealing to the notion that masculinity and femininity are mutually exclusive constructs (Bordo 2003; Butler 1999), femininity is partly constructed as that which is *not* masculine and therefore as that which is attractive to the opposite sex. Thus, the discourse of the feminine body, based as it is on an insistence on binary gender oppositions and heteronormativity, supports the belief that the body’s aesthetic merit resides in its ability to attract the opposite sex (Butler 1999; Jaworski 2003). So from this perspective, the discourse of the sexually attractive female body and the discourse of the feminine body are interdependent, each relying on and implicitly invoking the other in the construction of the ideal female body.

However, not all discourses within an order of discourse are necessarily equal in value or equally prominent. One discourse may emerge as dominant and, in so doing, it subsumes the other related discourses. Fairclough (1989; 2001) describes this process as *colonisation*,

where the dominant discourse is the *colonising* discourse and the related discourses are *colonised* discourses. The colonising discourse holds the most sway in a given order of discourse and often exploits the related discourses to legitimise its aims (ibid). To relate this notion to the previous example of the discourses of the ideal female body, my explanation of extract three describes how the discourse of the healthy body is ultimately in service of the discourse of the sexually attractive body and thus has been colonised by the latter (cf. 5.4.2). As is suggested by its name, the discourse of the healthy body constructs female health as the key concern, as ostensibly more important than concerns about losing weight or being sexually attractive. It appears that, by couching the pursuit of female sexual attractiveness in terms of health and physical well-being, the discourse of the sexually attractive female body can legitimate its aims of promoting compulsory heterosexuality and the supremacy of the attractive subject within the social order.

1.7.4 Power and the body

This study is particularly concerned with the effect of power at the level of the individual body; how young women exercise power over their own bodies through self-surveillance and self-correction to social norms (cf. 2.2.1.2). I believe that the pervasiveness of the ideal of female thinness resides at the level of the individual woman who exercises disciplinary power against her own body by controlling her eating habits. In this regard, I found Foucault's (1979) analysis of how power functions at the micro-level of the individual particularly relevant. By contrast, Marxist analyses of power tend to focus on the macro-level of the state (Wetherell & Potter 1992). While the state undoubtedly has a role to play in, for example, the regulation of the body in social space, I believe that the sustainability of contemporary body management practices (such as dieting and exercising) derives from a belief in self-discipline (which is a type of power). This functions in effect to produce docile, regulated bodies (Bordo 2003; Foucault 1975; 1979).

In addition to its focus on power at the level of the individual, a Foucauldian analysis of power emphasises that power can be experienced as a positive, productive force, rather than simply as a negative repressive one (Foucault 1975). In an analysis of contemporary female body management practices, it is useful to conceive of power as having positive effects, since one can then understand that disciplinary practices of the body, such as dieting, can be experienced at the level of the individual woman as *empowering*. To conceive of power only in terms of its repressive, limiting effects (as is the tendency in Marxist analyses) is to ignore the positive effects of power, its capacity to "produce effects at the level of desire – and also

at the level of knowledge” (Foucault 1980: 59). Thus, while I have drawn extensively on the Marxist methodology of CDA in this study, I have adopted a Foucauldian conception of power in interpreting the young women’s discussions of disciplinary practices of the body (cf. 2.4.1.2).

1.8 The structure of the thesis

I have structured the thesis in order to foreground the relevant theoretical and methodological decisions (chapters 2 and 3) which inform the subsequent interpretation and explanation of the conversational extracts (chapters 4 and 5).

In chapter 2, I review the literature which has enabled me to embed the body talk data in its social, political and historical contexts. The chapter is divided into three major themes, of which the first two correspond to the overarching topic of my study and the last to the theoretical framework of my chosen methodology, CDA. The first section, 2.2, entitled ‘The body as an object of social study’, describes the influence of sociocultural factors on the maintenance and reproduction of the contemporary Western female body ideal, the ideal of thinness. It also seeks to position the ideal historically in terms of the progressive civilising of the body (cf. 2.2.1.4) and the effect of postmodernism on current conceptions of the body (cf. 2.2.1.5). Since this study focusses on discourses of the female body, in sections 2.2.2.1 and 2.2.2.2 respectively, I consider two theoretical frameworks for conceptualising the relationship between discourse and the body: 1) Butler’s (1986; 1993) analysis of performativity, the body and discourse and 2) Foucault’s (1979) analysis of discourse and disciplinary power on the body.

The second section of this chapter focusses on the construction of identity in discourse (cf. 2.3). This section reviews studies on the discursive construction of identity within a variety of social science subdisciplines, namely discursive psychology, sociolinguistics, conversation analysis and ethnography (cf. 2.3.2, 2.3.4). It describes the methodological tools which theorists have used to study texts on identity. The last section, 2.4, is closely related to the section on discourse and identity in that it discusses the principal theoretical concepts of the methodology used to analyse the body talk data, namely CDA.

Chapter 3 describes the methodological decisions taken in the data collection process. I consider, for example, the choice of participants (cf. 3.2.1), my role as the researcher in the conversations (cf. 3.2.3) and the stimulus exercises used to elicit body talk (cf. 3.2.4).

Section 3.3 describes how my chosen methodology, CDA, is applied to a text, focussing on the three interdependent steps of CDA (description, interpretation and explanation) and on the problems of applying CDA to a conversation. I describe how I supplemented the tools of CDA with tools from Conversation Analysis (CA) to account for the micro-level interactional details of the conversations (cf. 3.3.2.3).

In chapter 4, I present my interpretation of three body talk extracts, which draws on particular textual features identified in the description phase of the analysis. The description of each extract is contained in Appendix E so that the reader can verify the basis on which I make particular claims in the interpretation. Since my research focusses, in part, on the notion of the ideal female body as indefinite and dynamic, I chose to analyse extracts which capture this instability. As such, the extracts contain multiple, often conflicting discourses which encode the participants' shifting ideologies. I identify and label the various discourses and track the shift from one discourse to the next in the course of the extract. In terms of organisation, the interpretation of each extract is presented individually (cf. 4.2, 4.3, 4.4). In answering my second research question (cf. 1.2), I devote one subsection of each interpretation to a discussion of my role in the interaction (cf. 4.2.3, 4.3.3, 4.4.3). I conclude by summing up the main findings of the interpretation in terms of how they illuminate answers to my research questions (cf. 4.5).

Chapter 5, my explanation of the extracts, describes the significance of my findings in terms of the broader context of contemporary Western society. I consider, for example, the role of consumer capitalism, postmodernism, cosmetic surgery and the ethic of health in framing the young women's conceptions of the ideal female body. I follow a similar organisation to that of chapter 4 in that I present a separate explanation for each extract (cf. 5.2, 5.3, 5.4).

Chapter 6 summarises the main findings of my study. In section 6.2 I address my secondary research question (cf. 1.2) relating to whether the young women are resisting, transforming or reproducing hegemonic discourses of the ideal female body in the body talk conversations. In section 6.3, I reflect on the limitations of the study and suggest fruitful avenues for future research. I conclude by evaluating the relevance of my findings to the existing literature on the ideal body (cf. 6.4).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I review the literature which informs the study as a whole and, more specifically, the literature which has enabled me to situate the analysis of the body talk data within its social, historical and political contexts. The chapter is divided into three main sections: the first two, 2.2 and 2.3, relate to the overarching topic of this study, namely the female body and identity, and the final one, 2.4, relates to the theory of my chosen methodology, namely Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The first section on the body discusses contemporary studies of the female body and the ideal of slenderness (cf. 2.2.1). It also describes two philosophical theories of the body (cf. 2.2.2). The second broad topic area reviews a selection of studies on the discursive construction of identity(ies), including studies on national identities, gendered identities and ethnic identities (cf. 2.3). Section 2.3.2 identifies and comments on the analytic tools which theorists in this field have used to study ‘identity texts’. Lastly, section 2.4 reviews the theory behind CDA. This section aims to provide the theoretical context for the description of the praxis of CDA in chapter 3.

2.2 The body as an object of social study

This review of the body is divided into two subsections, namely ‘The ideal of female thinness’ and ‘Theories of the body in philosophy’. The first subsection, 2.2.1, focusses specifically on the contemporary female body ideal and, in keeping with the main theme in the literature, the multiple contextual factors which contribute to the dominance of this ideal in Western culture. In this regard, I consider the role of the popular media in promoting female thinness (cf. 2.2.1.1) and I discuss the gendered meanings attached to the thin female body (cf. 2.2.1.2). I briefly review some sociocultural explanations for anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa since they represent pathologies of the body which relate directly to the contemporary obsession with female thinness (cf. 2.2.1.3). In 2.2.1.4, I provide an historical context for the current construal of the female physical ideal by referring to the notion of the ‘civilisation of the body’. I also describe how the rise of postmodernism has significantly influenced contemporary Western culture’s view of the body (cf. 2.2.1.5). Section 2.2.2 discusses two theories of the body within the discipline of philosophy. In 2.2.2.1, I describe Butler’s theory of performativity in terms of the insights it offers on the construction of the body in discourse (Butler 1986; 1993). I then consider Foucault’s (1972; 1975; 1979) analysis of the relationship between discourse, power and the body (cf. 2.2.2.2).

2.2.1 The ideal of female thinness

The current physical ideal for Western women is a slim body which resembles a newly pubescent girl's body, rather than the curvaceous body of an adult woman (Bartky 2003; Bordo 2003; Grogan 1998; Seid 1989). Not only is the female body of Western fashion slim, it is also toned and taut so that no bulges show (Bordo 2003; Grogan 1998; Seid 1989). It is a body which is tightly controlled and regulated by the rational mind, civilised to guard against 'irrational' emotional impulses, such as the desire to eat (Lupton 1996; Shilling 2003). American-based psycho-social studies on female body image, such as Grogan (1998: 2) indicate that "body dissatisfaction is normative in women in the Western world from eight years of age upwards, and...this has a significant impact on behaviour such that most women try to change their shape and weight, and many women avoid activities that would involve exposing their bodies" (see also Bordo 2003; Hesse-Biber 1996; Seid 1989). While it is difficult to obtain statistics on the number of women with body image disturbances and associated eating disorders in South Africa, recent research in this field has revealed that abnormal eating attitudes affect teenage girls of all ethnic groups in this country (Le Grange, Telch & Tibbs 1998; Szabo & Hollands 1997). These studies suggest that disorders like anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa may be increasing in developing countries such as South Africa. Given the implications of these local studies, young women's current preoccupation with body shape (Blum 2003; Hesse-Biber 1996), specifically with modifying or maintaining their body shape, is an issue requiring urgent attention.

2.2.1.1 Popular media discourses of ideal female body

One of the explanations for the high levels of body dissatisfaction amongst Western women is the effect of the popular media on women's body images (Grogan 1998; Hesse-Biber 1996; Macdonald 1995). The power of the popular media to reproduce the contemporary ideal of female beauty in the consumer lies in their use of a discourse which highlights women's physical deficiencies and then offers solutions to these perceived deficiencies (Smith 1990). In this way the popular media, as a vehicle for the beauty industry, exploit women's belief that they do not measure up to the beauty ideal (McRobbie 2000). This particular discourse of femininity seeks to engender in the reader a distinctive relation to the self (Davis 1997; Smith 1990). It requires the reader to view her body as an identity project, an object in need of transformation: "...she reflects on her self in terms of the discourse, examining her body to appraise its relation to the paradigmatic image, becoming an object to herself" (Smith 1990: 187). Women's bodies are objectified in the popular media to sell

products and, according to some feminist explanations (for example, Grogan 1998; Malson 1998), this pervasive objectification by the popular media contributes to women's body image disturbances and their sense of disjuncture from their own bodies. Whether or not the objectification of women in the popular media is a direct cause of women's body dissatisfaction, the female body is certainly a marketable asset in Western culture. According to Lupton (1996), one of the reasons the overweight female body is stigmatised, is because it is perceived as unattractive and therefore unmarketable. To ensure the marketability of the female body and the continued adherence to the current beauty ideal, the discourse of the ideal body creates a false sense of a woman's flaws, distorting a woman's perception of herself so that she views her body as needing modification to meet current female beauty ideals (Lupton 1996; Seid 1989; Smith 1990).

Controlling one's eating in an effort to lose or maintain weight essentially requires a person to repress their desire to eat (Macdonald 1995). However, the self-denial aspect of following an eating regime is obscured in pro-diet discourse. Instead the popular media exploit positive discourse to highlight the benefits of weight-loss: "Far from being cast within a paradigm of self-denial or rigorous and painful discipline, losing weight is part of a positive discourse about responding to a challenge, making the most of yourself and feeling good" (Macdonald 1995: 206). Furthermore, the discourse of diet promotes weight-loss as an option for every woman, regardless of their socio-economic status. By mystifying thinness as an egalitarian ideal, the beauty ideal of the thin female body appears ideologically acceptable (Seid 1989). However, the discourse of diet effaces the inequalities of social class and economic status which ensure that the ideal is only attainable for women who have sufficient time and money to manage their bodies and eating practices accordingly (Bordo 2003; Seid 1989).

2.2.1.2 Engendering the thin female body

Feminists argue that the conceptualisation of male and female bodies in relation to traditional dichotomies, such as that of the *mind/body* (cf. 1.3) and the *nurturer/nurturant*, is a product of patriarchy and, as such, is imbued with unequal gender relations (Bordo 2003; Davis 1997). For example, in terms of the *nurturer/nurturant* dichotomy, Western women's relationship with food is intrinsically linked to their role as the nurturer, but never as the one who is nurtured. According to Bordo (2003), the way in which women provide food for men and children is often depicted as an act of love in itself, in which she is expressing love while

simultaneously satisfying her own need to give love. In this cultural formulation of a woman's role, male hunger is established "as thoroughly socially integrated into the network of heterosexual family and love relations" (Bordo 2003: 125). By contrast, women are seldom depicted as receiving food (and by implication, love) from others.

The psychological explanation of binge eating as a form of comfort eating endorses the perception that women may use food as a substitute for some basic emotional need which they perceive as being unfulfilled (Lupton 1996). For example, in a study of selected American college students and their eating habits, Counihan (1999) found that some foods are imbued with the status of rewards. These foods were typically categorised as 'bad' foods because of their high calorie content and low nutritional value. The reward status of such foods derives from their capacity to provide the individual with emotional comfort and pleasure. Lupton (1996: 150) describes the labelling of foods as 'good' or 'bad', "food morality". This suggests that, in a society which values asceticism in the form of dieting and the mastery of the will over the body, foods which are consumed merely for emotional pleasure are 'bad' since they go against the ethic of asceticism. Not only is the food labelled 'bad', the individual's eating behaviour and its associated lack of control is equally 'bad' (Lupton 1996). According to the cultural symbolism of overeating, fat bodies, particularly fat female bodies, embody a lack of self-control and gluttony (Counihan 1999; Lupton 1996; Malson 1998). Thin bodies, by contrast are associated with the corresponding positive attributes of self-discipline and the ability to defer gratification (*ibid*).

The control of the female appetite entails the reproduction of more general feminine practices, such as self-restraint and self-discipline: "...the social control of female hunger operates as practical "discipline" (to use Foucault's (1979) term) that trains female bodies in the knowledge of their limits and possibilities. Denying oneself food becomes the central micro-practice in the education of feminine self-restraint and containment of impulse" (Bordo 2003: 130). Body management behaviours, such as controlling one's food intake, are therefore aimed at producing docile, disciplined female bodies. The fact that the ideal of female slenderness effectively disempowers women by keeping them in a state of perpetual self-surveillance begs the question: why do women continue to subscribe to an ideal that disempowers them? In terms of individual control, women derive a very real sense of personal power from body management behaviours such as dieting (Bartky 2003). On a micro-level they experience these behaviours as endowing them with a sense of mastery over their bodies. Within the discourse of diet, regulating and transcending the female appetite is

coded in terms of self-control and increased personal power (Bordo 2003; Malson 1998; Pienaar 2004).

The distinction between the symbolic value and practical reality of body management practices is important to note here (Bordo 2003). Foucault (1979) captures this distinction nicely by analysing the body from two complementary perspectives. Firstly, he identifies the ‘intelligible’ body, which refers to the symbolic value of the body. It encompasses our cultural conceptions and aesthetic representations of the body. Secondly, Foucault describes the ‘useful’ body which represents the practical reality of the body. The two perspectives are complementary in that the ‘intelligible’ body describes the *cultural symbolism* behind various representations of the body, while the ‘useful’ body emphasises the *praxis* required to attain the ‘intelligible’ body. When women describe dieting and similar practices of bodily discipline as empowering they are viewing these practices from the perspective of the ‘intelligible’ body, or in terms of their symbolic value. In so doing, they may obscure the perspective of the ‘useful’ body, from which it is clear that body management practices disempower women: “...the contemporary disciplines of diet and exercise...[reproduce] normative feminine practices of our culture which train the female body in docility while at the same time being *experienced* in terms of power and control” (Bordo 2003: 27).

Another reason why many Western women continue to subscribe to an ideal which disempowers them is because this ideal (and its associated body management practices) is integral to a woman’s identity (Bartky 2003). To manage her body so that it is “feminine”, by patriarchal standards, is vital to a woman’s sense of self, her sense of female identity. Resistance to the very practices which endow her with an essentially feminine, and therefore socially valued identity, may constitute an attack on a woman’s identity: “To have a body felt to be “feminine” – a body socially constructed through the appropriate practices – is in most cases crucial to a woman’s sense of self as female and, since persons currently can *be* only as male or female, to her sense of self as an existing individual” (Bartky 2003: 39). Not only do these practices constitute a woman’s identity, they also enable her to appear sexually desirable. Therefore, any attempt to resist such practices is potentially desexualising.

These are two explanations offered for the enduring appeal of the contemporary ideal of thinness amongst Western women. While this ideal may be highly valued in twenty-first

century Western society, it has not always been the physical ideal to which women have subscribed. In order to provide a historical context for the current preoccupation with slenderness, section 2.2.1.4 briefly reviews the progressive civilising of the body, particularly the female body in Western history. But before I review this, I describe two psychosomatic pathologies of the body, anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa as these relate to the contemporary preoccupation with female slimness.

2.2.1.3 Psychosomatic pathologies of the body

Having discussed some of the possible factors which reproduce body dissatisfaction, I now describe two psychosomatic pathologies, namely anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa, both of which develop partly as a result of high levels of body dissatisfaction and a poor body image (Hepworth 1999; Malson 1998). Since this study does not focus specifically on pathologies of the body, but rather on the ideal body more generally, this review of the pathological body practices associated with anorexia and bulimia is necessarily brief. For a more comprehensive discussion of the social psychology of eating disorders, readers can refer to Bordo (2003: 165–182), Hepworth (1999) and Malson (1998).

According to definitions within Western medicine (often referred to as the biomedical model), anorexia nervosa is a typically female psychosomatic pathology, where the sufferer refuses to maintain a ‘normal’ body weight (their body weight is at least 15% lower than the normal range for their height), obsessively fears gaining weight and so reduces their food intake or exercises extensively to lose perceived excess weight (Hepworth 1999; Malson 1998; World Health Organisation Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health 2003). A person diagnosed as anorexic may also appear undernourished and emaciated. In addition to these symptoms, the anorexic suffers from a distorted body image in which she experiences her body as much fatter than it is according to objective measurements, such as body mass indices (Hepworth 1999; Malson 1998).

Given the prevalence of eating disorders amongst Western women (Malson 1998), feminist research on anorexia in particular has argued that the anorexic body is a cultural text which makes a powerful statement about gender and femininity (Bordo 2003; Malson 1998). According to Bordo’s (2003) explanation, the anorexic woman’s body is an emblem of the twenty-first century, inscribed with the standardised ideal of contemporary femininity. Following the complementary ethics of nurturer/nurturant and control/indulgence (cf. 2.2.1.2), the ideal woman should serve as an emotional and physical nurturer to others and

should control her own bodily desires, including her eating habits. The anorexic realises these ideals on the cultural text that is her body through her absolute denial of bodily hunger: “this is the most concrete expression of the general rule governing the construction of femininity: that female hunger – for public power, for independence, for sexual gratification – be contained, and the public space that women be allowed to take up circumscribed, limited” (Bordo 2003: 171). Paradoxically though, and in terms of a critical feminist perspective, anorexia nervosa is at the same time an embodied form of protest against Western society’s ideals of femininity: “Through embodied rather than deliberate demonstration she exposes and indicts those ideals, precisely by pursuing them to the point at which their destructive potential is revealed for all to see” (Bordo 2003: 176). However, it must be emphasised that this form of protest is unconscious and counterproductive as it manifests itself in a disorder. The protest itself is undermined because the anorectic capitulates to the pathological behaviour which governs her life (Malson 1998; Turner 1984).

Bulimia nervosa is a related psychosomatic disorder, often accompanied by symptoms of anorexia nervosa, in which the individual engages in periods of overeating followed by attempts to purge the body of the excess food either through vomiting, use of laxatives, excessive exercising or dietary fasting (Lawrence 1987; Malson 1998). Like anorexia nervosa, bulimia has a complex causation in the family, society and individual psychic conflicts (Hepworth 1996). A socio-cultural explanation of bulimia nervosa views it as an embodied response to the asceticism/consumption dialectic of consumer capitalism (Bordo 2003). Bulimics inscribe the tension of this dialectic on the cultural text that is their bodies by vacillating dangerously between the two extremes of overindulgence and sublimation in a daily spiral of bingeing and purging.

2.2.1.4 The production of civilised bodies

Western societies make the distinction between ‘civilised’ bodies and ‘grotesque’ or ‘uncivilised’ bodies (Lupton 1996; Shilling 2003). This distinction parallels the dualism of rationality/irrationality: the ‘civilised’ body symbolises self-control and rationality and conversely, the ‘uncivilised’ body represents the attributes of self-indulgence and irrationality (Lupton 1996). In these terms then, the civilising process of Western society is constituted in part by the increasing valorisation of the management of emotional expression (Elias 1982 in Lupton 1996; Shilling 2003). Therefore, to describe a society as ‘civilised’ does not, as in the lay sense, entail a value judgment of the merits of different societies (Shilling 2003). Rather, ‘civilised’ refers, in sociological terms, to the set of processes which

result in the emergence of a refined, restrained, reflexive society. By this I do not mean to imply that contemporary Western society is repressive and Victorian in nature. On the contrary, the asceticism entailed by the development of self-restraint and self-discipline is constantly balanced out by the opposing ethic of consumption. This ethic privileges the indulgence of one's bodily desires over sublimation of these desires (Bordo 2003; Lupton 1996). Modern capitalist discourses exploit a belief in consumption by encouraging consumers to capitulate to indulgence and to their desire for immediate gratification. So the modern consumer is bombarded by these contradictory injunctions to indulge in all the commodities available and somehow to suppress the desire to indulge by exercising self-control.

The development of so-called 'civilised' Western society from the sixteenth century onwards in Europe essentially entailed the development of a sense of self (Lupton 1996). Linked to this awareness of self, was a progressive reflexivity and rationalisation of the body (ibid). Rationalisation refers to the process by which the body displays the self-control to internalise spontaneous bodily or emotional impulses (Shilling 2003). The internalisation of desires and impulses relates to the way in which power is exercised over the body in contemporary Western society (Foucault 1979; Bordo 2003; Mennell 1991). The German sociologist, Elias (1982 cited in Mennell 1991) distinguishes between two types of control of the body, namely external control (*fremdzwang*) and internal control (*selbstzwang*). In medieval and early modern Europe, control of the body was issued by external decree (*fremdzwang*) in the form of Church, state and medical regulations (Mennell 1991). The civilising of the body has involved the development of *self-control* (*selbstzwang*) so that individuals no longer need external sources to regulate their body practices (Foucault 1979; Mennell 1991). In terms of the practice of eating, the 'civilising of the appetite' has required that modern Western society internalise the controls embodied by the early eating rules of the State, the Church and doctors. The shift from external to internal control of the body is evident in modern discourses which construct the body as a site of social control. It is a body which is disciplined, not through external means of restraint but through self-regulation: "there is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his (sic) own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against himself" (Foucault 1979: 138).

The self-regulatory element described above implies not only that a woman must view her

body as an object in need of regulation, but also that in disciplining her body she must adopt the perspective of the archetypal male: “In contemporary patriarchal culture, a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the consciousness of most women: they stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgement. Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal Other” (Bartky cited in Weitz 2003: 34). Since many female beauty practices such as dieting and exercise are aimed at increasing a woman’s sense of heterosexual desirability, it follows that the adoption of the male gaze affords a woman the best perspective from which to evaluate her body in terms of its sexual attractiveness. As the reader will see, one of the prominent features of the body talk extracts is the participants’ recurring references to the male gaze where they judge a woman’s attractiveness from the perspective of the average heterosexual male (cf. 4.2.4). Thus, the use of the term *male gaze* here is consonant with Laura Mulvey’s (1975) original use of the term to describe the gendered roles of male spectator and female sexual object on which classic Hollywood cinema relies i.e. it implies that men traditionally adopt the role of spectator, gazing at and appraising women as erotic objects. References to the male gaze derive undoubtedly from a heteronormative perspective, where it is assumed that all women want to appear desirable to men (Jaworski 2003). While I am not suggesting that the sole reason women manage their appearance is to appear desirable to men, I do believe that many of the ritualistic female body management practices are based on a heterosexual ideal of femininity and are thus aimed at enhancing a woman’s sexual desirability to attract members of the opposite sex. The adoption of the male gaze functions as another disciplinary practice of the female body which ensures women’s continued adherence to a homogenising, elusive ideal of femininity (Bordo 2003).

2.2.1.5 The postmodern body

While the civilising of the body is a key factor in the development of the contemporary ideal of female slenderness, I believe that it constitutes only one historical influence on the current female physical ideal. The continuing appeal of female thinness owes its existence in large part, I believe, to the emergence of postmodernist ideologies (Davis 1997). In what follows I describe how postmodern readings of the body have been adopted and reproduced in consumer culture, in order to sustain the ideal of female thinness.

Before describing the links between postmodernism and contemporary body management practices, I wish to clarify the central differences between modernist and postmodernist perspectives on the body. Within the modernist paradigm, the body represents the one

constant form in a changing world (Davis 1997). It is the source of truth, the medium through which we view an objective reality (ibid). The traditional metaphor used to describe the modernist body is the machine (Turner 1982). This was the metaphor used to characterise the body when the first theories of diet emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It claims that the body is a system of parts, which functions mechanistically, such that “the input and output requirements... can be precisely quantified mathematically” (Turner 1982: 182). According to the machine metaphor and the progressive civilisation of the body each part of the body, like cogs in a machine, can be controlled (Shilling 2003; Turner 1982). As a reaction against the mechanistic, fallible modern body, postmodernism conceives of a limitless, transcendent body, a body which shifts to reveal an endless multiplicity of realities, rather than one objective reality (Davis 1997). Contemporary medical science has enabled not only the control of the related parts of the body as envisaged in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, but also the radical reconfiguration of the body (Bordo 2003). Such a reconfiguration was not considered possible within the modernist view of the body as unchangeable, so not only have we “technically and technologically realized that conception [the body as machine], it can also be argued that we have metaphysically deconstructed it” (Bordo 2003: 245).

The metaphor which perhaps best describes the postmodern body is the *cyborg*. This term is a portmanteau of ‘cybernetic organism’, meaning a bionic person “whose body has been taken over in whole or in part by electromechanical devices” (Wordnet Princeton University Cognitive Science Laboratory 2006: n.p.). Like a cyborg, the postmodern body is fragmented and constantly changing: “...[a body of] indeterminate sex and changeable gender...who continually alters his/her body, creates and recreates a personality...[and] floats across time” (Smith-Rosenburg 1985, cited in Bordo 2003: 228). Encoded in the metaphor of the postmodern cyborgian body are the notions of continual transformation and indeterminacy, both of which are central to appropriations of the postmodern body within the discourse of consumer culture (Bordo 2003). In contemporary consumer culture, where there is a fixation with consumption, glamour and transformation, the body has become a vehicle of self-expression which can be transformed at will to fit in with the individual’s constantly changing identities (Davis 1997). Contemporary discourse on the body is therefore postmodern in its ideals (Bordo 2003). For example, this discourse highlights the plasticity of the postmodern body, how open it is to deconstruction and reconstruction. We need only to imagine the possibilities and they can become a reality – or at least that is what the discourse tells us.

The ideal of the postmodern body as cultural plastic has been exploited by popular culture to promote various means of body transformation for women, such as weight-loss and cosmetic surgery. For example, in popular magazines the rhetoric of individual choice and self-determination is used to promote the modification of the female body through weight-loss (Pienaar 2004). According to this discourse, a woman who diets to lose weight is doing so because she has made the ‘choice’ to improve herself by transforming her ‘deficient’, overweight body into a ‘flawless’, thin body. In fact, the ‘choice’ to subscribe to this ideal is circumscribed by what counts as a socially acceptable body (Bordo 2003; Davis 1997). So-called ‘liberatory’ practices, such as dieting, function in practice to discipline and limit the female body by constructing it as perpetually inadequate and in need of transformation (ibid).

2.2.2 Theories of the body in philosophy

2.2.2.1 Butler: Discourse, gender and performativity

Since this study investigates the discursive construction of one aspect of gender identity, namely the female physical ideal, I draw on the work of philosopher Judith Butler (1993; 1997; 1999; 2004) to conceptualise the relationship between discourse and identity. This brief review of Butler’s work is an attempt to explain her formulations in simple terms, as I have understood them to be relevant to my study. I refer readers to Salih (2002) or Butler’s (1993; 1999) work for a more comprehensive, theoretical discussion of gender performativity.

Butler bases her studies of identity on the following key premise: identities are not fixed and determinate (Butler & Salih 2004; Salih 2002). Moreover, she believes that identities do not originate somewhere, nor are they ever fully realised (Butler & Salih 2004). They are in a constant state of flux and are therefore continually being constructed and reconstructed. To capture the instability of identities, Butler (1986; 1993) terms the individual a “subject-in-process” who is constantly “doing” their identity in a sequence of reiterative acts. This represents a *genealogical* approach to the study of identity, one which is concerned with the processes by which the individual assumes various identities, rather than with the possible origins of these identities (Butler 1993; Butler & Salih 2004).

More specifically, Butler’s subject is constructed in discourse and thus the subject is the *effect* of the discourse that constitutes it: “There is no ‘I’ outside language since identity is a

signifying practice, and culturally intelligible subjects are the effects, rather than the causes of discourses that conceal their workings” (Salih 2002: 64). In other words, the *expression* of one’s identity is indistinguishable from its *construction* in discourse (Butler 1993; Butler & Salih 2004). Discourse in this sense refers not to individual utterances or speech acts, but to “large groups of statements governing the way we speak about and perceive a specific historical event or moment” (Salih 2002: 47). Butler’s concern is therefore to describe what she terms, “the performativity of identity”, the processes by which an identity is constructed or performed in discourse (Salih 2002).

The above explanation of the relationship between identity, discourse and the performativity of identity attributes constitutive power to discourse (Butler & Salih 2004; Salih 2002). Put simply, when we name something we call it into being, we “constitute the subject in the act of naming it” (Butler & Salih 2004: 7). This conception of the power of naming derives in part from Austin’s Theory of Performatives (1962). This theory posits that various types of speech acts effect changes on the world, that we ‘do’ things with language (Austin 1962, cited in Butler 1993; 1994). According to Butler’s (1993; 1997) appropriation of the theory of performatives within her work on identity, language acts on us by constituting our identities: “Language sustains the body not by bringing it into being or feeding it in a literal way; rather it is by being interpellated within the terms of language that a certain social existence of the body first becomes possible” (Butler 1997: 5, cf. 1.7.2 for a definition of *interpellation*). The power of language to constitute the subject derives from the reiterative process of naming. The act of naming is not a single constitutive act; rather, the initial name is reiterated over time, reinforcing the subject’s identity (Butler 1993; Butler & Salih 2004). Butler and Salih (2004: 7) use the analogy of the birth of a baby girl to describe how gender identity is reiterated through the repetition of the identity category, “girl”: “The “girling” of the girl does not happen once, but the initial interpellation is reiterated over time so that the “naturalized effect” of sex and gender is reinforced and/or contested”.

Much of Butler’s (1986; 1993; 1999) work on identity focusses on the construction of gender identity within a heterosexual matrix of power. She claims that we “do” our gender identities in different ways at different times, making it possible to resist traditional gender dualisms, such as male/female, gay/straight and masculine/feminine (Butler 1999). I have appropriated Butler’s notion of gender performativity to explain how identities are constructed in conversation. I believe that the notion of gender performativity can be applied to other identity categories, such as race and sexuality, and that one of the ways in which identity is

performed is through talk. When we have conversations, we are not only expressing our identities, we are actively constituting them. When a woman describes herself in conversation as, for example, elegant, she is not merely expressing her perception of herself, she is interpreting and appropriating one aspect of the cultural conception of femininity and, in so doing, constituting her ‘feminine’ identity (cf. 1.7.2, 5.5, 6.4).

2.2.2.2 Foucault: Discourse, power and the body

Foucault, like Butler, emphasises the role of discourse in constituting the body (Foucault 1972; 1979). In fact, Butler draws heavily on Foucault’s theory of the relationship between discourse and the body to explain how we enact our identities in discourse (Butler & Salih 2004, Salih 2002). Apart from elucidating the relationship between discourse and the body, Foucault’s analysis shows how power is implicated in this relationship at the micro-level of the individual body (Foucault 1979; Shilling 2003).

Foucault views the body as an object that is produced and governed by discourse. Discourse in a Foucauldian sense, consists of social ‘practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak’ (Foucault 1972: 49). Thus, discourse does not simply describe or reflect an objective body but rather, as a social practice, discourse constitutes the body (cf. 1.7.2). All objects of our social reality ‘come into being’ in discourse since discourse “finds a way of limiting its domain, of defining what it is talking about, of giving it the status of an object – and therefore of making it manifest, nameable and describable” (Foucault 1972: 41). Operating as it does on the principles of exclusion and choice, discourse inevitably constructs and reproduces a selective view of reality (Foucault 1971). According to this conception of the relationship between social objects and discourse, the body is conceived of as a causal effect of discourse, rather than as an active corporeal entity (Foucault 1975, 1979, Shilling 2003). The body is a *tabula rasa*, on which discursive systems of power act (Shilling 2003).

In Foucault’s analysis of the punitive, disciplinary systems of the eighteenth century prison, the mental asylum and the school, the body is described as a direct locus of social control (Foucault 1975; 1978; 1979). In these systems, power was exercised meticulously over the body by external societal sources and their related discourses, which prescribed and policed the individual’s body management behaviours (Foucault 1975; 1979). These institutionalised disciplinary systems began to change in the twentieth century with the internalisation of power so that the individual began to act as his/her own overseer, exercising power from

below (ibid). Foucault (1975: 58) views the development of self-surveillance and individual control of the body as a counter-effect of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' punitive system of discipline and normalisation (in the form of prisons, school regimes and mental hospitals):

From the eighteenth to the early twentieth century I think it was believed that the investment of the body by power had to be heavy, ponderous, meticulous and constant... And then starting in the 1960's, it began to be realised that such a cumbersome form of power was no longer indispensable as had been thought and that industrial societies could content themselves with a much looser form of power over the body.

Foucault is concerned with the 'micro-physics of power' on the body, the way in which power is distributed in discourse through "a multiplicity of minor processes of domination", which function to discipline and regulate the body (Foucault 1979: 138). As mentioned in the discussion of the difference between internal control and external control (cf. 2.2.1.4), modern power is not sustained from above, through sovereign decrees which repress and destroy their subjects. Rather it works from below and is constitutive: it seeks to generate forces, ordering them and making them proliferate. An analysis of power/control of the "docile" female body from Foucault's (1979; 1980; 1988) and Elias' (1982, cited in Mennell 1991) perspective must therefore look at how power is sustained, not through physical restraint, but through the more insidious and self-sustaining normalising mechanisms of *self-discipline* and *self-control*, which ensure that each woman becomes her own overseer, exercising power from below (Bordo 2003; Davis 1997).

A criticism of Foucault's theory is that, by attributing so much power to discourse, it tends towards discursive essentialism (Shilling 2003). According to this criticism, Foucault obscures the *dialectic* relationship between discourse and the body since he focusses on how discourse shapes the body but not on how the body reacts to and sometimes resists discourse: "The body is affected by discourse, but we get little sense of the body reacting back and affecting discourse. Even when Foucault makes the occasional reference to the body putting up resistances to power and dominant discourses, he cannot say what it is about the body that resists" (Shilling 2003: 71). In contrast to the Foucauldian view, a neo-Marxist perspective on the relationship between discourse and the body would view the body as having an undeniable materiality and agency, which is independent of discourse (Fairclough 1989; 1992). However, the neo-Marxist perspective acknowledges that the body is always mediated through discourse, that we only know the body through discourse (Fairclough 1989). This study of female body talk, although it draws on the work of Butler and Foucault,

adopts a neo-Marxist view of the relationship between discourse and the body: yes, the body is constituted in part through discourse, but it has the power and agency to shape discourse too.

Despite the critique of Foucault's (1975; 1979) work, his analysis of the relationship between the body and discourse has enabled me to conceptualise female physical identity and related body management practices as being produced in discourse. Since my study is linguistic, it is useful to understand how discourse shapes the body and, in turn, the subject's physical identity. While I believe that the body is not reducible to discourse, I view the body as constituted and lived, *in part*, within the matrices of discourse. My study seeks to identify the discourses which constrain the ways in which a woman constructs the notion of the ideal body in conversation (cf. 4.1).

2.3 Discourse and the construction of identity

2.3.1 The nature of identity

Before reviewing the literature on the discursive construction of identity, I wish to define the term *identity* and to outline my theoretical assumptions about the nature of identity as it relates to the body. I use the term *identity* to refer essentially to a person's sense of self and this includes their perceptions of what makes them similar to and different from other people (Lawrence 1987). An important aspect of identity is that it is relational: an individual's identity is constructed in relation to (and often in opposition to) the Other, a person or group that is perceived as different to the individual (De Cilia, Reisigl & Wodak 1999; Edley & Wetherell 1997; Scott 2002). So the othering of out-group members, based on perceived differences, is an important part of identity construction, as many studies show (see for example, Wetherell & Potter 1992; De Cilia 1999; Jaworski 2003). Benhabib (1996, cited in De Cilia *et al.* 1999: 154) eloquently captures the relational aspect of identity: "Since every search for identity includes differentiating oneself from what one is not, identity politics is always and necessarily a politics of the creation of difference. One is a Bosnian Serb to the degree to which one is not a Bosnian Moslem or a Croat".

The popular conception of identity as stable and fixed is an essentialising one which obscures the possibility of reinventing identity across social contexts (O'Flynn 2005). Many early sociolinguistic studies espoused a similar conception of identity: "Historically, sociolinguistic studies have tended to view identity monolithically, often assuming a one-to-one relationship between language use and membership in some identity category (usually

based on class, race, or sex). Speakers were “allowed” only a single identity that was typically mapped onto a particular identity category” (Barrett 1999: 317). Barrett (1999) cites, amongst others, Labov’s (1972) sociolinguistic study of inner city Afro-American youth identity as evidence for this claim. According to Labov (1972), members of the community who did not fit adequately into the youth subculture were labelled ‘lames’, indexing their failed identity. Thus, Labov’s (1972) study misrepresented Afro-American identity as consisting of two dichotomous identities: the true identity and the failed identity.

In contrast, this study conceives of identity as inherently unstable, incoherent and dynamic (De Cilia *et al.* 1999; Lawrence 1987). I believe that identities are constantly being negotiated and re-negotiated in light of new information in the discursive setting: “...we treat selves as being *accomplished* in the course of social interactions, reconstructed from moment to moment within specific discursive and rhetorical contexts and *distributed* across social contexts” (Edley & Wetherell 1997: 205). This is not to suggest that there is no continuity to identity, that it is schizophrenically constructed from scratch every time a person speaks or acts. Rather, this conception of identity, while it emphasises the fluidity and flexibility of identity, also acknowledges its continuity, a continuity derived from past discursive practices:

Identity – who one is and what one is like – is established through discursive acts...identity and forms of subjectivity which become instantiated in discourse at any given moment should be seen as a sedimentation of past discursive practices. A sense of identity and subjectivity is constructed from the interpretative resources – the stories and narratives of identity – which are available, in circulation, in our culture” (Wetherell & Potter 1992: 78).

This quotation additionally implies that identity (and its construction in discourse) is constrained by a limited set of culturally available discourses.

The section which follows reviews the literature on the discursive construction of identity, focussing particularly on the principal analytic concepts which underpin the study of ‘identity texts’. It describes part of the theoretical framework on which this study draws to analyse the discourse of body talk.

2.3.2 The study of identity in discourse

2.3.2.1 Discursive psychology and identity

There is a wealth of literature on discourse and identity within the discipline of discursive psychology (see for example, Harré & Stearns 1995; Spitzack 1988; Tulloch & Tulloch

2003; Wetherell & Potter 1992). With some exceptions (for example, Wetherell & Potter 1992), the aim of discursive psychology is to analyse the psychological processes and effects of discourse, rather than the ideologies which underpin discourse (De Cilia *et al.* 1999; Harré & Stearns 1995). This study, by contrast, investigates the linguistic *resources* used to reproduce or challenge a particular ideology, as it is instantiated in discourse. One of the primary analytic tools which discursive psychologists use to analyse discourse is the interpretative repertoire. In their study on how a section of New Zealand society reproduces racist discourse, Wetherell and Potter (1992: 90) define ‘interpretative repertoire’ as: “...broadly discernable clusters of terms, descriptions and figures of speech often assembled around metaphors or vivid images...we can talk of these things as systems of signification and as the building blocks used for manufacturing versions of actions, self and social structures in talk”. I believe this corresponds broadly to what other theorists have labelled discursive themes or categories (De Cilia *et al.* 1999) or simply discourses (Coates 1999; Gwyn 2003; O’Flynn 2005; Sunderland 2004). Studies such as those mentioned above essentially analyse identity texts at the macro level in terms of how the general content of a text encodes a particular representation of reality. While research which uses interpretative repertoires as the analytic tool is revealing, it differs from this study in that it does not focus on micro-level linguistic features of identity texts, such as the use of specific discourse markers, intertextual references and lexical sets to construct a particular ideology.

Studies in discursive psychology follow the Foucauldian view of discourse as a system of meaning comprising a coherent set of values, behaviour and related subject positions (Coupland & Gwyn 2003). Theorists within discursive psychology emphasise how discourse, far from being an abstract theoretical phenomenon, is a form of social practice which acts in a normative way to regulate behaviour by constructing certain values, claims and worldviews as acceptable and others as unacceptable (Coupland & Gwyn 2003; Wetherell & Potter 1992). This study adopts a narrower focus in analysing one aspect of discourse, namely the sets of *linguistic* structures which underpin and reproduce a particular ideology. Nonetheless it shares a similar aim with that of discursive psychology, namely to analyse discourse as it is instantiated in actual linguistic performances.

2.3.2.2 Conversation analysis and identity

In contrast to CDA’s focus on ideology, Conversation Analysis (CA) examines the interactional details of a conversation, such as turn-taking, conversational implicatures and speaker roles (Sunderland 2004). Studies on the construction of identity which use a CA

approach typically examine the strategies participants use to position themselves in the interaction (see for example, Liang 1999; Mendoza-Denton 1999; Stockoe 1998; Tannen 1999). I will not be using the methods of CA to analyse the construction of female physical identity since research on identity within a CA context is interested in *how* various identities are enacted in a text, rather than *what* these identities mean in light of the broader social context (Sunderland 2004). This study, by contrast, is concerned with the content of conversation, specifically the ideologies which underpin the discussions around the female body. For this reason, it was felt that the use of CDA would better serve the aims of the study. Where I have referred to features of CA in the data, such as overlapping speech and latched utterances, it has been to supplement my analysis of the *ideology(ies)* encoded in a particular discourse (cf. 3.3.2.3 for more detail on the interactional conventions).

2.3.2.3 Ethnography and identity

One of the significant features of the body talk conversations is the young women's attention to the multiple, intersecting categories of difference which are constitutive of a woman's identity, particularly her sense of her embodied self. These categories of difference include gender (specifically performing a 'feminine' identity), sexuality, ethnicity and age. In my explanation of extracts one and three, I explore the young women's conception of the relationship between external appearance and internal character (cf. 5.4.3). Their conception of body-shaping activities such as plastic surgery is that such activities effect changes at the level of identity. Evident in their construction of the relationship between the body and identity is an awareness of the intersecting categories of difference which constitute identity. What I particularly like about the ethnographic and the anthropological approaches to the study of identity is that, like the participants in this study, they pay attention to the multiple factors which intersect in the discursive construction of identity (Barrett 1999).

For example, in a study on linguistic stance-taking in the conversations of Latina adolescents Mendoza-Denton (1999), analyses how the variables of class, nationality and dialect (urban versus rural) influence the social dynamics of the conversation. She focusses specifically on discourse markers of affiliation and disaffiliation, showing how these "index particular regional, class, or national identifications" (Mendoza-Denton 1999: 273). In a similar ethnographic study of adolescent communities of practice, Eckert (2005) describes how adolescent speech exhibits linguistic innovation and how it is constitutive, not only of identity, but of the adolescent social order. She looks specifically at the linguistic resources used to establish categories and group boundaries, i.e. how language encodes a group's

distinctive identity. While an analysis of the linguistic markers of identity is not in itself innovative, Eckert's (2005) discussion of the ways in which adolescents signal their group identity and delineate group boundaries is. She shows how the different dimensions of identity, such as gender, class, age, subcultural affiliations and race intersect. I believe her analysis is marked by a sensitivity to the nuanced contextual factors which influence the identity texts she examines. While attention to contextual detail outside of the text is typical of ethnographic and anthropological accounts of language and gender, I believe it can be usefully applied to a linguistic study such as this. In order to develop a richly contextualised account of women's 'body talk', this study refers to contextual factors such as the participants' appearance and the school ethos which shape their constructions of the ideal body (cf. 3.2.2., 4.2.1, 4.3.1, 4.4.1).

2.3.3 Discourse as heteroglossic, inconsistent and fragmented

A significant theme in studies on discourse and identity is the heteroglossic nature of discourse (Fairclough 2003). I mentioned this briefly in my discussion of identity as dynamic and unstable (cf. 2.3.1) but it is a topic which bears further examination. Discourses are heteroglossic in the sense that they contain traces of other discourses, or in the words of Bakhtin (1981) 'multiple voices' (cf. 1.7.1). This means that a given discourse is not isolated and independent but is always related to other discourses: "any utterance is a link in a very complex organized chain of other utterances" (Bakhtin 1986, cited in Fairclough 2003: 42). The relations between discourses are realised in part through intertextual links and knowledge that is presumed as shared by the producer and interpreter (cf. 3.3.3.2). A piece of discourse as it is realised in a text may enter into dialogue with another text by taking issue with or endorsing the latter's ideology.

Moreover, discourses are not consistent sets of beliefs and values which derive from one coherent model of the world (O'Flynn 2005; Wetherell & Potter 1992; Wetherell 1996). Rather, as practices which are both constitutive and reflective of the social world, they are fragmented and contradictory: "When we examine the argumentative patterns in ordinary discourse we do not find...the neat organization which might be expected from a person working from a consistent set of beliefs and attitudes or a single model of the world. Rather, what we see is a fragmentation" (Wetherell & Potter 1992: 92). The variations and inconsistencies within discourses are crucial to their operation in shaping social practices. So when a discourse is instantiated in, for example, a policy statement or a newspaper article, the tensions and inconsistencies which the discourse contains are reflective of the complex

social landscape in which it operates (Wetherell & Potter 1992; Wetherell 1996).

Rather than gloss over the incoherencies within a discourse for the sake of presenting a theoretically elegant account, some studies attempt to explain the conflicting subject positions which people take up in representing reality through discourse (see for example Barrett 1999, on the construction of a polyphonous drag queen identity; Edley and Wetherell 1997, on the construction of counter-hegemonic masculinities and Wetherell 1996, on shifting ideological repertoires in young women's conversations). One such study on how the concepts of race, culture and nation are constructed in order to legitimate racist practices against Maori New Zealanders shows how patterns of argumentation in everyday discourse are heterogeneous and inconsistent (Wetherell & Potter 1992). In the discourse of nationhood the Maori people occupy an ambivalent position: they are both included and excluded by this discourse. In accounts of New Zealand's role in World War Two in which the Maoris fought for Britain, the Maori people are granted partial membership as New Zealand nationals. However, their status as New Zealand nationals is merely iconographic and so they are, in effect, excluded by the discourse of New Zealand nationhood. This layered account of the inconsistencies within discourses of race, culture and nation is reflective of the incoherencies of social life in New Zealand in which the Maoris occupy an ambivalent position in relation to New Zealand national identity (*ibid*).

In a study of femininity in the conversations of teenage girls, Coates (1999) presents a diachronic perspective on how girls' communicative practices shift in the direction of adult norms as they negotiate their changing identities. She identifies different discourses of femininity, such as discourses of resistance and self-disclosure, and shows how each offers a different way of 'doing' or performing femininity: "Even in these short extracts we can see instances in which the discourses come into conflict...Different discourses give these girls access to different femininities. More mainstream discourses position them in more conventional ways, whereas more radical or subversive discourses offer them alternative ways of being, alternative ways of doing femininity" (Coates 1999: 129). Since the girls' notions of femininity are precarious and contradictory, they experiment with a range of subject positions and discursive practices to construct their gendered identity. Drawing on the insights from studies such as these, this study aims to account for the multiple discourses on which the women draw to construct their notions of the ideal female body and femininity.

2.3.4 The discursive construction of the ideal body

Two studies in the area of discourse and identity, which bear striking similarities to mine, focus on the discursive construction of the ideal body in women's conversations (Spitzack 1988; Wetherell 1996). Spitzack's (1988) article on weight-loss and female identity analyses the discourses of body management featured in young women's statements about themselves. However, the analysis does not rely closely on the data in the sense that the author makes few references to excerpts from her interviews with women. Instead, it analyses other textual sources like "before and after" pictures in magazines, beauty programs and pro-diet discourse featured in magazines. While these are all undoubtedly forces which influence a woman's physical identity, none of these forces are identified (directly or indirectly) by the women in the interviews. Spitzack (1988) uses conversational the data as a peripheral source to justify her claims about the politics of weight-loss and the female body. My study, by contrast, is data-driven and aims to provide a *linguistic* analysis of the ideological basis of the current female body ideal as reflected in the conversations of a group of young Western women.

An analysis of discourses of the body (or in her terms 'ideological repertoires' of the body) forms the basis of Wetherell's (1996) study of the ways in which a group of British teenagers negotiates their identities in response to the conflicting societal messages about female fatness. Drawing on a sample of in-depth interviews with white, mostly middle-class, British adolescents, Wetherell (1996) shows how young women adopt different subject positions in response to contemporary ideologies of the ideal female body shape.

What I found most valuable in Wetherell's (1996) study was her attention to how ideological positions are inherently unstable and dynamic. She describes how participants in a conversation about the female physical ideal re-negotiate and sometimes contradict their previously constructed ideological positions. This is a normal part of conversation and is evidence of the fact that interactional factors, such as shifting topic and the relationship between participants, shape the construction of identity within one piece of discourse (Wetherell 1996). This results in a series of dynamic, incoherent and fragile identities being constructed within a conversation.

Wetherell (1996) identifies three discourses of the female body ideal, namely the individualist discourse, the personological discourse and the discourse of the 'natural' body. The individualist discourse, as its name suggests, emphasise that women are autonomous and

can resist social pressure to conform to the ideal of thinness. By contrast, the personological discourse highlights the effect of social pressure (in this case the pressure to be thin) on adolescent girls. Wetherell argues that, in this discourse, social pressure dominates over individual autonomy. In order to resolve the dilemma between the social pressure to conform and the individual's autonomy, the young women in Wetherell's (1996) study frequently draw on a discourse of the 'natural woman', a discourse which presents the decision to diet as a completely autonomous one, made in response to the individual's desire to have a 'healthy', 'natural' body.

The repertoire of the 'natural woman' is one which is often employed in magazines to promote thinness. It emphasises the health benefits of thinness over the cosmetic benefits (Pienaar 2004). It is part of a discourse which mystifies thinness by presenting it as a 'natural', biological imperative, rather than the cultural imperative it really is:

In this discourse thinness does not become a social or cultural imperative but is represented as an obvious value in itself, an unquestioned standard which is difficult and dangerous to think about, criticize or deconstruct because to do so contradicts a dominant repertoire in which the subject is constituted as a free agent in control of her life, contrasted with others who are victims of mere social pressure" (Wetherell 1996: 40).

By naturalising dieting in this way, this discourse both mystifies and entrenches the ideal of thinness. In terms of the integration of health concerns with the desire to be thin, my explanation of the body talk discourses in this study argues that the discourse of health has been colonised by the discourse of diet to legitimate dieting as a means of improving health (cf. 5.4.2). Wetherell's (1996) study was illuminating in this regard as it helped me to understand the relationship between body management discourses and, more specifically, how one discourse can be used in the service of another to reproduce the dominance of the ideal of thinness.

2.4 The Theory of Critical Discourse Analysis

I used the theoretical framework and related methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA hereafter) to analyse the body talk conversations. CDA is based largely on the work of Fairclough (1989; 1992; 2001), and it aims to explain how a piece of discourse enacts power relations and ideological processes of which people are largely unaware. With its focus on discourse, dominance, social relations and power, CDA might alternatively be termed "*sociopolitical* discourse analysis", a form of analysis which seeks to reveal the role of discourse in the reproduction of unequal power relations in a society (van Dijk 1993: 105, emphasis mine). CDA will be used to answer both research questions, the first of which

focusses on the ideologies which inform the discursive construction of the female body ideal and the second of which investigates my role (as the researcher) in shaping the participants' constructions of female beauty (cf. 1.2).

2.4.1 An overview of Critical Linguistics

CDA developed out of a particular model of language, namely Critical Linguistics or Critical Language Study (CLS) (Hodge & Kress 1988; Fairclough 1989; Mills 1995). Critical refers here to the study of texts from an openly political standpoint, to reveal how a given text reproduces or challenges existing social, historical and cultural conditions: "Critical linguistics is a theory of language whose aim [is] to provide an illuminating account of verbal language as a social phenomenon, especially for the use of critical theorists...who [wish] to explore social and political forces and processes as they act through and on texts and forms of discourse" (Hodge & Kress 1988: vii). As this quotation illustrates, early Critical Linguistics viewed the relationship between language and social structures as one-way, where social structures shaped language, but not the other way round (Mills 1995). By contrast, contemporary Critical Linguistic studies (for example, Fowler 1991; Fairclough 1989; 2001; van Dijk 1993; Wodak 1997) have challenged this notion by emphasising the dialectic relationship between language and society: "As well as being determined by social structures, discourse has effects upon social structures and contributes to the achievement of social continuity or social change" (Fairclough 1989: 37).

Critical Linguistics' emphasis on the *dialectic* between language and society has necessitated the development of a particular model of textuality and meaning to account for this dialectic (Fairclough 1989; Fowler *et al.* 1979; Mills 1995). This model of the relationship between text and meaning attributes importance to both the production and interpretation processes of creating meaning in a text. Moreover, it emphasises that the producer's construction of the text and the interpreter's response to it are never purely individual processes, but are mediated by their respective social affiliations: "meaning does not simply reside in a text but is the result of a process of negotiations and a set of relations between the social system within which the text is produced and consumed, the writer and the reader" (Mills 1995: 10).

In terms of its place within mainstream linguistics, Critical Language Study (CLS), like sociolinguistics and pragmatics, investigates the interdependence of language and social context (Fairclough 2001). However, it differs from pragmatics in that it focusses on extended pieces of discourse, rather than on "single invented utterances" (Fairclough 1989: 10). In addition, where pragmatics assumes that most interactions occur between equals in a

spirit of cooperation, CLS emphasises the social struggles and inequalities realised in verbal interactions between interlocutors of unequal status. And, unlike conventional sociolinguistic study, whose aim is largely to *describe* the social constitution of language, Critical Linguistics aims to *explain* the role of discourse in sustaining or challenging a hierarchical social order (Fairclough 1989; Fowler *et al.* 1979; Mills 1995; Wodak 1997).

2.4.1.1 Discourse, power and ideology

Related to Critical Linguistics' view of language are several key tenets, concerning the nature of discourse and the relationship between discourse, power and ideology. In terms of Critical Linguistics' conception of *discourse*, Fairclough (1989) differentiates between *discourse* and *text*. He describes *text* as "a product of the process of text production" and uses the term to refer to both spoken and written pieces of language (Fairclough 1989: 24). *Discourse*, by comparison refers to the "*process* of social interaction of which the text is just a part" (Fairclough 1989: 24, emphasis mine). So while a *text* is what emerges out of the process of production, *discourse* is a broader term for the interaction between the processes of production and interpretation in terms of how these processes are conditioned by the social context. The definition of discourse on which I have relied in this study is: sets of socially conditioned semiotic systems which frame the way we perceive, represent and constitute reality (Foucault 1972, cf. 1.71). This study focusses on the *linguistic* aspects of discourse i.e. the use of language, as opposed to other semiotic systems, in the expression and constitution of reality (Fairclough 1989; Wodak 1997).

Thus, an analysis of *discourse* requires a genealogical approach which focusses on process rather than product, tracing the interaction between the processes of production and interpretation. Fairclough (1989: 24) conceives of the text as a *resource* in production and interpretation: "the formal properties of a text...[constitute] *traces* of the productive process...and *cues* in the process of interpretation". However, it is not only the formal textual properties which are involved in the processes of production and interpretation; people produce and interpret the textual features through a particular lens, representing the composite of their values, beliefs and assumptions. These sets of ideas about the natural and social world are termed "members' resources" (MR) and "they are cognitive in the sense that they are in peoples' heads, but they are social in the sense that they have social origins – they are socially generated...[they are] socially transmitted and, in our society, unequally distributed" (Fairclough 1989: 24).

Implied in the belief that discourse is socially generated is an assumption that language itself

is a form of social practice (cf. 2.2.2.2, 2.3.3). This means that language does not exist in a vacuum outside of society, but rather it exists within society since “social phenomena *are* (in part) linguistic phenomena” (Fairclough 1989: 23, emphasis original). Critical theorists emphasise that, as a social practice, discourse is not merely reflective of social processes, but is in fact constitutive of these processes (cf. 1.7.2). Hall (cited in Wetherell & Potter 1992: 63) eloquently describes the constitutive effect of discourse as a semiotic system which not only represents, but systematically maps and circumscribes our reality: “...how things are represented and the ‘machineries’ and regimes of representation in a culture do play a constitutive, and not merely a reflexive, after-the-event, role. This gives questions of culture and ideology, and the scenarios of representation – subjectivity, identity, politics – a formative, not merely an expressive, place in the constitution of social and political life”.

2.4.1.2 Marxist versus Foucauldian conceptions of power

It may be evident from the account of Critical Linguistics thus far that a key concern of CLS is the workings of power in and through language. In this regard, Fairclough (1989) devotes a chapter in his acclaimed work, *Language and Power*, to explaining how power is evident both *in* discourse and *behind* discourse. He discusses discourse as a site of social struggle, a means for achieving and maintaining power through the “naturalisation” of a dominant discourse by those in power (Fairclough 1989: 95, cf. 2.4.2.1). The idea that power is “held” and “maintained” by the dominant group in a society and wielded over the subordinate group(s) is a particularly Marxist view of power (Wetherell & Potter 1992). In what follows I compare the Marxist and Foucauldian conceptions of power and I explain the view of power I adopt in this study.

According to the Marxist view, power is something which is homogeneous and unitary (Wetherell & Potter 1992). It is also generally conceived within this paradigm as being located with specific people and social structures. It is in this sense that one can trace power to its particular origins (ibid). However, critical theorists do acknowledge that power is not always unilaterally exercised and that dominance is “jointly produced...when dominated groups are persuaded, by whatever means, that dominance is natural or otherwise legitimate” (van Dijk 1993: 250). While critical theorists acknowledge the role of the subordinated groups in the perpetuation of unequal power relations, the focus of critical theory is on the discursive strategies used by the *dominant* group to maintain their power (van Dijk 1993). Foucault, by contrast (1972; 1975; 1978; 1979) is less concerned with how a particular social group ‘holds’ power over another in a society than he is with the *nature* of power. He reconceptualises power, not as something which one group ‘holds’ and wields unilaterally

over another, but as a force which is dispersed and scattered over multiple locations, a force without origin or end. Thus, a Foucauldian study of power is concerned with the processes by which power shifts and mutates across the social landscape (Foucault 1972;1979).

My sense is that the repressive, limiting effects of power are rather overdetermined in Marxist analyses of power and discourse. By contrast, I have found Foucault's (1979) analysis of disciplinary power enlightening since it illustrates how power can have positive effects: "...power would be a fragile thing if its only function were to repress, if it worked only through the mode of censorship, exclusion, blockage and repression...If, on the contrary, power is strong this is because...it produces effects at the level of desire – and also at the level of knowledge" (Foucault 1975: 59). Existing research on the female physical ideal posits that one of the reasons women continue to subscribe to the ideal of thinness is because body management practices, such as dieting, endow them with a sense of personal power, which is crucial to their sense of identity (cf. 2.2.1.2). Wetherell and Potter (1992: 84) provide a neat summation of power as a productive force: "Power is not just a negative prohibition, but can be recognised when a subject willingly says 'yes' to some mode of behaviour, or sees this mode as particularly expressive of their real identity" (Wetherell & Potter 1992: 84).

Marxist studies of power and discourse focus on the macro-level of the state as the supreme agent of power. In a study such as this, a focus at the macro-level will facilitate an understanding of how patriarchal structures construct women's bodies in ways which effectively disempower them (Bordo 2003; Bartky 2003). By contrast, Foucauldian analyses are concerned with the *individual* as the effect of power, specifically with the processes by which the subject exercises power over herself through continual acts of self-surveillance (Bordo 2003; Foucault 1979; Wetherell & Potter 1992). This is of import to this study since I believe that the pervasiveness of the ideal of thinness resides at the level of the individual woman, exercising disciplinary power against her own body through *self*-correction to contemporary social norms (cf. 2.2.1.4). This study is concerned not only to identify the state structures through which power is exercised over the female body, but also to identify how power operates at the micro-level of the individual to ensure the sustainability of the ideal of female thinness (cf. 1.7.4).

2.4.2 A critical conception of ideology

Central to CDA is the concept of *ideology*, since discourse enacts and transmits ideological assumptions (cf. 1.7.1 for a definition of ideology). Language and ideology are related in that

language is the most common means through which we represent reality. This means that our experience of reality (and our related ideologies) is mediated through language (Trew, cited in Fowler *et al.* 1979). Ideology is often powerfully pervasive because it poses as common sense. In this way, ideology is constructed as an “implicit philosophy” (Gramsci 1971, cited in Fairclough 1989: 84), which needs no explanation and which is ‘natural’. Under the guise of common sense, ideology can be (mis)used to legitimate unequal power relations in a particular society. For example, Mills (1995) describes how certain ubiquitous gendered ideologies encode both heteronormative and racist assumptions, both of which are used to sustain a hierarchical social order. With reference to a *Guess* advertisement for perfume, featuring a picture of a white male and female embracing, Mills (1995) describes the ideal relationship naturalised in this representation as being that of a white, heterosexual couple. By contrast, “blackness and homosexuality are implicitly designated as marked forms of identity in comparison with this seemingly ‘normal’ image of relationship” (Mills 1995: 19). CDA aims to deconstruct such notions of ‘normality’ and ‘common sense’ by showing how they are socially constructed to serve a particular group’s interests (cf. 2.4.1.2).

The fact that ideology typically masquerades as common sense also has positive effects, such as maintaining group solidarity, by allowing group members to take various assumptions for granted. Whether its effects are positive or negative or a combination of the two, the power of ideology resides in its invisibility. The most effective ideologies “are brought to discourse not as explicit elements of the text, but as the background assumptions” which shape the production and interpretation of the text (Fairclough 1989: 85). This is not to suggest that, in the process of interpretation, the interpreter cannot resist the ideologies implicit in the text (Hodge *et al.* 1989; Mills 1995). However, the most effective texts are those which render the process of interpretation, and thus the reproduction of ideology, as seamless and unconscious as possible (Fairclough 2003). This study is particularly interested in the ideologies which reproduce normative ideals of female beauty. My interpretation and explanation of the selected extracts reveals that, while the young women do at times resist the prevailing female physical ideal, they also paradoxically reveal their unconscious subscription to this ideal and to the body management practices necessary to attain the ideal (cf. 4.5, 5.2.3, 5.3.3, 5.5, 6.4).

2.4.2.1 Naturalising ideology

A logical question relating to ideology and common sense is: how does ideology become common sense? Fairclough (1989: 91) terms the process by which discourse (and in turn ideology) becomes common sense, *naturalisation*. By this he refers to the processes by

which a particular discourse type dominates other discourse types to the extent that it is viewed as legitimate and most importantly, natural. A discourse type refers to “conventions, norms, codes of practice underlying actual discourse” (Fairclough 1989: 90). I find the distinction between *discourse* and *discourse type* to be ambiguous since I understand discourse to encompass in its meaning *both* the underlying conventions and social practices through which we represent and constitute reality (cf. 1.7.1). Hence I use the terms interchangeably in this study.

The notion of domination is important in understanding the process of naturalisation since it points to the fact that naturalisation is a function of the power of one discourse type to suppress others within a particular social institution. Since discourse encodes ideology, the naturalisation of a discourse type entails a concomitant ideological shift in which ideologies become common sense: “Ideologies come to be ideological common sense to the extent that discourse types which embody them become naturalised” (Fairclough 1989: 92). This has an important implication for the dominant discourse type: it makes it appear ideologically neutral and therefore unproblematic.

2.4.2.2 Positioning social subjects

Not only does ideology construct beliefs and assumptions, it also constructs and positions the social subject (Fairclough 1989; 1992). This is not to say that people have no agency and do not exist outside of discourse (cf. 2.2.2.2). Rather, it points to the existence of a dialectic relationship between social subjects and discourse: social subjects shape discourse and are in turn shaped by discourses. Discourse shapes social subjects in the sense that there is a limited set of positions which they can occupy within a given discourse type. For example, the discourse type of the doctor-patient consultation, has a conventional set of subject positions “which those who operate within it are constrained to occupy” (Fairclough 1989: 102). According to the discourse of conventional medical science, doctors have a particular social identity in the traditional doctor-patient relationship: they are positioned as holding the power to diagnose illness, prescribe medicine and heal, while the patient is positioned as powerless, awaiting the doctor’s intervention.

People are largely unconscious of the way discourse positions them as subjects (Fairclough 2001). They view the positions as self-evident and unproblematic and this is part of the naturalising power of dominant discourses. An example of naturalisation which relates to this study is the way in which female body management practices produce docile subjects: by defining what it means to be a healthy, modern subject, these discourses of the body act as

social control mechanisms which constitute the subject's identity (cf. 2.2.1.1, 5.4.1). In addition, these subject positions are arbitrary in the sense that they are socially generated, not predetermined (cf. 2.4.1.1). Through the process of socialisation people learn the various subject positions which they may adopt in a particular discourse type and conversely those positions which are unavailable to them. This means that the social subject is "constituted as a particular configuration of subject positions" so that their identity is fragmented, dispersed and constantly changing in response to the range of subject positions which they may occupy in various discourse types (Fairclough 1989: 103, cf. 2.3.1).

In terms of the study of female physical identity, I am concerned with the range of subject positions which contemporary discourses of femininity and the ideal female body offer the young women in this study. For example, a discourse which emerges in the data is a traditional discourse of femininity which positions women as objects of the male gaze (cf. 2.2.2.4). I argue that this positioning renders women passive objects of male desire and, as such, that it reproduces unequal gender relations (Bordo 2003). The participants also draw on an alternative discourse of the 'new woman', a discourse which I argue positions women as powerfully agentive and successful (Pienaar & Bekker 2006a). The use of these oppositional discourses suggests that an ideological struggle is taking place, in which the participants are seeking to negotiate the meaning of the ideal 'feminine' woman in terms of the conflicting demands made by 'traditional' norms of femininity and other forces in contemporary society.

2.4.2.3 Ideological struggle in discourse

I mentioned in 2.4.2.1 that a discourse type may emerge as dominant in a particular institution and I would now like to explore the implications of this. The notion of a dominant discourse type implies that some discourse types in an institution may be subordinate or suppressed. In contemporary capitalist societies, there is often great ideological variation which derives from the fact that a variety of social groups with different interests and beliefs co-exist. The groups may be divided along class, ethnic, gender or age lines, to mention a few possible divisions. The ideological diversity sometimes manifests itself in ideological struggle, with discourse being the primary vehicle through which the struggle takes place.

Discourse types do not only vary at an institutional level; at the micro-level of the situation and at the level of the individual there may be a number of competing discourse types operating simultaneously (Fairclough 2001). These discourse types and the discourses which they realise may be ideologically opposed since ideology is not, as one would assume, coherent and logically organised: "...ideology ceases to be seen as an elegant coherent

totality but as fragmented and contradictory, with the very stresses and variations within it being crucial to its operation” (Wetherell & Potter 1992: 61).

The ideological struggle realised in discourse is central to this study since the participants are in the process of negotiating their (physical) identities in response to competing ideologies of the ideal female body. Faced with these competing ideologies, they draw on several discourses in an attempt to construct a coherent, sustainable physical identity. Furthermore, the discourses which the young women invoke are not always ideologically compatible with one another. Instead, there are contradictions and tensions which point to possible ruptures in the existing *order of discourse*. The latter term refers to the ways in which discourses are related through ‘interdependent networks’ (Fairclough 1989: 29, cf. 1.7.3). These networks have distinct sets of conventions associated with them and each network is used in specific domains. This study aims to identify the relationship between each discourse and the broader social context, in terms of whether a particular discourse reproduces, challenges or transforms the existing social order (cf. 1.2). In other words, how does the construction of the female body in each of the intersecting discourses relate to the current order of discourse? In my explanation of the extract three for example (cf. 5.4.2), I describe the discourse of the sexually attractive female body as having secured dominance by *colonising* other related discourses within the order of discourse, such as the discourse of the healthy body and the discourse of diet (cf. 1.7.3 for a definition of *colonisation*).

The traditional view of ideology, which has been radically opposed in contemporary critical discourse studies (for example, Hodge & Kress 1993; Wetherell & Potter 1992), is of ideology as “a once-for-all category whose immutable forms confront pre-ideological individuals, assigning them the only social roles and meanings they can have, allowing no space or time in which negotiation or divergence or resistance could occur” (Hodge & Kress 1988: 259). By contrast, this study views ideology as messy, inchoate and inconsistent, in keeping with the reality of broader social relations (Wetherell & Potter 1992). Additionally, ideology is dynamic in the sense that there is always the possibility for speakers and text producers to contest a prevailing ideology and to resist its effects (Mills 1995). The study aims to identify and account for variation within and between discourses. In doing so it describes how the participants adopt different (sometimes oppositional) ideological positions to legitimate their claims and to construct a series of fragile, dynamic identities (cf. 2.3.1).

2.5 Summary

In this chapter I have reviewed the literature which has enabled me to situate the ‘body talk’

data within their social, historical and political contexts. The first section focusses on the overarching topic of this research, namely the female body. In order to contextualise my first research question, which focusses on the ideologies behind the ideal female body, I discuss the contemporary ideal of female thinness with reference to the sociocultural factors which contribute to its dominance in Western society. For example, I consider the influence of popular media discourse (cf. 2.2.1.1) and asymmetrical gender relations on the sustainability of this ideal (cf. 2.2.1.2). To provide a historical context for the current obsession with female thinness, this section discusses the progressive civilising of the body (cf. 2.2.1.4) and how the philosophical movement of postmodernism (cf. 2.2.1.5) has been taken up in consumer culture to construct discourses which sustain the ideal of thinness. Lastly, this section discusses two theoretical frameworks for understanding the role of discourse and power in constituting the body: I consider Butler's analysis of the performativity of identity in discourse (cf. 2.2.2.1) and Foucault's analysis of discourse and disciplinary power (cf. 2.2.2.2).

The second section of this chapter, entitled 'Discourse and the Construction of Identity' reviews a selection of studies on the discursive construction of identities. The first subsection, 'The nature of identity' seeks to position the study in terms of the particular view of identity on which I have based my analysis of female physical identity (cf. 2.3.1). I also compare the theoretical concepts underpinning studies of identity in discursive psychology and Conversation Analysis (CA) to the concepts on which I draw in this study (cf. 2.3.2). This section additionally aims to foreground recurring themes in the literature on 'identity texts', such as the notion that discourse is dynamic, inconsistent and heterogeneous (cf. 2.3.3). The final section provides an overview of the theory behind the methodology I use to analyse the 'body talk' data, namely Critical Discourse Analysis (cf. 2.4). This section provides the *theoretical* context for the description of the *praxis* of CDA in chapter 3.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into two main sections. These deal, respectively, with the initial data collection and the methods of data analysis. More specifically, section 3.2 describes the methodological decisions that I took in collecting the data for this study. I explain my aim to collect spontaneous conversation, my choice of participants (cf. 3.2.1) and the stimulus exercises used to elicit body talk conversation (cf. 3.2.4). I consider the constraints on the collection of unmonitored, spontaneous conversation, such as the effect of the Observer's Paradox, the somewhat artificial nature of the stimulus exercises and the unequal power relations between myself and the research participants. I also detail the means by which I sought to limit the asymmetrical relations between the researcher and the research participants (cf. 3.2.3). The second section, 3.3, describes how my chosen methodology, CDA, is applied to a text, focussing on the three interdependent steps of CDA, namely the description, interpretation and explanation of the text. Since most studies which employ CDA focus on the analysis of *textual* data (Tannen 1991), section 3.3.2.3 examines the problems associated with applying CDA to *conversational* data. In this regard, it explains my choice to supplement the methods of CDA with methods from Conversation Analysis (CA) to account for the micro-level interactional details of the conversations. I conclude in 3.4 with a summary of the main points covered in the chapter.

3.2. Data collection

3.2.1 Choice of participants

As indicated in 1.5, the body talk data was collected from friendship groups comprising young, white, Western female volunteers between the ages of fourteen and eighteen, all of whom attend a boarding school in Grahamstown. I selected six friendship groups from the volunteers, with a maximum of four and a minimum of two participants per group. The study comprised a total of sixteen young women as research participants. The groups were selected according to the following criteria: each group comprised three to four English first language, Western women. The cultural label, "Western" is defined for the purposes of this study as "of Caucasian extraction", since, due to the legacy of apartheid in South Africa, culture tends to correlate with race or ethnic group. While I recognise that ethnicity is a problematic construct (Dyer 1997), I chose to limit the participants to "white" women because there is a consensus in the literature on the female body that the contemporary female body ideal, that of the thin, toned body has been, until recently, largely a (white)

Western ideal (Bordo 2003; Grogan 1998; Hesse-Biber 1996; Seid 1989). An additional reason for choosing to limit the participants to white women relates to my own ethnic and cultural affiliations: although I am Eurasian, I most closely affiliate myself socially to white, Western women. This may be because I attended a prestigious private school where the majority of learners (and thus most of my friends) were white. I have been inducted into the mores of South African Indian culture and do have mixed cultural affiliations but my dominant cultural values are Western. I believe that my knowledge of this group and my status as a reflective insider would give me access to the members' resources (MR) or cultural schemas on which the participants draw in their body talk discussions (cf. 2.4.1.1). Having access to the participants' MR is important in the interpretation phase of the analysis because the analyst has to place herself in the shoes of the participants to understand the worldview to which they are subscribing.

I recorded a thirty to sixty minute conversation with each friendship group, using one or two stimulus exercises per group to elicit conversation (cf. 3.1.4). Since I devised three stimulus exercises, I was able to replicate each exercise once in order to collect a reasonably representative sample of data. This meant I had a maximum of three hundred and sixty minutes (or six hours) of recorded conversation on which to base my selection of extracts for analysis (cf. 3.2.5).

Since the participants are minors, I obtained the written consent of the school (*in loco parentis*) and of each participant to record their conversations (Rhodes University Ethical Standards Committee 1997). I guaranteed the participants' anonymity through the use of pseudonyms and the deletion of any references within the conversations which may have revealed their identities. This included providing a pseudonym for the school since the fact that Grahamstown is a small town with a limited number of schools increases the possibility that the participants could be traced through references to the school.

One of my concerns in collecting body talk data, was to limit the effect of the Observer's Paradox. The Observer's Paradox is a term originally coined by Labov (1966) in his early studies on linguistic variation. It describes the main problem researchers face when trying to record spontaneous, casual speech styles or the vernacular. While the aim of such research is to collect unmonitored, natural speech, "the act of observation itself militates against obtaining the most casual speech styles", resulting in the Observer's Paradox (Cukor-Avila 2000: 254). In order to limit the effect of the Observer's Paradox, I did not initially explain the details of my research aims to the participants. Instead, I gave a general explanation of

my interest in women's informal language use in a friendship group setting. At the end of each recording session, I revealed my research aims and secured the volunteers' informed written consent before transcribing the data (the consent forms are included as Appendix B₁).

The participants were also asked to fill in a biographical information sheet (Appendix B₂), which was based on the information sheet used in the pilot study (cf. 1.4), with some revisions. One of the important revisions was to include a section on ethnicity, in which the participants were given a range of options from which to choose. Their affiliation with a particular group is likely to be based on a sense of shared cultural traditions and ancestry with that group. In order to ensure the validity of their responses to this closed question, the sheet also included an alternatively phrased open question on ethnicity. The reason for including this section was to ensure that I, as the researcher, did not categorise the participants according to my subjective perceptions of their ethnicity. Instead, the participants defined their own ethnicity with reference to existing ethnic constructions, such as Hispanic, African and Indian. While all the volunteers were asked to fill in this sheet, only those who labelled themselves Western or white were selected to participate in the study.

3.2.2 The educational ethos of the school

At this point, I feel it necessary to provide background information on the school at which the research was conducted. The school, which I shall refer to as *Smithson College*, is a private school in Grahamstown. The school is an elite and, primarily, boarding school. Most of the learners live on campus in hostel accommodation. The school promotes community living as they believe it encourages the learners to develop a tolerance of difference and a simultaneous appreciation of the value of interdependence (School website 2006). Living in a close-knit community means that the learners develop very close bonds with their friends, who, in the absence of family, become their support networks (Personal communication with learners 2006).

Smithson College describes some of its aims as: "Christian witness in thought, word and deed; the provision of a quality education in a stimulating and challenging environment which will enable and encourage pupils to realise their full potential; nurturing independent thought and action within the bounds of interdependence and companionship" (School website 2006). These aims suggest a holistic approach to education, an approach which emphasises not only the individual's acquisition of knowledge and academic skills, but also their social and spiritual development. The school's belief in the holistic development of the individual is evident in the wide range of extramural activities which they offer such as

music, community outreach projects, sporting challenges, drama and art (School website 2006). While many of these activities are voluntary, participation in sport is compulsory and the learners are required to take a minimum of two sessions of sport a week. They are also encouraged to take responsibility for maintaining their own fitness (outside of the biweekly sport sessions) and many learners do so by running and ‘working out’ at the on-campus gym (Personal communication with learners 2006).

In addition to regular sport sessions, Smithson College has recently introduced various sporting or physical challenges, many of which are also fundraising activities. For example, from 15 to 23 April 2005, a group of 18 Grade 10 and 11 female learners participated in the 2005 *Grahamstown to Cape Town Challenge*, in which they had to run and cycle from Grahamstown to Cape Town and then swim from Robben Island to Blouberg Strand (School website 2006). There is also an annual outdoor education program, the *Fish River Journey*, where all Grade 10 learners spend 19 days hiking, canoeing and cycling from the source to the mouth of the Fish River. From these select examples, it is evident that Smithson College places great emphasis on the development of physical fitness, sporting prowess and stamina. I believe that this ethos of health and physical fitness informs the female learners’ perceptions of what constitutes a healthy female body, what is beautiful and what type of body represents the ideal female body (cf. 6.2).

3.2.3 The role of the researcher

I was present during the recordings of the conversations for the study and I chose to be an “animated conversationalist” (Wetherell & Potter 1992: 98) by providing backchannels, commenting and questioning the participants’ assumptions about what constitutes the ideal female body. This was an attempt to encourage the participants to negotiate their subject positions and to debate issues on the notion of the ideal female body.

My choice to be a co-participant in the conversations derives from a central aim of this study, namely to collect naturally occurring, everyday conversations or as close to this as possible. Given this aim, I believe that my presence as an observer would have been more marked than my presence as a co-participant who contributes to the discussion. Since discourse is never free of ideology, it follows that there is no ideologically neutral position or value-free way of perceiving and representing the world (Fairclough 1989; Fowler *et al.* 1979; Lakoff 2000). Thus, as the researcher and co-conversant in the body talk conversations, my contributions construct a version of reality, just as the participants’ contributions do. I have

consequently treated my contributions to the conversations as topics of analytic interest, requiring a detailed and, as far as possible, objective analysis of the ideologies which inform my position (Wetherell & Potter 1992). In answering my second research question (cf. 1.2), I critically evaluate my contributions to the conversation in terms of how they may have influenced the participants' constructions of the ideal female body (cf. 6.2).

The discussion above points to the problem of the researcher's potentially elevated position in the interactions. My presence and the presence of the tape recorder will have affected the nature of the conversations, possibly making them more formal and constrained than they would otherwise have been (Labov 1972). However, I attempted to limit the constraints on the participants' contributions as well as the power differential by conducting the recordings in environments with which the participants are familiar ie. "their turf". The recordings took place in the participants' rooms or common rooms, places where they were likely to be sufficiently comfortable to speak naturally.

An important consideration in terms of power dynamics is the norm-enforcing power of the group. It is possible that the pressure of the group mitigated against the effect of my presence by ensuring that the participants acted naturally (Labov 1972). While I consider my presence as a potentially constraining factor on the participants' contributions, I believe that the norm-enforcing presence of the group will, to some degree, have overridden the effect of my presence. In this regard, it is also useful to note the participants' manifestations of trust during the conversations. For example, during some of the discussions of female plastic surgery, the participants openly commented on various parts of their bodies which they had had surgically altered or which they would alter. In one particularly striking instance, one of the participants proclaimed that she had a hunch-back. When I expressed disbelief, she invited me to touch her hunch-back. Given the face-threatening nature of such an admission and the large spatial boundaries between the young women and me, as the largely unknown researcher, this offer to touch her hunchback is an indication of the young woman's trust. Such manifestations of trust indicate that the young women were acting fairly naturally and spontaneously in my presence. However, this is not to suggest that the roles between me and the participants were completely egalitarian and that I had no influence on the direction of the conversation. As I argue in chapter 4, while my elevated status as the researcher was diminished in some cases, in others it was increased, with the result that my contributions played a critical role in guiding the discussions (cf. 4.2.3, 4.3.3, 4.4.3).

In retrospect, I realise that my aim to encourage critical discussion in the conversations was

not congruent with my aim of decreasing the power imbalance between myself and the participants: by questioning the participants repeatedly during the course of the conversations, I was enacting my perceived higher status as the omniscient, objective researcher. The tension between the two aims of encouraging questioning and simultaneously trying to invoke solidarity with the participants is tellingly enacted in some of the conversations, included in my interpretation (cf. 4.2.3). While I was not able to resolve this tension in the interactions themselves, I have tried, in a critical spirit, to account for the ways in which my increased power and status as an outsider (the older researcher) shaped the direction of the conversations.

As Fairclough (1989: 167) acknowledges in his discussion of the analytic stage of interpretation within CDA, “it is only really self-consciousness that distinguishes the analyst from the participants she is analysing”. Both the analyst and the participants in the discourse are involved in interpreting the text according to particular ideological frames. The difference between the analyst and the participants is simply that the analyst seeks to identify and explain the frames through which s/he is working (Fairclough 1989; 1992). I should also like to add that the analyst’s position is characterised by a degree of temporal remove in the sense that, unlike the participants who are interpreting ‘on-the-spot’, s/he has the advantage of being removed in time from the discursive event. However, despite this advantage, adopting a self-conscious, critically reflexive position to analyse the data is one of the greatest challenges of CDA since it is difficult to interrogate one’s perspective to reveal the ideological biases therein. This challenge is magnified when, as in this study, some of the data *are* one’s own contributions. I cannot therefore claim to have succeeded wholly in this regard, although I believe I have reported on *some* of the biases and ambiguities in my own contributions.

3.2.4 Eliciting body talk: the stimulus exercises

Each discussion on the topic of the ideal body was facilitated using one of three pre-planned stimulus exercises, based on the success of similar exercises in the pilot study (cf. 1.4). The stimulus exercises were designed to encourage conversation on issues relating to female body image, such as the features of the ideal female body and the experience of being a fat or thin woman in Western society. Moreover, the stimulus exercises aimed to be sufficiently provocative in their content to elicit fairly spontaneous, unmonitored discussion amongst the young women.

I termed the first stimulus exercise a “consensus exercise” since the participants had to reach

a consensus on their understanding of the ideal female body. The participants were given a range of twenty photographs of women, taken from popular South African magazines, such as *FHM*, *Cosmopolitan* and *The Oprah Magazine* (Appendix A₁). The magazine photographs contain women ranging in age from 16 to 40+, although most of the images featured young women (16 to 30) since the magazines from which the images were taken are aimed at a fairly young readership. The images featured women of different ethnicities and body sizes, although admittedly pictures of “larger”, older women were under-represented since such pictures do not typically feature in mainstream popular magazines (LeBesco 2004; Macdonald 1995). I framed the question for this exercise as follows: “Which woman has the best or ideal body? You need to agree on which woman you choose and discuss the reasons why a particular woman does/does not have the ideal type of body”.

For the second stimulus exercise I gave the participants a set of ten photographs (Appendix A₂). Five of the photographs feature women who labelled themselves (or who were labelled in the source article) as anorexic (cf. 2.2.1.3). The other five photographs feature women who identified themselves as obese. Obesity is defined as an excessive amount of body fat in relation to lean body mass (World Health Organisation Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health 2003). More specifically, in terms of the Body Mass Index (BMI), an obese person is one whose BMI is over 30kg/m² (ibid). While it may not be defined as a disorder in the same way in which anorexia is (cf. 2.2.1.3), obesity is constructed in popular culture as a deviant condition and even as a disability: “Fat people, in their excessive refusal to be disciplined into culturally “acceptable” body shapes and sizes, are then as corporeally deviant as those others considered, without a second thought, to be disabled” (LeBesco 2004: 74, cf. 5.3.2).

Given the common construction of the anorexic and obese body as problematic or deviant, this exercise aimed to encourage discussion on what constitutes a “normal” female body and, by contrast, what constitutes a “pathological” or “abnormal” body. It also aimed to reveal the values associated with female fatness and thinness in Western society. Given these aims, I asked the young women: “What do you think when you see women who look like this?” I did not identify the women in the photographs as either anorexic or obese so as to avoid leading the participants’ responses.

The third stimulus exercise features eight images of women who had undergone plastic surgery (Appendix A₃). The photographs are in sets of two, featuring a full-length shot of

each woman before and after plastic surgery. All of the women appear to have undergone multiple cosmetic procedures so that their appearance in the before and after photographs is markedly different. As far as possible, the photographs show women of different ages and ethnicities, although there is a higher proportion of older Caucasian women. Although I could not find reliable statistics on the demographic composition of female plastic surgery patients, I believe the higher proportion of older (40+) Caucasian women who have had plastic surgery suggests that they constitute the majority of female plastic surgery patients. If this is the case, then the ethnic and age composition of the women featured in this exercise reflects more general demographic trends amongst female plastic surgery patients. In order to generate conversation I asked the participants the following two questions: 1) “What do you think when you see images like these?” and 2) “Would you opt for plastic surgery?”

This exercise was devised in light of the results of the pilot study (cf. 1.4), which indicated that young women view plastic surgery as a key concern in contemporary Western society. The possibility of transforming the body through surgical intervention is increasingly popular amongst women of all ages (Blum 2003; Davis 1997). The results of my pilot study revealed that the young women drew on several related discourses in their discussions of plastic surgery, such as the discourse of the plastic body and the discourse of individual choice and self-determination. These discourses construct the female body as a site of continual transformation and improvement, a project to be managed by the individual in their efforts at self-realisation (Blum 2003). This exercise aimed to tease out the meanings of plastic surgery in relation to the contemporary Western female physical ideal of the slender, toned, youthful body (cf. 2.2.1).

3.2.5 Transcription and choice of extracts for analysis

After each recording session I made detailed notes on what I had observed during the session. I noted what van Dijk (2001: 101) terms “semantic macrostructures” or the main topic(s) of the conversation. Identifying the gist of the conversation is part of what participants naturally do in an attempt to organise the meaning details of the discourse(s) into a coherent whole (van Dijk 2001). Thus, the process of writing down the semantic macrostructures mimics what I, as a co-participant, would have been doing cognitively (and possibly verbally) during the conversation. I also noted features such as power relations between the participants and shifting ideological positions. These notes helped me to contextualise the conversations during the subsequent analysis stage, a month after the recording sessions.

I transcribed the recorded conversations using a selection of Jefferson's transcription conventions (in Schenkein 1978) (Appendix C), which offer a means of capturing the micro-level interactional details, such as latched utterances, overlaps and intonation patterns, all of which typically form part of Conversation Analysis (Psathas 1995; ten Have 1998). I believe that, while these interactional details are not typically investigated within the methodological framework of CDA, they offer clues to the ideologies encoded in the body talk conversations (cf. 3.2.2.3).

The data amounted to 161 pages of transcribed conversations. It was from this large data set that I selected extracts for analysis. Since one of my research aims was to focus on areas of contradiction and contestation in the body talk discourse, I chose three extracts where the young women are engaged in discursive struggles to define notions of, for example, what is ideal, feminine and beautiful (cf. 2.4.2.3). Extracts one and three feature the same group of participants and were taken from different points in the same conversation. Thus, a total of six participants feature in the interpretation of the extracts in chapter 4. While I realise that the number of women featured in the extracts is not representative of the total number who participated in the research, my concern was not to analyse extracts from a representative sample of participants. This would have entailed applying an external set of criteria to the selection of extracts for analysis. Instead I chose to select the extracts based on an internal criterion, namely that the extracts had to feature oppositional discourses. The young women in the three extracts draw on several oppositional discourses as they negotiate their positions on the ideal female body (cf. 4.1). In choosing the extracts, I also tried to include a representative sample of the range of topics which the women discussed, based on the stimulus exercises. So the extracts feature discussions on plastic surgery, the overweight female body, female beauty and the anorexic body.

In selecting the start and endpoint of the three extracts I was guided by the way the participants signalled transition points in the conversation. Since conversation is a concerted activity speakers "behaviourally orient to the order in their concerted behaviour and accordingly constitute and signal their contexts for each other" (McDermott, Gospodinoff & Aron 1978: 249). For example, when one of the participants initiated a topic change and the others behaviourally oriented themselves to this change, I took this to be an appropriate endpoint for an extract. Similarly in selecting the start of the extract I identified points in the conversation where members collectively negotiated a transition from one aspect of a topic

to the next (McDermott *et al.* 1978). So the extracts represent conversational episodes, “bounded by changes of topic or activity” (Tannen 1991: 38). Reading the contextual clues offered by the participants themselves also assisted me in identifying the discourses in the extracts. For example, in places where a participant disagreed with another’s assertion and offered an oppositional view, I read this as a possible signal that another discourse was being invoked. In this way I sought to ensure that my interpretation of the discourses in an extract converged with the participants’ perspectives (Chick 1987).

In making sense of the various discourses featured in the extracts, I identified discourses as distinct in terms of the perspectives from which they represent the ideal female body. I was guided by Fairclough’s recent work on CDA in identifying the different discourses. In a section on the characterisation of discourses in a text, Fairclough (2001: 129–130) notes that a discourse represents a particular “vision of the world” and that in identifying one, the analyst should be cued to the ways in which discourses “‘lexicalize’ the world”. In order to isolate the perspectives offered by different discourses I answered the question: what particular worldview do I have to entertain if this conversational episode is to make sense? Identifying the lexical sets and classificatory schemes in a discourse also helped me to isolate the assumptions about the ideal body on which the discourses was based. I then labelled each discourse to capture the characteristic conceptions of the female body which underpins it. For example, in extract two, I identified two discourses which represent oppositional views of the overweight female body (cf. 4.3.4). I termed the first one a discourse of silence on female fatness since it features the use of euphemism and politically correct language to avoid speaking candidly on the subject. I described this discourse as encoding a belief that being an overweight woman in Western society is socially taboo. The second discourse is called an anti-fat discourse. As its name suggests, it is in opposition to the former discourse since it openly represents fatness as undesirable and unattractive. In total, I identified nine different discourses across the three extracts, all of which are related under the theme of the ideal female body. The process of identifying and labelling the discourses in an extract proved invaluable in helping me to bring a sense of order and clarity to what initially appeared to be a chaotic, inchoate extract.

In order to ensure that the extracts do not represent data chosen specifically to serve my analytic interests, I closely reviewed *all* the data for evidence that would counter the conclusions reached in the interpretation of the selected extracts (Erikson 1986). I believe that this process also enabled me to recognise and account for the use of oppositional

discourses within an extract (cf. 2.3.3, 2.4.2.3). An alternative to subjectively choosing which extracts to interpret would have been to select, for example, only the first 1500 words from each conversation. While this may have increased the validity of the interpretation by ensuring the data was chosen randomly, I came to realise that a selection based on word count would cut out potentially rich episodes. In addition, the methodology used in this study, CDA, is not quantitative and therefore does not subscribe to criteria like randomness, normal distribution etc. (Fairclough 2003).

3.3. Methods of analysis

3.3.1 Overview of Critical Discourse Analysis

Having described the theoretical background of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (cf. 2.4), I would now like to explain how this theory informs the analysis of a text. The theoretical basis of CDA describes three perspectives through which to analyse a piece of discourse, namely discourse as *text*, as *interaction* and as *social context* (Fairclough 1989; 1992a). These three dimensions of discourse correlate with the three steps of CDA: “the *description* of the text; *interpretation* of the interaction processes [production and interpretation]; and *explanation* of how the interaction process relates to social action” (Fairclough 1992a: 10). The delineation of CDA into stages is a useful procedural mechanism but it does not imply that the stages are independent and unrelated. In fact, the stages are interdependent and one can begin the analysis with any stage as long as the interrelation of the stages is reflected in the final discussion (Janks 1997).

CDA hypothesises three interwoven values of a text, namely the experiential, expressive and relational. The experiential value describes the “text producer’s experience of the natural or social world” (Fairclough 1989: 112), i.e. the construction of knowledge and beliefs in and by the text. The expressive value traces the text producer’s appraisal of the reality represented in the text, focussing on how subjects and social identities are constructed by the text (ibid). Lastly, the relational value describes the social relationships enacted by the text through the linguistic choices made. Central in this regard are the power dynamics between the participants. These are particularly salient in this study since the status of the researcher is likely to be privileged in the body talk conversations. By analysing relational value and treating the researcher’s contributions to the conversations as a topic of analytic interest, this study illustrates how unequal power relations are enacted in the conversations (cf. 12, 4.2.3, 4.3.3, 4.4.3). More specifically, I show how my status as the researcher sometimes has the effect of constraining the participants’ contributions and thus influencing the ideological positions they adopt in the conversations (cf. 4.2.3, 4.3.3, 4.4.3). For example, some of the

young women, in reaction to my unintentional critique of their views, adopt a politically correct stance possibly in an effort to avoid having to defend their views.

Having provided a brief overview of CDA, I now turn to an account of the three interdependent stages of analysis, namely the description, interpretation and explanation.

3.3.2 Description

The first stage, the description, focusses on the features of the text itself. The analyst is concerned with identifying formal features of the text according to a list of categories suggested as part of the CDA framework. In analysing the body talk extracts, I performed the description first and then drew extensively on the descriptive features of the extracts in the interpretation in chapter 4. The description of each extract is provided as Appendix E should the reader wish to see how I arrived at a particular interpretation through identifying the formal features of the extract. In the description stage, I was guided by the questions outlined in Fairclough (1989: 110–112; 2001: 92–3). In the interests of brevity, I omitted the following questions since they deal with features which were not present in the talk data: Are there important features of relational modality?; What metaphors are used?; Are there markedly informal or formal words?; What nominalisations are used? For the rest, I follow Fairclough's (1989; 2001) questions for the description stage and give examples relating to each question from my own research on female body talk.

3.3.2.1 Vocabulary

What *experiential* values do words have?

- Are there any ideologically contested words?

This sub-question under the question on experiential value relates to ideological struggle in discourse (cf. 2.4.2.3). It points to the fact that a particular word or expression may itself be a point of ideological struggle within the text/conversation. For example, in several of the body talk extracts there is negotiation of the meaning of the term *feminine* (Pienaar & Bekker 2006a). Some of the participants argue that the term includes *petite* and *dainty* in its reference. Others oppose this representation and argue instead that *feminine* implies *voluptuousness* and *curvaceousness*.

- What classification schemes are used?

By *classification scheme* Fairclough (2001: 96) refers to “a particular way of dividing up

some aspect of reality which is built upon a particular ideological representation of that reality". In answering this question, it is necessary to identify the ways in which vocabulary in a text is organised to fit within a particular discourse. For example, in traditional diet publications such as *Shape* magazine, there is a classification scheme where the body is constructed as a machine, which must be regulated to ensure 'maximum performance' (Pienaar 2004). This scheme derives from a mechanistic view of the body, signalled by terms such as *performance*, *efficiency* and *tone up and get fit*. Such terms encode an assumption that the body will only function properly if it is given the right fuel and exercise (ibid).

- Is there rewording?

Fairclough (1989: 113) describes rewording as the process by which "an existing, dominant, and naturalized wording is being systematically replaced by another one in conscious opposition to it". Therefore, rewording provides an alternative representation of a particular aspect of reality, one which opposes the dominant one. For example, some body talk extracts in this study feature what I term *anti-diet discourse*. This discourse contests the dominant representation of dieting as a normal form of female body management by rewording the terms used to describe dieting. For example, instead of describing dieting as desirable and normal behaviour, this discourse describes it as obsessive and unnatural. Very often this rewording occurs alongside with negative assertions which seek to demystify dieting. For example, the anti-diet discourse may state, "dieting is *not* effortless and it does *not* offer you a balanced eating plan". These negative assertions "implicitly tak[e] issue with the corresponding positive assertions" in traditional diet discourse (Fairclough 1989: 154).

- Is there overwording?

Overwording describes the use of a high number of terms, which are synonyms or near synonyms, to describe a particular aspect of reality. In terms of its ideological significance, overwording props an aspect of reality on an ideological pedestal by its sheer frequency of occurrence in a particular text. The preoccupation with a particular phenomenon also points to the possibility that it is a "focus of ideological struggle" in the text (Fairclough 1989: 115). To use the example of diet discourse once again, some diet publications promote dieting by equating weight-loss with increased female sexual attractiveness (Bordo 2003; Turner 1982). However, some womens' diet magazines couch the importance of dieting not in terms of sexual desirability but, rather, in terms of health and physical well-being. This is evident in their use of expressions such as *good for your heart*, *healthy*, *fit*, *wholesome* and *well* (Pienaar 2004). The integration of these two concerns may constitute a concession to

women's increasing awareness of the problems associated with the objectification of the female body: a "counter-offensive" by consumerist discourses (Fairclough 1989: 73) in the form of couching the pursuit of female sexual attractiveness in less objectifying, more palatable terms (cf. 5.4.2). In this case then, the overwording of terms related to health is evidence that this is an area of ideological struggle, one in which the imperative to diet must be carefully represented to appeal to the modern, independent woman (Pienaar & Bekker 2006b).

- What ideologically significant meaning relations are there?

Fairclough (1989; 2001) identifies three types of meaning relations: hyponymy, synonymy and antonymy. Since neither synonymy nor antonymy feature in the three body talk extracts analysed in chapter 4, I focus instead on the remaining meaning relation, hyponymy. Hyponymy indexes an inclusive semantic relationship where the meaning of the superordinate term is included in the hyponym. To give an example of hyponymy in this study, consider the consensus exercise in which the young women were asked to reach a consensus on whom they perceived to be the most attractive woman from a range of photographs (cf. 3.2.4). Their conversation represents an attempt to negotiate the construction of a taxonomy of women based on physical appearance. This taxonomy contains a notable set of hyponyms of the superordinate term, *women*, including the following co-hyponyms: *skinny women*, *feminine women* and *butch women*. In addition, the co-hyponyms *feminine woman* and *butch woman* exist in an antonymous relationship to each other. So part of the meaning of *feminine* is constituted by its relationship with its opposite, that which is *masculine* or *butch*.

What *relational* values do words have?

- Are there euphemistic/dysphemistic expressions?

A euphemism is a mild or inoffensive term used as a substitute for an offensive or distasteful term. A recurring euphemism in the body talk data is *curvy* or *curvaceous*, as a substitute for the more direct but potentially offensive term, *fat*. The avoidance of a more conventional but potentially inappropriate term carries important relational value since the "choice of wordings depends on, and helps create, social relationships between participants" (Fairclough 2001: 97). I describe the young women's euphemistic descriptions of overweight women as an attempt to avoid appearing critical and unkind to their interlocutors (cf. 4.3.4). Their use of euphemisms may additionally be a function of my increased power (as the researcher) in the interaction: the young women are uncertain of my stance on the

subject of excess weight and thus couch their comments in politically correct, inoffensive terms. In this way they can avoid any possible criticism or contestation of their views. A dysphemism, by contrast, denotes an offensive expression, used in place of a more polite conventional one. For example in extract two, the use of *swamp donkey* or *siff ass girl* in place of *unattractive woman* represents a dysphemism (cf. 4.2.3). The use of such terms (and failure to avoid them) assumes that all the participants subscribe to an ‘anti-ugly/pro-beauty’ ideology i.e. that they share this negative evaluation of unattractive women.

What *expressive* values do words have?

Since expressive value indexes the text producer’s evaluation of reality (cf. 3.3.1), it acts as an important clue to the ideologies being constructed in the text. Consider the near synonyms *slim* and *skinny* which have the same denotation but which have very different connotations. The term *slim* usually carries positive expressive value and signals the producer’s positive appraisal of this particular body shape. *Skinny*, by contrast carries negative expressive value as it has connotations with excessive, unattractive thinness.

3.3.2.2 Grammar

How does the grammar encode *experiential* values?

- What types of process and participant are used? Are there patterns evident in the processes?

The bulleted sub-question (under the general question relating to experiential value) is concerned with how grammatical forms encode a particular representation of reality. Like the questions which focus on vocabulary, it is based on the notion of linguistic choice: when one speaks or writes, one has a range of grammatical processes and participants from which to choose (Fairclough 1989; Halliday 1994). The choice made (however unconscious) is significant in terms of the ideology(ies) which are enacted in the text. For example, in an utterance like, *the Sure-slim diet made her lose weight*, the diet plan is positioned as responsible for the subject’s weight-loss; it is the agent of the weight-loss and the woman following the diet is positioned as passive, the patient of the process. Pro-diet publications feature many processes where the diet is positioned as the agent of the action and I believe that such constructions encode the belief that weight-loss is effortless (Pienaar 2004). In fact, losing weight requires a person to repress their desire to eat, to *control* their appetite but diet publications obscure this self-denial aspect and foreground the apparent effortlessness of dieting through the use of constructions which position the dieter as passive (Macdonald

1995; *ibid*).

Fairclough (1989; 2001) identifies three types of process, namely *actions*, *events* and *attributions*. The first, an *action*, has two participants, an agent and a patient, with the agent being the one doing the action. This is the most unmarked way of representing a process. It is also called an *active* sentence and follows a Subject Verb Object (SVO) word order. For example, in the sentence *Suzie ate supper*, *Suzie* is the agent/subject and *supper* is the patient/object, the participant being acted upon. Another example is, *the meal has ended*, which has only one participant and follows an Subject Verb (SV) word order. This is an example of an *event*. The third type of process, *attribution* (or *relational* process in Systemic Functional Grammar terms) has one participant linked to an attribute by a copula verb, or a verb like *seem*, *feel* or *appear*, or a form of the verb *have*. The verb *have* links a possessive attribute to the participant, as in *Patricia has collagen implants in her lips*. The copula verb, *be* links a subject to a non-possessive attribute in the form of an adjective as in, *Posh Spice is anorexic* or a nominal group as in, *she is a plastic surgery addict*. What is interesting about the processes in a text is the patterns that they form and how these patterns cue the reader to the producer's representation of reality. For example, one would need to consider whether the majority of utterances were *possessive* attributions (as in, she *has* a manly body) or *non-possessive* attributions (as in, she *is* manly). It is possible that, in this example, possessive attributes imply that the subject has "ownership" of various physical attributes and thus, control over their appearance. On the other hand, non-possessive attributes may encode the notion that these attributes are immutable, that the subject cannot change them.

While these three grammatical categories represent the main grammatical processes, I found it useful to refine these categories to provide a more fine-grained account of the grammatical relations realised in the body talk extracts. I employed the processes identified in the Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) framework to provide the detail at this level (Butt, Fahey, Spinks & Yallop 1999; Halliday 1994). My choice to supplement CDA's original three grammatical processes with those identified in the SFG framework is in keeping with Fairclough's (2003) more recent work on CDA where he subdivides the original three process types to include other grammatical processes and associated participants. I distinguish between five types of processes and their participants represented in tabular form below. Although SFG typically labels six process types and subdivides some of these further, I have chosen to discuss only those processes which emerged in the body talk data and which I believe pattern in ideologically significant ways in the data:

Table 1: Process Types and Participant Roles

Process Type	Participants
Material	Actor, Goal, Beneficiary, Range
Mental	Senser, Phenomenon
Relational	Carrier, Attribute, Identifier, Identified
Existential	Existent
Verbal	Sayer, Reported, Target, Verbiage

What the processes have in common is that they all represent some form of “happening, doing, being, saying and thinking” (Butt *et al.* 1999: 46). Thus, processes are realised in the verbal group in a sentence. The verbal group includes auxiliaries and negative markers. Although a clause may contain more than one verb, an analysis of verbal processes is concerned with the head of the verbal group, the verb which carries the weight of meaning in a clause (Martin, Matthiessen & Painter 1997). For example, in the sentence *my aunt **should be dieting***, the verbal group consists of three verbs: a modal auxiliary, *should*, a non-modal auxiliary, *be* and the head or nucleus of the verbal group, *dieting*. In this example *dieting* represents the relevant process type, which would be the focus of a grammatical analysis of the text’s experiential value. When it comes to the analysis of expressive and relational modality, the modal verbs in the verbal group are of interest.

The first type of process identified in the table above is the **material** process, which describes tangible actions or experiences in the material world (Butt *et al.* 1999). Material processes usually describe physical actions like *jumping*, *running*, *eating* and *cooking*. An example related to this study is provided below, where the doer of the material process is the *actor* and that which is affected by the process is the *goal*:

<i>The new girl at school</i>	<i>eats</i>	<i>a lot of junk food</i>
Actor	Process: Material	Goal

A common material process found in the body talk extracts relates to the subject of weight gain/loss:

<i>She</i>	<i>naturally</i>	<i>puts on</i>	<i>weight</i>
Actor	Circumstance	Process: Material	Range

This example illustrates a different type of participant, namely *range*. The noun *weight* acts as an extension of the verbal group since “the verb is fairly empty and gets the bulk of its

experiential meaning from the Range” (Butt *et al.* 1999: 48). One can distinguish *range* from *goal* by asking whether the second participant was affected by the material process. If so, then the participant is likely to be a *goal* and if it is largely unaffected by the process then it is likely to be the *range*. Typically the range and the process coalesce to one idea or semantic unit and thus the verbal group relies on the presence of the range to express its meaning. In this case, if one omitted the range *weight*, the verbal group *to put on* would be fairly meaningless. The *circumstance* is an optional element in any sentence and its function is to give more detail about when, where, how and/or why something occurred: “...in some respects, circumstances, as the name suggests, are more peripheral than participants, being concerned with matters such as the settings, temporal and physical, the manner in which the process is implemented, the people or other entities accompanying the process rather than directly engaged in it” (Bloor & Bloor 1995: 126). Although circumstances are optional, they do help to frame the process and in the example above the circumstance functions to naturalise, and thus legitimise female weight gain.

The next example illustrates the last possible participant associated with material processes, the *beneficiary*. Typically the beneficiary receives something from the actor, whether it be goods or services (Martin *et al.* 1997).

<i>A Swiss surgeon</i>	<i>gave</i>	<i>her</i>	<i>a facelift</i>
Actor	Process: Material	Beneficiary	Range

SFG distinguishes **mental** processes which relate to cognitive or affective actions: “[they] encode the inner world of cognition, perception, inclination or liking/disliking (known as *affect*)” (Butt *et al.* 1999: 51, emphasis original). The participant who processes these actions is termed the *senser* and because of the nature of mental processes, the senser must either be a conscious being or a non-conscious entity whose actions have been personified (Martin *et al.* 1997). That which is sensed is called the *phenomenon* as the example below shows:

<i>Guys</i>	<i>don't like</i>	<i>chicks who've had too much plastic surgery</i>
Sensor	Process: Mental	Phenomenon

The body talk extracts feature a high number of mental processes as the young women are engaged in discussions of what they like/dislike about various kinds of female bodies. In my interpretation I also note that many of the mental processes invoke the male gaze to judge women's attractiveness (as in the above example, cf. 4.2.4). In chapter 4, I identify these processes as reproducing the *active/passive* gendered binary by positioning the male as the

senser and the female as the phenomenon.

The third type of process is the **relational** process, which corresponds with Fairclough's (1989) attributions, described above. SFG distinguishes between two types of relational processes: *attributive* and *identifying* processes (Halliday 1994; Butt *et al.* 1999). Relational attributive processes ascribe an attribute or characteristic of a participant. For example:

<i>Angelina Jolie's lips</i>	<i>are</i>	<i>100 percent natural</i>
Carrier	Process: Relational attributive	Attribute

The participant which possesses the attribute or quality is called the *carrier* and the characteristic which s/he possesses is the *attribute*. If the process is relational *identifying*, one participant (the *identified*) is used to identify the other (the *identifier*) in terms of its role or identifying characteristics (ibid). The *identifier* is therefore co-referential with the *identified*; that is they represent different descriptions of the same entity (Lobeck 2000):

<i>College boys</i>	<i>are</i>	<i>another species</i>
Identified	Process: Relational identifying	Identifier

Existential processes represent the simple existence of something and, thus, they only have one participant, the *existent*. Like relational processes, existential processes feature the copula verb *to be*. Typically these processes are preceded by the dummy or empty subject *there* as in the example below (Bloor & Bloor 1995):

<i>There</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>no such thing as the ideal female body</i>
Dummy/empty subject	Process: Existential	Existent

In this example, the existence of an ideal female body is being called into question. Thus, the existential process has negative polarity i.e. it asserts the non-existence of the ideal body.

Lastly, I identify **verbal** processes in the body talk data. These are processes which construe the act of speaking (Butt *et al.* 1999; Bloor & Bloor 1995). The participant who verbalises something is labelled the *sayer* and the words s/he speaks are the *reported* or the *quoted* if they represent direct speech. The addressee is known as the *receiver*. For example:

<i>I</i>	<i>said</i>	<i>[to] her</i>	<i>"You need to lose weight"</i>
Sayer	Process: Verbal	Receiver	Quoted

When the content of the speech is summarised in one nominal group, this nominal group is

called *verbiage* (ibid):

<i>No one</i>	<i>discusses</i>	<i>the weight issue</i>
Sayer	Process: Verbal	Verbiage

Verbal processes are ideologically significant because they offer the speaker a means by which to introduce alternative viewpoints in the form of quotations or reported speech. The population of viewpoints or voices in a text carries important expressive modality: it signals the speaker's certainty about their position and their awareness (or lack thereof) that their position is contestable (Fairclough 2003; Martin & Rose 2003). The alternative voices are drawn in to endorse, challenge or contrast with the speaker's own attitudes (Martin & Rose 2003). For example, some of the body talk extracts feature verbal processes where the participants introduce alternative views on a particular issue, such as female weight gain or plastic surgery. The alternative views typically represent those of potential male sexual partners ("guys"). For example, in negotiating their stance on female plastic surgery, one of the young women asserted, *But [if she announced that her lips were surgically altered] all the guys would be like "no I never thought she was hot I never thought she had nice lips"* (cf. extract one contained in Appendix D₁). I think that the phrase verb *be* functions as a verbal process and *like* introduces the direct speech or *quoted*. In this example, the verbal process functions to introduce the hypothetical male perspective on female plastic surgery. I argue that the young women invoke the male gaze in this example and in others to legitimate their view that female plastic surgery is undesirable (cf. 4.2.4).

- Are sentences positive or negative?

In terms of experiential value, negative sentences "distinguish what is not the case in reality from what is the case" (Fairclough 2001: 104). Negative sentences are particularly important in terms of how they encode intertextual references (cf. 3.3.3.2) and in terms of the implicit meanings they generate. For example, the sentence, *she is **not** butch*, implies another perspective on the proposition, namely that she *is* butch. The use of negation may point to a competing discourse or at least to the contestation of another participant's viewpoint within the conversation. By comparison, the positive equivalent of the sentence above, *she's butch* does not generate the same notion of contestation nor the possibility of competing discourses. The patternings of positive/negative sentences can cue the analyst to the ideological struggle taking place in the form of competing discourses (cf. 2.4.2.3).

How do the grammatical choices encode *relational* values?

- What sentence modes are used?

English has three types of sentence modes: declarative, interrogative and imperative. This question is concerned with the patterns of sentence modes in a particular text as this is related to the function of the text. For example, newspaper reports typically feature a high frequency of declaratives as their function is to inform readers of newsworthy events. In the body talk texts, I note a high frequency of interrogatives within my contributions to the discussions (cf. 4.2.3, 4.3.3, 4.4.3). I argue that my increased power in the interaction as the researcher means I have asymmetrical rights to ask questions. In this regard, I also consider the type of questions being asked. If one participant asks a series of yes/no questions which constrain the responses of his/her interlocutors, s/he may be seeking to construct a particular (closed) version of events, a version which s/he supports and which may silence other possible interpretations of the same event (Fairclough 1989: 125–6).

How does the grammar encode *expressive* values?

- Are there modal verbs? If so, how are these used?

Expressive modality refers to the text producer's degree of certainty about the truth value of the utterance (Fairclough 2001; Morrish 1997). Expressive modality is often marked by modal auxiliaries, such as *may*, *might*, *will*, *can't*, etc. For example, the use of the modal *will* (as in, "she *will* have a boob job before she's forty") expresses a high degree of certainty on the part of the speaker, while the use of *might* in the same sentence signals a low degree of certainty about the probability of the proposition. Patterns of expressive modality are ideologically significant because they act as cues to the producer's belief in the truth of their claims. A low degree of expressive modality may index the producer's awareness that the statements s/he is making are potentially controversial or problematic (Fairclough 1989). By contrast, patterns of high expressive modality index the producer's claims to the *truth* and their certainty that their presentation of reality is logical and factual. This commitment to the truth value of a set of propositions "supports a view of the world as transparent – as if it signalled its own meaning to any observer, without the need for interpretation and representation" and this can be ideologically convenient (Fairclough 1989: 129).

- How do the patterns of tense encode expressive modality?

In terms of the role of tense in the expression of modality, consider the example, "Most American women *are* overweight". The use of the simple present tense form of the verb *to be* expresses "a categorical commitment of the producer to the truth of the proposition" (Fairclough 2001: 107). It may also signal the speaker's perception that the proposition is universally valid or generalisable (Morrish 1997). By contrast, the addition of a modal

auxiliary, such as *might* lowers the probability of the statement being true. The patterns of tense and modal verbs are ideologically significant because they indicate whether the producer is presenting their view of the world as transparent and unproblematic (Fairclough 2001), as in the first example of categorical modalities above. By contrast, a pattern of hedges, subjective modality markers (for example, *I think*) and low probability modal verbs indicate that the writer/speaker is aware that their position is tenuous and open to other interpretations.

- How do the adverbs encode expressive modality?

Adverbs, such as *probably*, *maybe*, *certainly* and *definitely* sometimes accompany the use of modal auxiliaries and encode varying degrees of certainty and probability on the part of the producer. Thus, combined with modal verbs they indicate the producer's degree of commitment to a set of propositions and their awareness of other possible contesting views.

Connective values: How are sentences linked together?

The connective value of the text describes how the formal features of the text establish logical relations between various parts of the text. Connective value also refers to how “formal features point outside the text to its situational context or to its ‘intertextual’ context” (cf. 3.3.3.2) i.e. how a text positions itself in relation to other texts (Fairclough 2001: 108). Establishing a text's connective value is important in that it signals the semantic relations both within the text (“local” semantic relations) and across other texts of the same genre (“global or higher level semantic relations”) (Fairclough 2003: 91). *Local* semantic relations have to do with how the text establishes cohesion through the use of logical connectors, lexical sets and references to the previous or following statements in the given text (see the section on logical connectors below for more details). To give an example of *global* semantic relations which relates to this study, consider popular pro-diet publications, such as the South African magazine *Shape*. Many of the articles in *Shape* are structured around the framework of “problem-solution”, where the problem is the reader's excess weight and the solution is the weight-loss product, whether it be the latest diet, a new appetite suppressant or a diet shake (Pienaar 2004; Seid 1989). These publications are constructed this way to highlight the reader's deficiencies in order to encourage them to buy a new product to correct the perceived deficiencies (Smith 1990, cf. 2.2.1.1). So while diet publications purportedly serve an informative function (similar to that of other popular magazines), they are driven by the commercial aim of selling the latest diet products. An analysis of the connective values of a text can reveal the means by which a text exploits

particular sets of semantic relations in order to achieve its aims.

- What logical connectors are used?

Logical connectors include terms like *although*, *because*, *but* and *as a result*. They are terms which establish some kind of link between two sentences or clauses. For example, *although* establishes a concessive link between the following two clauses: “*Although* she tried numerous diets, Kate struggled to lose the weight she’d gained”. The connector, *although* encodes the assumption that, given the fact that she had followed several different diets, one would have expected Kate to lose the excess weight. Here is an example of a causal or consequential relation signalled by the connector *because*: “Kate didn’t lose weight *because* she binged on chocolates and chips at least once a week”. In both cases the use of connectors implies a logical, commonsensical relationship between two events (cf. 2.4.2 for a discussion of common sense and ideology). In addition, when two propositions are linked one can usually be identified as the main clause and the other as the subordinate clause. In the first example, the main clause is: *Kate struggled to lose the weight she’d gained* and the subordinate clause is: *she tried numerous diets*. Very often, the information is backgrounded or presupposed in the subordinate clause. Therefore, the presuppositions (cf. 3.3.3.2) and the logical connectors encode the producer’s assumptions about what is normal and logical (and therefore ideological).

- What means are used for referring outside and inside the text?

This question focusses on the grammatical devices used to avoid redundancy in a text, such as pronouns which enable one to refer “in a reduced form to material previously introduced into a text” (Fairclough 2001: 110). The use of the definite article has particular ideological significance since it is often used to refer to things which are not explicitly established in the text or in the situational context, but are rather presupposed as given. For example, the use of the definite article in the statement “Stay-Slim – Offering you *the* only long-term weight-loss solution”, presupposes that, while there are many weight-loss programs available, there is only *one* (*Stay-Slim*), which promises *long-term* results.

3.3.2.3 Textual structures

What interactional conventions are used?

- How is the turn-taking system operating? Is one participant dominating the conversation and controlling the turn-taking? If so, how?

While the above question on turn-taking does help to guide a discussion of how power is

enacted in the interactional elements of a conversation, I found it necessary to investigate particular interactional features in more depth since I believe that a superficial analysis of the micro-level interactional features of the body talk conversations would constitute an oversight. My interpretation of the extracts in chapter 4 indicates disagreement and ideological struggle on the notion of the ideal female body. These negotiations on the ideal body translate into attempts to claim power in the interaction i.e. to have a particular interpretation of the ideal body recognised as legitimate and therefore as powerful. Importantly, many of the cues to the shifting power dynamics (the relational value) are contained in micro-level features of the conversations, such as overlaps and interruptions (van Dijk 2001; Fairclough 2001). Van Dijk (2001: 106) describes the function of micro-level interactional features as being to “signal ‘pragmatic’ properties of a communicative event, such as the intention, current mood or emotions of speakers, their perspective on events talked about, opinions about co-participants, and especially interactional concerns such as positive self-presentation and impression formation”. To my mind this quotation highlights the importance of conversational features in encoding the expressive value (the speaker’s “perspectives on events”) and the relational value (“opinions about co-participants” and “positive self-presentation”), both of which are connected to the production of social power.

I have investigated the following interactional features which I bring to bear on the interpretation of the body talk data: latched or contiguous utterances, overlapping speech, pauses, emphasis, inserted aspiration, decrease in volume and non-verbal activity (such as clapping). Firstly, latched utterances, where the speakers are co-constructing a description or narrating an event, often signal a high level of co-operation and agreement between speakers (Coates & Jordan 1997). Their co-operative efforts may be evidence of the fact that they subscribe to the same ideology, enabling them to *co-construct* a particular piece of the discourse. Coates and Jordan (1997: 223) describe the co-operation and collaboration amongst participants as a “collaborative floor” in which “what is said is construed as being the voice of the group rather than of the individual”. Secondly, I have noted overlapping speech segments where two or more participants speak simultaneously (Psathas 1995). Overlaps may constitute an interruption, an attempt to take the floor. Therefore, they may signal competition and possibly even disagreement amongst the participants. Alternatively, overlapping speech may signal a high level of co-operation and collaboration when several participants contribute to the talk simultaneously, without trying to compete for the floor (Coates & Jordan 1997; Jefferson 2004). The possible ambiguous relational value of overlaps (and other conversational features) points to the need to situate a given feature in the context

of the surrounding speech (Cameron 2001). The third interactional feature which I transcribed is intervals or pauses between utterances, which may signal, for example, that the participant (particularly if s/he is narrating a story) is building up suspense (ibid). Alternatively, a pattern of repeated pauses, combined with the use of fillers like ‘uh’ could indicate the speaker’s uncertainty and hesitancy (Tannen 1991). I noted stress or emphasis, marked by the prolongation of a speech sound, a rise in pitch and/or an increase in volume (Psathas 1995). Emphasis may be used to mark the added import of a particular word or expression in an utterance. Thus, the use of emphasis can act as a cue to the speaker’s opinion of the phenomenon being discussed or their opinion of a co-participant. Repeated emphasis, combined with other expressive linguistic features, like an increase in speech rate, rapid turn-taking and co-operative overlaps may indicate a high level of involvement and rapport between speakers (Tannen 1991). I recorded inserted aspiration or an ‘in-breath’ which may signal surprise or shock. The fifth feature I explored was a decrease in volume, often in the case of whispering. This feature could indicate that the speaker is divulging a secret or revealing “potentially damaging information” (Cameron 2001: 109). Lastly, I explored non-verbal activity, such as clapping or laughing, which provides clues as to the situational context of a given utterance (Glenn 2003). Laughter, for example, may signal the participants’ affiliation with each other since, “[t]o laugh when someone else has done something humorous, laughed first, or otherwise indicated a nonserious orientation provides a way to display like-mindedness” (Glenn 2003: 29). An analysis of interactional features of contributes to an understanding of the situational context of the conversation.

Having described and illustrated the features of the description stage, the next section describes the second analytic stage, the *interpretation* of the text.

3.3.3 Interpretation

The interpretation stage requires one to interpret the *meaning* of the formal features of the text (i.e. those outlined in 3.2) in terms of the discourse in which the text is embedded and the common sense assumptions against which the text is produced and interpreted. Thus, one cannot stop at the description stage of analysis and expect to understand how the text relates to larger social structures since the “relationship between text and social structures is an indirect, mediated one” (Fairclough 1989: 140). Moreover, the experiential, expressive and relational values of textual features derive from the common sense assumptions of both the producer and the interpreter of the text.

3.3.3.1 Coherence

A crucial part of the interpretation phase is the analyst's/interpreter's ability to develop a *coherent* understanding of the fit between the text and the world. This requires one to identify “what aspects of the world it [the text] relates to, or indeed what conception of the world it presupposes”, i.e. the text's *coherence* (Fairclough 2001: 65). The *coherence* of a text does not reside simply in the connections made in the text itself (i.e. its *cohesion*), but is generated through the process of interpretation, by the activation of common sense assumptions in the interpreter (Fairclough 1989; 2001). These assumptions are part of the MR (cf. 2.4.1.1) and they enable the interpreter to make sense of a text based on their previous experience and expectations (ibid).

3.3.3.2 The situational and intertextual context

Since meaning does not reside in language alone, a comprehensive analysis of ideology would consider a variety of semiotic systems, such as visual, paraverbal and behavioural codes (Mills 1995, van Dijk 2001). Van Dijk (2001: 99) notes that, while there are many dimensions to discourse (and therefore to the reproduction of ideology in discourse), a single analysis is necessarily limited in scope and therefore cannot hope to account for all possible dimensions: “...in any practical sense there is no such thing as a ‘complete’ discourse analysis: a ‘full’ analysis of a short passage might take months and fill hundreds of pages. Complete discourse analysis of a large corpus of text or talk, is therefore totally out of the question” (van Dijk 2001: 99). As a *linguistic* analysis, this study of female body talk is necessarily limited to an analysis of language, specifically verbal language in context. In order to present the texts in their context, I have referred, in my interpretation of the extracts, to factors in the situational and intertextual context which I believe contribute to the reproduction or contestation of particular ideologies in the conversations. Factors such as my physical appearance as the researcher, the school setting and the school ethos are taken into account as part of the interpretation stage of the CDA.

The situational context refers to “features of the physical situation, properties of participants, what has previously been said”, as well as to the common sense assumptions (the members' resources) which act as cues in the interpretation of the text (Fairclough 1989: 144). When the analyst defines the situational context, s/he does so by interpreting “what conventions are being drawn upon and how” (Fairclough 1992: 11). This entails identifying the discourse type and whether the text is a typical example of its discourse type or whether it presents an alternative or oppositional stance (cf. 2.4.2.1 for a definition of *discourse type*). In doing this,

the analyst will look at four interrelated dimensions of the discourse type, namely its contents, what subject positions are being set up, the dynamics of these subject positions in terms of power and social control, and the role of language in this picture.

The four dimensions of a discourse type are realised through a) the *semantics* (meanings of the formal textual features), b) the *pragmatics* (meanings ascribed to the text by the participants in terms of their knowledge of the world), and c) the *schemata* (interpretative frames) drawn on to make sense of the text (Fairclough 1989). The role of language in this framework relates to the connections which a particular discourse type makes, both the connections to the situational context and to those made within the text. A useful way of conceiving of the relationship between the discourse type and the processes of interpretation and production is to think of the discourse type as a “meaning potential”, a potential which is activated in the interactive processes of production and interpretation: “[a discourse type has] a particular constrained configuration of possible experiential, expressive and relational, and connective meanings” (Fairclough 1989: 149). The notion of meaning potential is also central to Systemic Functional Grammar (Halliday 1994) which views language as a system of choices containing a range of possible meanings. Everytime a person speaks or writes they are making paradigmatic choices and are thus activating the meaning potential of language.

It is important to note that the situational context may differ according to one’s ideological position and thus the analyst cannot assume that the context is transparent and read homogeneously by all participants in an interaction (Fairclough 1989; 1992b). For example, participants within the same cultural setting may be drawing on different interpretative frames to interpret the text. It is also possible that the more powerful participant may impose his/her reading of the text on the other participants. Given the possibility of multiple textual interpretations, the analyst must determine which interpretative frames are being used to interpret the situational context and whether these are shared by all the participants (ibid).

The intertextual context represents the set of pre-existing discourses to which the current one is related and on which the participants rely in interpreting the text (Fairclough 1989; 1992a; 1992b; 2003). The intertextual context is important as it signals “what can be taken as given in the sense of part of common experience, what can be alluded to, disagreed with and so on” (Fairclough 1989: 145). The information which is taken as common ground between the participants in an interaction is collectively subsumed under the notion of presupposition. Presuppositions are cued by the formal properties of a text, such as the use of the definite

article and the use of subordinate clauses in which information is backgrounded against the prominence of the information in the main clause. The text producer assumes that the information encoded in the presupposition is related to the given text through antecedent texts within the reader's experience (Fairclough 1989). The reason we recognise a particular discourse is because it calls to mind another text in which the linguistic traces of this discourse exist (Sunderland 2004). The significance of interpreting the intertextual context is to show how a text is always produced dialogically with other texts within the same historical context; "...any text is explicitly or implicitly 'in dialogue with' other texts...which constitute its 'intertexts'. Any text is a link in a chain of texts, reacting to, drawing in, and transforming other texts" (Fairclough 2001: 223, cf. 2.3.3).

For example, a diet text such as the South African magazine, *Shape*, presupposes that the average young Western woman (representing the ideal reader) wants to be thinner than she currently is and that she is in search of a diet success story, which will motivate her to lose her perceived excess weight (Pienaar 2004). Importantly, the magazine also presupposes that the reader has tried numerous traditional diets and failed to lose weight. The *Shape* articles make *negative* intertextual references to the ideal reader's previous experience of dieting in statements such as "dieting is *neither* effortless *nor* quick". Negative propositions such as this implicitly take issue with a competing discourse in which dieting *is* constructed as effortless and quick. They seek to debunk traditional diet myths and to offer a permanent solution to the reader's presumed weight problem (Pienaar 2004). This brings me to the point about the use of negation as a means of contesting antecedent texts in the reader's experience. The text producer may make a negative assertion "as a way of implicitly taking issue with corresponding positive assertions" in antecedent texts which the interpreter is assumed to have read/heard (Fairclough 1989: 155). My study of diet discourse revealed that the use of negation as part of the intertextual context was part of a "consciousness-raising discourse" (Coates 1999), a discourse which sought to demystify traditional claims about dieting (Pienaar 2004).

3.3.3.3 Pragmatics: interpreting the speech acts

I mentioned that one of the levels of textual interpretation is the pragmatics of the text (cf. 3.3.3.2). Pragmatics refers to the "meanings which participants in a discourse ascribe to elements of the text on the basis of their MR and their interpretations of context" (Fairclough 1989: 155). One of the features of pragmatics is the speech act. This refers to what the speaker or writer is doing when they produce an utterance/sentence, i.e. the illocutionary

force of the utterance/sentence. For example, they may be promising, accusing, threatening or simultaneously doing several things. However, there is no one-to-one correspondance between the form of the utterance and its function(s) (Fowler *et al.* 1979). For example, a person may construct an utterance as a request for information, such as “Are you going to eat that?”. This apparent question may function as a command in certain settings to get the interlocutor to give the speaker whatever food she has not eaten. The way in which this utterance is interpreted will depend on the context in which it occurs and the participants’ common sense assumptions about the nature of the discourse type.

Speech acts encode important relational value since they cue the interpreter to the power relations operating in a particular discourse type. For example, they signal who has the power to ask questions and give commands and, conversely, who is disempowered by the discourse type. Part of the interpretation stage requires an analysis of the patterns of speech acts as a cue to the power relations enacted by the discourse.

3.3.4 Explanation

The explanation stage aims to place the text in its larger social context to explain its role in the perpetuation or contestation of existing social structures (Fairclough 1989; 1992a). In other words, it looks at the social effects of the processes of production and interpretation, specifically in terms of how they reproduce particular social relations of power. The explanation of a text thus involves a discussion of the role discourse plays in the process of social struggle (Fairclough 1989). By social struggle Fairclough (1989: 164) is not only referring to “overt struggle or conflict”, which is only one way in which struggle manifests itself. Social struggle refers more generally to how unequal power relations play themselves out in everyday discourse, whether the participants are aware of the asymmetrical relations or not.

Since CDA conceives of a dialectic relationship between discourse and society, the explanation stage also aims to show how discourse is the *product* of various social processes, particularly struggles for power in an institution or society. This has implications in terms of the MR (members’ resources) on which people draw to produce and interpret discourse (cf. 2.4.1.1). A discourse may either *reproduce* or *contest* the MR on which it draws. By contesting the MR, a discourse will, to some degree, contribute to the transformation of the MR and, if sustained, to broader social transformation. The contestation or reproduction of the MR in discourse implies that the producer and interpreter must each have a particular

relationship to the MR. The reproduction of the MR implies that the producer/interpreter “is in a *normative* relation to her MR, that she is acting in accordance with them in a rather direct way” (Fairclough 1989: 165). By contrast, the contestation of the MR requires a creative or alternative relation on the part of the producer/interpreter to his/her MR. S/he may be combining the MR in alternative ways or resisting them. In this study for example, the participants sometimes resist traditional assumptions about what constitutes a “desirable” woman and they invoke a “discourse of the new modern woman” to construct an alternative conception of the desirable modern woman as one who is powerful and successful.

This relation of the text producer/interpreter to the MR nicely illustrates that people are not necessarily always duped by discourses and that they do not always unconsciously reproduce them. Rather, people are active agents who may choose to resist their MR or combine them in creative new ways to generate alternative discourses which challenge or redefine the *status quo*. The creative use of discourse arises “when relations and practices are in flux, and when the social action is perhaps oppositional or in some way problematic” (Fairclough 1992b: 11). However, it is when particular alternative discourses (or innovative adaptations of the MR) become pervasive that they bring about sustained transformation in terms of the MR (Fairclough 1989). It should be clear that, in looking at the social effects of discourse in the explanation stage, CDA is drawing on the notion of discourse as social practice (cf. 2.4.1.1).

There is an important relationship between the MR and ideology: the beliefs about social relationships and social identities which form part of the MR in turn constitute an ideology or set of ideologies. So by studying the MR on which the participants draw to produce and interpret discourse, one is studying ideology. In sum then, the explanation stage looks at three aspects of discourse: 1) the power relations at the level of the situation, the society and the institution(s) which influence the form and function of the discourse; 2) the ideologies which underlie the discourses; and 3) the social effects of discourse in terms of the maintenance or transformation of the *status quo*, with a particular focus on power relations and social struggle in discourse. In terms of the power relations at the level of the situation (or the first aspect of discourse above), the interpretation of the body talk extracts reveals an unequal power dynamic between me and the participants. The extracts attest to my coercive role in promoting conservative, reactionary discourses of female beauty, which reproduce the hegemony of the current ideal of the youthful, slender, toned body (cf. 4.2.3, 4.3.3, 4.4.3). Turning to the power dynamics at the level of society, the interpretation of extract one

reveals how unequal gender relations are enacted in the extract in the grammatical processes: the *active/passive* gendered binary is reproduced in the majority of these processes in which men are positioned as active agents performing various actions while women are positioned as passive recipients of male actions (cf. 4.2.4). With regards to the ideologies and social effects of the body talk discourses (the second and third aspects of discourse above), the explanation of the extracts in chapter 5 describes how the dominant body talk discourses encode an ideology which promotes female sexual desirability, youthfulness and thinness. I believe that this ideology reproduces a belief in the supremacy of conventionally beautiful women within the social order and, as such, that it constructs women who do not conform to the prevailing beauty norms (most notably overweight, ageing women) as second class citizens (cf. 5.5, 6.4).

3.3.5 Applying CDA: The challenge of readability

One of the problems I experienced in applying Fairclough's (1989; 2001) three stages (description, interpretation and explanation) to the conversations is that this delineation of the analysis into stages did not always allow for the interpretation to emerge organically in response to, for example, the multiple discourses featured in the extracts. At times, I found the categories within the stages worked against the interpretation in that they divided it into artificial sections. For example, while analysing a feature in terms of its expressive value, I found myself simultaneously analysing its relational value. I also began to cross the boundaries between the description and interpretation stages. Therefore, the reader will notice that, at some points in the descriptions of the extracts (Appendix E), I not only identify a particular textual feature but also begin to interpret its significance in terms of the situational context (part of the interpretation stage).

In addition, because this study focusses on the use of multiple, sometimes contradictory discourses (cf. 1.2), it was useful to divide a given extract according to the discourses invoked at various points in the extract. I found it productive to consider each of these discourses as a coherent text, although I also had to account for the interrelation between the discourses. While this was a useful strategy for analysing the conversations, it was difficult to reconcile this organic analytic procedure (which developed in response to the unique features of a particular extract) with Fairclough's (1989) distinct analytic categories for analysing the text in its entirety. I have sought to retain the rigour provided by Fairclough's procedure while still allowing the conversations to guide the direction and form of the description and interpretation of the text.

For expository purposes I have separated the analysis of the extracts into two sections, the interpretation and the explanation. Chapter 4 presents the interpretation of the texts: it interprets the formal features of the texts (based on the description) in terms of how they encode the participants' background assumptions (cf. 3.3.3). Thus, it is concerned with the micro-level features of the text, rather than with the macro-level effects of the text in terms of "societal processes of struggle" and the reproduction of (unequal) power relations (Fairclough 1989: 141). In presenting my interpretation of the extracts in chapter 4, I decided against using Fairclough's (1992: 11) interpretative headings which focus, for example, on the ideal reader, the discourse type and coherence in the text. Guided by my research aim to analyse oppositional discourses, I have instead analysed each extract in terms of the discourses invoked at various stages of the extract. I have sought to account for the shifts from one discourse to another and to identify which discourse, if any, is dominant in a given extract. In this case I aimed to merge Fairclough's analytic categories (which would usually be applied to the text as a whole) with my delineation of the text into distinct discourses.

The choice to present the interpretation of each extract in this way was also guided by a concern for readability: I believe that delineating each extract into artificial sections (across which there may be a fair degree of repetition) does not make for a readable interpretation. Moreover, it is common practice in most CDA research to analyse only the ideologically significant features of a text (see for example Fairclough 2003: 194–202; Flowerdew 2004, Janks 1998; Ricento 2003). While I acknowledge that following the headings of *ideal reader*, *discourse type* etc. in the interpretation stage does provide analytic rigour, I think that these headings should be employed as a procedural framework in the early analysis stage. Thus, I have employed these headings in my provisional analyses, but have omitted them in the presentation of my final interpretation in favour of a more holistic, coherent analysis of each extract.

Chapter 5 presents the explanation of the texts. The explanation section is at one remove from the text as it is not concerned with the immediate situational context of the text, but rather with the social context of discourse (Fairclough 1989; 2001). Therefore, chapter 5 considers whether the body talk discourses (and the ideologies they encode) contribute to the reproduction or transformation of the *status quo*.

3.4 Summary

This chapter began by describing the procedure used to collect the relevant body talk conversations. In this regard I explained my choice to use young, Western, English-speaking

women as research participants. I described the stimulus exercises used to elicit data on the topic of the ideal female body. I also considered the role of the researcher as a co-conversant in the conversations, whose contributions are of equal analytic interest (cf. 3.2.3). The chapter then went on to describe the method of analysis, namely CDA (cf. 3.3). I discussed the three steps of CDA and sought to provide examples of the various textual features within the context of my recent study on diet discourse (Pienaar 2004). Following Fairclough's more recent work on CDA, I explained my choice to supplement the original CDA framework for identifying the grammatical processes in a text with a more calibrated set of process types and participant roles as defined in the SFG framework (cf. 3.3.2.2). The application of the CDA framework to the body talk data should enable a nuanced analysis of how a selection of young Western women express, reproduce and possibly contest certain ideologies in their conversations on the female physical ideal.

4. INTERPRETATION OF THE THREE EXTRACTS

4.1 Introduction

Drawing on the relevant literature discussed in chapter 2 and the research methodology of CDA presented in chapter 3, I now present my interpretation of three body talk extracts. Following Fairclough's (1989) separation of the analysis into stages, I divided the analysis of each extract into two distinct sections, the interpretation and explanation. In this chapter, I focus on the interpretation of each extract, drawing on the relevant features of the description contained in Appendix E. In chapter 5, I provide the explanation of the extracts in light of the broader socio-cultural context. To reiterate, the interpretation stage of CDA focusses on the features of the text as these relate to the situational context, the intertextual context and the participants' background assumptions (cf. 3.3.3). Since one of my research aims is to analyse oppositional discourses (cf. 1.2), I account for the multiple, conflicting discourses evident in each extract. I also consider my role as the researcher in possibly constraining the participants' contributions and in influencing the direction of the discussions. So the interpretation of each extract begins with a discussion of my role in the interaction. I then consider a number of significant ideological features of the extract, for example the role of the male gaze (extract one) and the participants' opposing perspectives on the overweight female body (extract two). The relevant extracts are included as Appendices D₁, D₂ and D₃.

What is common across the extracts is that they feature oppositional discourses which reflect the fact that the young women are wrestling with the notion of the ideal female body. The organisation of the interpretations reflects the increase in complexity in terms of the number of oppositional discourses realised in a particular extract. I have ordered the extracts from least to most complex in this regard. Thus, the first two extracts feature only two discourses jostling for dominance, while extract three features five discourses and is therefore the most ideologically complex extract to interpret.

Extract one represents a discussion of one particular female body management practice, cosmetic surgery (cf. 4.2). More specifically, it constitutes a debate on the merits of the 'natural' female body over the surgically enhanced body. It features two discourses, namely the discourse of the natural woman and an oppositional discourse of the sexually attractive female body. The first discourse endorses the natural female body as the ideal and argues against cosmetic surgery as a means of enhancing a woman's appearance. The opposing discourse constructs female sexual desirability as the key concern, regardless of whether this

desirability has been achieved through surgery or not. Both discourses appeal to male notions of female attractiveness to legitimate their respective conceptions of the ideal female body.

Extract two (cf. 4.3) is a discussion of the overweight female body, elicited in response to an image of a woman whom the participants described as *curvy*. What is interesting about this extract is the participants' reluctance to discuss the subject of female excess weight, a reluctance which is reflected in their use of euphemism. In the interpretation of this extract I attempt to explain the ideological significance of the discourse of silence on the topic of female fatness. I play a significant role in this extract because I intervene several times in an attempt to coerce the young women to discuss candidly their opinions of the designated *curvy* woman. Thus there are two discourses operating in this extract, the participants' discourse of silence on female fatness and the discourse which I adopt, an anti-fat discourse (cf. 4.3.4). In a spirit of reflexivity, I consider my coercive role in this extract as well as the participants' resistance to adopting a negative stance on female fatness (cf. 4.3.3).

As mentioned earlier, extract three is the most ideologically complex of the three because of the number of discourses realised in the course of the extract. It represents a good example of a discursive struggle taking place on the notion of the ideal female body and more specifically, on the relationship between a woman's physical appearance and her personal well-being (cf. 4.4.6). In negotiating this, the participants draw on the following five discourses: a pro-moderation discourse; a discourse which presents anorexia as a lifestyle choice; an anti-fat discourse; a discourse which constructs personal happiness as a predisposition and an alternative discourse which constructs happiness as independent of female body size. What strikes me about extract three is that, although the women appear inarticulate and even incoherent at times, they are in fact working through a complex cluster of interrelated discourses in an attempt to arrive at a consensus of what constitutes the ideal body.

To some extent my interpretation follows the CDA framework outlined in Fairclough (1989). However, it does not follow Fairclough's headings of 'ideal reader', 'discourse type' etc. Rather, it is thematically based and focusses on the shifts from one discourse to another in the extract as the young women negotiate their conceptions of the ideal female body. I conclude the interpretation by summing up the commonalities and differences between the extracts, specifically in terms of how the ideal female body is defined and how various

notions of femininity are negotiated.

4.2 Extract one

4.2.1 The context of the discussion

This extract features an animated discussion between four female friends aged sixteen who were living in the same hostel at Smithson College at the time of the recording. The conversation took place in the common room at the hostel one evening after supper. The young women padded into the common room in their fluffy slippers and pyjamas. They arranged themselves comfortably in a semi-circle on easy chair and bean bags and pulled up an extra chair for me. I was dressed in jeans and a t-shirt in an attempt to approximate their casual appearance. I was also not wearing any make-up since to do so would have set me apart from them as older, formal and different. I recognised that my presence at the school was already marked and did not wish to draw further attention to myself as an outsider. My concern was to minimise possible differences and to approximate the norms of the group in terms of my appearance in the hope that the young women would view me as less of an outsider and more of a partial insider. If they perceived me as such I believed that the young women would be more likely to speak spontaneously and openly, without overly monitoring their contributions in my presence (cf. 3.2.3).

Three of the young women featured in this extract, namely Hayley, Winnie and Timega had been friends for at least a year while the fourth young woman, Sophie, was new to the school and had only known the other girls for three weeks. Unsurprisingly, Sophie contributed the least to the conversations, particularly when the other girls spoke of shared experiences to which she was not privy. I indicated in my post-recording notes on this conversation that Winnie and Timega were the dominant speakers who tended to steer the direction of the conversation and who held the floor for the longest periods. For example, in this extract, Timega contributes 25 utterances to the conversation and Winnie 23. Together, their contributions represent almost half (48%) the total number of utterances in this short extract. They were also the most outspoken participants and the ones who initiated changes in topic and who spontaneously offered their forthright views on the images used in the stimulus exercises. Timega appeared to be the ‘joker’ in the group and made self-deprecating remarks in order to elicit laughter from her friends. The young women identified Winnie as the clever one and Timega teased her about having such a large vocabulary and always using *big words*. Hayley appeared to be the most unconventional of the three friends, whose beliefs were often at odds with those of the others. She was unafraid to voice unorthodox viewpoints

as is evident in both this extract and in extract three where she also features. Hayley plays an important role in invoking oppositional discourses which take issue with the assumptions of her interlocutors. However, her views were often overridden by the dominant participants, Winnie and Timega.

I will briefly describe the physical appearance of each participant (including myself) as I believe that this may have a bearing on their views of different types of female bodies. For example, an overweight young woman may be more accepting of larger female bodies, by virtue of her own excess weight and her possible perception that her body does not conform to the prevailing ideal of the slender female body. I acknowledge that my perceptions of the young women are subjective and shaped by culturally conditioned notions of beauty. Moreover, I am aware that in describing the young women, I am entering an evaluative mode which reproduces essentialist notions of female attractiveness. Therefore, I cannot claim to be providing a neutral, objective description but I believe that given the topic of the discussions, it is important to describe this element of the situational context.

None of the young women is overweight, although Winnie is tall and big-boned and, at first glance, may appear plump. She has a ruddy complexion, freckles, deep brown eyes and a mass of brunette curls. By her own admission, she has a distinctive nose which she believes resembles a *ski slope*. While her appearance is striking in its distinctiveness, it is not strikingly attractive. By contrast, Timega is petite and slender with an olive complexion. She too believes her nose is unattractive because it is large and slightly hooked. She has brown eyes and shoulder-length wavy brown hair. Of the four young women I perceive her to be the most attractive. It is interesting that Timega is the most confident, outspoken participant. She also appears to be the most popular, judging from the other girls' support of her in the extract. It is possible that her popularity and confidence derive in part from her conventional attractiveness but they may equally well derive from her sense of humour. Both Winnie and Timega are very critical of their appearance and claim that they would undergo plastic surgery to improve their noses. The third participant, Hayley, is tall and dark blonde with a light complexion and blue eyes. She is slim but has prominent bone structure which gives her the appearance of being hefty. Sophie is short, though slightly taller than Timega, with wavy blonde hair and blue eyes. Her complexion is porcelain-like with a few freckles. She is slim but more curvaceous than Timega whose skinny frame is angular by contrast. I perceived Sophie to be the least striking of the participants but this perception may well be based on her shyness, rather than on her appearance. Lastly, I am petite with shoulder-length

auburn hair and green eyes. Like Timega, my complexion is olive but, unlike her, I have no freckles. My frame is also not as angular as Timega's but neither is it as curvy as Winnie's.

In order to elicit the discussion on which extract one is based, I used the third stimulus exercise (Appendix A₃), featuring eight images of women who had undergone plastic surgery (cf. 3.2.4). Because the images were in sets of two featuring each woman before and after surgery, the participants could compare the effects of plastic surgery on the women's appearance. I asked the participants to comment on the images and to indicate whether they would opt for plastic surgery. Prior to this I had also shown them the images from the second stimulus exercises (cf. 3.2.4) which featured overweight and anorexic women and they had spent 45 minutes discussing these images before I raised the issue of plastic surgery. So this extract was taken from the last half an hour of the conversation and, by this stage, I think that any initial reticence on the part of the young women had dissolved. It is also likely that they had forgotten the presence of the recorder and were thus speaking fairly spontaneously.

Since the images resemble those seen on makeover reality shows like *Extreme Makeover*, I drew a parallel between the current set of pictures and those seen on this reality programme (see Table 2, line 28). In *Extreme Makeover* and in other makeover reality shows on television, like *The Swan*, participants win a makeover and each makeover process is filmed and broadcast as an episode in the series. The programme shows the participant before surgery, being prepared for surgery and during surgery. Finally, after undergoing surgery and being subjected to a strict fitness regime and weight-loss plan, the participants' transformation is revealed to the audience and to their friends and family. I questioned the participants about the appeal of reality makeover shows and they expressed varying responses, ranging from expressions of shock at the youth of some of the subjects to awe at their transformation from *ugly duckling to swan*. I have reproduced a section of the discussion in Table 2 to give the reader a sense of the young women's initial response to the images and to contextualise extract one:

Table 2: The surgical transformation of the body

1	K: oh let me show you these pictures talking about that you've obviously I'm sure you've seen
2	Extreme Makeover
3	Timega: [ooh I <u>love</u> that show!]
4	Hayley: [OH YES!]
5	Winnie: I <u>love</u> Extreme Makeover
6	K: WHY do people <u>love</u> it? It's such a <u>terrible</u> show
7	Winnie: no but no but cause the people are so <u>happy</u> afterwards=
8	Hayley: =But I think that's also on the show like you I've <u>never</u> seen an Extreme Makeover where
9	the person's <u>sad</u> afterwards=
10	K: =but <u>why</u> do you think people <u>love</u> to watch this cause <u>everyone</u> does
11	[I haven't met any]
12	Winnie: [it's because I]
13	Hayley: [you see the <u>process</u>]
14	Winnie: [I think it's cause] you just see them I think like for <u>me</u> it's more like the <u>emotions</u> that
15	go with it like they're so <u>happy</u> afterwards it's like even if it <u>is</u> only on <u>TV</u> and whatever
16	K: [ja]
17	Winnie: [they] just like I don't know I just think it's like they they have these <u>touching</u> little videos
18	that they send in and whether [it's like all true or not]
19	Sophie: [where they like <u>cry</u>] and
[...]	
20	K: but still people are transfixed=
21	Winnie: =[people like <u>drama</u>]
22	Hayley: [people love it]
23	K: ja=
24	Timega: =they love reality=
25	Hayley: =but you see these people change [from ugly ducklings into swans]
26	Winnie: [people are <u>vultures</u>]
27	Timega: [I'm not even gonna <u>lie</u>] it's like one of my favourite programs ((laughs))
28	Sophie: [ja me as well]
[...]	
29	K: =but what <u>draws</u> you to it?
30	Just the fact that it's this tr- [transformation]
31	Hayley: [well actually just]
32	Winnie: I'm not <u>really</u> like oh my goodness Extreme Makeover it's just that it was on TV=
33	Hayley: =I think it's like the <u>shock</u> like [oh my God]
34	Timega: [ja I think it's like almost]
35	Sophie: [you went from <u>that</u> to this]
36	Timega: I think in a weird way it's like the <u>hope</u> that like [if you don't feel like that good about]
37	Hayley: [I could <u>become</u> that!]
38	Timega: yourself well maybe you know there- there's hope=
39	Sophie: =there's hope for me=
40	Timega: =like if <u>she</u> can look like that and then look like <u>that</u> maybe [there's hope that I can]
41	Winnie: [I can too]
42	Timega: look like this and then look like that
43	Timega: I think it could almost be like the hope
44	[that maybe one day]
45	K: [that kind of fairytale]
46	Timega: it'll be <u>you</u>
47	K: [ja]
48	Timega: [ja like] you like watching aah boyfriend and girlfriend and then=
49	K: =happy ending=
50	Timega: =their little happy ending
51	and you hope that you can have that too

What is striking about the extract in Table 2 is that it features contradictory discourses as the young women negotiate their stance on plastic surgery and on reality television shows which promote its transformative potential. Their position on the matter is ambivalent and their struggle to clarify their views is played out both in the extract in Table 2 and in extract one (Appendix D₁). For example, on the one hand, Winnie questions the authenticity of reality programs which depict people before, during and after surgery. She expresses doubt about whether the emotion captured on camera is real or staged: *[they] just like I don't know I just think it's like they they have these touching little videos that they send in and whether [it's like all true or not]* (lines 17–18, Table 2). She also draws attention to the voyeuristic element of the show, an element which she believes constitutes part of its appeal (lines 21 and 26, Table 2). On the other hand, Timega and Hayley describe how reality shows focussing on the surgical transformation of ordinary people give them hope that one day they may be transformed as in a fairytale from *ugly ducklings into swans* (line 25, Table 2). In extract one, as will be explained in more detail below, Winnie takes issue with one of the other participant's idealism and renounces the existence of fairytales (1:87, where 1 refers to the extract number contained in Appendix D₁ and 87 to the line number within that extract), contending that *they just don't exist*. It is possible that Winnie's renunciation encodes an intertextual reference to Timega's similarly idealistic view (lines 43–51, Table 2) that the fairytale stories enacted on *Extreme Makeover* occur off camera too.

4.2.2 Introduction

I identified two discourses being drawn upon in extract one, namely the discourse of the natural woman and an oppositional discourse of the sexually attractive female body. As its name suggests, the discourse of the natural woman argues the merits of so-called natural appeal. Such appeal is juxtaposed with surgically enhanced beauty or, in the words of the young women, with *fake* beauty (1:26, 1:49–50, Appendix D₁). The oppositional discourse of the sexually attractive female body constructs heterosexual desirability as the key concern, overriding the appeal of the natural, authentic female body. In order to legitimate their initial view that the natural female body is ideal, the young women appeal to male notions of female attractiveness. Under the section entitled, 'Invoking the male gaze', I explore the possible reasons why the participants appeal to the male gaze and related to this, I discuss the reproduction of traditional gendered binaries in the grammatical processes of the extract (cf. 4.2.4). In the final section of the interpretation, 4.2.5, I focus the relationship between the two discourses drawn upon in the extract and explain the conflicting ideologies which these discourses encode.

4.2.3 The role of the researcher

Several features in extract one attest to the unequal power relations between myself and the participants. For example I speak far less than the other participants (only eight times, as compared to an average of 18 times for the other participants). In speaking less than the other participants I signal my status as an observer rather than a co-conversant. It is also interesting that of the six questions posed in the extract, I pose four of them (cf. 1:52, 1:55, 1:93, 1:98). My asymmetrical rights to ask questions and to avoid contributing fully to the discussion are probably a function of my perception that my role in the body talk conversations was that of critical discussant, rather than equal co-participant.

On one of the occasions when I intervene to question the participants' views, my contribution occasions a shift in their stance. In 1:52–6 I question Hayley's claim that a woman's natural appeal is what attracts members of the opposite sex:

- 50 **Hayley:** =if she now comes out and says my lips are fake all the guys would be like no
 51 I never thought she was hot I never thought she had nice lips=
 52 **K:** =you think so?=
 53 **Hayley:** [well I do]
 54 **Winnie:** [yes]
 55 **K:** [what?! do] you think they prefer women natural?
 56 **Hayley:** I think so

My tone in 1:52 is one of surprise and doubt. Hayley yields to my questioning by emphasising the personal pronoun *I* in her response, *well I do* (1:53), which has the effect of marking her opinion as subjective and encoding an implicit acknowledgement of alternative viewpoints. I respond by rephrasing my question in an attempt to encourage the participants to change their stance: *what?! do you think they prefer women natural?* Firstly, the question *what?!* in this utterance constitutes an open challenge to Hayley's position. Secondly, the emphasis on *natural* gives the term contrastive value: I am implicitly contrasting the natural female body with the *surgically altered* equivalent to dispute the notion that natural feminine appeal is favourable.

My questioning of the view that men prefer natural, non-surgically altered women (1:52, 1:55) causes the participants to qualify their pro-natural stance. In response to my scepticism in 1:55, Sophie concedes that the previous view that all men prefer natural (non-surgically altered) female bodies is not as definitive as the participants originally claimed. She admits that such a view is true *to a certain extent* (1:57), thereby modulating the strength of the previous claims. Given Sophie's shyness and the fact that, as a new member of the group, her

position is tenuous, it is perhaps unsurprising that she is willing to defer to me, rather than risk having to defend a controversial view in the face of opposition from me. In 1:59, Winnie is quick to add the emphatic qualifier that, not only does a woman have to be *natural*, she also has to be *beautiful*. This marks the shift to the discourse of female sexual attractiveness, a discourse which relies on male notions of attractiveness and which emphasises the social value of female beauty.

One of my comments in this extract which I believe is particularly revealing in terms of signalling my ideology is the utterance in 1:74, which I have reproduced below:

73 **Timega:** a guy would choose a natural siff ass girl or like=

74 **K:** =swamp donkey ((laughs))=

Following Timega's use of the pejorative phrase *siff ass girl* to negatively characterise unattractive women, (1:73) I draw on a similarly derogatory term in 1:74, *swamp donkey*. Not only is *swamp donkey* derogatory, it is dehumanising as it likens the object of the description to an animal, to a donkey at that. According to the users' dictionary of urban slang, swamp donkey is a term of British origin which refers to a woman who is *both fat and ugly* (Online urban dictionary 2006). So the term has connotations, not only of female ugliness but also of excess weight. In terms of experiential value, my use of this offensive term constitutes a tacit signal that I share the participants' belief that ugly women do not attract members of the opposite sex. Given the disparaging remarks about unattractive women being *siff* (1:64, 1:66, 1:73), the participants and I signal our subscription to a pro-beauty ideology (cf. 2.2.1.1, 2.2.2.4). This ideology is based on male notions of female attractiveness, compulsory heterosexuality and the belief in the supremacy of conventionally attractive women within the social order.

In analysing my use of this term, I must confess my suitable embarrassment that I chose to describe a particular kind of woman in such offensive terms. By doing so, I acknowledge that I contributed powerfully to the phenomenon of deriding unattractive women and implicitly elevating attractive women as the ideal in this interaction. The fact that, despite my best intentions to resist normative constructions of female beauty, I ended up reproducing these very constructions points to the tension between my intention to challenge prevailing beliefs about women (in the face of opposition from the group) and my desire to conform to the dominant beliefs of the group. Faced with this tension, my desire to conform, to fit in with the group, trumped any conscious aims to resist normative constructions of female beauty. This shows how powerful these constructions are.

4.2.4 Invoking the male gaze

I identified one of the characteristic features of this extract as being the pervasiveness of the male gaze (cf. 2.2.2.4). The use of the term *male gaze* in this context is consonant with Laura Mulvey's (1975) original use of the term to describe the gendered roles of male spectator and female sexual object on which classic Hollywood cinema relies, i.e. it implies that men traditionally adopt the role of spectator, gazing at and appraising women as erotic objects. This binary of man as "bearer of the look" and woman as "erotic spectacle" (Mulvey 1975: 19) is borne out when the female participants appraise a given woman in terms of whether a man would *choose* her (1:73, 1:75–80, 1:88–9). As I argue in 2.2.2.4, the adoption of the male gaze operates as a disciplinary practice of the female body, as it constitutes another perspective from which a woman judges and regulates her body so that it conforms to dominant, heteronormative ideals of femininity.

The male gaze is adopted a total of 23 times in the extract to legitimate particular constructions of different types of female bodies as ideal/not ideal (see for example, 1:1, 1:3, 1:12, 1:24–5, 1:45, 1:50–55, 1:73). In fact, there are only six occasions (1:35, 1:37, 1:39, 1:41, 1:42 1:43) where the young women offer an opinion which is based on their own perceptions, rather than on the hypothetical perceptions of the average heterosexual male. The limited number of subjective modality markers, such as *I think* and *I believe* bears testament to the fact that the participants in this extract seldom evaluate a woman's attractiveness from their personal subject positions, preferring to adopt the subject position of a *guy* (1:1, 1:24, 1:45, 1:50, 1:73). The term *guy* refers either to all men, or to a particular group of young men who represent potential sexual partners for these women. It is possible that their subject position of 'young woman' does not afford the participants enough perceived legitimacy to judge another woman's attractiveness. This may be because attractiveness is typically constructed in terms of heterosexual desirability, rather than in terms of pure aesthetic appeal: "...the normative body is a sexually functioning one and the aestheticisation of the body is constructed primarily as a concern for interpersonal attractiveness and sexual gratification of self and/or significant other" (Jaworski 2003: 173).

For example, in 1:44, in response to my statement that Angelina Jolie's lips are too big, Winnie calls on male notions of female attractiveness to disagree with my perception:

- 44 **K:** =But shame they are quite big I wouldn't like my lips that big=
 45 **Winnie:** =ja but all the guys seem to love it!

In 1:45 Winnie indicates that, while she herself agrees with my observation that Jolie's lips are too big (*ja*), the average *guy* appears to like her lips. The fact that she is voicing the opinion of a guy means that she does not have to defend this position as if it were her own. Adopting the male gaze to counter my view also has the effect of placing Winnie at one remove from the claim: she is not disagreeing with me personally but is rather invoking the male perspective to do so. What is significant about this brief exchange is that I do not push my view any further, despite my potential power to sway the other participants' views. My subsequent silence on this matter suggests that, ultimately, it is male notions of female attractiveness that count and that, speaking from my position as a woman does not afford me sufficient legitimacy to determine what is attractive in another woman.

Because the male gaze is appealed to frequently in this extract, it follows that the participants typically position men as the agents who appraise a woman's beauty or *choose* a woman based on her physical appearance (1:73–6). Women on the other hand, are seldom given agency and are most often positioned as objects of the gaze. Explained in terms of traditional grammatical relations, men are the agents who initiate sexual advances and women are the patients, the passive recipient of male actions. Probably the most revealing illustration of the gendered roles in the extract is the jointly constructed description of an intimate exchange between a man and a woman who has had cosmetic surgery (1:12–20). In this example, the man is constructed as agentive: he fondles the woman's artificial breasts and then exclaims perfunctorily, *oh that was fun* (1:19). It is interesting that the woman's response to this intimate exchange is not mentioned at all: it is a one-way exchange, initiated by the man, with the woman (or rather her breasts) positioned as the passive 'beneficiary' of his actions. The participants use this example to legitimate their perception that women who have cosmetic surgery to make them more attractive have limited heterosexual appeal.

The *active/passive* gendered binary illustrated with reference to the exchange above is borne out in the majority of the grammatical processes in the extract. In what follows I will describe the asymmetrical gender positioning in terms of the mental, verbal and material processes realised in the extract (cf. Appendix E₁). I identified 27 mental processes, i.e. processes which describe cognitive or affective actions (cf. 3.3.2.2). Many of the mental processes in this extract relate to the act of appraisal i.e. *liking/disliking* a particular type of woman, *perceiving* various physical attributes and *choosing* a woman based on her physical appearance. Of the 28 mental processes in this extract, 15 reproduce the *active/passive* gendered binary where the male is positioned as the active *senser* and the female as the

passive *phenomenon* i.e the thing being sensed (cf. Appendix E₁). Of the remaining 13 mental processes, three use the generic pronoun *you* to refer to the senser (which is arguably gender neutral), one uses the inclusive pronoun *we* to refer to all women (see below), four present a woman (the speaker) as *senser* and the other five mental processes represent subjective modality markers like *I think* and *I don't know*, which encode the speaker's level of certainty. To illustrate the positioning of males as *sensors*, consider the following examples of mental processes taken from the extract (1:45, 1:55, 1:73):

<i>all the guys</i>	<i>seem to love</i>	<i>it [Angelina Jolie's lips]</i>
Senser	Mental	Phenomenon

<i>they [men]</i>	<i>prefer</i>	<i>women <u>natural</u></i>
Senser	Mental process	Phenomenon

<i>a guy</i>	<i>[would] choose</i>	<i>a natural siff ass girl</i>
Senser	Mental process	Phenomenon

A similar gendered pattern is evident in the verbal processes. I identified six verbal processes and, in terms of the participant roles, five of them positioned a male as the sayers, the active participant performing the process (cf. the description of extract 1 contained in Appendix E₁). Of the material, verbal and mental processes realised in the extract (36 processes in total), the majority of agentive participants (sayers, sensors or actors) are male. There are only seven utterances where women are positioned as agentive participants, speaking, sensing or doing something, for example in 1:50, 1:73 and 1:86:

<i>she</i>	<i>comes out</i>
Actor	Material process

<i>She</i>	<i>says</i>	<i>my lips are fake</i>
Sayer	Verbal process	Quoted

<i>You (a woman)</i>	<i>should go</i>	<i>on Extreme Makeover</i>
Actor	Material process	Circumstance

<i>we all (women)</i>	<i>know</i>
Senser	Mental process

Women are often positioned as the carrier (of attributes) in relational processes but this is

arguably quite a passive role in the sense that it does not involve any action on the part of the participant. It is the male participants who appraise a woman's sexual desirability and decide whether they would *choose* a particular woman based on her physical attributes (1:73, 1:75, 1:76).

4.2.5 Opposing discourses of female beauty

In what follows I examine in more detail the two opposing discourses drawn upon in this extract, namely the discourse of the natural woman and the discourse of female sexual attractiveness. I explore the relationship between these two discourses in an attempt to identify which discourse is dominant in the extract.

In response to viewing the images of women who underwent a radical physical transformation through multiple cosmetic surgical procedures, the participants begin by expressing a critical view of plastic surgery (1:1–58). To describe the disadvantages of plastic surgery they draw on a discourse which I call the discourse of the natural woman. This discourse expresses the belief that women who undergo plastic surgery to improve their appearance and correct their perceived physical deficiencies end up appearing *fake* (1:26, 1:49, 1:50) and *extreme* (1:30). The adjective *extreme* could be a reference to the perception that multiple surgical procedures have the effect of making a woman's appearance completely unnatural, far beyond what is considered normal because such surgery erases all characteristic flaws in an attempt to achieve the 'perfect' body.

Crucially, the crux of the young women's argument against plastic surgery is that the surgically enhanced female body has limited appeal to members of the opposite sex: while men may find such a body sexually attractive (1:12), they are unlikely to want to *get to know* the person behind the body, so to speak (1:12–25). There seems to be a 'body' versus 'person' distinction operating here, one which separates a woman's physical appearance from her personhood. The fact that the participants imply a distinction between a woman as an 'erotic spectacle' and a woman as a partner in a heterosexual relationship points to their rejection of the notion that women are simply erotic objects. This may explain their resentment towards image-obsessed *College guys* who reduce them to sexual objects by putting pressure on them to be beautiful (1:90–100).

The first ten lines of the extract are very interesting because the participants are negotiating the reference of *male*. Hayley prefaces her statement (in 1:9) with a set of alternative terms

to denote males: *guys or boys or men or whatever*. Her use of the subjective modality marker, *don't you think*, the enumeration of several alternative terms for males, her use of the dismissive, vague term *whatever* (because she is reluctant to settle on one definitive term) and her modulated shift from the adverbial *very* to the more tentative, *quite* all index low expressive modality. Hayley is not certain of the validity of the statement she is about to make and she is aware that it is controversial. In terms of relational value, Hayley's preface *don't you think* seeks to elicit the other participants' endorsement of her view. The other participants register her uncertainty about which referent to use and, before she has even completed her utterance, Timega jumps in and qualifies that, when referring to the learners at College, one should use the term *boys* (1:3).

Hayley then qualifies that she means *the male species in general* (1:6). The use of the term *species* is important since it presupposes that men and women are sufficiently different to qualify as belonging not merely to different genders, but to different species. This distinction relies on a discourse of gender difference, one which emphasises that men and women have genetically predisposed, complementary traits (Sunderland 2004). Arguably, the use of *species*, more often used with reference to animals, is negatively expressive as it functions to depersonalise the referent. Therefore, one possible interpretation of the term is that it encodes Hayley's implicit negative appraisal of men. Although the young women willingly (and possibly unthinkingly) adopt the male gaze (cf. 4.2.4), there appears to be some underlying resentment towards men in this extract. In fact, Winnie is *explicitly* disparaging of a particular group of men in 1:7, namely *College boys*. She claims that College boys are not even considered people, thus dehumanising them. This pejorative description presages the participants' criticism of *College boys* in 1:90–100.

Having clarified who is being referred to, Hayley states that *they [the male species in general] are against plastic surgery* (1:9). Her utterance carries high expressive modality and supports a belief in a transparent, unproblematic view that *all* men are against women undergoing surgery. To illustrate the high expressive modality of the current utterance it is useful to juxtapose it with several alternatives such as ***I think some men, a few men, some men might be against plastic surgery***, all of which function to limit the applicability of the statement and to lower the expressive modality. It is interesting that, within the space of a few lines, Hayley shifts from being tentative to being adamant about the truth value of her statement (compare 1:1 and 1:4 with 1:9). It is likely that her increased certainty derives from the other participants' contributions, which help to clarify the scope of her proposition,

i.e. to generalise it to *all men*. Yet, despite Hayley's initial commitment to this position and the other participant's endorsement of the natural female body as the ideal, they later shift to a more modulated position, one in which they concede that male notions of female attractiveness matter most (regardless of whether the woman concerned has undergone cosmetic surgery to make her more sexually attractive).

In 1:59 Winnie qualifies that, not only does a woman have to be natural, she also has to be beautiful to attract a member of the opposite sex. Thus, the extract hinges on male notions of female sexual attractiveness, evident in the overwording of terms describing this aspect of reality: *prettier*, *beautiful* x2, *look good* x3. There is also an overwording of terms describing the opposite pole, namely the unattractive woman: *siff*, *siff ass girl*, *swamp donkey*. These pejorative terms encode the view that an unattractive woman inspires pity (*shame for you*, 1:68) and is confined to the outer limits of social acceptability. Moreover, in terms of relational value the dysphemistic expressions used to refer to unattractive women encode the participants' sense of disaffiliation from such women (1:64–74).

Given the reliance on male notions of female attractiveness, I believe that the discourse of female sexual attractiveness holds more sway than the discourse of the natural female body. Winnie disqualifies the latter discourse when she refutes Hayley's claim that men prefer natural women (1:81) by categorically stating that fairytales do not exist i.e. to believe that men prefer natural, unsurgically altered women is to believe in fairytales (1:84–7). The implication is that the world of fairytales (in which female physical appearance is presumably unimportant) is an idealistic world, which bears no resemblance to a reality in which female beauty matters. In terms of expressive modality, Hayley's preface in 1:81, *I don't know* and her concession that she is *old-fashioned* carry low expressive modality i.e. they index Hayley's lack of commitment to the view that men prefer natural women. Her tentativeness may cue Winnie's counter-argument in 1:86–7 that such a view is unrealistic. By saying this, Winnie acknowledges that, while ideally a woman's natural appearance should be valued, in reality it is only valued if men find it sexually attractive. The value placed on male notions of female attractiveness is encapsulated in Winnie's assertion that a man would choose a woman who had undergone plastic surgery over a natural, unaffected woman, *just because she [the surgically altered woman] is prettier* (1:80).

4.2.6 Summary

What is perhaps most distinctive about this extract is the tension between appealing to male

notions of female sexual attractiveness and the young women's sense that there is more to a woman than physical beauty. Thus, while the young women acknowledge that ultimately it is female beauty which counts, they express underlying resentment towards image-conscious men (typified by the average *College boy*) who *put pressure on* women to be beautiful and who presumably measure a woman's worth by her physical appearance (1:90–100). By discrediting so-called 'fake', surgically altered women, the participants appeal to the belief that, while a woman may be rendered physically perfect through surgery, her appeal is limited to a member of the opposite sex. In their construction of the limitations of the surgically enhanced female body, they promote the belief that a woman's character is equally important not only in attracting a member of the opposite sex, but in sustaining his interest.

But ultimately, despite their underlying frustration at the gendered *status quo* which emphasises the importance of female physical beauty, the participants concede that this is the dominant ideology (1:59–100). To believe that personality and other non-physical attributes of a woman matter is, as Winnie puts it, to believe in fairytales which simply do not exist (1:87). Her view is rather pessimistic since it implies that asymmetrical gender relations and, in particular the value placed on female beauty cannot be challenged. She and the other participants defer to the power of the male gaze and to the supremacy of conventionally beautiful women within the social order. The recurring references to the male gaze, the reproduction of the *active/passive* gendered binary in the grammatical processes, the derisive description of unattractive women and the participants' concession that female beauty matters, all contribute to reproducing the dominance of the discourse of female sexual attractiveness in this extract.

4.3 Extract two

4.3.1 The context of the discussion

The conversation from which extract two derives was recorded one hot Saturday afternoon. I met the two young women, Cally and Kath in one of their rooms in the hostel where they were boarding. Because it was so hot, we all sat on the cool wooden floor of the room in a circle. The two young women were both dressed casually in shorts and t-shirts. In terms of their physical appearance, both young women are slim. Cally is particularly toned and muscular since she is a ballet dancer. She has pale skin with a ruddy complexion and a few freckles. Her blue eyes offset her long auburn hair. She has a friendly, attractive face. Kath is slightly taller than Cally with blonde hair, open features and blue eyes. While not as muscular as Cally, she has a slim physique. Both young women struck me as friendly and

unselfconscious. Their confidence may have derived in part from the fact that they were both prefects in Grade 12 and were therefore senior students in the hostel.

In order to elicit the relevant conversation from which extract two derives I used the consensus exercise described in 3.2.4. This exercise required the participants to reach consensus from a range of photographs on whom they perceived to be the woman with the ideal body. In response to this task, the participants discussed the merits and demerits of each woman featured in the photographs in an attempt to construct a taxonomy of women based on physical appearance. Their taxonomy contains a notable set of hyponyms, which index an inclusive semantic relationship with the superordinate (in this case *women*). The hyponyms which emerge in the conversation as a whole include the following: *skinny women*, *voluptuous women*, *sexy women* and *exotic women*. In this extract, the young women are discussing the merits of one woman whom they describe as *curvy* (2:2, where 2 refers to the extract number contained in Appendix D₂ and 2 to the line number within that extract).

I will now situate extract two (Appendix D₂) in terms of its co-text, namely the discussion which preceded it. Extract two is taken from the first five minutes of the conversation so it is likely that the participants were still conscious of the presence of the recorder and, as a result, were monitoring their contributions. I have reproduced an extract from the preceding discussion in Table 3:

Table 3: Discussing the first *curvy* woman

1	K: This I've done this with the other girls as well I took these pictures from South
2	African magazines like <u>Oprah</u> and <u>FHM</u> and <u>Cosmo</u> and I want you to look at them
3	and tell me which woman and you have to <u>agree</u> on it that's the tough part=
4	Cally: =okay=
5	K: is the most attractive or who has the best <u>body</u> and why so as you're going
6	through them like talk about it don't just put them aside try and articulate as far as
7	you can=
8	Kath: =okay=
9	Cally: =okay sure
10	okay let's start with this one ((laughs))=
11	Kath: lots of curves ((laughs)) ((the black woman in the gold evening outfit))
12	Cally: ja she's she's <u>curvy</u>
13	Kath: ja
14	Cally: ja I wouldn't say that she's [the most attractive]
15	Kath: [not too keen on the <u>neck</u>]
16	((laughs))
17	K: the <u>neck</u> ? what's wrong with the neck?
18	Kath: like double=
19	K: =double <u>chin</u> ((laughs))
20	Kath: ja well she looks very <u>glamorous</u> though [but ja]

21	Cally:	[jaa]
22	Kath:	[she dresses well for her]
23	Cally:	[she wouldn't be my]
24	Kath:	<u>size</u> =
25	Cally:	=ja
26	Kath:	and she does look she looks better than she probably you know
27		[makes herself look good]
28	Cally:	[ja she (())]

In the discussion in Table 3, the young women are debating the merits of another woman, whom they also describe as *curvy*. This would explain the comparison between the two women, invoked in extract two (2:2) by the use of the adverb *also* in *she's also curvy*. Although they did not appraise the first woman negatively based on her curviness, they were quick to disregard her on the basis that she had a funny neck. My question, *what's wrong with the neck?* (line 17) occasioned a shift to a more positive description of the woman, indicating the participants' sensitivity to my implied critique of their view.

The young women did not pronounce definitively on whether or not the woman in question was attractive, although Cally described her in euphemistic terms as not *the most attractive* (line 14). Instead they moved on to discuss the second image of the *curvy* woman next to the scale. I have reproduced the photograph of the relevant woman below (Figure 1) since I believe it is crucial for the reader to view the particular woman being discussed in order to understand the participants' perceptions of her and the ideologies which underpin these perceptions.

Figure 1: The *curvy* woman



4.3.2 Introduction

As will become evident from the interpretation, I perceive the woman in Figure 1 to be overweight. Since female fatness is viewed as transgressive according to contemporary Western norms of beauty, describing someone as fat can be offensive (LeBesco 2004; Braziel & LeBesco 2001). Thus, the participants appear reluctant to comment openly on the woman's body shape and size, opting instead to couch their comments in euphemistic language to minimise the risk of offense. Another possible reason for their tentativeness and hedging around the subject is that the group is quite small and thus my presence may have been more evident and may have stifled the expression of their views. Moreover, given my higher status in the interaction as the researcher, the participants may wish to position their appraisal of the woman in relation to mine i.e. to determine my position on the issue of female fatness and whether I would be critical of their viewpoints. In this regard, one of the aims of this interpretation is to show how my contributions to this extract shaped the participants' responses in particular ways (cf. 4.3.3). More specifically, I consider my attempts to elicit a candid discussion of female fatness, one which constructs fatness according to the dominant Western beauty ideal as transgressive and sexually undesirable (Bordo 2003; LeBesco 2004; Lupton 1996). I discuss the means by which the participants resist an overt adoption of this anti-fat stance and I explain their resistance in terms of the taboos surrounding the topic of fatness and the possible influence of the rather artificial research setting (cf. 3.2.1 on the Observer's Paradox).

In addition to the discussion of the participants' resistance to an anti-fat ideology and my role in the interaction, I will consider the operation of two ideologically significant features in the text: 1) the use of euphemisms and politically correct language in the discussion of female fatness or what I term the *discourse of silence* on fatness (cf. 4.3.4), 2) the ageist assumptions linked to notions of the ideal female body shape (cf. 4.3.5). I argue that the dominant Western construction of fatness as transgressive is both reflected and reproduced in the discourse of fatness, a discourse which is characterised by the use of euphemisms and inoffensive language. I have termed it a discourse of *silence* since it is paradoxically what it *not* said, what is implied in the 'spaces' of the discourse, that is ideologically significant.

4.3.3 The role of the researcher

In selecting this particular photograph for inclusion in the consensus exercise I made a set of assumptions about how the participants would respond to the subject featured. Because the photograph features an arguably overweight, middle-aged woman, posing unabashedly in her

underwear, I assumed that it would be provocative. I expected the participants to make barbed comments about the woman's body size and the fact that she is ingesting something. In fact, in an effort to elicit an anti-fat position from the participants, I intervene seven times in the space of this short extract. For example, my question in 2:4–5 presupposes that the young women would have a set of (negative) associations linked to *a woman like that*. The deictic *that*, referring to something distant from the speaker and the hearer, encodes relational value in this context. It signals an attempt to disaffiliate myself and my interlocutors from the referent. My sense of disaffiliation from the woman concerned is based on my perception that she is unlike me: I perceive that she is overweight and that I am not. Therefore, my reference to the woman sets her up as part of the out-group based on her body size. By relegating the subject to the out-group, I simultaneously attempt to elicit a response of solidarity from my interlocutors, to indicate that we are part of the in-group of 'thin' women. This constitutes a signal (however subtle) to the young women that I would align myself with an anti-fat stance and that they can adopt a similar stance without fearing a rebuke from me.

However, the participants appear not to have noticed the implied anti-fat ideology in my question. Or if they have, they do not immediately indicate so by aligning themselves with or challenging my view. Instead, they pause and then Kath asks me for clarification (2:7). This may be a bid to encourage me to rephrase the question in such a way that I reveal my personal views of the woman. Both the pause (*uuuum*) and Kath's request for clarification support the interpretation that the participants are reluctant to respond to the woman featured, at least until they are certain of my view and of the type of response they can offer without fear of criticism from me.

In response to the young women's reticence to discuss their associations with female fatness and in a bid to elicit their candid responses to the woman in Figure 1, I encourage them to *just [give] your reaction immediately without [(thinking)]* (2:9). My utterance presupposes that, given time for reflection, the participants would censor their comments or couch them in politically correct terms. By framing my question in this way I encode the perception that a taboo exists around this particular type of female body. In terms of relational value, because of my higher status in the interaction, this utterance carries the force of a directive. By directing the young women to respond to the image and by defining the ways in which they should do so, I enact my increased power in the interaction. Their knowledge that I was seeking to promote a particular response and the artificiality of the exercise may have

predisposed the young women to resist giving their candid views on the woman in Figure 1.

In 2:18, Kath tentatively admits that she *wouldn't classify her as the most attractive person*. The modal *wouldn't* softens her negative judgement by introducing a level of tentativeness to the proposition. Compare it with the alternative, using the simple present tense: *she is not the most attractive person*. By contrast, this expresses a high degree of certainty on the part of the speaker and, as such, it represents a definitive and more uncompromising view than that expressed in 2:18. Not only is the proposition tentative, the use of the negative in *wouldn't* takes issue with the corresponding positive proposition, namely *I'd classify her as the most attractive person*. Thus, the intertextual reference to this positive proposition presupposes that there are people who would find the woman attractive. This is quite different to maintaining that *she is unattractive*, which interestingly none of the participants maintain in the extract. Even when I boldly announce my perception of the other participants' views in 2:40, I avoid this construction and opt instead for the more polite, arguably less critical *she wouldn't be one of the ones you'd choose as attractive*. In the extract as a whole there is a general avoidance of the terms *unattractive* or *ugly* and a choice to use alternative euphemistic constructions, like those discussed above. It appears that, like references to female fatness, references to ugliness are highly offensive. This is linked to the inordinate value placed on beauty in contemporary Western society, such that female unattractiveness is rapidly becoming (if it is not already) socially unacceptable (Blum 2003).

My response to Cally in 2:19 implies that she is being deliberately polite, while in fact obscuring her forthright opinion. In 2:22 I once again note the participants' reluctance to speak openly about their perceptions of the woman: *it's funny no one wants [to say]*. The use of *no one* in this utterance is an intertextual reference to previous conversations with other young women in the study. It signals a comparison with these conversations, one which reveals a similarity between Kath and Cally's respective responses to the image and the responses of previous groups of young women. Admittedly, the participants would have been unlikely to interpret this as an intertextual reference and probably assumed the referent, *no one*, referred solely to them. However, the intertextual reference is salient as it reveals a similarity across four friendship groups from both the pilot and main study who had seen this image, namely that the young women were hesitant to discuss the 'curvy' woman featured in the image. It is possible that the participants' reluctance to discuss female fatness stems in part from where on the fatness continuum each of them is located. For example, the participants who perceive themselves to be overweight are likely to make concessions for

similarly overweight women. By contrast, the participants who conform to the ideal of female thinness are likely to be more critical of their overweight counterparts. However, to verify this hypothesis one would need to assess the young women's perception of their level of fatness/thinness and whether this does correlate with the degree to which they criticise or make concessions for overweight women.

In 2:27, I employ another coercion tactic to elicit a candid response from the young women. In an attempt to construct a very personal, close relationship between the participants and the woman in Figure 1, I propose a hypothetical situation in which I position the subject as the participants' mother. More importantly, I assume that by positioning the young women in this way I will encourage them to speak frankly on the topic of female fatness (as if they were a daughter recommending to their mother that she lose weight). This positioning presupposes that the relationship between a mother and child is one in which the child would care about the mother's welfare, specifically about her body shape and size. It also presupposes that a mother would be open to receiving comments from her daughter about her weight. It is significant that my question encodes a preferred response of agreement: I want the participants to concede that yes, if the woman was their mother, they would perceive her as overweight and recommend that she lose weight.

However, far from agreeing with me, they disagree emphatically and seem rather shocked (evident in their emphatic: *noo* and *no!*) that I would suggest commenting negatively on one's mother's weight, however hypothetically. Their strong disagreement may be a response to my use of the modal verb, *need* as part of the hypothetical proposition, *you need to lose weight*. The modal verb gives the proposition the illocutionary force of a directive. Thus, in the situation I propose, the 'daughter' (represented by the participants) is instructing her 'mother' (represented by the woman in Figure 1) to lose weight. Such an instruction accords the daughter a certain amount of authority in the interaction, the authority not only to comment on the sensitive issue of the mother's weight, but to implicitly instruct that she lose weight. The young women's emphatic refusal to do so may be a function of the possible asymmetrical power relations of a mother-daughter relationship in which a daughter would never make a comment which threatens her mother's authority (particularly a highly face-threatening comment about her weight).

The participants' disagreement may also be due to their perception that the woman is *not that bad* i.e. she is not sufficiently overweight that the need for her to lose weight would

override considerations of respect between a daughter and a mother. The emphasis on the adverb *that* in this phrase presupposes that the woman possesses a degree of ‘badness’, where *bad* in this context denotes *overweight*. Thus, Cally’s assertion encodes a tacit acknowledgment of my perception that the subject is overweight, although admittedly not as overweight as my question in 2:27 implies.

Finally, in 2:40 after several unsuccessful attempts to elicit a direct comment on the woman’s attractiveness, I pronounce definitively on her attractiveness by proposing that the participants *definitely* would not choose her as attractive. The utterance is introduced using the adversative conjunction, *but*, which signals that I am about to present an oppositional view. In this case, my statement does not represent a wholly oppositional view since the young women have already insinuated that the subject is unattractive. However, unlike the young women’s carefully phrased, inoffensive statements, my statement is bold and frank. It is only when I voice this view, that the young women agree with me that the subject is not attractive. Consequently, in short order, they relegate her to the *no pile* of unattractive women (2:41–6).

4.3.4 The discourse of silence on female fatness

Kath initially describes the woman in Figure 1 as *curvy* (2:2), which I think represents a politically correct alternative to the term *overweight* in this context. The fact that Kath laughs after describing the woman as *curvy* supports the interpretation that she is describing the woman in euphemistic terms: her laughter may be cued by an awareness that her description of the woman is so understated as to appear ironic since the woman is arguably more than simply *curvy*. Kath’s laughter may also reflect an element of nervousness and discomfort related to the fact that fatness is a controversial, potentially offensive subject in contemporary Western society (LeBesco 2004). In terms of relational value, both the arguably nervous laughter and the euphemistic description of the woman are probably cued by Kath’s uncertainty about my stance on the subject of excess weight. Thus, she appears to be censoring her own comments for fear of critique from me should she speak openly. If this interpretation is correct, it follows that Kath’s perception of the need to censor her comments is a function of the asymmetrical power relations between myself and the participants in the interaction. Moreover, since the consensus exercise is a rather artificial one which I devised to provoke discussion, it is possible that Kath views this image as particularly loaded. She may be alert to the fact that this image has been expressly chosen to elicit discussion and that it is thus likely to be provocative.

Cally's comment in 2:3 where she describes the woman as *just chilling like* is deliberately non-committal and vague. *To chill* is a slang term meaning to relax or contentedly to do nothing (Online Urban Dictionary 2006). In this case it seems to apply to the woman's relaxed posture and considering that I asked the participants which woman has the ideal body, the comment appears somewhat off-topic. One interpretation of this comment is that Cally, like Kath, is reluctant to confront the issue of the woman's excess weight. Although her description carries a degree of positive expressive value (*chilling* is positively expressive), in the context of the participants' reluctance to discuss the issue of female fatness, Cally's comment could be read as a polite, euphemistic way of avoiding a negative appraisal of the woman's weight.

Kath poses two rhetorical questions (2:10 and 2:12) which function as negative appraisals of the woman concerned. By questioning why she is featured in the magazine, Kath implies that, by virtue of her appearance (and presumably her excess weight), she is not fit to appear in the glossy pages of a magazine and that only a certain type of woman should rightly appear as a model in a magazine (2:10). Bolstered by my supportive minimal response and laughter in 2:11, Kath goes on to highlight that the woman is naked (which is she not in fact; she is semi-clothed) and eating/drinking (2:12). Kath's first remark concerning the women's apparent nudity may constitute a veiled comment on the women's body size: as a *curvy* woman, it is inappropriate that she openly displays her corpulence in the pages of a glossy magazine. By extension, Kath seems to perceive this woman's nakedness as unattractive. Secondly, the comment that she is *eating food or drinking actually* (2:14) can be interpreted as a negative comment on the woman's weight: it serves to highlight Kath's perception that such behaviour is remarkable and/or inappropriate. It is likely that this construction is related to the view that female fatness and associated eating practices are transgressive and shameful (Barbas 2004, LeBesco 2004). Therefore, if one is overweight, one should not openly indulge in the 'infantile' desire to eat. To do so is to attract more criticism because one is displaying the transgressive behaviour that caused the weight gain in the first place.

The participants' reluctance to engage on the issue of female fatness is evident, not only in the utterances themselves, but also in the interactional features of the conversation. Unlike in some of the other conversations, this extract features very few overlaps and latched utterances, which, had they been present, may have indicated the participants' interest and engagement in the topic (Coates & Jordan 1997, cf. 3.3.2.3). In the few instances of

overlapping speech, the overlaps are supportive rather than violative: they occur at transitional relevance places (TRPs) when the first speaker is completing a turn and the second is providing a minimal response to show their support and sustained interest in the conversation. The supportive function of the overlaps is unsurprising as the participants are not vying for the floor or disagreeing. Since the young women's utterances are hesitant and couched in politically correct language, it seems unlikely that they would be prepared to disagree with each other on a topic which is so contentious and potentially offensive that it warrants censorship in the first place. The young women's reluctance to engage with the topic is confirmed in the pauses in 2:6, 2:39 and 2:45 and the lack of contiguous utterances. There are only eight instances of contiguous utterances and all of these occur at the end of a speaker's turn (at a TRP) and at the start of a minimal response (see 2:16–7, 2:23–4, 2:24–5, 2:29–30, 2:30–1, 2:40–1, 2:41–2, 2:43–4). This is evidence of the co-operative, supportive nature of the extract. Given their apparent reluctance to respond to the picture and given the sensitive nature of the topic, it is possible that the young women feel the need to indicate their solidarity and support of each other's views through minimal responses and the occasional latched utterances.

Although the participants avoid commenting directly on the subject's excess weight, the pattern of material processes in this extract reveals a preoccupation with weight. Out of a total of 32 processes only six are material, which is unsurprising given that the focus is not on actions, but rather on an appraisal of the woman concerned. The material processes are: *chilling* (2:3), *walking around*, (2:12), *eating, drinking* (2:14), *lose* [weight] (2:27) and *put on* [weight] (2:33). The last four of these processes focus on activities related to weight gain or loss and thus signal the participants' perception that the woman in Figure 1 *is* overweight.

The majority of processes in this extract are relational processes consisting of two participants, a carrier and an attribute (cf. 3.3.2.2). Most of the attributes describe the woman in terms of her physical appearance. The only attributes which describe the woman in terms of her personality or state of mind are *nice* and *relaxed* (2:23). Interestingly, these two attributes represent the only unambiguously positive descriptions of the woman. In terms of her appearance, she is characterised negatively as *not attractive* (2:18) and *oldish* (2:31). I believe that the descriptor *oldish* is negatively expressive given the equation of beauty with youth in Western culture and the associated pathologising of the ageing female body (Blum 2003). The woman is also described ambivalently as *not that bad* in response to my question about whether she needs to lose weight (2:29).

In terms of relational value, it is possible that, given their rather negative characterisation of the woman's *appearance*, the participants feel obliged to comment positively on her *character* in order to avoid appearing unduly critical. The participants' preoccupation with not appearing critical suggests that, just as there are taboos around female fatness, so too are there taboos regulating criticism (Brown & Levinson 1987; Morand 2000). These taboos serve as cultural parameters governing face-threatening speech acts which include criticism, disagreement and interruption. Politeness norms (both linguistic and non-linguistic) aim to "mitigate the force of the FTA [face-threatening act], and thus preserve, at least to a degree, the addressee's face" (Morand 2000: 237). Viewed in terms of politeness theory and the management of face-threatening acts in conversation, (Brown & Levinson 1987), the participants' positive description of the woman in Figure 1 (*she looks nice and relaxed*, 2:23) may be an attempt to mitigate their previous criticism of her. It is also possible that, by describing the woman positively in terms of her personality traits, the participants are invoking a discourse of the alternative woman, who although not conventionally attractive, still possesses positive attributes, such as her *relaxed* character (2:23).

Kath's conditional comment in 2:34–5 concerning the relationship between a woman's appearance and her state of mind could also form part of this alternative discourse: *well if she's happy with herself then that's fine*. In the context of the discussion of the woman's body size, this proposition highlights the importance of being self-content over being thin. Kath's comment also draws attention to the woman's self-image as ostensibly more important than an outsider's perception of her. The emphasis on self-image and self-contentment opposes a discourse of heterosexual desirability (Sunderland 2004) which equates beauty with sexual desirability and which positions women as objects of the male gaze. By contrast, the value which Kath places on self-contentment constructs women as autonomous beings whose self-images are independent of the male gaze. Interestingly, even though the young women draw on an alternative discourse of female beauty in this extract, their final decision to relegate the woman to the 'no' pile of unattractive women suggests that the hegemonic ideal of the young, thin, toned female body wins out in the extract: according to this yardstick, the older, curvy woman does not measure up. It is also possible that the nature of the consensus exercise and specifically my designation of a 'no' pile of unattractive women forced the young women to make a decision on the *curvy* woman based on a dichotomy of *attractive/unattractive* (cf. 4.5).

4.3.5 Ageing and the female body

I noted in the discussion of grammatical features above that one of the participants Cally, describes the woman as *oldish* (2:31, 2:33). Her choice of the term *oldish* over the more commonly used adjective, *old* carries relational value. It is likely that Cally chose this euphemistic term because of the age differential between myself and the participants. At the time of the recording, I was twenty three years old and the participants were between fifteen and eighteen years old so there was an age gap of at least five years between us. If Cally perceives me as old, her use of the polite alternative, *oldish* may be an attempt to minimise the risk of offending me. Harris (1997) states that “the basic psychology of euphemistic language is the desire to put something bad or embarrassing in a positive (or at least neutral light)”. The fact that the subject of female ageing warrants the use of inoffensive, euphemistic language suggests that ageing, like being overweight, is perceived as socially unacceptable or taboo.

Cally’s utterance in 2:31 encodes low expressive modality i.e. a lack of commitment to the proposition that the woman is *oldish*. I believe that her choice of the relational process *looks* is less authoritative than the alternative, the copula *is*: compare “she *looks* quite oldish” with “she *is* quite oldish”. The verb *looks* is more tentative as it denotes *seems* or *has the appearance of*. Its use implies that the statement is based on the subject’s physical appearance and thus is not conclusive. Cally’s laughter in 2:33 may signal her awareness that her description of the woman as *oldish* may be offensive, both to the woman in question and to me by virtue of my age. Her laughter could be interpreted as nervous or as an attempt to mitigate the potential offence caused by her description.

Cally then goes on to argue that it is *natural* for a woman to put on weight as she ages. She uses the generic plural *you* to refer to women in general, making her proposition generalisable to all older women. Cally’s emphasis on the fact that female weight gain is a *natural* consequence of ageing (where *natural* has positive expressive value) functions to depathologise such weight gain. I believe that the emphatic use of *naturally* in this proposition constitutes another attempt to avoid evaluating the woman negatively. It is possible that, in response to my negative construction of the woman as overweight, Cally is seeking to legitimise the woman’s excess weight by linking it to the process of ageing.

Cally’s emphatic use of the auxiliary *do* in 2:33 encodes high expressive value, indexing her certainty and belief in the truth value of the proposition: *when you do get oldish ((laughs))*

you do [naturally put on weight]. It is also possible that the auxiliary *do* carries oppositional value: it presupposes that the corresponding negative proposition is true, namely that when one is *not* oldish (i.e. when one is young), one does *not* naturally gain weight. This reproduces the Western beauty ideal where beauty, as represented by the slim female body, is identified with youth (Blum 2003). The implication is that while it may be acceptable, even *natural* for a woman to gain weight when she ages, it is not acceptable for her to be overweight when she is young (ibid). So while Cally's construction of the relationship between ageing and female weight gain encodes a degree of acceptance of alternative types of female bodies, it does not wholly reject female thinness as the beauty ideal.

4.3.6 Summary

What is perhaps most interesting in this extract is the participant's resistance to adopting an anti-fat discourse, despite my attempts to coerce them to articulate this stance. I offer two possible explanations for the participants' reluctance to engage on the topic of female fatness and for their resistance to articulating an anti-fat view. Firstly, the young women may be suspect of my aims in seeking to elicit this stance, particularly since they are aware that the conversation will be subject to analysis. They may find my overt anti-fat stance and my attempt to promote it rather suspect. It is possible that they view my coercion tactics as a deliberate ploy to elicit what I assume are their politically incorrect, negative views on female fatness. Such data would reveal their subscription to the dominant Western pro-thin female beauty ideal. Thus, the young women may be censoring their contributions and avoiding articulating a negative view of female fatness. Even if this interpretation is correct, one cannot discredit the extract as a whole on the basis of the Observer's Paradox (cf. 3.2.1). The very fact that the participants resist adopting an anti-fat discourse and draw on a discourse of silence instead shows that they have access to this alternative discourse. Since the discourse of silence on female fatness is part of their discursive repertoire it bears investigation in terms of the ideologies which underpin it (cf. 5.3.1).

Secondly, the young women appear to be negotiating an alternative view of what constitutes the ideal female body, one which is more accepting of different types of female bodies and which seeks to resist hegemonic beauty norms. There are several possible points of rupture in the extract where the participants arguably resist the hegemonic beauty ideal of the young, thin, toned female body. These occur, for example in 2:23 and 2:31–6 where they offer alternative constructions of the woman concerned not as overweight and unattractive, but as self-content, relaxed and nice. However, despite the possibilities these constructions offer as

an alternative to the prevailing beauty ideal, the young women implicitly concede that, ultimately appearance matters: the subject does not measure up to traditional notions of female beauty and she is placed in the ‘no’ pile of unattractive women.

In addition to the discussion of the participants’ resistance to an anti-fat ideology, I also considered how the participants draw on a discourse of silence on female fatness. Through its use of veiled, politically correct language, this discourse encodes a refusal to speak openly about fatness. This effectively renders the fat body invisible, relegated to the outer limits of social acceptability (LeBesco 2004).

4.4 Extract three

4.4.1 The context of the discussion

This extract (Appendix D₃) was taken from a conversation elicited using the stimulus exercise in which I showed the young women ten pictures of women who self-identified as either anorexic or obese (3.2.3). I asked them what they thought of when they see women who look like this. I did not identify the women as either anorexic or obese because I did not want to influence the participants’ perceptions of the women concerned. This extract was taken from within the first ten minutes of the conversation and, although I expected the participants to monitor their contributions initially, this group of friends was very comfortable and outspoken from the start. I had only just shown them the photographs when they started to comment frankly on their perceptions of the women therein. The frequency of overlapping utterances, latched utterances, exclamations and emphatic assertions in the conversation as a whole is testimony to the fact that the young women found the images provocative and were animated in their discussion of anorexic and obese women (Coates & Jordan 1997). It is interesting that this group of young women, unlike those in extract two, did not display a reluctance to discuss the overweight female body. I hypothesise that their animated discussion on the topic was a result of two main contextual factors: 1) This group consisted of four young women while the group in extract two consisted of only two. Because they were part of a larger group, the norm-enforcing power of the group may have been stronger, ensuring that they spoke fairly naturally; 2) All of the participants in this group (except Sophie) were outspoken and confident, which may have contributed to their ability to discuss the topic of female fatness unselfconsciously.

In terms of the discussion which preceded extract three, the young women responded to the stimulus exercise images by comparing the anorexic and obese women in terms of who they

perceived to be happier. I have reproduced two preceding extracts in Tables four and five which illustrate the participants' ambivalent attitude towards the overweight female body:

Table 4: Example of a pro-fat discourse

1	Timega: ja all the fat people <u>do</u> look happy=
2	Winnie: =fat is good=
3	Hayley: =fat is happy=
4	Winnie: =aah I'm gonna go with the
5	[fat] ((laughs))
6	Sophie: [fat's the] new thin remember Hayley=
7	Hayley: =Fat's the new thin we decided=
8	Sophie: =ja
9	Timega: ja pee-aitch phat phat is phat ((laughs))
10	Winnie: Ja okay=
11	Timega: =Remember that company we were going to start ()
12	((laughs))
13	They were gonna stop the tuckshop from selling junk food so we were like ja we
14	were gonna start a junk food shop called <u>Cellulite</u>

Table 5: Example of an anti-fat discourse

15	Winnie: [that's gross]
16	Hayley: [but that's us in ten years time]= ((pointing to the women in bikinis))
17	Timega: =But it must be so uncomfortable to be fat on a [hot day]
18	Winnie: [kay]
19	[...]
20	Winnie: this is so <u>cute</u> ((pointing to one of the swimmers/women in bikinis))
21	Hayley: seen that one
22	[...]
23	Winnie: [what? which]
24	Hayley: [I think the granny is cute]

While they draw on a pro-fat discourse and claim that *fat is happy* (line 3) and *fat is the new thin* (line 7), they also describe the obese women as *gross* (line 15) and equate fatness with physical discomfort (line 17). The young women's ambivalence on the subject of female fatness is also evident in their descriptions of the obese women as *cute* (lines 21 and 24), an adjective which often carries associations of innocence and child-likeness. When the term *cute* is used to describe an adult it has rather patronising connotations. By contrast, the pro-fat discourse upon which the young women initially draw (Table 4), seeks to resist the prevailing negative construction of female fatness and to imbue fatness with positive meaning. This is evident in their use of the positively expressive slang term *phat* which is an acronym for *pretty hot (attractive) and tempting* (Online urban dictionary 2006). Admittedly, the pro-fat discourse appears somewhat ironic, evident from the young women's laughter and jocular tone in this extract (Table 4). Even if their use of the pro-fat discourse was intended

to be ironic, the fact that the young women draw on both discourses prior to extract three (Appendix D₃), attests to their ambivalent attitude towards the overweight body. This ambivalence is confirmed in extract three where they draw on several contradictory discourses as they negotiate what it means to be an overweight woman in contemporary Western society.

4.4.2 Introduction

This extract represents a debate on the relationship between a woman's body size and her personal happiness. In particular, the extract features a discursive struggle on whether female fatness and personal contentment are mutually exclusive. The participants featured in this extract are the same as those in extract one since both extracts are taken from the same conversation (cf. 3.2.5 for a discussion of my choice of extracts). I identified five discourses operating in the extract, one of which is drawn upon twice during the course of the extract. The young women begin by drawing on a pro-moderation discourse (3:1–11, Appendix D₃), which constructs the healthy body as the ideal to which women should subscribe. This discourse establishes a causal link between health and personal happiness. Then the young women shift to address the relationship between anorexia and personal contentment (3:12–22). This section features two discourses, namely the discourse of the disordered anorexic body and an oppositional discourse which constructs anorexia as a lifestyle choice, rather than a disorder. The discourse of the disordered body is based on the Western biomedical model and constructs anorexia as a psychosomatic disorder, where poor self-esteem and depression are symptomatic of the disorder (cf. 2.2.2.3). Two of the young women draw on this discourse in constructing anorexia and self-contentment as mutually exclusive states. The oppositional discourse is used when one of the young women, Hayley, articulates the controversial view that an anorexic woman can be happy. The third discourse which is drawn upon is an anti-fat discourse (3:23–31), one which endorses the dominant Western ideology that fatness is associated with personal unhappiness (Bordo 2003; LeBesco 2004). Then the participants shift once again to oppose this idea and to draw upon a discourse of personal characteristics (3:32–38). This discourse relies on the idea that one's state of mind (whether one is happy or not) is a general predisposition. Lastly, I labelled the fifth discourse (3:39–61), the discourse of self-contentment since it endorses the ideology that happiness is *not* dependent on a woman's physical appearance. It seems to resist the prevailing Western notion that female *thinness* is associated with personal happiness by suggesting that overweight women also experience happiness. I will discuss whether this discourse does in fact constitute a challenge to the hegemonic beauty ideal of female thinness or whether it

covertly promotes this ideal. Finally, after invoking the discourses described above, the young women rearticulate the pro-moderation stance which values physiological health and well-being (3:62–71).

For explanatory purposes, I discuss each discourse separately in terms of the knowledge and beliefs they encode about the ideal female body. This choice is based on my belief that each discourse presupposes a particular worldview (cf. 1.7.1). However, I acknowledge that to separate the extract into discourses is to place artificial boundaries on discourses which do overlap. For example, a particular discourse may have been drawn upon to take issue with or to endorse a previous one. Thus, recognising that each discourse is not drawn upon in isolation but that they are interrelated, I will discuss the relationship between the discourses, identifying whether one is subsumed by another and which discourse, if any, predominates in the extract. Unlike the previous two extracts, I present the interpretation sequentially, rather than thematically. This decision is based on the fact that the extract is particularly complex in terms of the number of discourses featured and my interpretation aims to track the shift from one discourse to the next in the extract.

4.4.3 The role of the researcher

In this extract, my role is not as marked as in the previous two. However, my initial contribution on the issue of the overweight female body may have shaped the young women's construction of fatness as unhealthy. In response to the young women's articulation of an oppositional discourse on female fatness, one which constructs fatness positively as the *new slim* (cf. 4.2.1), I raise the controversial question of whether it is in fact better to be fat (3:1). My emphasis on the adjective *fat* in the question *so you reckon it's better to be fat*, encodes an element of doubt and surprise that the young women would advocate being overweight over being slim. At first, Winnie emphatically announces that it *is* better to be fat (3:2) but when I question this stance by encouraging the young women to reconsider the pictures of overweight women (3:3), they quickly backtrack into a more conservative position, in which they advocate being *healthy* (3:6). By referring to the pictures of overweight women, I seem to imply that the objective, graphic evidence attests just the opposite of what the young women propose, namely that being overweight is *undesirable* and aesthetically *unappealing*.

In terms of relational value, the participants' adoption of a conservative position on the meanings of female fatness may be an effect of my power in the interaction to influence the

participants' views. I believe that what follows in this section is largely cued by the fact that I initially take issue with the young women's pro-fat stance and tacitly signal my subscription to a more conservative stance which endorses the prevailing ideal of female thinness. For example, in 3:5 when Winnie concedes that it is not better to be *fat*, her emphasis on the adjective *fat* may be cued by my similar emphasis on the term in 3:1. Thus, she may be trying to align her views with mine to avoid any more contestation from me.

The emphasis on the adjective *fat* in Winnie's concession (3:5) also carries experiential value. It encodes a contrast with the unmarked, unemphatic equivalent of the term: it is likely that the young women are signalling a contrast between degrees of fatness where the unmarked, unemphatic *fat* connotes the attribute of being slightly or moderately overweight and the marked, emphatic equivalent, *fat* connotes being heavily overweight or obese. I believe that the contrast implied between marginal excess weight and obesity is part of the pro-moderation discourse which the young women draw upon in 3:1–11: while being overweight is constructed as acceptable, being obese (or in their terms, *fat*) is unhealthy and therefore unacceptable (3:4–5). It is also possible that the young women are using the term *fat* in an ambiguous fashion because they are seeking to dissimulate their shift to a conservative stance on female fatness. This shift is likely to have been provoked by my scepticism in 3:1, where I tacitly signal my subscription to a pro-moderation ideology which constructs female fatness as unhealthy.

4.4.4 Constructing the healthy female body

The fact that both Winnie and Timega preface their concessions in 3:4 and 3:5 with *well* indicates that they are about to present an oppositional view to the pro-fat one expressed previously (cf. Table 4 in 4.2.1). Timega's utterance in 3:4 is particularly tentative because not only is she opposing their unreserved pro-fat position, but she is also disagreeing with Winnie's emphatic assertion in 3:2. In terms of relational value, her use of the adverb *maybe* and the discourse marker *well* signal Timega's tentativeness and her attempt to minimise the possible risk of offense implied by her disagreement with Winnie.

By shifting to a pro-health stance, the participants endorse moderation represented in the form of a balanced, healthy body. The participants juxtapose female fatness and thinness in this extract to construct both body shapes as extreme (*overboard*, 3:4) and therefore as unhealthy. The term *overboard* (3:4), the emphatic adjective *fat* (3:5) and the phrase *so anorexic you're about to die* all carry negative expressive value, indexing the participants'

negative appraisal of both excess weight and thinness as extreme body sizes. By contrast, Timega equates good health with self-contentment:

- 6 **Timega:** just content with yourself but in a healthy way [because]
 7 **Winnie:** [it doesn't]
 8 **Timega:** if you're content with yourself but you're so anorexic that you're about to
 9 die then obviously not

In 3:6 the adversative conjunction *but* introduces a qualifying statement to Timega's claim that it is important to be self-content. Timega qualifies her statement in order to distinguish between being content and suffering from a life-threatening eating disorder and being content and *healthy*. Of these two possibilities, she renounces the former in 3:8–9 and implies her subscription to a pro-health ideology.

Although Timega advocates being *healthy* and happy, her proposition in 3:8 presupposes that an anorexic woman (ie. an *unhealthy* woman) can also be happy. In 3:12, Winnie challenges any link between anorexia and personal happiness and argues that they are mutually exclusive states (the shift to the anti-anorexia discourse). She prefaces her statement with the adversative conjunction *but* to signal that she is about to present an oppositional view. In terms of experiential value, her use of the modal verb *can't* (3:12) encodes the notion of impossibility i.e. Winnie is precluding the possibility of an anorexic woman being self-content. Moreover, the use of negation (in the form of *can't*) encodes an intertextual link with the preceding pro-moderation discourse. It is used to take issue with the equivalent positive proposition proposed in this discourse, namely that one can be both happy and anorexic (3:8–9). Winnie's proposition in 3:12 carries high expressive modality, indexing her authoritativeness and commitment to the belief that being anorexic entails being unhappy.

Although Timega is reluctant to concede that her presupposition in 3:8 may be invalid, her counter-response to Winnie (3:14) is rather weak. She prefaces it with the discourse marker *well* and the low probability adverb *maybe*, both of which carry low expressive modality i.e. they indicate that Timega is not convinced of the truth value of her proposition. Hayley, who up to now has been silent, agrees with Timega that it is possible for an anorexic to be happy (3:15). However, it is not Hayley's endorsement of Timega's position that is unexpected and controversial, but rather the hypothetical scenario which proposes: [*if you're happy with what you are*] *if you're having a good life and you're anorexic then I know it sounds horrible but then rather have a good life for a short period of time then be unhappy for the rest of your life* (3:15–7). I believe that this scenario is controversial because it acknowledges the life-threatening nature of anorexia (*rather have a good life for a short period of time*)

without condemning the disorder. By proposing that anorexics can live happy lives (albeit short ones), Hayley is drawing on a discourse which endorses anorexia as a legitimate lifestyle choice. Hayley's use of the hedge *I know it sounds horrible but* (3:15) indexes her awareness that her stance is controversial. Then in 3:19, following Winnie's questioning of her view, Hayley emphasises her awareness that the situation she is proposing is *not* universally valid but is hypothetical at best: *But the thing is just in case*.

By contrast, Winnie's response carries high expressive modality (3:20), encoded in her use of present tense to express what she perceives is a generalisable truth about all anorexics. Even Timega is forced to modulate her position by agreeing with Winnie that some anorexics are in fact *unhappy* (3:21). The fact that Hayley does not continue to push her controversial viewpoint suggests that she too has backed down. Given the context of the previous section in which anorexia is equated with poor health and given the high expressive modality of Winnie's anti-anorexia statements, it appears that the anti-anorexia position wins through up to this point. Taken together these two sections serve to confirm the construction of extreme thinness and fatness as unhealthy and as linked to unhappiness. In this sense, the ideology realised in this section corroborates the previous pro-moderation ideology.

4.4.5 Constructing the overweight female body

Having conceded Winnie's point that anorexics tend to be unhappy, Timega goes on to voice her opinion that overweight people are similarly unhappy, by virtue of their excess weight. Timega prefaces this view with a pause and the disclaimer, *okay I know this is gonna sound weird* (3:23). Both these features indicate her perception that her viewpoint is controversial and politically incorrect. Moreover, her disclaimer indicates her awareness of the existence of an alternative, politically correct discourse which encodes an oppositional ideology to the one she is about to propose. In terms of relational value, her disclaimer seeks to pre-empt the other participants' contestation of her view.

Timega presents the politically incorrect stance that people who perceive themselves to be fat are unhappy. Timega's statement is bold in its refusal to conform to the taboos around labelling someone overweight and around discussing female fatness (LeBesco 2004). It is particularly bold because she employs sarcasm to deliberately exaggerate the hypothetical situation of a fat woman celebrating her excess weight. She does so by emphasising a fat woman's possible reaction to being overweight: *you're not like WOOO WOOO and you're not like YAY I'M SO FAT YEEEEAAH!* (3:24, 3:27, 3:30). In terms of experiential value, this

has the effect of making the hypothetical scenario appear absurd and laughable. The humour in this remark relies on the Western assumption that excess weight is a negative attribute and that no overweight woman would revel in her excess weight.

In terms of relational value, the humour may constitute an attempt to align the participants with her view. Interestingly, when all the participants respond by laughing loudly at Timega's assertions, she becomes more authoritative since their laughter confirms that they agree with her view. The fact that all the participants laugh may also be an effect of Timega's increased power in the interaction. Her overlapping utterance in 3:23 (*sh-*) confirms this power since it appears to indicate that Timega is silencing Sophie. If this interpretation is accurate, it follows that she must have increased status in the interaction (or possibly in the friendship group) to be able to silence other participants at will. It is worth noting, however, that Sophie was a new member of the friendship group so it is possible that the power differential between her and Timega was increased by her tenuous position in the group (cf. 4.2.1).

Emboldened by the other participants' laughter, Timega goes on to emphasise the absurdity of the situation by raising her voice (3:27) and laughing. At this point Hayley quotes a hypothetical exclamation of an overweight woman celebrating her excess weight: *I'm a big mama!* (3:28). By dramatising the exclamation, Hayley, like Timega before her, renders it absurd and therefore rejects the possibility of a fat woman exulting in her excess weight. The phrase *big mama* represents a dysphemism (cf. 3.3.2.1) in this context as it is used ironically. It carries relational value since Hayley's choice to use such a phrase is based on her assumption that her interlocutors share her disparaging view of the object of the description, namely fat women.

Timega's remark in 3:30 (*ooh ja gotta lose some weight*) presupposes that all overweight women want to lose weight, presumably to conform to the ideal of thinness. The utterance represents the hypothetical speech of the average overweight woman in which the word *like* is used quotatively to encode the verbal process. In other words, the utterance could alternatively be rendered as: *you say [to yourself] ooh ja gotta lose some weight*. What is interesting about this utterance is that the verbal process is reflexive i.e. directed at the self. Timega presents the scenario of the subject regulating her own weight and instructing *herself* to lose weight. This illustrates the notion of self-policing: the contemporary Western body management practice by which the subject disciplines her body to ensure it complies with

prevailing social norms of what constitutes a desirable body (cf. 2.2.2.4). In terms of the larger context of the extract, this section serves to confirm the previous negative coding of excess weight, particularly the view that overweight women are unhappy (cf. 3:1–11).

In opposition to Timega's view that all fat people are unhappy, Winnie claims in 3:32 that *some people are just happy though*. Winnie's opposing remark may be cued by Timega's sudden increased tentativeness at the end of 3:31, evident in her use of the low probability adverbial *maybe* and her expression of low expressive modality, *I don't know*. She appears to lose her former resolve and authoritativeness and this opens up the space for Winnie to offer an opposing view. In Winnie's qualifying remark the logical connector, *though* encodes a link to the previous discourse as it sets up a contrast with what has just been resolved i.e. the consensus that overweight women are unhappy. The emphasis on the copula verb, *are* in this utterance also encodes this interdiscursive link. It carries contrastive value with the corresponding negative proposition which Timega presented previously, namely that overweight people are *not* happy (3:30).

Surprisingly, despite her previously expressed negative views on overweight women (3:23–31), Timega agrees emphatically with Winnie's statement by exclaiming *ja!* (3:32). Timega begins her new proposition with the logical connector *so* which signals the point where Timega adopts an alternative discourse, one which is in contradiction to the preceding discourse that one's body shape will affect one's happiness. Timega now draws on the discourse of personal characteristics to claim that happiness is a general predisposition (3:37) and that a woman's body shape will *not* affect her personal happiness, provided of course that she has the requisite *tendency* (3:37) to be happy. Contrary to this claim, Timega's emphasis on the adverb *lot* in 3:33 presupposes that, while one's weight does not have a big effect on one's personal happiness, it does have at least *some* effect. The inherent tension in the proposition in 3:33 may be a function of Timega's lack of commitment to her current viewpoint, realised in the low expressive modality of her propositions: *ja! so I don't think it really has a lot to do with...weight that makes you happy or not. I think generally if you are have the tendency to be a happy person you will be happy whether you're fat or skinny*. She prefaces these statements with the subjective modality marker *I [don't] think* and uses the qualifying adverbs *really* (3:33) and *generally* (3:37) to temper her propositions and encode her uncertainty. Timega may be modulating her claims in this way because she is aware that they contradict her previous categorical statements linking fatness with unhappiness (3:23–31). Where relational value is concerned, it is possible that Timega is aware that her previous

sarcastic remarks about fat women were uncompromisingly negative and hence she wishes to qualify her previous position to avoid appearing too critical.

In 3:34–5 Winnie proposes that, in one’s teenage years, body shape matters more than in later years. Thus, presumably her reference to *some people* in 3:32 is limited to older people, who have *got past* worrying about their weight (3:35). In terms of the expressive modality realised in her utterance, note the use of the subjective modality marker *I don’t think* and the filler *like*, both of which suggest a degree of tentativeness and uncertainty. In sum, the section realises a higher proportion of low expressive modality markers which indicate that neither Winnie, nor Timega are wholly committed to the idea that there is no link between body shape and personal happiness. Certainly, it is difficult to reconcile Timega’s current stance with her previous one that happiness is determined by one’s body size and, more specifically, that if one is too overweight or underweight, one will be unhappy (3:1–11, 3:23–30).

4.4.6 Negotiating the relationship between health and happiness

In 3:39–61, the participants argue that being overweight can be linked to being happy – an about-turn given their previous anti-fat stance in 3:23–31. The participants cite two examples of friends (one of whom is overweight and the other who has put on weight), who are happy because they are overweight. While the first example (3:39–42), introduced by Sophie does not explicitly state that the young woman concerned is overweight, this fact is implied by the context of the utterance within the previous discussion of the relationship between body weight and personal happiness. In the first example, Winnie’s emphasis on *happy* (3:40) carries contrastive value, encoding the fact that she is taking issue with Timega’s previous equation of fatness with *unhappiness* (3:23–5).

In an attempt to justify the view that fat women can be happy, Winnie goes on to cite another example of a mutual friend, Sam, whom she describes as *much happier* after putting on weight (3:55). This example is significant in terms of the context of Sam’s personal history, a history of disordered eating behaviour. The participants describe in detail Sam’s previous disordered state using negatively expressive phrases like, *thin, thin, thin; sport maniac; lived for sport; anorexic* and *bulimic*. These phrases create the image of someone with an unhealthy obsession with her body and, specifically, with being thin and toned. Therefore, the participants are implicitly contrasting the disordered body (the anorectic Sam) with the healthy body (the recovered, overweight Sam). So yes, Sam was happier when she put on

weight, but her weight gain occurred in the context of being anorexic or unhealthily thin. Given the insight into her previous pathology, it is perhaps unsurprising that excess weight is constructed as symptomatic of personal happiness. While this section ostensibly realises a pro-fat ideology, it does not endorse excess weight in *all* contexts, as the universal norm to which one should aspire. The mere fact that the contrast made is one between a disordered female body and a comparatively, ‘normal’ healthy body, suggests that the participants’ endorsement of female fatness is conditional at best.

Winnie and Sophie co-construct this description of their mutual friend, with Sophie in particular confirming (3:45, 3:55) Winnie’s description. The frequency of latched utterances and supportive overlaps in Winnie’s and Sophie’s contributions indicate their collaborative construction of fatness as symptomatic of personal happiness. Timega, by contrast recedes into the background in this section. Her limited role in the current section is particularly evident if one compares her current confirmatory minimal responses (3:42, 3:48, 3:53) to her previous voluble, emphatic contributions to the conversation (3:23–5, 3:27, 3:30–1, 3:33, 3:36). She begins to raise an alternative view in 3:58 and then I step in to question Sophie and Winnie’s pro-fat position in 3:59. My tone in 3:59 may have been one of surprise and it is possible that Timega read this as an indication that I disagree with Sophie and Winnie. This may have given her a boost of confidence to counter the current viewpoint in the next section (3:62–71) by emphasising that Sophie and Winnie’s construction of the relationship between happiness and excess weight is conditional (3:62, 3:67–9, 3:71).

This construction of fat women as happy represents the only real challenge to the prevailing ideal of the thin female body as it offers real-life evidence to refute the negative associations with female fatness and the corresponding construction of the slender female body as the ideal (LeBesco 2004). In contrast to the current discourse, the first three discourses (3:1–31) serve tacitly to endorse the ideal of thinness. The first two discourses (the pro-moderation discourse and the discourse of the disordered body) promote the ideal of thinness by constructing extreme body shapes (anorexia and obesity) as unhealthy. The third discourse, the anti-fat discourse conforms to Western norms of beauty by constructing female fatness as undesirable. Therefore, this discourse also supports the prevailing thin ideal. Finally, the fourth discourse of personal characteristics presents a case for happiness being a predisposition which is unrelated to body size. While this arguably represents an oppositional discourse in that it challenges the notion that a woman can only be happy if she is thin, the low expressive modality realised in this discourse shows that the young women

are not committed to this stance (cf. 4.4.5). So the oppositional view that body size and personal happiness are unrelated is not sustained in the interaction.

Timega's counter-response to the pro-fat view presupposes that happiness is within the individual's control i.e. one can choose to be happy by adopting the right *mindset* (3:62). This contradicts the earlier statements (3:32–8) which suggested that happiness is a general predisposition, which is not subject to individual control (cf. 4.4.5). Timega's statements imply that if one is overweight or underweight one has to make a conscious decision to be happy: *it's harder it it takes up a lot of energy to smile* (3:68). This confirms the previous equation of extreme fatness/thinness with unhappiness since it presupposes a causal relationship (encoded partly through the use of the logical connectors, *and* and *so*, 1:68) between these two body shapes and unhappiness. In both cases, the implication is that the individual would consciously have to confront their unhappiness in an *effort* to be happy.

Timega initially proposes this position tentatively: note the use of the subjective modality marker, *I think* (3:62), the qualifier, *more of* (3:62), the low epistemic modal verb, *might* (3:64), the hedge, *well not necessarily* (3:64), all of which index an uncertainty and an awareness of oppositional voices. The emphasis on *fat* in *not necessarily fat* (3:65) mirrors the previous distinction between the unmarked, unemphatic use of the term and the marked, emphatic alternative (cf. 4.4.3). Like Winnie before her (3:5), Timega is qualifying her view by arguing that only marginally overweight women (the unmarked, unemphatic *fat*) could be happy. The fact that Timega adds this disclaimer to her statement suggests that the degree of excess weight will affect a person's happiness: the more overweight one is, the less likely one is to be happy. So, in effect this supports an anti-fat ideology which equates excess weight with unhappiness.

Timega becomes more sure of her position (3:67–71) when Winnie agrees with her and co-constructs this view in 3:63, 3:66 and 3:70. Timega's use of the present tense to advocate what she perceives is a universally valid truth (*you're healthy when you're skinny...you're not really healthy....then you're not healthy either*), the use of the adverbial *obviously* (3:78) and the absence of qualifiers or subjective modality markers all carry high expressive modality. They signal her commitment to the truth value of her propositions and the authoritativeness of her claims.

In 3:66–68 Timega negatively evaluates extreme thinness. It is at this point that she qualifies

that, while one mustn't be too thin, one equally mustn't be too fat: *but like you obviously mustn't be a like a fat ass either*. This construction is an example of meronymy where a part of something is used to represent the whole. In this case, Timega is equating a possessive attribute and part of the woman's body (her *ass*) with her identity as an embodied subject. She is literally *defining* a woman according to the appearance of her body, and specifically one part of her body. In addition, *fat ass* is a dysphemism and is therefore negatively expressive. So not only is Timega defining the subject according to the size of her *ass*, she is negatively evaluating this particular type of *ass* and, by implication, this type of woman. In terms of relational value, Timega's choice to use this derogatory term is based on the assumption that her interlocutors share a similarly negative view of fat women. Winnie and Timega then go on to construct a causal link (evident in their use of the logical connector *cause* in 3:70–1) between *excess* weight and poor health. It is worth noting that Winnie and Timega were the dominant participants in the conversation as a whole. Thus, their co-construction of the relationship between body shape and health is particularly definitive and their current viewpoint emerges as dominant in the extract.

By juxtaposing extreme thinness (*skinny*) and fatness (the emphatic use of *fat ass*), the participants construct both body sizes as unhealthy and as symptomatic of unhappiness. The conversation has come full circle: the participants started off by advocating a pro-moderation, pro-health position (3:1–11) and now, after much negotiation and invoking several discourses, they end up advocating a balance between being thin and being overweight. Attaining such a balance is equated with being healthy and happy.

4.4.7 Summary

What is interesting about this extract is the fact that the young women resist prominent ideologies, such as the pro-thin ideology which values female slenderness and constructs fatness as transgressive and socially unacceptable (Brazier & LeBesco 2001; LeBesco 2004). In this regard, I discussed how the participants draw on an oppositional discourse in which they construct fat as the new thin (4.4.1, Table 4). They also reappropriate the negative connotations of female fatness by using an alternative adjective *phat*, which is positively coded to refer to a voluptuous, sexually appealing woman (Urban online dictionary 2006). At another point in the extract, the young women present a case for female fatness as desirable. To justify this stance they cite two examples of overweight friends who are happy (3:39–61). However, this position is not sustained and when it is contested by one of the most dominant participants, Timega, all the other participants shift to a more conservative

position where they rearticulate the merits of the healthy female body. They construct the healthy body as one which is in proportion (neither too fat nor too thin). The interpretation shows that, of the five discourses drawn upon in the extract, it is the pro-moderation discourse which is dominant since it is drawn upon twice and it is the only view upon which the young women ultimately agree.

4.5 Conclusion

Having interpreted the extracts separately, I now draw the interpretations together by commenting on their significance in terms of my research questions. In answering the first research question which pertains to the ideologies reflected in the discourses of the ideal female body (cf. 1.2), this concluding section considers the discourses which emerged as dominant in the extracts. I aim to explain the knowledge and beliefs about the ideal female body contained in these dominant discourses. With regard to the second research question, this section comments on my role in the three extracts in an attempt to ascertain whether my contributions attest to my conscious aim to be an equal co-participant (see 3.2.3) or whether they reflect my perception of my increased status in the interaction.

The interpretation of extract one reveals the significance of the male gaze in the women's constructions of beauty. To legitimate their conceptions of female attractiveness, the young women appeal strongly to male perspectives of what constitutes the ideal female body. I noted in my interpretation that references to male notions of female beauty suggest that attractiveness is construed primarily on the basis of perceived heterosexual desirability, rather than on aesthetic merit (Jaworski 2003). The dominance of the male perspective on female beauty is attested by the fact that, despite my potential to sway the young women's views by articulating alternative notions of beauty, I too defer to the authority of male notions of female attractiveness (cf. 4.2.2). Although the young women do articulate an alternative perspective which argues the merits of the 'natural' female body, they concede that the 'natural' body is only valued when it is also conventionally attractive.

Based on the interpretation of this extract, it would appear that, faced with the choice of having a natural, conventionally unattractive body or having a surgically enhanced attractive body, the young women would choose the latter despite their acknowledgment of the problems associated with cosmetic surgery (cf. 4.2.1). Winnie in particular maintains that, while she would like to believe in a fairytale world where a woman's 'natural' appeal is valued, reality dictates that a woman's merit resides primarily in her sexual attractiveness.

The participants' negative characterisation of unattractive women as *siff ass girls* and *swamp donkeys* also contributes to reproducing a belief in the supremacy of the conventionally attractive woman within the social order. The recurring references to male notions of female beauty and the reliance on a belief in compulsory heterosexuality is borne out in other extracts, making this extract fairly representative of the discourses found in the study as a whole (for another example, see Pienaar & Bekker 2006a).

Turning to extract two, a discussion of the overweight female body, the interpretation points to two taboos related to the ideal female body, namely being overweight and ageing. The fact that both phenomena warrant censorship (through the use of euphemistic language) is evidence of the young women's perception that female weight gain and ageing are socially unacceptable. By constructing the ageing, overweight female body as undesirable (cf. 4.3.4, 4.3.5), the participants conversely endorse female thinness and youthfulness as attributes of the ideal female body.

The interpretation of extract two also revealed several points of rupture in the discourse where the participants appear to be negotiating an alternative ideal of female beauty, one which values personal contentment as a measure of attractiveness. They describe the woman in Figure 1 positively in terms of her personal characteristics and seek to naturalise her excess weight as an effect of ageing (cf. 4.3.5). But the participants do not dwell long on the subject's positive attributes and when I declare that she is unattractive, they agree with me and move on to discuss the woman in the next image. So the participants' articulation of an alternative beauty ideal, one which is accepting of women of different sizes, body shapes and ages, is not sustained in this extract and it appears that prevailing notions of beauty win out, determining the decision to relegate this particular woman to the 'no' pile. However, I acknowledge that in designating a 'no' pile in 2:46, I constrained the participants' options to a binary of *attractive/unattractive*. Such a construction is essentialising and fails to acknowledge that attractiveness occurs along a continuum. In retrospect, I realise (to my frustration) that this dichotomous construction of physical appearance in the consensus exercise worked against my research aims to promote the articulation of alternative discourses of female beauty. The very exercise of putting women into 'yes' and 'no' piles means that, given a choice based on physical appearance, the young women do not really have the ideological space to develop and sustain an alternative ideology. Nonetheless, I think it is revealing that, despite these limitations, the participants do invoke alternative

discourses of female beauty in an attempt to challenge the hegemonic Western ideal of female thinness. While these discourses may not hold the most sway in the extracts, the fact that the participants draw on them suggests that there is a discursive struggle taking place on what constitutes the female physical ideal.

The discursive struggle on the notion of the ideal female body is particularly evident in extract three, the most complex of the extracts and the one which features the most discourses. What I find intriguing about this extract is that, in negotiating their stance on the relationship between personal happiness and physical appearance, the young women draw on several discourses, some of which are in opposition to each other. This points to the fact that they are co-constructing their ideologies in real-time in response to the other participants' contributions. Thus, one can trace the participants' shifting ideological positions in the discourse itself and, by analysing their commitment to the various ideologies (or in Fairclough's (1989) terms, the level of expressive modality), it is possible to identify which ideology is dominant in the extract.

The participants begin by drawing on a pro-moderation discourse which equates moderation with physiological health and well-being (cf. 4.4.4). Two of the other discourses which they draw on, the discourse of the disordered body and the anti-fat discourse (cf. 4.4.5), corroborate the pro-moderation ideology by constructing the anorexic and overweight body as unhealthy. Since both being too fat and being too thin are viewed as unhealthy, the participants appear to be implicitly endorsing a balance, namely the attainment of a proportional body size. I believe that the pro-moderation discourse is the one which wins out for four related reasons:

1. It is the discourses which the participants initially invoke and return to after much debate.
2. This discourse carries high expressive modality, indexing the participants' commitment to their propositions (cf. 4.4.4).
3. This is the position which I implicitly support in 3:1–11 and it is possible that the young women subconsciously aligned their positions with mine to avoid further resistance from me.
4. The conversation moves on to a different topic, with no further disagreement on the issue.

In terms of the ideology encoded in the pro-moderation discourse, I think that it represents a conservative, politically correct stance on female body management. Unlike the oppositional pro-fat stance (cf. Table 4 in 4.4.1), which aims to oppose the prevailing female physical ideal (and therefore represents a contentious view), the pro-moderation discourse effectively endorses the project of the thin female body by equating thinness with good health and by advocating balanced eating. It represents an apparently commonsensical view of the thin body as ideal because it is healthy. Although the young women do challenge the pro-thin ideology by arguing that fat women can be happy and that being overweight is preferable to being underweight (cf. 4.4.5), this oppositional stance carries low expressive modality and is not sustained in the extract.

In all of the extracts, there is evidence of a discursive struggle taking place on the notion of female beauty and, more particularly, what constitutes the ideal body. There are points in the extracts in which the young women challenge the ideal of the conventionally attractive thin, youthful female body by, for example, constructing female fatness as desirable (cf. 4.4.1, 4.4.5) or by presenting a case for the appeal of the natural (non-surgically enhanced) female body (cf. 4.2.5). But ultimately, these oppositional discourses give way to dominant discourses which endorse female sexual attractiveness and the value of the conventionally attractive, thin toned body. The discourses which predominate across the extracts, namely the discourses of female sexual attractiveness (extract one), the discourse of silence on female fatness (extract two) and the pro-moderation discourse (extract three) attest to the young women's subscription to the prevailing Western ideal of beauty.

In response to the second research question (cf. 1.2), I now consider my role in the interactions and whether I influenced the direction of the body shape discussions. In extract one, when I question the young women's belief in an alternative ideology which values the appeal of the natural female body, they shift to draw on a discourse of female sexual attractiveness which realises a pro-beauty ideology (cf. 4.2.3). Thus, it is possible that, had I not been present, the alternative ideology of the natural female body may have held more purchase. The fact that my questioning of the participants' views caused them to reconsider their stance on the matter of the ideal body is an indication of my powerful role in the interaction. Certainly, the least powerful participant in this extract, Sophie, was willing to defer to me and to align her views unquestioningly with mine. The other participants, particularly the most outspoken ones, Winnie and Timega, were more prepared to defend

their positions in the face of my critique. Nonetheless, I believe that the shift from the discourse of the natural body to the discourse of female sexual attractiveness was due in part to my critique of the ideology encoded in the former discourse.

My coercive role is most marked in extract two, perhaps because of the participants' reticence to discuss the topic at hand (cf. 4.3.3). I intervene several times in an attempt to encourage the young women to articulate a negative view of female fatness. What is significant about this interaction is that, despite my increased power, my coercion tactics fail since the young women stubbornly resist an overt adoption of an anti-fat stance. I propose several explanations for their reluctance to speak candidly on the topic of female fatness. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, the participants' silence on the topic speaks to the strength of taboos on discussing excess weight. Secondly, the participants' knowledge that I was seeking to promote a particular response and the artificiality of the exercise may have predisposed them to resist giving their candid views on the woman in Figure 1. The young women may well have been suspicious of my openly negative stance on the overweight female body, reading it as a dubious and artificial stance which is not reflective of my true beliefs on the matter. Thirdly, the presence of the recorder may have served as a constant visual reminder that the recording would be subject to analysis, militating against the young women's spontaneous expression of their views. Despite these constraints, the extract is ideologically interesting because the discourse of silence is based on the perception that the female fatness is socially taboo and that discussions of the subject therefore warrant censorship.

Lastly, in extract three I do not appear to play as significant a role as I do in the other extracts (cf. 4.4.3). However, I believe that my initial questioning of the participants' oppositional stance on female fatness (cf. Table 4) may have predisposed them to adopt a more conservative stance in which they endorse physiological health and well-being. In articulating this view, they draw on a pro-moderation discourse which effectively promotes the ideal of female thinness by constructing the overweight body as unhealthy. Thus, this discourse covertly endorses thinness by presenting dieting as being motivated primarily by a concern for health (Pienaar & Bekker 2006b). I think that the shift to this pro-moderation discourse represents a concession on the part of the young women, a concession in response to my critique of their previously articulated pro-fat stance. Moreover, it is significant that the discursive struggle around the ideal female body culminates in a consensus that the healthy body is the ideal to which one should aspire. It is possible that one of the reasons this

discourse prevails in this extract is because it is one discourse which I do not critique. In fact, by negatively evaluating both the anorexic and overweight female body as undesirable extreme body sizes, I tacitly signal my subscription to a conservative pro-moderation ideology.

The irony of my contribution to the discussions arises from the fact that, although I aimed to be critical and to promote alternative viewpoints, in reality I adopted a conservative stance on the ideal female body. It is possible that, had I not been present, the oppositional ideologies would have gained more currency, enabling an alternative body ideal to prevail (cf. 6.2). What is significant about the extracts is that, despite my attempts to constrain the participants' contributions and to promote conservative ideologies, these young women still draw on alternative discourses. In doing so, they exhibit a level of critical awareness and a desire (however unsustained) to resist normative constructions of female beauty. While ultimately the conservative discourses predominate, there is nonetheless a significant degree of discursive flux in the extracts. In the chapter which follows I explain the ideologies underpinning the conceptions of female beauty which the young women articulate in the extracts. The chapter explores, *inter alia*, the role of consumer capitalism, postmodernism, cosmetic surgery and moral coding of the body in reproducing hegemonic beauty ideals.

5. EXPLANATION

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I situate the interpretation of the three extracts (Chapter 4) in the context of contemporary Western society, a society which places great value on a woman's appearance as a measure of internal worth (Gimlin 2000; 2006). I explain the ideologies encoded in the various body talk discourses as these relate to broader social structures. More specifically, this chapter discusses the cultural and social forces which reproduce hegemonic (and often oppressive) ideals of female beauty.

In relation to extract one, this chapter draws parallels between accounts of plastic surgery and a fairytale discourse which reproduces the "happy ever after" myth (cf. 5.2.1). It explains the transformative appeal of cosmetic surgery in terms of the motivations the young women offer for opting for surgery, motivations which are based on socially conditioned conceptions of ageing, beauty and gendered identity (cf. 5.2.3). I discuss how cosmetic surgery discourses promote a belief that any woman can attain the ideal body through surgical intervention. The explanation of extract two explains the ideologies which underpin the discourse of silence on female fatness (cf. 5.3.1). It explores the taboos surrounding the overweight body and by comparing discourses of fatness with those of disability, it presents a case for viewing excess weight as a type of disability in the context of Western society (cf. 5.3.2). I also discuss how anti-fat discourses contribute to sustaining the hegemony of the ideal of female thinness. Lastly, the explanation of extract three acknowledges the centrality of the pro-moderation discourse in the women's accounts of the ideal body. The explanation draws on the work of Foucault (1975; 1979) to show how the health promotion movement supports a political agenda by defining what it means to be a productive, modern subject (cf. 5.4.1). I attribute the dominance of the health ethic to the rise of Surveillance Medicine, a form of medicine which emphasises individual responsibility in the prevention of disease and the improvement of physiological health and well-being (Armstrong 1995). In section 5.4.2, I explain the sociocultural and medical factors which sustain the related ethics of health and moderation. I describe how the discourse of the healthy body has been allied to the discourses of diet and female sexual attractiveness to legitimate the pursuit of beauty as being driven by a concern for physiological health and well-being.

In my explanation of the three extracts, I do not focus solely on the relevant extracts; instead, my explanation draws on the salient discourses and themes in the conversations as a whole.

While most of the explanation relates specifically to one of the extracts analysed in detail in chapter 4, I make some points which are based on other parts of the conversations. Where necessary I have reproduced the relevant extracts so that the reader can access them as part of my explanation. I draw on other parts of the conversation because there are recurring themes in each conversation which are not evident from looking at one isolated extract. I explain the social significance of these themes to better reach a holistic view (rather than a partial view in terms of a discrete extract) of what ideologies underpin the discussions on the female physical ideal.

5.2 Plastic surgery and the post-surgical female body

In relation to extract one (Appendix D₁) and the discussions of plastic surgery, the explanation investigates three themes which emerged as salient in the young women's account of the post-surgical female body. The first theme, discussed in 5.2.1, focusses on how plastic surgery discourses exploit the fairytale genre to promote the life-changing transformative potential of surgery. I consider why a belief in the "happily ever after" myth holds such appeal in contemporary Western society. I also explore the links between the contemporary belief in the body as a site of endless transformation and the ideals of postmodernism, ideals which emphasise indeterminacy and the continual transformation of the body (cf. 2.2.2.5). In extract one, the young women initially appeal to the natural body as being the ideal to which women aspire. They construct the 'natural' body in relation to its perceived opposite, the surgically enhanced body. In light of this, section 5.2.2 interrogates the conception of the 'natural' body by showing it fails to acknowledge the social constructedness of the body. Thirdly, I consider the pursuit of physical beauty through plastic surgery. In response to the young women's concerns about particular physical features which they would like altered through surgery, I consider the compelling reasons women offer for the appeal of cosmetic surgery (cf. 5.2.3). The young women's motivations for potentially choosing surgery to reconfigure their appearance encode a desire to enhance femininity, a desire to increase sexual desirability and a preoccupation with 'correcting' perceived physical deficiencies.

5.2.1 Fairytales and fictions

One of the recurring discourses on which the young women draw in their discussions of plastic surgery is what I term the fairytale discourse which constructs cosmetic surgery as having the miraculous, fairytale-like ability to transform a so-called ugly body into a beautiful one (and, in so doing, to transform a person's life). By appealing to the metaphor of

the transformation of the ‘ugly duckling’ into a ‘beautiful swan’, this discourse relies on the knowledge and appeal of fairytales as part of our cultural imaginary (cf. Table 6 below). Rosen (2004: 21) cites classic tales like *The Ugly Duckling*, *Cinderella* and *Pygmalion* as appealing to the belief in the power of physical transformation as a means of attaining happiness. Bordo (2003) draws a parallel between the fascination with the fairytale transformation which plastic surgery purports to offer and stories of travel to new, uncharted lands, full of promise. However, I think that the appeal of surgery has more to do with the universal mate quest and with the role of the fairytale as part of our cultural mythology. Young girls in mainstream Western culture are inducted into the fantastical worlds of fairytales, most of which centre on the mate quest, where the lonely heroine searches and finds the hero, who fulfils all her dreams (Nash 1990). She is transformed from lonely and sad to ‘happy ever after’. The dominant discourses which promote plastic surgery have yoked these ‘happily ever after’ stories to the transformative power of plastic surgery. These discourses and reality television shows which reproduce them help to create the viewer’s expectation of radical transformation from ugly to beautiful, from sad to happy.

I believe that the media imagery and the discourse of reality television shows like *Extreme Makeover* are particularly powerful in reproducing this belief in the viewer. These discourses seek to engender in the viewer a distinctive relation to the self, one in which she views her body as an object in need of transformation (Smith 1990, cf. 2.2.1.1). Moreover, when people watch these transformations on television, they often project the transformations they see in the post-surgical female bodies onto themselves, imagining their own bodies as being similarly enchanted (Blum 2003). In the extract in Table 6, the young women signal their projective identification with the subjects on *Extreme Makeover* (cf. 4.3.1 for a description of *Extreme Makeover*). They envisage the image-changing surgery being enacted on their bodies, *giving them hope that they could look like that* (lines 64–71):

Table 6: Invoking the transformative appeal of cosmetic surgery

53	Hayley: =but you see these people change [from ugly ducklings into swans]
[...]	
62	Timega: [ja I think it’s like almost]
63	Sophie: [you went from <u>that</u> to this]
64	Timega: I think in a weird way it’s like the <u>hope</u> that like
65	[if you don’t feel like that good about]
66	Hayley: [I could <u>become</u> that!]
67	Timega: yourself well maybe you know there- there’s hope=
68	Sophie: =there’s hope for me=

69 **Timega:** =like if she can look like that and then look like that maybe
 70 [there's hope that I can]
 71 **Winnie:** [I can too]
 72 **Timega:** look like this and then look like that
 [...]
 73 **Timega:** I think it could almost be like the hope
 74 [that maybe one day]
 75 **K:** [that kind of fairytale]
 76 **Timega:** it'll be you

Cosmetic surgery discourses construct the postmodern fantasy of endless self-improvement (cf. 2.2.1.5) and even miraculous transformation of the body as universally attainable. Bordo (2003: 245–6) describes the fantasy of postmodern culture as underwritten by a desire to transcend the limits of our corporeality: “[postmodern culture] has generated an industry and an ideology fueled by fantasises of rearranging, transforming, and correcting, an ideology of limitless improvement and change, defying the historicity, the mortality, and, indeed the very mortality of the body”. Plastic surgeons and reality makeover shows perpetuate the belief in the supremacy of youth and beauty in the social order by extolling the miraculous transformations surgery offers to anyone who deviates from the standard of youthful attractiveness (Blum 2003). Aesthetic surgery promises to make one not only beautiful and young, but happier, more self-assured, sexually desirable and successful in relationships (ibid; Gilman 2001). Gilman (2001: 332) asserts that plastic surgery, although effected at the level of the material body, has symbolic significance at the level of the individual's subjectivity: “It may seem that surgeons are operating on the material of the body, but they (and we) know better: they are reshaping our fantasies of ourselves”. The young women are initially uncritical of the transformative ideal of plastic surgery and fail to problematise the idea that plastic surgery *can change one's life*. This is evident in the extract in Table 7, in which the participants appeal to the belief that plastic surgery patients emerge happier as a result of their physical transformation (lines 6–8, 18–24):

Table 7: Transforming the self-image through cosmetic surgery

1 **K:** WHY do people love it?
 2 [It's such a terrible show]
 3 **Winnie:** [()]
 4 **Hayley:** [()]
 5 **K:** [I also love it but I just]
 6 **Winnie:** [no but no but cause the] people are so happy afterwards=
 7 **Hayley:** =But I think that's also on the show like you I've never seen an Extreme
 8 Makeover where the person's sad afterwards=
 9 **Timega:** =it's just like the people are genuinely nice
 10 **Winnie:** [jeeez like it!]

- 11 **Hayley:** [is that before and after?]
 12 **K:** ja
 13 **Winnie:** [oh my ()]
 14 **Hayley:** [like I didn't actually]
 15 [watch that one]
 16 **Winnie:** [okay this is so extreme]
 17 **Timega:** the people are genuinely nice and then they their inside gets to like you know [...]
 18 **Timega:** ja like you like watching aah boyfriend and girlfriend and then=
 19 **K:** =happy ending=
 20 **Timega:** =their little happy ending
 21 and you hope that you can have that too
 22 **Sophie:** [()] ((laughs))
 23 **Timega:** [aah look she ends] pretty
 24 well maybe I can also end pretty you know

Although not evident in the extract in Table 7 above, the young women do exhibit an awareness of the limitations of plastic surgery at other points in the conversation. For example, Winnie articulates a scepticism of pro-plastic surgery discourses when she questions whether reality shows which depict this fairytale-like transformation are authentic: *they just like I don't know I just think it's like they they have these touching little videos that they send in and whether it's like all true or not* (cf. 4.2.1, Table 2, lines 17–19). But finally, it is the fairytale myth, the optimistic belief in the 'happily ever after' that predominates in the subsequent discussion.

5.2.2 Deconstructing the 'natural' body

One of the discourses which the young women invoke in extract one is the discourse of the natural woman, a discourse which constructs so-called natural female beauty as the ideal. In what follows I argue that the rapid expansion of the cosmetic surgery industry (Wolf 1991) has influenced contemporary Western discourses of the body. More specifically, I describe how the popularisation of cosmetic surgery has caused a shift in definitions of the binary category, *natural/unnatural*, as it relates to appearance. Prior to the popularisation of plastic surgery within Western consumer capitalist society, the *natural* body was constructed as free of artifice, where *artifice* denotes make-up, hairstyling or other superficial, non-invasive means of enhancing the appearance. Now, because aesthetic surgery is becoming increasingly popular and is being touted as a realistic option for everyone, there has been a shift in definitions of categories such as natural/unnatural (Blum 2003). This is evident in the discourse upon which the young women draw, a discourse which yokes the *non*-surgically enhanced body to notions of naturalness. Note how the young women reconstitute the meaning of this term even further when they argue that *natural* is only positively expressive

when it is equated with beautiful (1:59–80, Appendix D₁). They go on to construct the naturally attractive female body according to Western norms of beauty: it refers to a body which is at the apex of youth and which is slim and toned (Blum 2003; Bordo 2003).

In the words of Blum (2003: 54), the *natural* body is equated in popular Western discourses with the notion of the “premediated body”, a body which is untouched by the surgeon’s knife, a ‘real’ body. But, as she rightly questions: “When identity itself is fashioned (and incessantly refashioned) in relation to these transient cultural images, how can we speak of any kind of premedia, premediated body?” (Blum 2003: 54). The distinction between the natural body and the surgically enhanced body is an artificial one since it presupposes the existence of a body which is not culturally shaped, which is authentic and untouched. I think that the young women use the term *natural* uncritically because they do not indicate an awareness that the notion of *naturalness*, particularly when used to refer to appearance, is never a neutral term. Because our experience of the body is always culturally mediated, it follows that there is no authentic body which is somehow liberated from the assault of images and discourses which promote a particular ideal of beauty. Discourses of the authentic, natural body such as that invoked by Hayley in extract one (cf. 4.2.5), while they may seek to be liberatory and to contest dominant ideals of beauty, are problematic in that they fail to recognise the social constructedness of our bodies. Bordo (2003: 142, emphasis original) takes issue with a belief in the ‘natural’ body by arguing that “Cultural practices, far from exerting their power *against* spontaneous needs, “basic” pleasure or instincts, or “fundamental” structures of body experience, are already and always inscribed [on our bodies]...Our bodies, no less than anything else that is human, are constituted by culture”. This may explain why, when I am asked if my research on the social construction of the female beauty ideal has somehow enabled me to liberate myself from oppressive Western beauty regimes, my answer is always “no”. I still understand and experience my body through culturally mediated discourses, which represent it in particular ways. The norms of femininity and beauty into which a woman is inducted from childhood are written on the body. The body is thus emblematic of these norms, making the idea of a premediated, acultural ‘real’ body at best mystifying and at worst fallacious (Bordo 2003).

5.2.3 In pursuit of beauty?

One feature of the young women’s discussions of plastic surgery which struck me was their desire to alter various bodily features which, to my mind, were insignificant and unproblematic, if they were noticeable at all. Yet two of the participants, Winnie and

Timega, constructed their respective noses as sufficiently different (and problematic) to warrant rhinoplasty. While I acknowledge that perceptions of appearance are relative, it is interesting to note the disparity between my positive perceptions of Winnie and Timega's respective noses and their negative self-perceptions of the same feature. I have reproduced the relevant extract in Table 8 below as I believe it illustrates a significant sociocultural phenomenon where Western women, who have the economic means, are increasingly pursuing cosmetic surgery as a means to reshape their appearance and their sense of embodiment.

Despite the other participants' attempts to counter Timega and Winnie's claims and to appeal to notions of 'normality' in emphasising that Timega and Winnie's noses are not deviant, neither Timega nor Winnie accepts these descriptions and each remains unsatisfied with her nose. It appears from this extract that for many women it is not acceptable to have a remarkable feature, which distinguishes one's appearance as not conforming to the homogeneous Anglo-Saxon ideal of beauty. Every aspect of the appearance is now subject to scrutiny and could be 'improved' through surgery. If one aspect of a person's appearance is remarkable, even characteristic, it is viewed as deficient and therefore as a suitable target for plastic surgery. As Blum (2003: 53) notes "...the stakes are raised on the category of ugliness itself, which can now be as minimal as the slight bump of a mole or eyes that aren't absolutely symmetrical". Gilman, a medical sociologist (2001), attributes a fear of prejudice, of being viewed as the Other, as one of the psychological reasons people opt for surgery to make their bodies conform to a homogeneous ideal of beauty. Davis (2003:74) in a humane account of a phenomenon she calls "surgical passing" argues that, to cast women's motivations for having plastic surgery as purely aesthetic in nature, driven by a desire to look beautiful is to obscure the deep-seated, psychological sense of 'otherness' that drives people to surgery:

I concluded that it makes more sense to frame cosmetic surgery as an intervention in identity – that is, a person's sense of her embodied self – than as a beauty practice. Linking cosmetic surgery to identity allowed me to acknowledge the gravity of women's suffering and to treat their desire for cosmetic surgery as more than a matter of having had the ideological wool pulled over their eyes.

Table 8: Nose jobs and notions of normality

3	Hayley: [I'd rather have a <u>car</u>]
4	Timega: <u>that</u> you only get when you're like
5	K: [((laughs))]

- 6 **Timega:** thirty late [thirties]
7 **Sophie:** [forty]
8 **Timega:** like at least
9 **Hayley:** unless you're like [seriously disfigured and like]
10 **Timega:** [but like] ja my nose which I'm gonna have when I'm like 18
11 **Hayley:** =Tim you're not seriously disfigured [like that]
12 **K:** [I've never] I didn't notice your nose
13 ((laughs))
14 **Timega:** I do I really [do]
15 **Winnie:** [I have] a ski slope
16 Nicola even agreed with me ((laughs))
17 **Timega:** okay I have like a little mm mm=
18 **Sophie:** =I've just got a nose ((laughs))
19 **Hayley:** me too [I have a nose]
20 **Winnie:** [believe me in her family] there's like a NOSE
21 [and everyone notices it]
22 **Hayley:** [THERE IS A NOSE IT'S LIKE THIS BIG I PROMISE YOU]
23 **Timega:** [okay but ()]
24 **Winnie:** [I HAVE GOT THE SWEETMAN NOSE AND I'M NOT EVEN IN YOUR
25 FAMILY]
26 **Timega:** okay witness the Kitson nose this is the Kitson nose=
27 **Hayley:** [No Tim you must see ()]
28 **Timega:** [everyone's got it my mother and my brother and my dad we all got it from]
29 my dad
30 [I love my dad]
31 **K:** [it's such a normal] nose though ((laughs))
32 **Timega:** no it's not=
33 **K:** =you guys both have normal noses=
34 **Timega:** =I'm glad you think so but this is not ((laughs))

In the conversational extract in Table 8, the young women construct surgery as an option for middle-aged women who wish to correct the perceived effects of ageing (lines 4–8) and as an option for anyone who perceives that an aspect of their appearance is unattractive or does not conform to the homogenous beauty ideal (lines 10–30). So the young women construct two related motivations for plastic surgery: 1) plastic surgery to repair the ageing body (and stave off mortality) and 2) plastic surgery to minimise or eliminate physical features which do not conform to the standardised Western beauty ideal. As Gimlin (2000: 80) asserts, decisions to have plastic surgery are not based on acultural aesthetic considerations, but rather they involve considerations of age and ethnicity, specifically the desire to achieve perennial youth and to minimise ethnic features which are characterised as deviant, as being outside the Western beauty model: “plastic surgery...speaks to the depredations of Anglo-Saxon ideals of beauty and the attachment of ideals of beauty to youth”. She goes on to characterise plastic surgery as a response to “a culture of appearance that is highly restrictive and which is less a culture of beauty than it is a system of control based on the physical

representations of gender, age and ethnicity” (Gimlin 2000: 89). This resonates with Davis’ (2003) account of surgical passing which refers to the current practice of having plastic surgery as a means of ‘correcting’ physical traits which mark the subject as the Other in terms of the dominant, ethnic and gendered identity.

Both Gimlin (2000) and Davis (2003: 75) identify a third motivation for plastic surgery, one which views surgery through the “lens of gender”, as a means for a woman to become more feminine and thus more sexually desirable. The importance of sexual attractiveness and the options surgery offers for enhancing a woman’s sexual desirability are evident in extract one where the young women invoke the male gaze to construct the post-surgical female body as desirable (cf. 4.2.4). If one views motivations for plastic surgery in terms of the intersection of all three categories of difference, namely gender, age and ethnicity, it becomes clear that plastic surgery does not simply represent another beauty practice but rather it represents an “intervention in identity”, a means of (re)negotiating a particular aspect of identity as a means of transforming a person’s embodied self-concept (Davis 2000: 74–5). I return to the notion of plastic surgery as an intervention in identity in 5.5.3.

In the young women’s accounts of the various aspects of their appearance which they would change through surgery, the young women construct fantasies of self-improvement and transformation. Moreover, by presupposing that plastic surgery is an option for all women, the participants efface the economic constraints on this so-called option. The participants belie their upper class socioeconomic status by constructing plastic surgery as ubiquitous. Their affluence affords them the economic means to choose plastic surgery as the ultimate intervention in reconfiguring their bodies, and hence their identities.

5.2.4 Summary

In my explanation of the young women’s discussions of plastic surgery, I explained the growing appeal of plastic surgery in terms of the broader social structures in which body management practices are embedded. This section began by analysing the fairytale discourse on which the young women draw to promote the transformative potential of cosmetic surgery (cf. 5.2.1). I describe how this discourse exploits the appeal of the ‘happily ever after’ myth to construct cosmetic surgery as ‘life-changing’. While I note that one of the young women was sceptical of the life-changing potential of cosmetic surgery, I conclude that the young women’s critique of the limitations of such surgery is overshadowed by a desire to believe in the fairytale-like power of surgical interventions to transform peoples’ lives. Section 5.2.2

focuses on the notion of the 'natural' body, which the young women appealed to in their discussions of the limited sexual appeal of the surgically enhanced female body. I describe how the definition of the natural body has changed in response to the popularisation of cosmetic surgery: the young women construct the 'natural' female body in opposition to the 'surgically enhanced' body. I problematise this conception of naturalness by showing how it presupposes that a premediated, authentic body pre-exists the culturally constituted body. I argue that this conception is mystifying as our bodies are always inscribed with the effects of particular cultural norms and power dynamics. Moreover, we experience and know our bodies through the lenses of culture, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. Section 5.2.3 explores the motivations women offer for having plastic surgery. I explain the appeal behind surgery in terms of how it effects changes both at the level of the external body and at the level of the internal self-image. Following Davis (2003), I present a case for surgery as a means of re-shaping identity along the lines of gender (surgery to enhance femininity), ethnicity (surgery to minimise markers of ethnic difference), sexuality (surgery to increase sexual desirability) and age (surgery to eradicate the signs of ageing).

I think that the growing appeal of cosmetic surgery in consumer capitalist culture speaks volumes about the prevailing social ideals which place a disproportionate value on physical appearance as an indicator of moral worth. Discourses which promote physical transformation as a goal of personal well-being are problematic in that they help to reproduce a belief in the supremacy of physical beauty within the social (and moral) order. Wolf (1991) describes the cultural capital attached to female beauty as supporting a meritocracy of beauty. She argues that, within this meritocracy, conventionally attractive women are afforded access to patriarchal institutions of power, such as high status professional positions, while so-called unattractive women are relegated to secondary status in the workplace. Pro-cosmetic surgery discourses perpetuate this hierarchy by placing an indordinate value on female beauty. According to these discourses, if a woman can attain beauty, she will solve her psychological, social and professional problems and gain access to the privileges afforded to the body beautiful (Gilman 1998).

In a particularly incisive critique of cosmetic surgery, Rosen (2004: 20–1) analyses plastic surgery narratives to reveal the disturbing beliefs that underpin them:

Buried in the logic of cosmetic surgery are some disturbing truths about what our culture believes: that it is acceptable to be satisfied by the external markers of success; that the pursuit of such markers is, in and of itself, a useful and psychologically healthy goal for people; that what used to be encouraged—a

lifelong process of moral education—is less useful, in the long term, than the appearance of success, health, and beauty; and that if we can overcome the limits nature places on our physical bodies, we should.

So my explanation of the young women's constructions of plastic surgery has not been intended as a defence of the merits of such surgery. Rather, it has sought to unpack the complex motivations women offer for the appeal of cosmetic surgery and to explain the relationship between the body, identity and social structures which underpins these motivations.

5.3 The overweight female body and the beauty ideal

The explanation of extract two (Appendix D₂) explains the ideologies encoded in the young women's constructions of the overweight female body as the antithesis of the ideal. In what follows I consider the sociocultural factors which influence and sustain a discourse of silence on the subject of female fatness. In this regard, I discuss the construction of the overweight subject as a failed, unproductive citizen in consumer capitalist society (cf. 5.3.1). This section also explains the multiple taboos attached to the overweight body, taboos which perceive excess weight as deviant in terms of social class, ethnicity and attractiveness. I seek to link anti-fat attitudes to the commonly held view that the overweight subject does not conform to the ideal of the civilised body. Moreover, I explain how anti-fat ideologies promote the ideal of the thin, toned, healthy body. I conclude section 5.3.1 by assessing the validity of American and European sociological research on the overweight body to the local South African context, and most particularly, its relevance to this study. Section 5.3.2 explores the commonalities between constructions of excess weight and disability. I present a case for excess weight being considered a disabling condition in so far as the discourses of the overweight body construct it as deviant, pitiable and culturally unacceptable. Lastly section 5.3.3 considers how, in naturalising the relationship between female ageing and weight gain, the young women signal their subscription to an ideology which values youthfulness, slimness and beauty. I explore the reasons why the ageing female body is increasingly pathologised by consumer capitalist discourses which construct youthfulness and beauty as available to all women. Lastly I seek to answer the question: is the democratisation of beauty within Western capitalist culture as liberatory as it purports to be?

5.3.1 Exploring the taboos around female fatness

In my interpretation of extract two (cf. 4.3.4) I described how the young women displayed a reluctance to speak candidly on the topic of female fatness. Despite my attempts to draw

them out, the young women refuse to voice their uncensored opinions on the overweight female body, opting instead to present their opinions tentatively and often euphemistically. I labelled the participants' euphemistic language a discourse of 'silence' on female fatness since it encodes a refusal to speak openly on the subject. In what follows I situate this discourse of silence in relation to social taboos surrounding the overweight body. In particular, I consider the construction of fatness in consumer capitalist society as problematic and socially undesirable and, in light of this, I explain how the overweight subject has come to symbolise the failed citizen, marked by their body size as the maligned Other (LeBesco 2004).

Anti-fat attitudes derive in part from the fact that thinness currently represents the ideal (cf. 2.2.1). As such, the fat body is viewed as the oppositional, unattractive body. Not only is the fat body considered unattractive, it also has associations with being lower class: "[Fat bodies are read as] inferior in terms of beauty, and threatening in terms of the suggestion of downward mobility" (LeBesco 2004: 154). The stigma linking the overweight body to working class status or poverty is partly based on the perception that poor people are "ignorant of good nutritional habits and [are] still deprived of adequate recreation space and good medical care" (Cauvin 2000: n.p.). Moreover, fat bodies are racially coded as being linked to racial minorities, such as African and Latino people, which is ironic given the prevalence of obesity amongst white Americans (LeBesco 2004). In sum, the overweight body carries multiple stigmas and is marginalised on the basis of its negative associations with a particular class, racial group and perceived unattractiveness. While the young women in this study did not explicitly link female fatness to lower class people and to minority racial groups, I think that their silence on the subject attests to their awareness of the stigmas attached to the overweight body.

Sociological research on the body claims that the stigmatisation of fatness in contemporary Western society derives from the dominance of the Protestant ethic, an ethic which endorses self discipline and the control of the irrational desires of the body by the rational mind (LeBesco 2004; Lupton 1996; Malson 1998). I believe that the value placed on self-discipline is also a function of the progressive civilising of Western society, a process which has required the subject to internalise impulses and to defer gratification (cf. 2.2.2.4). Modern discourses of the body construct the individual as responsible for regulating and managing their bodies in socially appropriate ways. By the standards of the civilised body, the fat body is transgressive as it represents a lack of self-control, overindulgence and a

concomitant moral lassitude: “fat is...interpreted as an outward sign of neglect of one’s corporeal self; a condition considered either as shameful as being dirty or irresponsibly ill (sic)” (Ritenbaugh, 1982 cited in Evans *et al.* 2002: 202, cf. 2.2.2.2). The negative construction of excess weight reproduces the perception that fat people are responsible for their body size and, therefore, that they can be legitimately discriminated against for their perceived failure to manage their body in ‘socially appropriate’ ways (Gingras 2005).

In a reflection on notions of citizenship in America, LeBesco (2004) describes how fat people are labelled failed citizens by virtue of the perception that being overweight hinders a person’s ability to contribute productively to the capitalist economy. In a similar vein Reischer and Koo (2002: 302) describe the negative attitudes towards the overweight body as an effect of the contemporary construction of the ideal body as one which conforms to the ethic of self-regulation, namely the thin, toned body: “If maintaining a “beautiful” body—carefully monitored and controlled in its size and appearance—is a symbol of cultural and social cooperation, then striving for a body in direct opposition to that ideal is tantamount to civil disobedience”. Another market-related stigma associated with the overweight body is the perception that fat bodies are unmarketable. Following Bourdieu (1987: 193), I believe that different types of bodies carry economic value or “physical capital”. Given the cultural preference for female thinness, the overweight female body carries low market value (cf. 2.2.1.1). Ironically, despite the perceived unmarketability of their bodies, overweight women constitute an obvious market base for diet and fitness products. In respect of their spending power and their consumption of the products designed to help them attain the ideal body, overweight women represent the ideal consumer, servicing the very industry which constructs them as deficient and unmarketable.

In my interpretation of extract two (cf. 4.3), I noted that discourses which villify fatness function as “corollaries to the cult of slenderness” in that they help to reproduce the hegemony of the contemporary physical ideal of the slim, taut female body (Evans *et al.* 2002: 191). The relationship between pro-thin discourses and anti-fat ones is illustrated in a British study of educational discourses on the topics of health, obesity and fitness (Evans *et al.* 2002). Referring to examples from several British curricula, the authors show how pedagogical discourses unwittingly construct fatness as unhealthy, problematic and socially undesirable. Such discourses promote a regulative ideology of health and fitness and indirectly elevate thinness (particularly amongst female learners) as the ideal. Evans *et al.* (2002) describe most British curricula as being uncritical of the negative discourses on

fatness in that they fail to problematise the equation of excess weight with poor health within the biomedical model (cf. 2.2.1.3 for a definition of biomedicine). Although I am hesitant to assert that Simthson College (the school which the participants in this study attended) is guilty of promoting similar negative constructions of female fatness and of endorsing thinness as the unproblematic norm, it is likely that the educational context in which the participants were situated had a bearing on their constructions of the ideal body as healthy, thin and fit. Certainly, I noted previously that Smithson College promotes an ideology of health and fitness as part of its broader ethos (cf. 3.2.2). However, I do not think that the young women's negative construction of female fatness can be reduced to the explanation that they were uncritically reproducing the school ideology of health. Rather, I hypothesise that the taboos surrounding fatness which were evident in the participants' discussions are reflective of the intersection of school, familial and media discourses which construct the overweight female body as antithetical to the ideal of the healthy, thin, fit body.

Most of the research cited above discusses the stigmatisation of the overweight body in the American context. This begs the question whether the findings are applicable to this local study of the discursive construction of the female physical ideal. Unlike the body of literature available in the European and American contexts, there is a paucity of research on the subject of the ideal body in the South African context (see Le Grange, Telch & Tibbs 1998; Szabo & Hollands 1997; Szabo 1999; Caradas, Lambert & Charlton 2001). The limited local research in this field indicates that abnormal eating attitudes and body dissatisfaction affect teenage girls of all ethnic groups in this country (Le Grange *et al.* 1998; Szabo & Hollands 1997). These results suggest that the prevailing Western ideal of female thinness (and the associated stigmatisation of the overweight female body) is no longer confined to the white, Western middle class population in this country. However, while the prevailing ideal may be spreading (through the process of acculturation) to women of all ethnic groups in urban South African settings, this is not to suggest that there is a single, homogeneous beauty ideal in this country (cf. 6.3 on suggestions for future research in this regard). Instead, I think that the South African context is all the more complex in terms of conceptions of the ideal body because it represents a multicultural, developing society. Since the intersection of factors such as race, class and culture influence women's constructions of the ideal body, it is likely that notions of the female physical ideal in South Africa will be divided along these lines. For example, a rural black woman living in the heart of the Eastern Cape is likely to subscribe to a traditional African physical ideal, one which values excess weight as a sign of wealth and well-being (Cauvin 2000; Puoane *et al.* 2002). By contrast, an

urban black woman who has grown up in the Northern suburbs of Johannesburg may have mixed cultural affiliations to both African and Western culture. Such a woman's conception of the ideal body is likely to be more complex as it may encompass some aspects of the ideal African female body and other aspects of the Western, Anglo-Saxon ideal. Moreover, with the AIDS epidemic in this country, differences between the healthy/disordered body are additional signifiers in the construction of the ideal body (Puoane *et al.* 2002). Since this study focusses on self-designated white, Western women I believe that American and European-based research on the ideal body is applicable to understanding the ideologies which underpin the young women's constructions of various body types and more specifically, their reluctance to discuss the overweight female body.

5.3.2 Fatness as disability: promoting the beauty ideal

In researching the stigmatisation of fatness, I was struck repeatedly by the parallels between the dominant constructions of fatness and those of disability. When I considered the young women's reluctance to speak about female fatness and their use of euphemistic language to discuss the topic, it appeared that the discourses of the overweight body and those of the disabled body have some features in common. In what follows, I argue that, if one considers the stigma associated with being overweight in contemporary Western society, the overweight body can be construed as disabled. In presenting this argument I adopt a sociological (rather than biomedical) definition of disability as "the attribution of corporeal deviance – not so much a property of bodies as a product of cultural rules about what bodies should be or do" (Garland-Thomson 1997: 6). Following this definition, disability is a culturally constructed condition, rather than one which is biologically determined and self-evident (Wendell 1996). Crucially the disabled body is understood in relation to the 'normal' body and it is therefore essential in reproducing "figures of otherness that support the privileged norm" (Garland-Thomson 1997: 5). The importance of the Other in defining the limits of the subject's identity is most convincingly illustrated in the work of Butler (1993) (cf. 2.2.2.1). In her discussion of the ways in which the heterosexual matrix disallows certain identities, Butler (1993: 3) maintains that the Other is necessary in circumscribing the behaviour and norms of the dominant subject. "In this sense, then, the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject". In relation to this study, the young women's decision to relegate the 'curvy' women to the pile of unattractive women constitutes an attempt to circumscribe the limits of the ideal body shape. By nominating overweight women as conventionally unattractive, the young women signal their identification with the ideal, thin female body. In extract two

(Appendix D₂) and in the majority of the conversations, the participants construct the overweight female body as being necessarily excluded by this identification.

Following the definition of disability cited above, the overweight body can be considered disabled in the sense that it enacts a refusal to conform to cultural rules regulating body size and shape (LeBesco 2004). Because the overweight body is not considered culturally acceptable or sexually desirable, it is marginalised as being deviant and pitiable (*ibid*). The discursive representations of the disabled body are strikingly similar, ensuring that both disabled and overweight people are relegated to the outer limits of what is considered normal. The stigma surrounding excess weight means that overweight individuals are frequently the victims of discrimination both socially and professionally (LeBesco 2004; Puhl & Brownell 2001). For example, a study by Latner and Stunkard (2003) of ten to eleven-year old American children's perceptions of obesity found that obese children were ranked last on a scale of likeability, even lower than children with obvious physical disabilities. Children's stigmatisation of their peers was remarkably consistent across ethnic groups in this study, suggesting that the negative characterisation of obesity is not restricted to a particular ethnic or cultural group. Research conducted in medical and health settings reveals similar negative attitudes amongst health care workers towards obese patients (Puhl & Brownwell 2001). For example, doctors attribute characteristics such as self-indulgence, lack of will-power and laziness to obese individuals (*ibid*). Looking at these commonly perceived traits of overweight people reveals that doctors and lay people alike share similar negative stereotypes. These stereotypes contribute to "socially disabling fat bodies" and to sustaining the hegemony of the ideal of the healthy, thin toned body (LeBesco 2004: 84).

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 is increasingly recognising obesity as a disabling condition in cases where it impairs the ability of the individual to function normally. The current Act defines disability as "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of [an] individual" (cited in Tydings & Rosenberg 2000). Following this definition, obese people can make claim to legal protection against unfair discrimination based on their body size. The application of the Act to protect obese people from ostracism has sparked much controversy as it raises questions about whether an individual's weight is within their control or whether, like more typical disabilities, it is a physiological condition over which the individual has limited control (LeBesco 2004). Importantly, the Act also acknowledges that notions of impairment may be based on subjective perceptions, rather than self-evident biological differences (Garland-

Thomson 1997). This acknowledgement implies that conceptions of impairment “depend on comparing individual bodies with unstated but determining norms, a hypothetical set of guidelines for corporeal form and function, arising from cultural expectations about how human beings should look and act” (Garland-Thomson 1997: 6–7). This landmark legislation contributes to a view of disability as a phenomenon which is socially sustained by practices which exclude and marginalise certain types of bodies. Interestingly, despite legal recognition that obesity can, in some cases, constitute a disability, many activists within the pro-fat movement have resisted lobbying for the acknowledgement of fatness as a disability for fear of the “double whammy of stigma” that could be attached to overweight people as a result (LeBesco 2004: 74).

In response to the construction of the commonalities between fatness and disability, some might argue that the fundamental difference between these two conditions is that the individual has some control over their weight whereas there is an associated lack of control with being disabled. While I acknowledge this point, I think that the important similarity between excess weight and disability lies not in questions of individual bodily control, but rather in the discourses which construct these conditions as abnormal and problematic. Just as discourses of the disabled body deploy negative representations of disability to elevate the able body as the norm, so too do discourses of the overweight body reproduce and legitimate the thin, toned body as the norm. Thus, the dominant discursive representations of both types of bodies help to maintain a particular set of unequal power relations between those people who possess normal, desirable bodies and those who possess abject bodies: “...the meanings attributed to extraordinary bodies reside not in inherent physical flaws, but in social relationships in which one group is legitimated by possessing valued physical characteristics and maintains its ascendancy and its self-identity by systematically imposing the role of cultural or corporeal inferiority on others” (Garland-Thomson 1997: 7).

5.3.3 The glorification of youth and the democratisation of beauty

One of the features I noted in extract two was the way in which the young women glorified youthful beauty and in so doing pathologised the ageing female body (cf. 4.3.5). The young women make concessions for the mature female body when they construct female weight gain as a natural consequence of ageing. This construction of the ageing body is based on the biological determinist view that some physiological aspects of ageing are beyond individual control and are simply indicative of general deterioration of the body (Tunaley, Walsh & Nicolson 1999). However, this determinist view of the causal relationship between ageing

and weight gain does not in fact embrace a liberatory beauty ideal for older women. Rather, it perpetuates the ideal of perennial youth by constructing the ageing body as embodying just those characteristics which are so reviled in the youthful body (Tunaley *et al.* 1999). In this way, the discourse of eternal youth reproduces the gap between those bodies which remain youthful (and therefore beautiful) and those which age, gain weight and come to represent the antithesis of beauty. Across all the extracts (Appendices G, H and I) the young women glorify youthfulness and, although there is some evidence of a discursive struggle regarding the ideal female body, the equation of youthfulness with beauty predominates. In what follows I explore the reasons why youth and female thinness continue to be constructed as ideal in contemporary Western society.

The pursuit of beauty in contemporary Western society has two interrelated elements: not only are women pursuing a particular Anglo-Saxon ideal of beauty, they are simultaneously pursuing perennial youth (Blum 2003; Bordo 2003). Ironically, this is happening at a stage in history when people are living longer. However, it seems that longevity is no longer the ultimate goal. Rather, people want to transcend the limits of their corporeality and remain eternally young: “At the very moment in history when we are living longer and healthier lives than any society before us, we want to stop aging. We want to live longer, but only if we can remain frozen in appearance as a rather distinguished but active 35 years for men or a still youthful and vivacious 25 for women” (Rosen 2004: 20). One of the reasons youth is viewed as a commodity is because it accrues economic and social rewards (Williams 1998, cf. 5.2.4). Rosen (2004) cites a research report in the February 2004 issue of the *Wall Street Journal* as evidence for the negative attitudes towards the ageing body and the corresponding positive attitudes towards the youthful body. This report found that 94 per cent of senior level corporate executives between the ages of 40 and 50 claimed that their age had adversely affected their applications for particular jobs. Viewed as less competent and sharp than their younger counterparts, many older executives are turning to cosmetic surgery to correct the effects of ageing and to increase their competitiveness in the job market.

Female ageing in many Western countries (most notably America) is negatively constructed as symbolic of a loss of fertility and sexual attractiveness (Rosen 2004; Tunaley *et al.* 1999). The ageing female body with its visible wrinkles, expanding waistline and loss of tautness represents the opposite of the wrinkle-free, slim, toned ideal body. As such, the mature female body is marginalised as the ‘Other’, a body which, according to the young women in extract two, is not fit to appear in the pages of glossy magazines. Moreover, discourses of the

ageing body, particularly in the cosmetic surgery industry pathologise ageing by equating it with physical deterioration (Blum 2003; Gilmin 2001). Cosmetic surgeons, and increasingly middle-class Western women, invoke the rhetoric of routine maintenance and restoration to normalise surgical interventions as simply a means of repairing and rejuvenating the body so that it maintains the appearance of youth (ibid). Viewed from this perspective, cosmetic surgery and other body management practices are means of self-improvement and ‘normal’ body maintenance, which appeal to a “brand of middle-class morality – nice middle-class people aesthetically maintain their homes”, and similarly, they have a moral duty to maintain their bodies (Blum 2003: 76).

In a discussion of the pursuit of youth and beauty, Rosen (2004) maintains that cosmetic surgery is the consumer capitalist American response to the fact that a homogeneous ideal of beauty is unequally distributed. She argues that cosmetic surgery appeals to America’s ideals of “equality, prosperity and individual autonomy” as it offers every person access to the cultural commodity of beauty (Rosen 2004: 19). In so doing, it promises an individual solution to the unequal distribution of beauty. In a similar vein Blum (2003: 52) describes how the pursuit of eternal youth and beauty used to be the sole preserve of celebrities and is now marketed as a possibility for everyone, regardless of race and class “explod[ing] it as a site of privilege”.

I believe that the democratisation of beauty derives from and reproduces the prevailing Western consumer capitalist belief in the value of self-improvement and individual transformation: “Our solution is to democratize beauty, to make it something that, fueled by envy and with enough money and effort, anyone can attain. This blunts its force as an instrument of inequality” (Rosen 2004:19). The pursuit of beauty is touted as a liberatory practice, freeing women from the chains of unattractiveness and enabling them to attain the ideal body. However, in effect the democratisation of beauty reproduces a double bind: by invoking the rhetoric of democracy, dominant discourses of beauty (and the related surgical technologies) place increasing pressure on women to pursue an ultimately unattainable ideal. In this regard, the pursuit of the ideal body can be seen as a Sisyphean task where women endlessly subject themselves to body management practices and technologies which, despite their efforts, will never yield the much-desired ideal body. Not only is the contemporary beauty ideal largely unattainable, so-called liberatory beauty practices function as powerful normalising mechanisms to erase individual and cultural differences in the pursuit of a homogeneous ideal body (Bordo 2003). Discourses which promote female body

management practices as a matter of individual choice and self-determination efface the fact that a woman's 'choices' are circumscribed by what counts as a socially acceptable, heterosexually desirable body (ibid).

5.3.4 Summary

The explanation of extract two has attempted to situate the discourse of silence on female fatness in terms of its sociocultural context. With reference to factors such as the moral coding of the body, the notion of the civilised body and the cultural capital linked to different types of bodies, I have shown how the stigmatisation of fatness is a cultural phenomenon. In contemporary Western culture, the overweight body has come to symbolise moral degeneracy, a lack of self-control and a lack of physical attractiveness. In short, it represents the antithesis of the ideal, civilised, self-regulating, thin body. The young women's reluctance to discuss their conceptions of the fat female body is an indication of the taboos surrounding fatness.

In the second part of my explanation (cf. 5.3.2), I discussed how these taboos and the general stigmatisation of excess weight provide a useful point of comparison with similar negative constructions of the disabled body. Both the overweight body and the disabled body are considered socially unacceptable and deviant. Thus, the discourses invoked to describe such bodies make recourse to euphemism and politically correct language to present these 'unacceptable' and 'offensive' phenomena in a neutral light. I think that such discourses serve to reproduce the divide between the 'normal', desirable body and the abject, undesirable body. Moreover, they help to sustain dichotomous constructions of bodily experience and bodily functioning, such as *healthy/unhealthy*, *desirable/undesirable* and *normal/abnormal*.

In section 5.3.3, I move away from a discussion of the meanings of the overweight body to a discussion of the ideals of youthfulness and beauty in consumer capitalist society, a society which places great importance on physical appearance as an index of moral and social worth. I noted in my interpretation of extract two that the young women construct the ageing female body as 'naturally overweight'. While this construction appears to promote an alternative, liberatory ideal of female beauty which values bodies of different ages and sizes, I believe that it operates in effect to elevate perennial youthfulness as the aesthetic ideal to which women should aspire. Consumer capitalist discourses market the youthful, attractive body as an ideal which is available to every woman, regardless of socioeconomic status, age and

ethnicity. Such discourses draw on the rhetoric of democracy to promise a solution to the unequal distribution of beauty. However, while they appear under the guise of being egalitarian and liberatory, these discourses operate in effect to ensure women's continued vigilance over their bodies and to sustain their pursuit of an ultimately unattainable body.

5.4 The pro-moderation ethic: constructing the healthy body

Of the five discourses invoked in extract three (Appendix D₃), the pro-moderation discourse is the one which ultimately wins out (cf. 4.4.6). My explanation of the pro-moderation discourse begins by investigating the relationship between this discourse and the production of self-regulating, disciplined subjects. In this regard, I view health promotion as being integral to the body project and, more broadly I view it as a mechanism of social control (Coveney 1998). Drawing on the work of Armstrong (1995), the explanation of the pro-moderation ethic considers how dominant conceptions of the healthy subject emerged in part from a new health movement, that of Surveillance Medicine. This new medicine emphasises the role of the individual in exercising a disciplinary gaze on his/her body to prevent illness and to ensure good health. Thus, Surveillance Medicine represents one strategy of modern health promotion since it reproduces the value of individual self-monitoring in the prevention of disease and in the development of a healthy population.

The pro-moderation discourse promotes physiological health and well-being as the attributes of the ideal body (cf. 4.4.6). In so doing, the ethic of moderation appears to position aesthetic concerns, such as the pursuit of sexual desirability, as being secondary to the primary goals of being healthy and exercising moderation. In the explanation which follows, I consider whether the ethic of moderation and health is distinct from the ideology of female sexual attractiveness or whether in fact it covertly promotes this ideology (cf. 5.4.2).

The final section of the explanation, 5.4.3, moves away from the discussion of the pro-moderation ethic to an exploration of the relationship between the body and the self which is constructed in both extract one and extract three. Extract one focusses on the relationship between the body and the self in the context of cosmetic surgery. Extract three is concerned with this relationship in terms of whether body size is a correlate of personal happiness. I believe that both extracts realise a similar conception of the relationship between the body and identity so I have attempted a joint explanation of the extracts in this regard. This explanation explores the sociocultural factors which are implicated in contemporary constructions of the body and identity as inseparable (cf. 5.4.3).

5.4.1 Producing disciplined subjects: the ideology of moderation

In what follows, I situate the dominant discourse of moderation within its sociocultural context to show how this discourse and the ideology it promotes is socioculturally conditioned. Drawing on the work of Foucault (1975; 1979), this explanation describes the ethics of public health and moderation as mechanisms of social control, which operate not only at state level but at the level of the individual body to produce self-disciplining subjects. I believe that the ideal of a healthy body is not an ideologically neutral, acultural ideal. Rather, it is value-laden, normative and situated in the often moralistic model of Western biomedicine (Lupton 1995, cf. 2.2.1.3). Similarly, the discourses used to promote the ideal of health are linked to particular political and social agendas. These discourses reveal more than simply a concern with health; they provide a “unique window” into notions of the ideal modern subject, the construction of a productive society and how the subject should manage their body in order to contribute fully to such a society (Williams 1998: 155).

In reading the pro-moderation discourse through the lens of Foucault (1979), I was cued by the work of Coveney (1998) and Lupton (1995), both of whom argue that public health discourses which endorse physiological health and bodily moderation, serve political agendas. In promoting particular body management practices these discourses produce modes of self-government i.e. self-sustaining techniques and practices to which the individual adheres in the act of disciplining his/her body (Foucault 1979, cf. 2.2.2.2). Thus, the promotion of health acts as a mechanism of social control, not in a conspiratorial sense, but simply in the sense that it prescribes particular body management practices which the modern, self-disciplined subject is expected to follow: “In other words, *pace* Foucault, we can see health promotion as a form of government which is productive in the sense that it produces modern subjects: it defines empirically what it is to be healthy (in ever expanding ways) and it ‘supervises’ the proper routes to health through a discipline which establishes for us a *rapport de soi*, or ethics” (Coveney 1998: 462). The idea that health promotion functions to regulate bodies and to delimit the boundaries of the ideal modern subject echoes an argument by Williams (1998: 437) in which he describes the pursuit of health as a set of performative rituals for managing the body. To illustrate the performative character of health discourses, Williams draws on the work of Butler (1993) who argues that gender identity is reiteratively performed; it is something one *does* rather than something one *is* (cf. 2.2.21). Similarly, Williams describes health as consisting of sets of discourse and practices which are performed at the level of the individual body, shaping it to fit into the moral and social

order: “The pursuit of health, in short, is an embodied practice and moral performance in which bodies, literally and metaphorically, become ‘viable’ – i.e. socially and culturally legitimated, materially shaped and practically ‘enmattered’” (Williams 1998: 437).

What is significant about modern discourses of health promotion is that, while they constitute mechanisms of power, they do not operate through modes of exclusion and repression in order to sustain the social order. Instead, modern health discourses are productive, effecting positive changes in terms of improving the health and well-being of the population (Lupton 1995). Thus, the strength and sustainability of these discourses, as modalities of power, derives from the fact that they produce positive effects at the level of the individual body (Foucault 1975, cf. 2.4.1.2).

According to some theorists, the belief in the pursuit of health may stem from the increasing secularity of Western society (Lupton 1995; Williams 1998). In a society where religion no longer holds much value, “focussing upon one’s diet and other lifestyle choices has become an alternative to prayer and righteous living in providing a means of making sense of life and death” (Lupton 1995: 4). Moreover, the pursuit of a healthy body requires adherence to a rigorous moral and ethical code of moderate eating, exercise, diet and nutrition.

The legitimacy of the health ethic derives from the fact that experts in the institution of biomedicine (for example, doctors and dieticians) endorse moderation, physical fitness and a balanced diet as being scientifically proven to improve physiological health and well-being (Lupton 1995). Critique of these health promotion strategies highlights the problems of *healthism* and *medicalization* which are defined as: “processes whereby experts, whether they be doctors, health promoters or some other ‘lifestyle expert’, define different areas of the lay person’s everyday life as problematic and suggest remedial solutions that involve individual behavioral change in order to promote health” (Korp 2006: 83). Within this model of health previously ‘normal’ domains of functioning are increasingly constructed as problematic and subject to expert intervention. These new topics of public health promotion include stress management, sexual health, parenting skills, sleeping habits and mental health (Korp 2006). In an analysis of consumerism and health promotion, Lupton (1994) notes how pleasurable domains of experience, such as eating rich foods and smoking, are reconstituted within health discourses as involving health risks and potential medical problems. She remarks ironically how “it is only in the realm of medicine that sexual encounters, for example, are considered a ‘health issue’” (1994: 83).

Armstrong (1995) describes the problematisation of ‘normal’ body functioning and the proliferation of so-called health risk behaviours within the contemporary biomedical model as constituting a distinct form of modern medicine, namely Surveillance Medicine. This new medicine has reconfigured the clinical categories of health and illness so that the boundaries of illness extend further to encompass previously unproblematic, ‘normal’ domains of bodily experience. Armstrong (1995) traces the historical emergence of this health care movement from the area of early child development (with the advent of antenatal clinics, day nurseries and other establishments for monitoring child growth and development) to community-based health monitoring and promotion following World War II. Thereafter, *self-surveillance* was increasingly exploited as a strategy of health promotion, which requires that individuals take responsibility for aspects of their health and well-being like diet, exercise and stress management. Surveillance medicine replaces the binary of *healthy/ill* with a calibrated continuum of bodily states which emphasise that while, “everyone [is] normal...no-one [is] truly healthy” (Armstrong 1995: 397). Even those who *are* healthy, can improve their health and conversely, those who are ill can still be healthy since health and illness are no longer viewed as mutually exclusive states. Consider for example, a person living with AIDS who, by taking anti-retrovirals, following a balanced diet and leading a healthy lifestyle can achieve good health (and stave off death).

Within the discourse of health promotion, medical terms like symptoms and diseases are reinterpreted to describe the potential for illness. These discourses talk of ‘risk factors’, ‘health monitoring’ and ‘lifestyle determinants’ which describe the warning signs of future illness and construct health as precarious. With regard to this study, the young women’s identification of overeating and undereating as health problems in extract three (Appendix D₃) follows the model of Surveillance Medicine: the idea that particular eating practices are unhealthy is based on the belief that such practices, while they do not necessarily cause illness, may still represent risk factors, associated with a “semi-pathological pre-illness at-risk state” (Armstrong 1995: 401). Moreover, the young women’s conceptions of health are located within an individualist model which privileges self-discipline and self-surveillance. The individual is responsible for maintaining a healthy body, placing the “locus of causality” firmly within the individual body (Williams 1998: 445). The young women view certain types of bodily behaviour as constituting health risks. For example, immoderate eating (both overeating and self-starvation) is constructed as problematic in that it does not provide the body with the necessary nutrients to attain good health. Conversely, the healthy subject is

one which is in proportion, eats a balanced diet and exercises to keep fit (cf. 4.4.4).

The promotion of health within the Western system of medicine functions to define and regulate notions of ‘normality’ and ‘health’ as these apply to the body. Contemporary nutrition strategies are based on a model of the disordered body: the individual body is constructed as deficient and as requiring nutritional intervention to ‘correct’ perceived bad practices of the body, such as bingeing, eating an imbalanced diet and engaging in risky sexual behaviour (Crotty 1995, cited in Coveney 1998). Importantly, the medical model promotes individual change and autonomy: it requires the development of reflexivity on the part of the individual so that they can evaluate their problematic bodily behaviours, based on the information provided by medical experts and make informed choices to improve their health (Lupton 1995). Those who fail to adhere to this ethic (most notably the sick, the overweight and the poor) are diagnosed as unhealthy, apathetic and non-compliant with medical health regulations.

5.4.2 Colonising discourses and the healthy body

In my interpretation of extract three (cf. 4.4.5), I describe how the participants’ negative construction of the overweight body implies that they subscribe to the prevailing ideal of female thinness. In this regard, the participants emphasise that overweight women need to regulate their bodies by dieting in order to lose the perceived excess weight. I noted how this construction reproduces a belief in self-policing, namely the process by which the subject disciplines her body so that it conforms to prevailing norms of the sexually attractive female body. I think that the reference to self-policing implies that the young women endorse dieting as a means of attaining the ideal body. This, combined with their parodying of the overweight female body, confirms that they subscribe to the ideal of the thin, toned, conventionally attractive female body. In what follows I explore the relationship between a discourse which promotes the ideal of female sexual attractiveness, the discourse of diet and the discourse which predominates in the extract, namely the pro-moderation discourse. I believe that these discourses share similar underlying concerns and are thus related within the order of discourse (cf. 1.7.4 for a definition of *order of discourse*).

On the one hand, the ethics of diet and moderation represent divergent concerns: the pro-diet ethic promotes female self-denial in the form of curbing the appetite (Macdonald 1995), while the pro-moderation ethic promotes an alternative, namely self-nourishment through healthy, balanced eating. The concern with following a balanced diet and avoiding

immoderate weight-loss programmes and appetite suppressants is illustrated in Table 9. While the participants endorse weight-loss for overweight women, they caution against unhealthy weight-loss programmes and the use of appetite suppressants which do not provide adequate nutrition. These weight-loss methods are also constructed as being counter-productive to the goal of slimness because they cause weight gain in the long run:

Table 9: Cautioning against ‘unhealthy’ weight-loss methods

1	Sophie: oh dietary pills
2	K: ja appetite suppressants=
3	Winnie: =ooh I’ve <u>heard</u> of those!=
4	Hayley: =my <u>mom</u> does all that stuff=
[...]	
5	Sophie: but my mom’s friend like sh- my mom can pick up straight away like that
6	she’s that she’s on the pills again because she gets like her <u>whole</u> moods <u>change</u>
7	completely when she takes a diet pill=
8	K: =she gets jittery or
9	Hayley: [<u>my</u> mom was taking them ()]
10	Sophie: [just a <u>horrible</u> person]
11	K: Oh really? I <u>have</u> heard that
12	Hayley: [()]
13	Winnie: [ja <u>ugly</u> side-effects]
14	Hayley: like all different ones to try and lose weight and she just you land up she
15	<u>ended</u> up gaining so much weight like at the <u>end</u> of it all after the year was finished
16	or whatever and now she’s just like <u>no</u> rather do it the [conventional]
17	Timega: [natural]
18	Hayley: way
19	eat healthily
20	go to gym
21	Sophie: ()
22	Timega: there’s one like lady that I know that went on this diet and you were
23	supposed to lose something <u>ridiculous</u> like three k’s like three kg’s a <u>week</u> and the
24	one week she only lost <u>two</u> and she started panick- like she had to go on a
25	<u>punishment</u> week where she’d just drink coffee something like that and like have
26	like a coffee and an apple a day [and this is like a]
27	K: [how <u>awful</u>]
28	Timega: <u>full-grown</u> lady with children and you know a <u>husband</u> and
29	[but the thing]
30	Winnie: [<u>jeez</u> how does that affect her <u>kids</u> ?]
31	[and stuff (that’s not healthy)]
32	K: [ja ((laughs))]
33	Timega: [the thing is she says she <u>knows</u> the way] she’s doing it is <u>bad</u> but she
34	doesn’t care because she’s been fat so long well she’s not really that <u>fat</u>
35	she’s just you know a little bit <u>plumpy</u> but not <u>fat</u> I’d never ever go and say she’s
36	<u>fat</u> she just says she’s been fat for so long that she doesn’t actually care she just
37	wants to get skinny (.) but she knows it’s bad for her though=

While the participants articulate an awareness of the problems associated with not getting sufficient nutritional value through dieting, they do not renounce dieting completely. As is

evident in the extract in Table 10 below, the participants represent fatness and overeating as being just as unhealthy as undernourishment. This extract also illustrates how the young women construct a causal relationship between a healthy body and one which is slim and active:

Table 10: Healthy bodies and active lifestyles

1	Timega: I got the biggest fright of my life when I got here and there was one fat
2	person and she matriculated=
3	Sophie: =but also [I think it's]
4	Hayley: [that's actually <u>true</u> hey]
5	Winnie: it's also Smithson girls are just really <u>active</u> like [we are]
6	Timega: [we are]
7	Winnie: [we <u>are</u> really active like our Grade is so sporty]
8	Sophie: [like at my old school no one did sport]
9	Timega: [ja I know I know]
10	but I'm just saying like no one is fat here
11	Hayley: But I don't know I think it's cause people lead healthy lifestyles=
12	Timega: =Winnie <u>shut</u> up you're not fat!=
13	Winnie: ((laughs))
14	Timega: I know you did that ooh ooh
15	All: ((laugh))
16	K: do you think but do you think that <u>proportionately</u> the girls are thinner or just
17	kind of average or <u>active</u>
18	Winnie: no the- like there's at all schools you have girls that are like fat and thin
19	and at Smithson there just really aren't like people that <u>are</u> [like overweight]
20	Timega: [generally there aren't]
21	very overweight people=
22	Winnie: =I mean you'll have girls that are like
23	[whatever they ()]
24	Timega: [(well-rounded in the right places everyone does basically)]
25	Winnie: but they're not like <u>unhealthy</u>
26	[fat]
27	K: [jaaa]

The construction of excess weight as unhealthy points to the fact that there is some overlap between the ethics of diet and health since both view *overeating* as unhealthy. It is in this respect that they both promote the ideal of thinness. It appears that the boundaries between the two ethics (and the related discourses of diet and moderation) have blurred, allowing for the creative co-construction of the ideal female body as *both* healthy and slim. This is attested to by Wetherell's (1996) study of the relationship between different body management discourses in which she describes how the discourse of the 'natural' woman represents the pursuit of thinness in terms of health concerns rather than in terms of cosmetic benefits (cf. 2.3.4). In addition, the pro-moderation discourse is closely related to the discourse of diet. In keeping with current colonising tendencies in consumer capitalist society (Fairclough 1989), the pro-moderation discourse appears to have been *colonised* by

the discourse of diet. The process of colonisation refers to ‘changes in salient relationships between discourse types within the societal order of discourse’ such that one discourse type emerges as most prominent (Fairclough 1989: 198, cf. 1.7.4). I believe that the pro-moderation discourse is used in service of the discourse of diet to legitimate dieting as being motivated primarily by a concern for moderation and health (Pienaar & Bekker 2006b). Since the discourse of diet in turn promotes the aims of the discourse of the sexually attractive body, one can argue that, of these three discourses, the discourse of the sexually attractive body represents the underlying one.

In terms of the link between these discourses within consumer capitalist culture, the discourse of the sexually attractive body and the discourse of diet are related in terms of the fact that dieting is often constructed by the popular media as a *means* to attaining a sexually attractive body (Turner 1982). The relationship between dieting and sexual attractiveness is underpinned by the contemporary focus on physical appearance. However, in terms of its history, dieting did not originate as a means of becoming sexually desirable, but rather as a means of attaining an ascetic spiritual ideal: ‘... dietary management developed through a moralistic medicine and finally established itself as a science of the efficient body. The principle change is that diet was originally aimed at a control of desire, whereas under modern forms of consumerism diet exists to promote and preserve desire’ (Turner 1984: 3). In other words, the management of internal desire through diet has been replaced by the management of the external body as a means of *producing* desire. The secularisation of dietary practices owes itself in large part to consumer culture and the commodification of the body (Bordo 2003; Seid 1989, cf. 2.2.1.1).

The colonisation of the pro-moderation discourse within the broader rubric of the sexually attractive female body is particularly interesting since, unlike in the case of the discourse of diet, I could not find a clear historical link between the discourse of moderation and that of sexual attractiveness. A possible explanation for the integration of these two concerns is that, by couching the overriding heteronormative goal of female sexual attractiveness in terms of health and physiological well-being, the discourse of the sexually attractive female body can legitimate its aims. Therefore, the colonisation of the discourse of the healthy body may constitute a concession to women’s increasing awareness of the problems associated with objectification of the female body: a ‘counter-offensive’ by consumerist discourses (Fairclough 1989: 73) in the form of couching the pursuit of female sexual attractiveness in less objectifying, more palatable terms.

5.4.3 Plastic bodies and transient identities

In extract three and in Table 7 (cf. 5.2.1) the young women explore the relationship between external appearance and internal character. In Table 7 they construct aesthetic surgery as an “intervention in identity” (Davis 2003: 74), a means of correcting a poor self-image. They comment in particular on the fact that surgical candidates on *Extreme Makeover* emerge happier and more self-assured as a result of surgery (cf. 5.2.1). In extract three they negotiate whether body size is a determinant of personal happiness, specifically whether being overweight or anorexic entails being unhappy and insecure. Since the relationship between a person’s physical appearance and mental well-being is one which the young women evoked several times in the course of the conversation, I believe it is a relationship which bears further investigation. In the explanation which follows I answer the question: in constructing different body sizes as symptomatic of unhappiness (extract three) and in proposing that the transformation of the body leads to the transformation of a person’s character (Table 7), what kind of relationship is being constructed between a person’s physical appearance and their psyche? I explore the link between the external body and the internal character in terms of pro-cosmetic surgery discourses and the postmodern conception of the body as cultural plastic.

I think that the popular view of the body as an identity project is reflected in the discourses on which the young women draw to construct the relationship between the female body and a woman’s subjectivity. In what follows I present an argument for how consumer discourses which present the body as cultural plastic (Bordo 2003) influence the young women’s perceptions of plastic surgery, identity and female beauty. In contemporary Western society, the body has become a vehicle of self-expression which the subject can transform at will to reflect his/her constantly changing identities: ‘Bodies no longer represent how we fit into the social order, but are the means for self-expression, for becoming who we would most like to be. In an era where the individual has become responsible for his or her own fate, the body is just one more feature in a person’s “identity project”’(Giddens, cited in Davis 1997: 2, cf. 2.2.1.5). Postmodern ideologies of the body (and the related surgical technologies) emphasise the plasticity of the body, a plasticity which renders it amenable to radical reconfiguration: “Not only has the body come to stand as the primary symbol for identity, but it is a symbol whose capacity for alteration and modification is understood to be unlimited” (Gimlin 2000: 80). Plastic surgery is perhaps the most radical and certainly the most invasive way of transforming the body, of realising its perceived limitless capacity for

reinvention. This capacity for reinvention, while realised at the level of the material body has profound implications for the subject's experience of embodiment and their self-concept. In a discussion of the far-reaching psychological effects of aesthetic surgery, Gimlin (2000: 88) goes so far as to state that "...the body and the self are understood culturally to be equivalent". Following this conception, if one alters the body, there must be a concomitant alteration to a person's selfhood. This is what the young women allude to in Table 7 when they construct plastic surgery as transforming a person's self-image, particularly their level of self-esteem and personal happiness. Similarly, in extract three when the young women describe being overweight or underweight as symptomatic of unhappiness, they are interpreting the individual's body and their selfhood as being inextricably bound together.

In a study of twenty female plastic surgery patients in Britain, Gimlin (2006: 712) notes that all the women felt that cosmetic surgery afforded them "greater freedom to negotiate selfhood through the body". While they did not necessarily emerge beautiful from surgery, the women unanimously believed that surgery had allowed them to manage their identities through reshaping their bodies. In a similar vein, a cosmetic surgeon, interviewed by Blum (2001: 127) in her study of the culture of cosmetic surgery candidly describes his belief in the power of appearance to shape a person's subjectivity and interpersonal relationships:

If you want to go out and be attractive to somebody else and start a new life, you've got to face facts – the way you look has a lot to do with whether you're going to attract somebody else...I've seen women who have not had particularly good relationships or haven't had a relationship with men for a long time, and I make them look younger and prettier, and they go on to get married and have wonderful, stable relationships. There's absolutely no question that the face-lift helped them. We live in a real, physical world.

Some theorists argue that the causal relationship constructed between physical and psychological transformation functions to legitimise cosmetic surgery as an intervention in identity, rather than simply as a beauty practice (Davis 2003; Gimlin 2000). According to Rosen (2004), plastic surgery discourses exploit the language of psychology to construct cosmetic surgery as a legitimate and necessary means of treating the subject's psychological problems. Feminist critiques of such surgery, on the other hand, argue that aesthetic surgery serves oppressive beauty regimes and that many people who have aesthetic surgery are cultural dupes to an image-obsessed society (Bartky 1990; Bordo 2003; Wolf 1991). I believe that the young women's discussions in Tables 6 and 7 construct a multi-layered view of aesthetic surgery as an intervention which speaks not only to women's attachment to Western ideals of beauty but also to a desire to (re)construct identity through reshaping the

body. Their construction of plastic surgery and the female body is based on the idea that a person's self-image is always and necessarily embodied so that surgical interventions at the level of the body will affect the subject's self-image (Gimlin 2000; 2006).

In extract three the young women confirm their belief that one's body size is a correlate of personal happiness and self-esteem. One of the meanings they attribute to being either overweight or significantly underweight is that both body sizes negatively affect a woman's level of happiness (cf. 4.4.4, 4.4.6). This confirms the findings of existing psychosocial research on female body image, namely that "a woman's body weight and her satisfaction with it should be important in her overall satisfaction with herself" (Tiggemann & Stevens 1999: 104). While the young women do cite some examples of overweight friends who are self-confident and happy, these appear to be exceptions rather than the norm (cf. 4.4.5). Ultimately, the young women advocate attaining a proportional 'normal' body size, one which is viewed as healthy and is thus symptomatic of a positive body image (cf. 4.4.6). Taken together extract three and Tables 6 and 7 reproduce the belief in the embodiment of identity: since experiences of the world and interactions with people are always mediated through the body, it follows that a person's body plays a vital role in the construction of their identity.

5.4.4 Summary

In response to the dominance of the pro-moderation discourse in extract three, I explained the ideology of health underlying this discourse i.e. an ideology which emphasises the importance of managing the body so that it is physiologically healthy (cf. 5.4.1). My explanation attributed the dominance of the health ethic to two factors, namely the health promotion movement and the rise of Surveillance Medicine in contemporary Western society. Firstly, the health promotion movement privileges health concerns and personal well-being over concerns with attaining an aesthetic ideal. Health promotion discourses prescribe particular sets of body management practices to which the individual is expected to adhere in order to improve their health. These practices include getting adequate nutrition through a balanced diet, regular exercise, not smoking and getting sufficient sleep. Following Foucault (1975; 1979), I described health discourses as modes of self-government which prescribe how individuals should manage their bodies. Thus, the pursuit of health constitutes a mechanism of social control defining and producing the ideal, self-regulating modern subject. Secondly, the explanation of the dominance of the health ethic described how a new medicine called Surveillance Medicine has emerged in the twenty-first century.

Surveillance Medicine places the individual as responsible for managing and maintaining his/her health and, in so doing, it contributes to developing the modern self-disciplining subject. Moreover, this new medicine has redefined the category *healthy/ill* to problematise normal body functioning. Formerly unproblematic bodily behaviours are recast within the discourses of Surveillance Medicine as constituting a potential health risk. The individual needs to continually monitor these health risks and effect the necessary lifestyle changes to ensure that the ‘risks’ do not develop into illnesses.

The second part of the explanation, 5.4.2, discusses the interrelation of three discourses within the order of discourse, namely the pro-moderation discourse, the discourse of diet and the discourse of female sexual attractiveness. I describe how the three discourses overlap in some areas, allowing for the creative construction of the sexually attractive female body as both healthy and thin. I conclude that the discourse of female sexual attractiveness emerges as dominant and that, by colonising the other discourses, it legitimates its ethic of compulsory heterosexuality, which positions women as erotic objects of the male gaze.

Lastly, section 5.4.4 considers the influence of visual consumer culture on contemporary body management practices. The explanation explains how body management practices like cosmetic surgery, dieting and exercise thrive on a culture which places an inordinate value on physical appearance as a measure of internal worth. I described how the young women’s belief in the inseparable link between external appearance and internal well-being reproduces the ideology that the body is constitutive of identity.

5.5 Conclusion

In situating the body talk discourses identified in chapter 4 within the broader context of Western consumer capitalist culture, this explanation discussed the ideologies and social forces which underpin and sustain dominant discourses of the ideal female body. For example, I explored the links between consumer capitalism and the objectification of the female body (cf. 5.3.3). I described how the contemporary conception of the body as a project derives in part from the postmodern paradigm, which constructs the body as a site of endless transformation (cf. 5.4.3). From this perspective, the body is merely another locus of control in the individual’s quest for attaining a particular identity.

Not only is the ideal body, thin and toned, it is also eternally youthful. I described, in relation to extract two, how the participants pathologise female ageing and equate youthfulness with

beauty. The explanation discusses how the valorisation of youth and the related pathologisation of ageing are part of the broader sociocultural process of the democratisation of beauty (cf. 5.3.3). This process describes how consumer discourses invoke the rhetoric of democracy to construct beauty as universally attainable: any woman can now access beauty through a plethora of surgical technologies, body management practices and beauty products. Within these discourses the management of the body (and particularly the management of female ageing) is constructed as routine maintenance to restore the body to its former youthfulness and attractiveness. In a critique of these discourses I described how they function as powerful normalising mechanisms, ensuring women's continued adherence to a homogenous beauty ideal, an ideal which positions them as objects of the male gaze.

Despite the young women's articulation of alternative ideals of female beauty during the conversations, I think that the challenges to the prevailing ideal of the youthful, thin, attractive female body are not sustained in the extracts. My explanation discussed the intersecting social processes which help to reproduce the prevailing ideal of female beauty. In this regard, I discussed the role of consumer capitalist ideologies which market the conventionally attractive female body as a form of cultural capital (cf. 5.2.4, 5.3.3). The explanation highlighted the benefits which accrue to beauty and which sustain the supremacy of the attractive female subject within the social order. My explanation of extract two discussed how anti-fat discourses complement the discourses of the ideal thin body, contributing to the hegemony of this ideal (cf. 5.3.1). By constructing the overweight body as abject and socially deviant, the anti-fat discourses position this body in opposition to the ideal thin body. The discussion of the ideologies encoded in the discourse of silence on fatness also drew parallels between discourses of the overweight body and discourses of the disabled body (cf. 5.3.2). Both sets of discourses rely on the binaries of normal/abnormal, healthy/unhealthy and desirable/undesirable to construct particular types of bodies as antithetical to the ideal. The stigmatisation of both overweight and disabled bodies circumscribes the limits of the ideal body and, in so doing contributes to sustaining the supremacy of conventionally attractive bodies within the social and moral order.

Another important social process which reproduces the dominance of the prevailing female physical ideal, is the colonisation of discourses within the order of discourse. Colonisation refers to the process by which several, related discourses become subsumed within one dominant, colonising discourse (cf. 1.7.4, cf. 5.4.2). In my explanation of extract three, I discuss how the pro-moderation discourse and the discourse of diet are increasingly used to

endorse the discourse of female sexual attractiveness and thus have been colonised by the latter. The discourse of diet has historical links with the discourse of sexual attractiveness in that dieting is marketed as a means of becoming sexually attractive (Turner 1982). Thus, the integration of these two concerns seems logical. It is less easy to explain the historical link between health concerns (evident in the pro-moderation discourse) and the pursuit of sexual attractiveness. In this regard, I suggest that the colonisation of the pro-moderation discourse by the discourse of the sexually attractive body allows the latter discourse to legitimate its aims in terms of health and physical well-being.

This explanation of the ideologies of the female physical ideal has revealed that notions of beauty are by no means static and predetermined. Instead, they are culturally conditioned and are reiteratively performed and transformed through a variety of semiotic codes, which range from modes of dress to bodily demeanour (cf. 1.5.1, 1.7.1). I have focussed on *conversation* as the semiotic means through which a selection of young Western women perform, negotiate and constitute particular ideals of beauty and femininity. Taken together, the explanation of the three extracts confirms the continued appeal of the ideal of the thin, youthful, toned, attractive female body and the associated marginalisation of bodies which do not conform to this ideal, such as the overweight body and the ageing body. In addition, the young women's accounts of the transformation of the body (extracts one and three) point to an understanding of the body as inseparable from a person's self-concept (cf. 5.4.3). This reflects their belief that the body plays a significant role in the construction of identity. I believe that the body talk conversations play an important role in shaping the young women's conceptions of body ideals and, more specifically, in circumscribing the limits of the socially and sexually desirable female body.

While I have discussed the ideological significance of the *dominant* discourses in this chapter, I noted in my interpretation that there are several oppositional discourses upon which the young women draw in the extracts (cf. 4.2.5, 4.4). While these fresh perspectives on the ideal female body are not sustained, they signal the participants' access to alternative discourses of female beauty. They also suggest that there are inherent tensions in the dominant discourses which promote the ideal of the youthful, thin, toned female body, tensions which create openings for this ideal to be contested. In my conclusion in chapter 6, I provide an explanation for why these oppositional discourses do not predominate in the extracts.

6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter presents a summary of the main findings of my interpretation and explanation in chapters 4 and 5 respectively. I begin by returning to my research questions, described in 1.2, to show how my findings provide answers to them. In chapter 5, I focussed on the *dominant* body talk discourses in order to explain the ideologies which sustain and reproduce the prevailing ideal of the youthful, sexually desirable female body. In doing so, I described how these discourses are related within the order of discourse, with some discourses being subsumed within the overarching discourse of female sexual attractiveness (cf. 5.4.2). While I have emphasised that the dominant body talk discourses support and reproduce the prevailing conception of the ideal female body (i.e. as one which is toned, beautiful by Anglo-Saxon norms, thin and youthful), I do not wish to imply that there are no areas of contradiction in and across these discourses. The interpretation in chapter 4 illustrated just the contrary namely, that the young women do draw on discourses which disrupt the order of discourse. These oppositional discourses resist the dominance of pro-body management discourses such as the discourse of diet, the anti-fat discourse and the discourse of female sexual attractiveness (cf. 4.2.5, 4.4). In this chapter, I consider briefly why these oppositional discourses did not hold much sway in the conversations. In relation to this and in light of the second research question which pertains to my influence in the conversations, I critically evaluate my role in pushing conservative agendas and stifling alternative viewpoints in the discussions. Lastly, I reflect on the limitations of this study and suggest possible avenues for further research.

6.2 Summary of main findings

The aim of my research is to answer two research questions, described in 1.2. With regard to the first research question, i.e. *what ideologies are reflected and perpetuated in the discourses associated with the ideal female body?*, my interpretation and explanation of the three body talk extracts reveals the dominance of traditional Western notions of beauty and most particularly the dominance of the ideal of female slenderness. Moreover, the young women in extract one construct attractiveness in terms of heterosexual desirability, rather than in terms of pure aesthetic merit (Jaworski 2003). They frequently adopt the male gaze to judge particular women as attractive or unattractive. I hypothesise that the male gaze affords the women the authority to define female beauty and to circumscribe its limits, an authority

which is not vested in the subject position of ‘young woman’. The construction of beauty in terms of heterosexual desirability also relies on and reproduces a model of heteronormativity. While all of the young women in extract one express an underlying resentment towards women being positioned as erotic objects, they concede that female sexual desirability matters, whether this is achieved by artificial means or not. Timega, in particular, expresses a resigned acceptance of the gendered *status quo* in which a woman’s beauty is disproportionately valued over other aspects of her identity. This position is nicely encapsulated in her remark that *you can be as plastic more plastic than Barbie and they [men] will, if you look good they’ll be like mmm* (1:88–9).

The interpretation of the extracts also describes how valorising female beauty entails pathologising the converse, namely female ugliness. In this regard, the participants in extract one characterise unattractive women negatively using dysphemisms like *swamp donkey* and *siff ass girl* (cf. 4.2). The unattractive female body is constructed relationally as antithetical to the ideal body: where the beautiful female body is thin, young and toned, its antithesis, the unattractive body is overweight, ageing and flabby. Unlike in extract one, where the participants openly criticise the unattractive female body, in extract two the participants display a reluctance to discuss unattractiveness in the form of the the overweight body. I attribute the difference in the participants’ discussions of this topic to situational factors, such as the different size of the groups and whether or not the participants were naturally outspoken (cf. 4.4.1).

The interpretation of extract two reveals the young women’s perceptions that excess weight is a subject which does not bear discussing and, if discussed, one must make recourse to euphemistic language to avoid causing offense to anyone labelled ‘fat’ (cf. 4.3.4). In chapter 5, I explain how the participants’ discourse of silence on fatness contributes to conceptions of the overweight body as the Other in terms of dominant norms of female beauty (cf. 5.3.1). By othering fat bodies, anti-fat discourses, whether they be covertly or overtly discriminatory, sustain the hegemony of the ideal of female thinness. Discriminatory attitudes towards fatness derive in part from the belief that the overweight body does not conform to the ethic of the civilised body, i.e. a body which is able to defer gratification and exercise self-control (cf. 5.3.1). The overweight body encodes a flagrant refusal to rein in its bodily impulses and, thus has come to symbolise “internal processes out of control – uncontained desire, unrestrained hunger, uncontrolled impulse” (Bordo 2003: 189). In addition, it is stigmatised because of the perception that overweight people are unproductive

and do not contribute adequately to the economy (cf. 5.3.1). In this respect, the overweight subject is marked as a failed citizen. My discussion of the stigmatisation surrounding fatness also draws parallels between discourses of the overweight body and discourses of the disabled body (cf. 5.3.2). Drawing on the work of Butler (1993), I discuss how both sets of discourse, through processes of marginalisation and exclusion, circumscribe the limits of the dominant subject.

The women's veiled discussions of female ageing in extract two suggest that, like being overweight, ageing is taboo (cf. 4.3.5). By pathologising the ageing female body, the participants elevate perennial youthfulness as the ideal to which women should aspire. In light of this, the young women's accounts of plastic surgery in extract one reveal their belief that surgery is simply routine body maintenance, aimed at restoring the ageing body to its former youthfulness. It appears that, for many of them, cosmetic surgery represents one of a myriad of body maintenance practices which women follow in their pursuit of youth and beauty. I link this inordinate value placed on youth and beauty in consumer capitalist society to the democratisation of beauty (cf. 5.3.3). This refers to the process by which discourses of beauty invoke the rhetoric of democracy to construct beauty as universally attainable. The discussion critiques the democratisation of beauty, describing how the supposedly egalitarian ideal of beauty places increasing pressure on women to be beautiful and ensures their continued adherence to an elusive, normalising ideal.

The participants' discussions of cosmetic surgery (extract one) and the debate on the relationship between body size and personal happiness (extract three) is underpinned by a belief in the integral link between the body and identity (cf. 5.2.3, 5.4.3). From this perspective, cosmetic surgery and other body management practices are construed as "interventions in identity", a means of transforming identity through reshaping the body (Davis 2000: 74-5). The young women understand identity as embodied such that transformations at the level of the body will inevitably effect changes at the level of identity. The young women engage with several categories of difference in their accounts of how cosmetic surgery transforms a women's self-concept. In this regard, they acknowledge the intersection of gender, age and beauty as categories of difference which influence women's motivations for cosmetic surgery.

A discourse which I did not expect to carry as much weight as it does is the pro-moderation discourse in extract three (cf. 4.4.6). This discourse emerges as dominant in the young

women's consensus that the ideal body is one which is neither too fat, nor too thin. They endorse the attainment of a balance with respect to body management behaviours. The dominance of the health ethic suggests that the ideal body is no longer one which is simply thin and toned; importantly, the ideal body is also healthy and in proportion. The participants distinguish an attractive but unhealthily thin body from its healthy equivalent. In this respect, they renounce unhealthy body practices such as self-starvation and bingeing. Instead they endorse the pursuit of health by following a balanced, nutritious diet. In my explanation of the ideology encoded in the pro-moderation discourse (cf. 5.4.1), I attribute the promotion of moderation and health to the rise of Surveillance Medicine in the twenty-first century. This new medicine charges the individual with the responsibility for disease prevention and health management. In so doing, Surveillance Medicine helps to sustain the dominance of disciplinary practices of the body which emphasise the subject's role in regulating his/her body so that it conforms to the norms of the healthy subject (cf. 5.4.1). Health promotion discourses, allied to Surveillance Medicine, act as mechanisms of social control in that they define what it means to be a healthy, productive subject and they prescribe the body management practices necessary for attaining good health. Following Butler (1993), I describe the pursuit of health as performative i.e. it entails the reiterative performance of bodily behaviours which constitute the subject in particular ways by circumscribing the limits of the healthy body (cf. 2.2.2.1 for a discussion of Butler's theory of performativity, cf. 5.4.1 for the application of this theory to the health ethic).

In my explanation of how the dominant body discourses are related within the order of discourse (cf. 5.4.2), I describe the pro-moderation/health discourse as being allied to the discourse of diet in that both discourses construct overeating as unhealthy and undesirable. Thus, they both endorse the ideal of the slim, toned female body. Since the discourse of diet in turn promotes the ideal of female sexual attractiveness (dieting is constructed as a means of increasing sexual desirability), the pro-moderation discourse is related, through the discourse of diet, to the overarching discourse of female sexual attractiveness. The young women's equation of beauty with heterosexual desirability in extract one confirms the dominance of the ideology of sexual attractiveness (cf. 4.2.4). I hypothesise that the integration of health concerns with the related imperatives of diet and sexual attractiveness may represent an attempt to legitimate the pursuit of the ideal, sexually desirable body by representing it in terms of health (Pienaar & Bekker 2006b).

In answering my first research question, the explanation of the extracts in chapter 5 aimed to

answer the following sub-question: *are the young women reproducing, resisting or transforming traditional assumptions about what is beautiful and desirable in a woman?* The explanation of the extracts shows that the young women are not, in any sustained way, challenging traditional assumptions of female beauty. They do invoke alternative discourses which, for example, endorse a woman's self-concept as a measure of her worth (cf. 4.2.6) or which embrace oppositional beauty ideals, such as the ideal that fat is 'the new thin' (cf. 4.4.1). However, these discourses are marginalised in the face of dominant discourses which promote prevailing beauty norms. These norms privilege youthfulness, thinness, muscular tone and health as attributes of the conventionally attractive woman (cf. 5.2.3, 5.3.3, 5.4.1). While the young women do not challenge current beauty norms, they do emphasise an important additional attribute of the ideal female body, one which is not emphasised in the extant literature, namely the attribute of physiological health and well-being (cf. 5.4.1). They caution against unhealthy eating practices and emphasise the value of moderation in relation to popular body management practices, such as dieting and exercise.

In light of my second research question, i.e. *what role does the researcher play in the discussions?*, my interpretation in chapter 4 reveals that, as the researcher, I play an important role in guiding the direction of the discussions. At times it would appear that the participants took their cue from me. Thus, my questioning of their assumptions often occasions a shift in the discourse or it causes them to modulate their viewpoints (cf. 4.2.3). Despite my aim to be an equal co-conversant in the conversations, the frequency of questions in my contributions attests to my unequal rights to pose questions and to constrain the participants' responses. Thus, it is worthwhile at this point, in a spirit of reflexivity, to comment briefly on the asynchronicity between theory and praxis in terms of the power relations enacted in the interaction. In theory, my concern was to decrease the power differential between myself and the participants in order to elicit conversations which were as close to natural as possible (cf. 3.2.3). In practice, I concede that I end up promoting a conservative, reactionary agenda by encouraging the young women to align their views on the ideal body with the prevailing ideal of female beauty. I believe that, by reproducing hegemonic ideologies of female beauty and by seeking to elicit these ideologies from the young women, I stifle the expression of alternative discourses which oppose traditional notions of beauty.

So despite my well-intentioned aim of ensuring a balance of power, it is clear from the

interpretation of the extracts that this does not happen in practice (cf. 4.2.3, 4.3.3, 4.4.3). My additional aims of keeping the conversations on topic and of encouraging the participants to review their assumptions take precedence, causing me to reproduce the very power imbalance I set out to correct. I did not count on my (subconscious) wish to elicit a conservative stance on what constitutes the female physical ideal, a stance which contributes to sustaining the dominance of the prevailing ideal of thinness. In retrospect I realise that, in attempting to elicit a view of the ideal body which conforms to prevailing beauty norms, I subconsciously enact my *a priori* assumptions about the participants' ideologies. For example, in extract two I assume that the participants will articulate discriminatory attitudes on female fatness, attitudes which reflect the hegemony of the ideal of thinness and the associated marginalisation of fatness (cf. 4.3.3). Based on this assumption, I try to elicit from the participants a politically incorrect, conservative view of the overweight body as unattractive and socially unacceptable. Interestingly, the participants resist the adoption of an overt anti-fat ideology, despite the fact that I signal my subscription to this ideology. Instead, they couch their views in euphemistic language, encoding their perception that female fatness is a potentially offensive topic (cf. 4.3.4). However, when I describe the woman in question as unattractive, the participants agree with my perception. Their agreement on this issue is further evidence of my powerful role in the interaction as promoter of conservative, hegemonic discourses which sustain the dominance of the ideal of female thinness. Similarly, in extract three I question the participants' expressed view that being overweight is a positive attribute (cf. 4.4.3). The participants' pro-fat stance, in seeking to recast the overweight body in a positive light, represents an oppositional discourse on female fatness. I note that my initial scepticism of this pro-fat stance may shape the participants' subsequent negative characterisation of fatness as unhealthy.

It was certainly not my aim to promote conservative, hegemonic discourses of the ideal body and, in fact, it contradicts my rather ambitious theoretical aim to ensure that I do not reproduce a power imbalance by influencing the participants' views. However, I acknowledge that my coercive role in promoting conservative discourses causes a particular power dynamic to emerge in the interaction. It appears that, despite my belief in an equal relationship between researcher and participants, configurations of power are not always subject to conscious transformations. Perhaps the sustainability of power resides in the fact that it operates largely at an unconscious level and emerges out of multiple intersecting forces

“of different origin and scattered location” (Foucault 1979: 138). In my theoretical considerations of the power dynamics, I focus only on my aim of being an equal conversant in the conversations. Consequently, I overlook the fact that power operates in a nexus of relations; there are other power dynamics at play in the interaction which derive, in part, from my unconscious aim of encouraging the young women to articulate a conservative view of the ideal female body as thin, youthful and conventionally attractive. This unconscious aim in turn derives from my expectation that such a conservative view would be elicited as part of the research process.

6.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research

Although this study reveals some interesting insights into contemporary ideologies of female beauty as these are realised in conversation, it is nonetheless limited and there is considerable scope for further research on the topic. In this section I describe four main limitations of the study and, in light of these, I suggest avenues for future research.

1. The first, and possibly the most significant limitation of this study is that it focusses on a very limited data set. While the transcribed conversations represent a considerable amount of data, my interpretation in chapter 4 is based on three extracts. I chose to focus on fewer extracts in order to give an in-depth analysis of each, rather than a superficial, though arguably more generalisable, analysis of many extracts (cf. 3.2.5).
2. This study, focussing as it does on a small selection of white Western upper class adolescent women attending a private school in Grahamstown, is hardly reflective of beauty ideals in South Africa as a whole. It is particularly limited because it focusses on a racial minority in this country and therefore presents a partial view of the cultural influences on female beauty ideals.
3. The third limitation of the study relates to the validity of my interpretations in chapter 4. There are several instances of ambiguity in the conversations, where I am unsure of what the participant meant by a particular utterance. In these cases I try to incorporate more than one interpretation of the utterance but ultimately, I made a subjective, though informed judgement on which interpretation was the most likely.
4. My engagement with the social significance of the oppositional discourses in the conversations is limited. Owing in part to my limited knowledge of social and

political theory and my decision to focus on dominant ideologies in chapter 5, I did not explore the social conditions surrounding the emergence of oppositional ideologies of female beauty.

The limitations outlined above and my findings in chapters 4 and 5 open up possibilities for future research. I list four avenues for further research below:

1. The analysis of a larger sample of conversational data would increase the generalisability of the findings of a study such as this.
2. Future research on the discursive construction of the ideal female body would need to be conducted with a representative sample of women from all ethnic groups in South Africa. This would provide an interesting basis for comparison of beauty ideals across ethnic groups. Another possibility would be to replicate the study at a selection of private schools, former model C schools and rural schools throughout South Africa. However, even if one was to extend the study beyond the confines of the Eastern Cape province to make it more representative in terms of South African teenagers as a whole, it may still appear incidental and parochial to non-locals. For many international researchers, South African trends are meaningless unless compared with broader global trends. Particularly given the effects of globalisation and increased population movement, this study would benefit from a comparison with similar studies in the global north (for example, the United States, Europe and Britain). Collaboration with a researcher from an American institution, for example, would enable a comparative analysis to evaluate whether the findings of a study such as mine are borne out in other “Western” countries.
3. Using the method of participant checking (Gumperz 1982) would increase the validity of the findings. This would entail asking the participants to check whether a particular interpretation of an event accurately reflects their understanding. Participant checking would additionally help to make the interpretation more nuanced and detailed.
4. Lastly, a concerted engagement with social and political theory, particularly on the tensions inherent in consumer capitalism and the rise of the feminist movement, would contribute to a more sophisticated analysis of the sociopolitical factors which influence the changing shape of female beauty.

6.4 Conclusion

Existing literature on the contemporary Western female physical ideal identifies the following attributes of the ideal body: youthfulness, thinness, muscular tone and attractiveness in terms of Anglo-Saxon norms. My research reveals that, while all these attributes are important, the group of young women who participated in this study evidence an additional concern with health (cf. 5.4). They consider physiological health to be one of the significant attributes of the ideal body. I believe that the goal of being healthy is conditioned by several factors within the educational and social context in which the study is embedded. Firstly, I think that the ethic of the health body represents a response to concern about the growing incidence of eating disorders amongst Western women. In all of the conversations the young women recount stories of how they had witnessed the development of body pathologies, such as anorexia and bulimia in some of their friends. While the participants express a desire to be slim, they are quick to distinguish between being healthily thin and being unhealthily thin. Similarly, they promote the pursuit of physical fitness and exercise but they caution against obsessive adherence to fitness regimes. Secondly, their endorsement of a pro-moderation stance in relation to the body may be conditioned by the educational ethos of Smithson College, an ethos which promotes participation in sport and other physical activities as part of a healthy lifestyle (cf. 3.2.2). Lastly, in terms of the broader social context, the promotion of health is increasingly evident in modern discourses of the body. These discourses emphasise the individual's role in the prevention of illness and in the attainment of a healthy body. I describe health promotion discourses as being allied to Surveillance Medicine, a new medicine which has remapped the boundaries between health and illness. Surveillance Medicine focusses on 'illness potential' by identifying risk factors associated with the onset of illness (cf. 5.4.1). The individual is encouraged to manage these potential health risks through, for example, controlling their diet, getting sufficient sleep and exercising. In a discussion of the interrelation of discourses of the body, I describe health promotion discourses as ultimately endorsing the pursuit of sexual attractiveness (cf. 5.4.2). Seid (1989: 10) comments on the power of the complementary relationship between beauty and health when she writes, "[t]he unusual alliance between our beauty and health standards gives the imperative to be fat-free a special potency and has bred the ancillary convictions that thinner is also happier and more virtuous".

The explanation of the selected body talk extracts shows that the notions of attractiveness and beauty are invested with culturally specific meanings, which, when performed in

discourse constitute the body in particular ways: "...beauty becomes an embodied concept that is not simply an articulation of dominant cultural values but also a negotiation of them" (Reischer & Koo 2004: 299). To return to Butler's (1993) idea of *interpellation*, the young women in this study are interpellating aspects of female physical identity and simultaneously reproducing a particular view of the ideal body in their conversations (cf. 1.7.2). In addition, this study illustrates how the body is a site of discursive struggle, where competing discourse vie for ascendancy. While the dominant discourses of female beauty appear to win out in the extracts, the fact that the young women draw on alternative discourses to resist normative constructions of female beauty suggests a level of critical awareness on their part. It is possible that, had I not promoted the dominant discourses across the extracts, the alternative constructions of the ideal female body may have gained more currency. However, a more cynical account of the hegemony of the ideal of the youthful, toned, beautiful body acknowledges the allure of this ideal, an allure which resists rationalisation and critique: "Despite our ability to theorize, analyze, and contextualize the underlying meaning of beauty in contemporary culture, we are no less enthralled by its display. As much as we may find solace in the well-worn adages that "beauty is only skin deep" and "beauty is in the eye of the beholder," our daily experience in the social world, and even our own responses to the body beautiful, tell us otherwise" (Reischer & Koo 2004: 315). The study reveals that female beauty continues to matter as an index of moral and personal worth, ensuring this group of young women's continued pursuit of a homogeneous, largely unattainable beauty ideal.

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APPENDIX A₁: STIMULUS EXERCISE 1











APPENDIX A₂: STIMULUS EXERCISE 2





APPENDIX A₃: STIMULUS EXERCISE 3







APPENDIX B₁: CONSENT FORM

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider the information on this form before you agree to participate in my research. Please read the terms below and sign at the bottom if you consent to these terms.

I understand my part in this research

I agree to participate in this research as a volunteer

I understand that I can renegotiate the terms of my participation at any time

I understand that I can withdraw at any time

I understand that my identity will be protected

I agree to the tape-recording and transcription of the conversations

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Thank you for your time and willing participation in my research. Your invaluable assistance will be acknowledged in my thesis.

Kiran Pienaar

APPENDIX B₂: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION SHEET**Preferred pseudonym:****Cell phone number:****Age:****Grade:****Nationality:****E-mail address:****Ethnic group (*Please circle the applicable option*):** Western Hispanic African Oriental
IndianOther (*please specify*):*I have known the friends who participated with me in this study for*

6 months–1 year

1–2 years

2–4 years

Other (please specify)

On average, how often do you spend time together (outside of school classes)?

Everyday

Every other day

Twice a week

On weekends

Are you currently living in the same hostel?

Yes

No

What culture would you say you belong to?

APPENDIX C: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

Transcription Conventions (based on Jefferson in Schenkein 1978)

?	rising inflection (not necessarily a question)
!	emphatic tone
-	incomplete word or utterance/ speaker sharply cut off
(.)	short pause
(0.5)	long pause
[	start of overlap
]	end of overlap
=	no gap between speakers/latched utterance
(but)	unclear fragment on tape – guess (the word but is just used as an example)
()	unclear fragment on tape – no guess
(())	clarificatory info about the preceding chunk of (C: sometimes underlined) talk e.g. laughs while speaking
(())	non-verbal activity e.g. claps
<u>but</u>	emphasis
BUT	louder
[.hh	sharp intake of breath]
[...]	material has been omitted
↑↓	a marked rising or falling intonational shift follows up or down arrow

APPENDIX D₁: EXTRACT 1

- 1 **Hayley:** but don't you think like guys or boys or men or whatever are very like (.) they're quite
 2 [against]
 3 **Timega:** [if you're] talking about College¹ it's boys=
 4 **Hayley:** =no well (.) people=
 5 **Timega:** =oh males in general=
 6 **Hayley:** =[the male species in general]
 7 **Winnie:** [we're talking about people not College boys]
 8 **Timega:** ((laughs))
 9 **Hayley:** like they're so like against surgery like they=
 10 **Timega:** =ja=
 11 **Hayley:** like oh my God!
 12 Like obviously they're like aah it looks nice but they don't want to get to know that person
 13 they're just like=
 14 **Winnie:** =jaaa=
 15 **Timega:** [ooh let me touch her boobs]
 16 **Hayley:** [()]
 17 **Timega:** and then go ja=
 18 **Hayley:** =ja or oh my God you can [see how much]
 19 **Winnie:** [that was fun]
 20 **Hayley:** surgery she's had
 21 They're not like oh [but ()]
 22 **Timega:** [(but just looking at photos and stuff they won't care)]
 23 **Hayley:** hey?
 24 No but obviously that's like something like I don't know guys just seem like they don't want to
 25 get to know people who are
 26 **Winnie:** [fake]
 27 **Timega:** [fa- ja]
 28 ja like those
 29 [people who have like]
 30 **Sophie:** [it's too extreme!]
 31 **Timega:** collagen in their lips ((mock deep voice))
 32 and like [meeeeuuuuggh]
 33 **Winnie:** [but that's the thing] it is
 34 **Hayley:** Posh Spice
 [...]
 35 **Timega:** that's grooooss!
 36 **Winnie:** and hello Angelina Jolie
 37 I don't like that chick
 38 **Timega:** but but then=
 39 **K:** =but hers I think are actually [natural]
 40 **Sophie:** [real] they are real
 41 **Timega:** no Angelina Jolie's are 100 percent natural
 42 you can see when she's like thirteen she's like = ((making a fish mouth, puffing lips out))
 43 **Sophie:** =ja those are real those are so real=
 44 **K:** =But shame they are quite big I wouldn't like my lips that big=
 45 **Winnie:** =ja but all the guys seem to love it!
 46 **Hayley:** [because it's natural]

1 College boys refers to the young women's male contemporaries at their brother school. The school's name is often abbreviated from 'Vernon College' to 'College'. Thus, when the participants refer to 'College boys', it is not a general reference to male college/university students

- 47 **Winnie:** [()]
 48 **Hayley:** I can promise you that if she=
 49 **Timega:** =if they were fake like that=
 50 **Hayley:** =if she now comes out and says my lips are fake all the guys would be like no I never
 51 thought she was hot I never thought she had nice lips=
 52 **K:** =you think so?=
 53 **Hayley:** [well I do]
 54 **Winnie:** [yes]
 55 **K:** [what do] you think they prefer women natural?
 56 **Hayley:** I think so
 57 **Sophie:** [to a certain extent]
 58 **Timega:** [you see that's]
 59 **Winnie:** [NATURAL but BEAUTIFUL]
 60 **K:** [natural and beautiful!] ((laughs))
 61 **Winnie:** [there we go]
 62 **Timega:** [if you're natural and you look good] that's great
 63 if you're natural and you look good that's great
 64 if you're natural and you're not ni- and you're siff then
 65 **Winnie:** [okay different story]
 66 **Hayley:** [if you I think if you're natural and you're siff]
 67 [it's]
 68 **Winnie:** [shame] for you=
 69 **Hayley:** =ja
 70 no but like
 71 **Timega:** do you think [do you think okay okay]
 72 **Winnie:** [but then goodness forbid you should go on Extreme Makeover]
 73 **Timega:** a guy would choose a natural siff ass girl or like=
 74 **K:** =swamp donkey ((laughs))
 [...]
 75 **Timega:** or would you choose a girl that had had a little bit of work done?=
 76 **Winnie:** =they'd [choose the girl that had]
 77 **Timega:** [cause she looks good]
 78 **Winnie:** the work done=
 79 **Timega:** =ja
 80 **Winnie:** just because she's prettier=
 81 **Hayley:** =I don't know [I'm very old-fashioned]
 82 **Winnie:** [even if they don't agree with the whole]
 83 **Timega:** No Hayley but you're not=
 84 **Winnie:** =[Hayley I also like to believe in fairytales]
 85 **Timega:** [let's just revert to College boys]
 86 **Winnie:** we all know I'm like lashed over²
 87 [disney or whatever but there is no such thing as a fairytale there just isn't]
 88 **Timega:** [you can be as plastic more plastic than Barbie and they will]
 89 if you look good they'll be like mmm=
 90 **Hayley:** =ja but College boys are different
 91 **Timega:** College [boys are another species]
 92 **Winnie:** [College boys are just] horrible=
 93 **K:** =what you think College boys aren't image?=
 94 **Timega:** [NO! WOOOO!]
 95 **Winnie:** [NO THEY ARE!]
 96 **Hayley:** [NOOOO!]

2 The term *lashed over* is slang for 'really like'

97 **K:** I was gonna say

98 [what planet are you on?] ((laughs))

99 **Winnie:** [they put such pressure on girls] and they're just mean=

100 **K:** =ja

APPENDIX D₂: EXTRACT 2

1 **Kath:** let's look at this one
2 Kay she's also curvy ((laughs)) ((the woman in her underwear next to the scale))
3 **Cally:** [just chilling like]
4 **K:** [when you see someone like that]
5 what are your associations with it?
6 (.)
7 **Kath:** uuuumm what do you mean like
8 **K:** like what are your first thoughts? you know just your reaction immediately without
9 [(thinking)]
10 **Kath:** [why is she in a] magazine?
11 **K:** okay ((laughs))
12 **Kath:** ((laughs)) why is she walking around naked [type thing?]
13 **Cally:** [ja]
14 **Kath:** in her in her flat ja and she's eating food or drinking actually but
15 **Cally:** ja I don't know
16 **Kath:** ja=
17 **Cally:** =she's [()]
18 **Kath:** [I wouldn't classify her as the most attractive] person ((laughs))
19 **K:** that's very diplomatic
20 **Kath:** ((laughs))
21 ()
22 **K:** it's funny no one wants [to say]
23 **Cally:** [she looks] nice and relaxed and=
24 **K:** =okay=
25 **Cally:** =ja
26 **Kath:** jaaa
27 **K:** if if your mom looked like that would you say to her I think you need to lose weight?
28 **Kath:** noo
29 **Cally:** no! she's not that bad=
30 **Kath:** =ja she isn't and=
31 **Cally:** =especially cause she looks quite oldish [and so]
32 **K:** [ja]
33 **Cally:** when you do get oldish ((laughs)) you do [naturally put on weight]
34 **Kath:** [well if she's]
35 happy with herself then [fine]
36 **Cally:** [ja]
37 **Cally:** well I think [personally]
38 **K:** [okay]
39 (.)
40 but she definitely wouldn't be one of the ones you'd choose as attractive? ((laughs))=
41 **Kath:** =no=
42 **Cally:** =no
43 **K:** kay=
44 **Cally:** =okay

45 (.)
46 **K:** so that's the no pile?
47 **Cally:** yeah

APPENDIX D₃: EXTRACT 3

- 1 **K:** So you reckon it's better to be fat?=
- 2 **Winnie:** =yes!=
- 3 **K:** looking at those pictures?
- 4 **Timega:** [kay well maybe not that overboard]
- 5 **Winnie:** [well not fat]
- 6 **Timega:** just content with yourself but in a healthy way [because]
- 7 **Winnie:** [it doesn't]
- 8 **Timega:** if you're content with yourself but you're so anorexic that you're about to die then
- 9 obviously not
- 10 **K:** okay=
- 11 **Timega:** =but like if you're happy with yourself=
- 12 **Winnie:** =but if you're anorexic you can't be content with yourself=
- 13 **Sophie:** =ja=
- 14 **Timega:** =ja well maybe [you will get to that]
- 15 **Hayley:** [if you're happy with what you are] if you're having a good life
- 16 and you're anorexic then I know it sounds horrible but then rather have a good life for a short
- 17 period of time then be unhappy for the rest of your life=
- 18 **Winnie:** =but Hayle what anorexic could have a good life?
- 19 **Hayley:** [But the thing is just in case]
- 20 **Winnie:** [they're constantly worried about what they're eating]
- 21 **Timega:** ja some are
- 22 **Sophie:** Like I was just trying to say like
- 23 [...]
- 24 **Timega:** sh- like (.) okay I know this is gonna sound weird but like when you think like
- 25 you're not fat but when you think you're fat you're unhappy you're not like WOOO WOOO!
- 26 ((loud laughter))
- 27 **All:** ((loud laughter)))
- 28 **Timega:** I'M SO FAT YEEEEAAAAH! ((laughs))
- 29 **Hayley:** I'm a big mama!
- 30 **All:** ((laugh))
- 31 **Timega:** you're like ooh ja gotta lose some weight you know you're not like YAAAAY it's
- 32 so I don't know like maybe it's=
- 33 **Winnie:** =some people are just happy though=
- 34 **Timega:** =ja! so I don't think it really has [a lot to do with]
- 35 **Winnie:** [I don't think teenagers] that are fat are happy
- 36 [but like once you've got like past]
- 37 **Timega:** [weight that makes you] happy or not
- 38 I think generally if you are have the tendency to be a happy person you will be happy
- 39 [whether you're fat or skinny]
- 40 **Sophie:** [you know that other girl that was here she was]
- 41 **Winnie:** she's a happy person=
- 42 **Sophie:** =you know what she was like she was soo happy=
- 43 **Timega:** =jaaa=
- 44 **Winnie:** =and Sam guys Sam who who was so like anorexic and bulimic and whatever and

44 then [she put on]
 45 **Sophie:** [she was so]
 46 **Winnie:** weight and she was she she said to me that she was much happier when
 47 [she was fat]
 48 **Timega:** [when she was bigger]
 49 **Hayley:** which Sam?=
 50 **Winnie:** =you didn't know her
 51 **Hayley:** [ooh like]
 52 **Winnie:** [she was] like thin thin thin she was a sport maniac and [she]
 53 **Timega:** [mm]
 54 **Winnie:** [like lived for sport or whatever]
 55 **Sophie:** [she like had to stop doing sport and everything]
 56 **Winnie:** ja and then she just put on like all this weight and she said that she was ten times
 57 happier
 58 **Timega:** [ja the thing is]
 59 **K:** [Really?]
 60 **Winnie:** [and she looked]
 61 happier as well
 62 **Timega:** I think it's more of a mindset and [the only reason you might]
 63 **Winnie:** [it is though]
 64 **Timega:** and the only reason you might be happier when you're
 65 [fat is well not necessarily fat is]
 66 **Winnie:** [it's just like about trying to control things]
 67 **Timega:** but just because you're healthy like when you're skinny like that you're not really
 68 healthy so it's harder it it takes up a lot of energy to smile and like be happy and but like
 69 obviously you musn't be like a fat ass but like
 70 **Winnie:** ((laughs)) [ja cause that's also dangerous]
 71 **Timega:** [ja cause then you're not healthy either]

APPENDIX E₁: DESCRIPTION OF EXTRACT 1

1. Vocabulary

What *experiential* values do words have?

- **Classification schemes**

Scheme around beauty/ugliness: swamp donkey/ugly/prettier/look good/beautiful/siff

Natural versus surgically altered appearance: /natural/real/collagen/fake/had a bit of work done/plastic/Barbie

- **Overwording**

men, male (species) x2, guys x4, boys x8

women, girls

prettier, beautiful x2, look good

choose girl x2

- **Rewording**

siff

siff ass girl

swamp donkey

chick (all examples of conscious attempts to oppose politically correct discourse)

- **Ideologically significant meaning relations**

Hyponymy

Superordinate: male species

Hyponymys: guys, men, boys, College boys

Antonymy

natural/fake

What *relational* values do words have?

- **Dysphemism**

siff ass girl: use of this term (and failure to avoid it) assumes ideology that ugly women are devalued is shared amongst participants i.e. that they share this negative evaluation of unattractive women (relational value).

swamp donkey: I am employing a term that I know is an example of Smithson College's slang in an attempt to evoke solidarity with the girls.

chick: Winnie could have said *girl* or *woman* here, both of which are more neutral. Her use of this term further indexes her dislike of the woman in question (expressive value) and also constitutes an attempt to align the other participants with her view (relational value).

- **Euphemism**

girl that's had a little bit of work done – for *girl that's had cosmetic surgery*.

What *expressive* values do words have?

natural:+

Fake: –
 plastic surgery: contested
 College boys: –
 Barbie: –
 Fairytale: contested
 old-fashioned: contested
 extreme: – (versus in a pro-radical sports discourse eg. “extreme sports” it would be +)

2. Grammar

How does the grammar encode *experiential* values?

- What types of process are used?

Process type	Example
Relational	they quite [<u>against</u>] surgery
	they're so like <u>against</u> surgery
	it looks nice
	that was <u>fun</u>
	people who are fake
	people who have like collagen in their <u>lips</u>
	it's too <u>extreme</u> !
	that's <u>grooooo</u> ss!
	but <u>hers</u> I think are actually <u>natural</u> (lips as carrier)
	Angelina Jolie's are 100 percent natural (lips as carrier)
	they <u>are</u> real (lips as carrier)
	ja those are real those are so real (lips as carrier)
	But shame they <u>are</u> quite big (lips as carrier)
	<u>because</u> it's <u>natural</u>
	they were <u>fake</u>
	that's [<u>NATURAL</u> but <u>BEAUTIFUL</u>
	if you're natural
	you look good
	that's <u>great</u>
	she had nice lips
	you're not ni- and you're <u>siff</u> then
	it's shame for you
	just <u>because</u> she's prettier=
	she was hot
	I'm very old- <u>fashioned</u>
	you can be as plastic more plastic than <u>Barbie</u>
	if you look good

	but <u>College</u> boys are <u>different</u>
	College boys are another <u>species</u>
	College boys are just <u>horrible</u>
Material	surgery she's had
Mental	they <u>don't</u> want
	(men don't want to get to) <u>know</u> that person
	you can <u>see</u> how much surgery (<i>you</i> referring to average male's perception)
	but just looking at photos and stuff (implied senser is the average male in this context)
	they won't <u>care</u> (<i>they</i> referring to men)
	I don't know
	ja but all the <u>guys</u> seem to love it!
	guys just seem like they don't want to get to know people who are
	I don't <u>like</u> that chick
	I think (subjective modality marker)
	I wouldn't like my lips <u>that</u> big=
	ja but all the <u>guys</u> seem to love it!
	I can <u>promise</u> you
	you <u>think</u> so?
	what do you think
	they prefer women <u>natural</u> ? (<i>they</i> refers to men)
	<u>I</u> think so
	do you think [do you think okay okay]
	a guy would choose a natural <u>siff</u> ass girl or like=
	or would you choose a girl that had had a little bit of <u>work</u> done? (<i>you</i> refers to the subject position of the average male in this context)
	I don't know
	even if they don't agree with the whole (<i>they</i> refers to men)
	Hayley I also like to believe in <u>fairytale</u> s
	we all know
	they put <u>such</u> pressure on girls (<i>they</i> refers to men)
	I'm like lashed over disney
	I <u>never</u> thought she was hot (this utterance represents a male's hypothetical perception of the subject i.e. the speaker is adopting the subject position of the average male)
	I <u>never</u> thought she had nice lips= (as above)
Verbal	and then go ja= (<i>go</i> introduces reported speech)
	and go ja or oh my God (as above)

	and says my lips are fake
	all the guys would be like no (<i>like</i> is used quotatively to introduce reported speech)
	they'll [guys] be like mmm (<i>like</i> introduces reported speech)
	they're just like ooh let me touch her <u>boobs</u> (<i>like</i> is used quotatively)
Existential	but there is no such thing as a fairytale there just <u>isn't</u>

Are there patterns evident in the processes?

- Some of the mental processes relate to expressive modality eg. *I think* (3:39, 3:55, 3:56, 3:71), *I don't know*, *I can promise you*. They index the speaker's level of certainty and their commitment to the truth value of the proposition.
- Several of the mental processes relate to judgements of appreciation or actions of assessment: *all the guys seem to love it*, *I don't like that chick*, *they won't care*, *they prefer women natural*, *guys would choose* (related to action of assessing), *I wouldn't like my lips that big*, *I never thought she was hot* *I never thought she had nice lips*.
- Notice how many of the mental processes invoke the male gaze to judge women's attractiveness. They also reproduce the active/passive gendered binary where the male is positioned as the sensor and the female as the phenomenon:
 - *they don't want to get to know that person* (male as actor, person used here to refer to a woman)
 - *they're just like [ooh let me touch her boobs]* (male as actor, woman as patient)
 - *guys just seem like they don't want to get to know people who are*
 - *[what do] you think they prefer women natural?* (male gaze: how a man views a woman is the issue at stake).
 - *a guy would choose a natural siff ass girl or like*
 - *or would you choose a girl that had had a little bit of work done?* (positioning participants as men, hypothetical construction implying "if you were a man").
 - *they put such pressure on girls* (male agent, female patient).

• Are sentences positive or negative?

but there is no such thing as a fairytale there just isn't

Negation is used in this sentence to contest an alternative discourse in which fairytales are constructed as real. Winnie denies the existence of fairytales in order to contest Hayley's assertion that men prefer natural women (1: 81), who have had no surgery, regardless of their appearance. Although Hayley admits this is an old-fashioned view, Winnie constructs it as idealistic, as a fairytale view, i.e. to believe that men prefer natural, unsurgically altered women is to believe in fairytales, which as Winnie points out simply don't exist. The implication is that the world of fairytales (in which female physical appearance presumably doesn't matter) is an idealistic world, which bears no resemblance to a reality in which female beauty matters.

50 **Hayley:** =if she now comes out and says my lips are fake all the guys would be like **no** I never
51 thought she was hot I **never** thought she had nice lips=

Negation is used here to contrast the hypothetical view which men adopt when they see Angeline Jolie i.e. they assert that she *is* 'hot'. However, the women argue that, if her lips were fake, men would **not** view her as 'hot'. So the women are invoking a discourse of the 'natural' woman to

construct beauty as ‘free of artifice’.

How do the grammatical choices encode *relational* values?

3) Are the pronouns *we* and *you* used?

- 61 Winnie: [there we go]
 62 Timega: [if *you*’re natural and you look good] that’s great
 63 if *you*’re natural and *you* look good that’s great
 64 if *you*’re natural and you’re not ni- and *you*’re siff then
 65 Winnie: [okay different story]
 66 Hayley: [if you I think if *you*’re natural and you’re siff]
 67 [it’s]
 68 Winnie: [shame] for *you*=
 69 Hayley: =ja=
 70 no but like
 71 Timega: do *you* think [do you think okay okay]
 72 Winnie: [but then goodness forbid *you* should go on Extreme Makeover]
 73 Timega: a guy would choose a natural siff ass girl or like=
 74 K: =swamp donkey ((laughs))=
 [...]
 75 Timega: or would *you* choose a girl that had had a little bit of work done?=
You used in place of generic pronoun *one* but the reference is to *women*, not to people generally. It is interesting though that the participants do not nominate women specifically in these lines. They do offer a reference to girl in 1:73 and they use *you* and *she* interchangeably (1:77, 1:80). Thus, it is evident from the context that they are speaking of women (as objects of the male gaze).

1) What sentence modes are used?

The majority of sentence are in the form of declaratives as the participants are negotiating the meanings of the surgically altered female body. There are some interrogatives: of my 9 utterances, 4 are questions, encoding a scepticism and questioning a participant’s previous statement (1:52, 1:55, 1:93, 1:98). It is interesting that of the six questions posed in the entire extract, I pose four of them. I also offer very little commentary and only once offer my own opinion. My asymmetrical rights to ask questions may be a function of my elevated status as the researcher. I perceive my role as that of a critical discussant, rather than a co-participant in the truest sense (despite my attempts at an early conceptual level to correct possible power imbalances between myself and the participants).

Timega speaks 25 times and all her utterances are statements. Hayley speaks 19 times, one of her utterances is a question requesting clarification (23). Winnie speaks 23 times and all of her utterances are statements. Sophie only speaks four times and her contributions are all confirmatory remarks, backing up the other participants’ statements. She was the newest member of the group and thus may not have had access to the shared knowledge which the other participants had. This may explain her limited contribution to the conversation.

How does the grammar encode *expressive* values?

- How do the adverbs and subjective modality markers (eg. *I think*) encode expressive modality?

- 1 Hayley: but don’t you think like guys or boys or men or whatever are *very* like (.) they *quite*
 2 [against]

Hayley's initial use of *very* encodes high expressive modality. She then modulates her position through the use of the adverb *quite*. I think this is because she realises that her position may be controversial and so she backtracks and couches it in less categorical terms. She also seeks to elicit the other participants' agreement by prefacing her statement with *don't you think*. Thus, the combination of this preface and her decision to modulate her position through the use of *quite*, index Hayley's awareness that her statement may be contested.

9 **Hayley:** like they're *so* like against surgery like they=

12 Like obviously they're like aah it looks nice but they don't want to get to know that person

13 they're just like [ooh let me touch her boobs]

So and *obviously* encode high expressive value, i.e. the speaker's certainty and commitment to the truth value of the propositions. *Obviously* supports the view that the proposition is transparent, logical and given.

48 **Hayley:** I can promise you that if she =

49 **Timega:** =if they were fake like that=

50 **Hayley:** =if she now comes out and says my lips are fake ***all*** the guys would be like no I never

51 thought she was hot I never thought she had nice lips=

The italicised and bolded terms above encode high expressive modality i.e. Hayley and Timega's belief that men definitely prefer women to be natural, not surgically altered. They are very certain of this stance until I question it in 1:52 and 1:55 below. It is only then that Hayley emphasises that she is expressing her personal view, rather than a universally valid one.

Following my questioning of the truth of their statements (1:52, 1: 55) the participants begin to qualify their position. They argue that men do not in fact prefer *all* natural women, but rather they prefer natural, beautiful women. In other words, they indicate that a woman's sexual desirability is predicated on her beauty. The participants concede that men would ultimately choose a woman who has had surgery to make her attractive over an unattractive but natural woman. The use of the subjective modality marker, *I think* indicates degree of uncertainty i.e. lowers the expressive modality:

55 **K:** [what do] you think they prefer women natural?

56 **Hayley:** I think so

57 **Sophie:** [to a *certain extent*]

66 **Hayley:** [if you ***I think*** if you're natural and you're siff]

The emphatic use of *goodness forbid* below encodes high expressive modality. It can be glossed as "god help you" i.e. if a woman has radical plastic surgery, she **will** be judged negatively by members of the opposite sex:

72 **Winnie:** [but then goodness forbid you should go on Extreme Makeover]

- **How do the patterns of tense encode expressive modality?**

In the section contesting plastic surgery and endorsing 'natural' beauty, there is a high number of present tense statements. These point to the speaker's certainty and commitment to the truth value of the propositions. They also point to the possibility that, of the various discourses invoked in the extract, the discourse of 'natural' beauty may be dominant:

9 **Hayley:** like they're *so* like against surgery like they=

12 Like obviously they're like aah it looks nice but they don't want to get to know that person

13 they're just like=

30 **Sophie:** [it's too extreme!]

35 **Timega:** that's groooss! (lengthened 'o' for emphasis – very certain of her point of view)

46 **Hayley:** [because it's natural]

40 **Sophie:** [real] they are real (emphatic use of present tense to oppose a view of Jolie's lips as **not** real)

43 **Sophie:** =ja those are real those are so real=

1 **Hayley:** but don't you think like guys or boys or men or whatever are very like (.) they quite

2 [against]....plastic surgery

In the utterances above Hayley's preface *don't you think* seeks to elicit the other participants' perspectives on her view. Her use of a negative interrogative, *don't you think*, encodes a preferred response of agreement. Thus, she is seeking to align the participants with her view. This in itself lowers the expressive modality of the statement. It indicates Hayley's awareness that her view may be controversial and, in light of this, she seeks the other participants' explicit endorsement of her view.

62 **Timega:** [if you're natural and you look good] that's great

63 if you're natural and you look good that's great

64 if you're natural and you're not ni- and you're siff then

66 **Hayley:** [if you I think if you're natural and you're siff]

67 [it's]

68 **Winnie:** [shame] for you=

The discourse of female sexual attractiveness evident in the utterances above also features the use of present tense, as part of conditional statements. The participants could have used the past tense (as is often used in hypothetical statements): if you *were* natural and you *looked* good, that *would* be great. By opting for the present tense form over the past tense and modal verbs like *would*, the participants encode their perception that they are expressing a universally valid truth. If you compare the two possible choices for expressing these conditional statements, it becomes clear that the use of present tense encodes a high degree of certainty and belief in the generalisability of the statements.

Connective values: How are sentences linked together?

1 **Hayley:** **but** don't you think like guys or boys or men or whatever are very like (.) they quite

2 [against]

The connector *but* indicates that Hayley is about to present an oppositional view i.e. one which opposes the view presented previously. To contextualise this utterance in terms of what was discussed before it, I asked the participants whether any of them would go for an 'extreme makeover'. This was a reference to the TV program, *Extreme Makeover*. All of the young women, except one expressed a desire to go through the 'extreme makeover' process and they discussed which parts of their body they would surgically alter. The previous discussion was therefore pro-plastic surgery as the participants enumerated the list of physical features they would change. In utterance one the conjunction *but* indicates a link with the previous utterances, specifically an adversarial link: Hayley is opposing the previous pro-plastic surgery stance by questioning whether men approve of female cosmetic surgery.

12 Like obviously they're like aah it looks nice **but** they don't want to get to know that person

13 they're just like=

14 **Winnie:** =jaaa=

15 **Timega:** [ooh let me touch her boobs]

The connector *but* above encodes an adversarial relationship between the two clauses, i.e it indicates that the speaker is about to introduce an oppositional statement. The second clause introduced by *but* functions as a qualifier, specifying that men like the surgically altered female body purely for its

aesthetic appeal, rather than in its entirety. There seems to be a ‘body’ versus ‘person’ distinction operating here, one which separates a woman’s body from her personhood. Thus, while a man may find a woman physically attractive, this does not imply that he is interested in her personality i.e. in ‘getting to know her’.

35 **Timega:** that’s grooosss!

36 **Winnie:** and hello Angelina Jolie

37 I don’t like that chick

38 **Timega:** *but but* then=

39 **K:** =*but* hers I think are actually [natural]

40 **Sophie:** [real] they are real

41 **Timega:** *no* Angelina Jolie’s are 100 percent natural

The connector *but* is used once again to introduce an oppositional viewpoint above. Similarly, *no* in 1:41 signals Timega’s disagreement with Winnie’s statements in 1:36 and 1:37 (which imply that Angelina Jolie has had collagen lip implants).

42 you can see when she’s like thirteen she’s like = ((making a fish mouth, puffing lips out))

43 **Sophie:** =ja those are real those are so real=

44 **K:** =*But* shame they are quite big I wouldn’t like my lips that big=

45 **Winnie:** =ja *but* all the guys seem to love it!

K’s use of *but* in 1:44 functions to introduce a qualifier: although Jolie’s lips are real, they are still unattractive. The use of *but* implies an adversarial link with the previous statements which construct the surgically altered female body as artificial, and by extension, undesirable. These statements imply that the converse (ie. the ‘natural’ body) is desirable. In 1:45 Winnie indicates that, while she herself agrees with K’s observation that Jolie’s lips are too big (*ja*), the average *guy* likes her lips. She uses *but* to introduce this alternative viewpoint. Once again, it is the male view of a woman’s appearance that is the issue at stake.

45 **Winnie:** =ja but all the guys seem to love it!

46 **Hayley:** [*because* it’s natural]

Because encodes a causal link between the two clauses i.e. it encodes a logical connection between male appreciation of a particular female feature (Jolie’s lips) and the fact that the given feature is ‘natural’.

62 **Timega:** [if you’re natural *and* you look good] that’s great

63 if you’re natural *and* you look good that’s great

64 if you’re natural *and* you’re not ni- and you’re siff then

The use of *and* in the above statements emphasises the imperative that a woman be **both** natural and beautiful.

In 1:72 below, the connector *but* introduces a qualifier to Hayley’s assertion: while the average heterosexual male will judge an unattractive woman negatively, he will judge her equally negatively if she undergoes surgery to improve her appearance. In light of both Hayley and Winnie’s assertions in 1:66–72, it seems that a conventionally unattractive woman is in a ‘no-win’ situation: she is relegated to the outer limits of heterosexual desirability by virtue of her appearance, but should she have her appearance surgically altered, she will be viewed as ‘artificial’. The participants also argue that men do not want to get to know women who’ve had surgery. This implies that, while men may find them

attractive and make advances on them, they won't desire a sustained relationship with them:

- 66 **Hayley:** [if you I think if you're natural and you're siff]
 67 [it's]
 68 **Winnie:** [shame] for you=
 69 **Hayley:** =ja=
 70 no but like
 71 **Timega:** do you think [do you think okay okay]
 72 **Winnie:** [*but* then goodness forbid you should go on Extreme Makeover]

3. Textual structures

Turn-taking structures

In this conversation there are 49 instances/lines of overlapping speech out of 100 utterances i.e almost 50% of all the utterances are overlaps. The majority of the overlaps indicate collaboration rather than competition since they are not attempts to wrest the floor from the current speaker. Rather they are evidence that the participants are working together to co-construct the meanings of the surgically altered female body. The pattern of overlapping speech and contiguous utterances signals the participants' engagement with the topic. The frequency of these two interactional features is a function of the strength of feeling and controversy which the topic of female plastic surgery evokes. The overlaps often represent confirmatory remarks in which the speaker has misinterpreted a TRP (transitional relevance place) in her eagerness to contribute to and confirm what the previous speaker has said. Below I give some examples of supportive overlaps and the occasional violative overlap, as well as examples of contiguous utterances.

Supportive overlaps

- 1 **Hayley:** but don't you think like guys or boys or men or whatever are very like (.) they quite
 2 [against]
 3 **Timega:** [if you're] talking about College it's boys=

This overlap occurs two syllables before the end of Hayley's utterance so it is likely to be a misinterpreted TRP, especially in light of the fact that Timega's comment is clarificatory i.e. she is clarifying who Hayley is referring to before Hayley continues.

- 6 **Hayley:** =[the male species in general]
 7 **Winnie:** [we're talking about people not College boys]

Again both speakers are providing clarificatory remarks, rather than trying to wrest the floor and change the topic which Hayley introduced in 1:2.

- 15 **Timega:** [ooh let me touch her boobs]
 16 **Hayley:** [()]
 17 **Timega:** and then go ja=
 18 **Hayley:** =ja or oh my God you can [see how much]
 19 **Winnie:** [that was fun]

Hayley and Winnie are co-constructing the hypothetical reaction of a man after touching a woman's silicone breasts. Their utterances follow on sequentially from Timega's utterance in 1:17 – evidence that they are following closely so that they can collaborate on their conception of plastic surgery.

- 75 **Timega:** or would you choose a girl that had had a little bit of work done?=
 76 []

76 **Winnie:** =they'd [choose the girl that had]

77 **Timega:** [cause she looks good]

This is another example of the co-construction of the meanings of the surgically altered female body. In 1:77 Timega pre-empts the end of Winnie's response by accounting for **why** a man would choose a surgically altered female body over a 'natural' one. Timega recognises that Winnie's response in 1:76 is a preferred response to her question and thus is able to offer an explanation for this response before Winnie is finished.

Violative overlaps

18 **Hayley:** =ja or oh my God you can [see how much]

19 **Winnie:** [that was fun]

20 **Hayley:** surgery she's had

21 They're not like oh [but ()]

22 **Timega:** [(but just looking at photos and stuff they won't care)]

Lines 1:21 and 1:22 are an example of a violative overlap where Timega is contesting a previous statement by introducing an alternative viewpoint.

71 **Timega:** do you think [do you think okay okay]

72 **Winnie:** [but then goodness forbid you should go on Extreme Makeover]

73 **Timega:** a guy would choose a natural siff ass girl or like=

Lines 1:71 and 1:72 above could be a violative overlap since Winnie jumps in before Timega is close to a TRP (she is in the middle of her turn). However, I don't think Winnie is trying to wrest the floor and continue on a different topic. She is merely excited and wants to voice a disclaimer.

80 **Winnie:** just because she's prettier=

81 **Hayley:** =I don't know [I'm very old-fashioned]

82 **Winnie:** [even if they don't agree with the whole]

Winnie may be interrupting Hayley in 1:82 above because she recognises from Hayley's preface (*I don't know*) that she is about to express an alternative viewpoint, one which contests Winnie's pro-beauty stance. Winnie takes the floor here to add a disclaimer to her categorical statement in 1:80. Her disclaimer may be an attempt to silence Hayley.

Latched/contiguous utterances

Given that 48% of the utterances are overlaps, and 48% are latched utterances, this means that only 4% of the utterances do *not* occur in quick succession or as overlapping speech. The very high frequency of latched utterances is further evidence of a collaborative floor, in which the participants co-construct their views of plastic surgery. It is also indicative of their engagement and sustained interest in the topic. The frequency of latched utterances, exclamations and emphatic speech indicates that they are excited and feeling strongly about the topic. Some examples of latched utterances, specifically where the participants are *co-constructing* their stance on plastic surgery. They are attending so closely to each other's contributions that they are able to fill in the gaps, to finish off a statement that a previous speaker has begun without pausing for thought:

48 **Hayley:** I can promise you that if she =

49 **Timega:** =if they were fake like that=

50 **Hayley:** =if she now comes out and says my lips are fake all the guys would be like no I never
51 thought she was hot I never thought she had nice lips=

52 **K:** =you think so? =

- 73 **Timega:** a guy would choose a natural siff ass girl or like=
 74 **K:** =swamp donkey ((laughs))=
 [...]

75 **Timega:** or would you choose a girl that had had a little bit of work done?=
 76 **Winnie:** =they'd [choose the girl that had]
 77 **Timega:** [cause she looks good]
 78 **Winnie:** the work done=
 79 **Timega:** =ja
 80 **Winnie:** just because she's prettier=

In 1:73–80 above Hayley and Timega are co-constructing a man's hypothetical response to the discovery that a woman's appearance has been surgically altered. In 49 Timega completes Hayley's conditional statement. She picks up from Hayley's statement in the middle of the sentence, without faltering.

APPENDIX E₂: DESCRIPTION OF EXTRACT 2

1. Vocabulary

What *experiential* values do words have?

- **Classification schemes**

Body shape: curvy (x2), bad (as in fat), put on weight

Age: oldish (as opposed to young).

Beauty: attractive, nice

Contentment: happy, relaxed, chilling

- **Overwording**

oldish (x2)

attractive (x2)

relaxed, chilling

- **Ideologically significant meaning relations**

Hyponymy: superordinate term = woman

Co-hyponyms = attractive women, curvy women, happy women, relaxed women, overweight women, oldish women (there are many more hyponyms in the conversation as a whole because the young women are negotiating a taxonomy of women based on physical appearance)

What *relational* values do words have?

- **Euphemism**

curvy for overweight (2:2): I think that Kath initially uses a politically correct alternative to the term *overweight* because she is uncertain of my stance on the subject of excess weight and thus she is censoring her own comments. The fact that she perceives it necessary to censor her comments on front of me (the researcher) is a function of my increased power in the interaction. Since the consensus exercise is a rather artificial one which I have devised to provoke discussion, it is possible that Kath views this image as particularly loaded. She may be alert to the fact that this image has been expressly chosen to evoke discussion and thus, that it is likely to be provocative. Also, my request that they *just give their immediate reaction, without thinking* is an attempt to prime the young women to respond candidly. They have probably recognised this attempt to prime them, and are consequently resisting a candid discussion of the meanings surrounding female fatness. The fact that Kath laughs after describing the woman in question as *curvy* could be interpreted in two ways. Either she is laughing nervously because she is unsure of how to respond to the image. Or she is laughing because she is aware that her description of the woman is so euphemistic and understated as to appear ironic since the woman is arguably more than simply *curvy*.

Oldish for *old* (2:31 and 2:33): It is possible that this is an attempt to be polite, particularly if the participants perceive me as older. The fact that female aging is a potentially face-threatening topic suggests that it is perceived as socially unacceptable. Thus, references to ageing need to be couched in inoffensive terms. However, the use of the term *oldish* may not simply be euphemistic. It could also be an attempt to modulate the adjective, *old*, similar to the use of an adverb like *somewhat* or *quite* which indicates the degree to which someone

possesses an attribute. Cally may be asserting that the woman in the picture looks *middle-aged*, as opposed to *very* old.

What *expressive* values do words have?

curvy: –
 oldish: –
 attractive: +
 put on weight: –
 naked: – (although only in relation to being fat)

2. Grammar

How does the grammar encode *experiential* values?

Process type	Example
Relational	Kay she's also curvy
	what are your associations with it?
	like what are your first thoughts?
	you know just [what is] your reaction immediately without
	I wouldn't classify her as the most attractive person
	that's very diplomatic
	it's funny
	she looks nice and relaxed
	if if your <u>mom</u> looked like that
	she's not <u>that</u> bad
	she isn't that bad
	she looks quite <u>oldish</u>
	you do get oldish
	that's the <u>no</u> pile
	but she definitely wouldn't be one of the ones
	she's happy with herself
Verbal	no one wants to say
	would you say to her
Mental	let's look at this one
	you see someone like that
	what do you mean
	you know just your reaction immediately
	without (thinking)
	I think personally

	...you choose as attractive
Material	just chilling like
	why is she walking around naked type thing
	she's eating <u>food</u>
	or (she's) drinking actually
	you need to lose weight
	you do <u>naturally</u> put on weight
Existential	why is she in a magazine?

Are there patterns evident in the processes?

- The majority of processes are relational processes. This is unsurprising given the stimulus exercise in which I asked them to reach a consensus on who represents the most attractive women, from a range of pictures. The majority of the attributes relate to aspects of the women's physical appearance (eg. *curvy*, *attractive*, *oldish*). The focus on physical appearance is also evident in the repeated use of the verb *looks* (used 3 times) to encode the relational process. This is further confirmed in the pattern of mental processes, two of which refer to the action of *looking* or *seeing* (2:1 and 2:4). In this case, these actions entail an appraisal of the woman's attractiveness based on her physical appearance. The appraisal element of the conversation is also evident in the participants' use of terms like *choose* and *classify*. Their conversation represents an attempt to negotiate the construction of a taxonomy of women based on physical appearance.
- As one would expect, there are very few material processes in this extract since it is not centred around events and actions. Of the six material processes, four focus on activities related to weight gain or loss: *eating*, *drinking*, *losing weight* and *putting on weight*. Although the participants avoid describing the woman in figure 1 as overweight, these processes reveal a preoccupation with excess weight. The fact that Kath draws attention to the fact that the woman is *eating food or drinking* (2:14) indicates that such behaviour is remarkable in some way. Thus, by explicitly comment on the woman's eating behaviour, Kath encodes her perception that the woman is overweight and should not be eating.

● Are sentences positive or negative?

Mostly positive sentences describing the woman in question. There are only four negative sentences:

- 27 **K:** if if your mom looked like that would you say to her I think you need to lose weight
 28 **Kath:** *noo*
 29 **Cally:** *no!* she's *not* that bad=
 30 **Kath:** =ja she *isn't* and=
 40 but she definitely *wouldn't* be one of the ones you choose as attractive ((laughs))=

The first two negative propositions (2:28 and 2:29) express overt disagreement with my hypothetical statement in 2:27. The elongation of the diphthong /əu/ in 2:28 functions to emphasise Kath's disagreement and Cally's exclamatory *no* is equally emphatic. Both Kath's and Cally's responses may also encode surprise at my bald suggestion that woman in question needs to lose weight. Cally's assertion in 29, with the emphatic use of the adverb *that*, encodes a tacit acknowledgment of my perception that the woman in question is overweight.

Notice that in 2:40, I am the one to pronounce definitively on the attractiveness of the woman in question. In 2:18, Kath tentatively admits that she *would not classify her as the most attractive person*. However, she does not describe her as **unattractive** and in fact, if anything her proposition presupposes that she possesses a degree of attractiveness. Up to this point the participants have been hedging around the issue and it is only when I voice this assertion, that they concede that unambiguously that they do not find the woman attractive. Consequently, in short order, they relegate her to the *no pile* (2:41–6).

How do the grammatical choices encode **relational** values?

- **Are the pronouns *we* and *you* used?**

- 27 **K:** if if *your mom* looked like that would *you* say to her I think *you* need to lose weight
 28 **Kath:** noo
 29 **Cally:** no! she's not *that* bad=
 30 **Kath:** =ja she isn't and=
 31 **Cally:** =especially cause she looks quite *oldish* [and so]
 32 **K:** [ja]
 33 **Cally:** when *you* do get oldish ((laughs)) you do [*naturally* put on weight]

My use of the pronoun *you* in 2:27 is significant: I am seeking to elicit the participants' views on the woman in the picture by hypothetically positioning her as the participants' (*your*) mother. The fact that I position her as their mother (rather than a friend or distant relative) is an attempt to construct a very personal, close relationship between the participants and the woman in question. More importantly, I assume that by positioning the young women in this way I can get them to speak frankly on the topic of female fatness (as if they were a daughter recommending to their mother that she lose weight). This positioning presupposes that the relationship between a mother and child is one in which the child would care about the mother's welfare, specifically about her (excess) weight.

My utterance in 2:27 also reveals my own view that the woman in question is overweight. It is possible that I believed, by speaking openly about my perception of the woman's excess weight, I would encourage the young women to do the same. However, my attempt fails and, far from agreeing with me, they disagree emphatically and seem rather shocked (evident in their emphatic: *noo* and *no!*) that I would suggest commenting negatively on one's mother's weight (however hypothetically). Evidently, they do not share my assumption that a daughter can comment negatively on her mother's weight problem, without appearing rude.

The young women then go on in 2:33 to argue that it is *natural* for a woman to put on weight as she ages. They use *you* as the generic pronoun to refer to women in general, making their assertions generalisable to all older women.

- **What sentence modes are used?**

The majority of Cally and Cath's speech are declaratives, in which they indicate their opinion of the woman in question. Kath poses two rhetorical questions (2:10 and 2:12) which have the illocutionary force of declaratives: they function as negative appraisals of the woman concerned.

I speak eleven times and six of my utterances are interrogatives. By contrast, between the two of them, the participants only pose one interrogative for clarification in 2:7. Kath speaks 13 times and Cally 14 times so they share the floor quite evenly. In most of the other conversations, my utterances represent less than 20% of the contributions but in this extract they represent 28%. This in itself suggests that I may have had a significant role in shaping the direction of the conversation. The fact that over half my utterances are interrogatives is a function of my increased power in the interaction.

In this conversation, I believe my increased power had a striking effect on the course of the conversation. I believe that my interrogatives in the following exchange have the illocutionary force of directives since my increased power in the interaction means the young women are obliged to respond:

- 4 **K:** [when you see someone like that]
 5 what are your associations with it?
 8 **K:** like what are your first thoughts? you know just your reaction immediately without
 9 [(thinking)]
 27 **K:** if if your mom looked like that would you say to her I think you need to lose weight?

In lines 8 to 9 my incomplete sentence, *you know just your reaction immediately without thinking* could be interpreted in two ways, either as an interrogative or a directive: *you know just **what is** your reaction immediately without thinking?* or *just **give me** your reaction immediately without thinking*. Even if one interprets it as an interrogative, it still carries the force of a directive, constraining the young women's subsequent utterances since they are obliged to respond to me.

How does the grammar encode **expressive** values?

- **Are there modal verbs? If so, how are these used?**

18 **Kath:** [I *wouldn't* classify her as the most attractive] person ((laughs))
 The modal *wouldn't* softens the negative judgement by introducing a level of tentativeness or conditionality to the proposition. Compare it with an assertion like: *she **is not** the most attractive person*, which expresses more certainty on the part of the speaker. It represents a definitive and more uncompromising view than that expressed in 2:18 through the use of the modal verb.

- **How do the patterns of tense and adverbs encode expressive modality?**

- 27 **K:** if if your mom looked like that would you say to her I think you need to lose weight?
 28 **Kath:** noo
 29 **Cally:** no! she's not *that* bad=

Given the emphasis on the adverb *that*, I argue that it carries contrastive value: it encodes a contrast with my previous assertion in 2:27. It implies that the subject is not as *bad* as I suggest. Combined with Cally's emphatic disagreement, her use of present tense to express a generalisable truth and the lack of subjective modality markers (eg. *I think*), the adverb encodes high expressive modality in this context. It indexes Cally's certainty that her assertion is defensible and accurate.

- 38 **K:** [okay]
 39 (.)
 40 but she *definitely* wouldn't be one of the ones you choose as attractive? ((laughs))=

My utterance in 2:40 represents an attempt to ascertain the participants' view of the woman in figure 1. The use of the adverb *definitely* encodes high expressive modality: although I am speaking on their behalf, I am certain of their appraisal of the woman in the picture. In terms of relational value, my laughter may be an attempt to soften the potential offense caused by this assertion: by implying that the woman is unattractive, I risk appearing critical and unkind.

33 **Cally:** when you do get oldish ((laughs)) you do [naturally put on weight]
 The auxiliary verb *do* emphasises the relationship between female weight gain and ageing. It is possible that the auxiliary *do* also carries oppositional value: it presupposes that the corresponding negative equivalent is true, namely that when one is *not* oldish (i.e. when one is young) one does *not*

naturally gain weight. This reproduces the Western cultural ideal in which beauty, as represented by the slim female body, is identified with youth. Although it may be acceptable, even *natural* for a woman to gain weight when she ages, it is not acceptable for her to be overweight when she is young (Bordo 2003; Blum 2001).

Connective values: How are sentences linked together?

40 **K:** *but* she definitely wouldn't be one of the ones you'd choose as attractive? ((laughs))=
The connector *but* signals that I am about to present an oppositional view to the preceding ones. In this case, the utterance introduced by *but* does not represent a completely oppositional view since the young women have insinuated that they do not consider the woman concerned attractive. However, unlike the young women's carefully phrased, inoffensive statements, my assertion is bold and frank. In this sense it is in opposition to the young women's censored, politically correct descriptions of the woman as *not the most attractive* (2:18) and *curvy* (2:2).

- **What means are used for referring outside and inside the text?**

2 Kay she's *also* curvy ((laughs))
The adverb, also implies a comparison with a preceding image – discussed above in relation to the preceding conversation which provides the context for the current extract.

22 **K:** it's funny *no one* wants [to say]
The use of *no one* encodes an intertextual reference to previous conversations with other young women in the study. I used this particular image as part of the consensus exercise with four friendship groups previously (three in the pilot study and one in the main study). My comment in 2:22 reveals a similarity across the groups, namely that the young women were hesitant to respond to the image. This similarity across the groups (both the university-aged students in the pilot study and the school learners in the main study)

4 **K:** [when you see *someone like that*]
The phrase *someone like that* encodes an intertextual reference to an anti-fat discourse – by using the spatial marker *that* to indicate something which is distant from the speaker and hearer, I am disaffiliating myself and my interlocutors from the referent (relational value). I am othering the referent as part of the out-group, based on her physical appearance, specifically her body size. I realise, in retrospect that my sense of disaffiliation from the woman concerned is based on my perception that she is unlike me: I perceive that she is overweight and I am not. Subconsciously, I was seeking to distance myself and my interlocutors from her. This constitutes a signal (however subtle) to the young women that I would align myself with an anti-fat stance and therefore, that they can adopt a similar stance without fearing a rebuke from me.

3. Textual structures

Turn-taking structures

Unlike some of the other conversations, this extract features very few overlaps and latched utterances, which, had they been present would have indicated the participants' interest and engagement in the topic. In the few instances of overlapping speech, the overlaps occur when one speaker is completing a turn and the other is giving a minimal response to show their support and sustained interest. Thus, the overlaps are supportive, rather than violative. This is unsurprising since the participants are not vying for the floor. If anything, they are reluctant to speak as is evident from the pauses in 2:6, 2:39 and 2:45 and the lack of contiguous utterances.

Some examples are provided below of supportive overlaps, where the overlap occurs close to the end of the first speaker's utterance (indication of a possible misinterpreted TRP by the second speaker), and where the overlap features a minimal response from the second speaker:

- 12 **Kath:** ((laughs)) why is she walking around naked [type thing] (close to clause boundary)
 13 **Cally:** [ja] (minimal response)
 31 **Cally:** =especially cause she looks quite oldish [and so]
 32 **K:** [ja]
 35 **Kath:** happy with herself then [fine]
 36 **Cally:** [ja]
 37 **Cally:** well I think [personally]
 38 **K:** [okay]

Contiguous utterances occur at the end of a speaker's turn and at the start of a minimal response. This is evidence of the co-operative, supportive nature of the extract: the speakers are attentive to each other's contributions and signal their agreement through minimal responses. Given their apparent reluctance to respond to the picture, it is possible that the young women feel the need to indicate their solidarity and support of each other's views in this extract. Since the young women's utterances are hesitant and couched in politically correct language, it seems unlikely that they would be prepared to disagree on a topic which is so contentious and potentially offensive that it warrants censorship in the first place.

Below are some examples of latched utterances which occur at the end of a turn and at the start of the next speaker's supportive response:

- 16 **Kath:** ja=
 17 **Cally:** =she's [(
 [...]
 23 **Cally:** [she looks] nice and relaxed and=
 24 **K:** =okay=
 25 **Cally:** =ja
 [...]
 29 **Cally:** no! she's not that bad=
 30 **Kath:** =ja she isn't and=
 31 **Cally:** =especially cause she looks quite oldish and so
 [...]
 40 but she definitely wouldn't be one of the ones you choose as attractive? ((laughs))=
 41 **Kath:** =no=
 42 **Cally:** =no
 43 **K:** kay=
 44 **Cally:** =okay

APPENDIX E₃: DESCRIPTION OF EXTRACT 3

1. Vocabulary

What *experiential* values do words have?

- **Classification schemes**
Body shape: fat/thin/fat ass/thin/skinny/anorexic/bigger
Psychosomatic pathologies: anorexia/bulimia/sports maniac
Psychological states: happy/content/mindset/unhappy/have a good life
- **Overwording**
 happy (x11), content (x3), have/ing a good life (x3)
 unhappy (x2)
 fat (x11), big(ger) x2
 skinny(x2), thin(x3), anorexic (x5)
 healthy x4
 weight (x4)

What *relational* values do words have?

- **Dysphemism**
fat ass
 big mama!

What *expressive* values do words have?

skinny/thin: –
 fat: contested
 healthy: +
 sports maniac: –
 anorexic: –
 bulimic: –
 big mama: –

2. Grammar

How does the grammar encode *experiential* values?

- **What types of process are used?**

Process type	Example
Relational	it's better to be <u>fat</u> ?
	just content with yourself
	you're content with yourself
	you're so anorexic
	you're happy with yourself
	you're anorexic

	you can't be content with yourself
	if you're happy
	what you <u>are</u>
	if you're having a good life
	you're anorexic
	have a good life
	be unhappy
	what anorexic could have a good life?
	you're <u>not</u> fat
	you're fat
	you're <u>unhappy</u>
	some people <u>are</u> just happy
	teenagers that are fat are happy
	it really has a <u>lot</u> to do with weight
	weight that makes you happy or not
	if you <u>are</u> have the tendency to be a happy person
	you <u>will</u> be happy
	she's a <u>happy</u> person
	she was like she was <u>soo</u> happy
	am who who was <u>so</u> like anorexic...
	she was <u>much</u> happier
	she was <u>fat</u>
	she was bigger
	she was like <u>thin</u> thin thin
	she was a <u>sport</u> maniac
	she was ten times happier
	and she looked happier as well
	it's more of a mindset
	you might be happier
	you're <u>healthy</u>
	you're skinny like that
	you're not really <u>healthy</u>
	it's <u>harder</u>
	be happy
	you mustn't be like a <u>fat ass</u>
	that's also <u>dangerous</u>

	you're not healthy <u>either</u>
	I'm a big <u>mama</u> !
Mental	I know
	they're constantly worried
	I think
	trying to <u>control</u> things
Verbal	you're not like WOOOO WOOO! (quotative use of like)
	you're not like... (quotative use of like)
	you're like... (quotative use of like)
	she she said to me
	she said that she was ten times happier
Material	she <u>put</u> on weight
	she like had to stop doing sport
	she just put on like all this <u>weight</u>
	it takes up a lot of energy to <u>smile</u>

- Are sentences positive or negative?

There are several negative propositions relating to what is **not** healthy:

4 **Timega:** [kay well maybe **not** that overboard]

5 **Winnie:** [well **not** fat]

8 **Timega:** if you're content with yourself but you're so anorexic that you're about to die then
9 obviously **not**

67 **Timega:** but just because you're healthy like when you're skinny like that you're **not** really
68 **healthy**

71 **Timega:** ja cause then you're **not** healthy either

Note the use of *can't* in the proposition below suggests an inability to be self-content ie. it removes the sense of choice and makes the proposition very certain. Compare with: *but if you're anorexic you won't be content* or *you might not be* or *you probably won't be*:

12 **Winnie:** =but if you're anorexic you **can't** be content with yourself=

How do the grammatical choices encode **relational** values?

- Are the pronouns *we* and *you* used?

You used as the generic form. This is important in terms of the discussion of anorexics: note how the participants' use of *you* changes in line 3:20 to *they* to encode their sense of disaffiliation from anorexics.

6 **Timega:** just content with *yourself* but in a healthy way [because]

7 **Winnie:** [it doesn't]

8 **Timega:** if *you're* content with *yourself* but *you're* so anorexic that you're about to die then
9 obviously not

10 **K:** okay=

11 **Timega:**=but like if *you're* happy with *yourself*=

- 12 **Winnie:** =but if *you're* anorexic *you* can't be content with *yourself*=
 15 **Hayley:** [if *you're* happy with what *you are*] if *you're* having a good life and *you're* anorexic
 16 then I know it sounds horrible but then rather have a good life for a short period of time then
 17 be unhappy for the rest of *your* life=
 18 **Winnie:** =but Hayle what anorexic could have a good life?
 19 **Hayley:** [But the thing is just in case]
 20 **Winnie:** [*they're* constantly worried about what *they're* eating]

- **What sentence modes are used?**

Mainly declaratives but note how I pose all the interrogatives (3 in total), indexing my asymmetrical rights to ask questions:

- 1 **K:** So you reckon it's better to be fat? =
 3 **K:** looking at those pictures?
 59 **K:** [Really?]

How does the grammar encode **expressive** values?

- **Are there modal verbs? If so, how are these used?**

- 18 **Winnie:** =but Hayle what anorexic *could* have a good life?
 The modal *could* introduces a bit of tentativeness to Winnie's question. But when interpreted in the context of her other utterances (3:12, 3:20), in which she uses the present tense to express what she perceives as universally valid truths and in which she pronounces definitively on the link between anorexia and unhappiness, it is clear that the balance of Winnie's utterances indicate her certainty that anorexics are *not* self-content. Therefore, this one instance of lowered epistemic modality is not particularly significant. Perhaps the lowered epistemic modality here is actually implicitly relational. Notice that she's disagreeing with Hayley – dispreferred response – so some hesitancy is called for here.

The modal *might* indexes low probability and the participant's lack of commitment to the truth value of the proposition ie. she thinks it unlikely that you can be fat and happy (experiential value). She recognises the statement as controversial, as one possible interpretation, rather than as "fact":

- 64 **Timega:** and the only reason you *might* be happier when you're
 65 [fat is well not necessarily fat is]

- **How do the patterns of tense and adverbs encode expressive modality?**

Use of present tense indicates speaker's perception that what she is saying is generalisable, i.e. it signals a high level of commitment to the truth value of the proposition. For example:

- 67 **Timega:** but just because you're healthy like when you're skinny like that you're not really
 68 healthy so it's harder it it takes up a lot of energy to smile and like be happy and but like
 69 obviously you musn't be like a fat ass but like
 70 **Winnie:** ((laughs)) [ja cause that's also dangerous]
 71 **Timega:** [ja cause then you're not healthy either]

The five "if...then" conditional statements below encode low expressive modality. The use of present tense in this section does not necessarily index universally valid truths. The "truths" are conditional (signalled by the use of "if...then"/hypothetical propositions) and thus, the expressive modality is

lower than in other sections of the text (eg. 3:76–80). Hayley's position is particularly tentative and her use of the hedge, *I know it sounds horrible but*, indicates her perception that her viewpoint is controversial. In 3:19 she emphasises her awareness that the situation she is proposing is *not* universally valid but is hypothetical at best: *But the thing is just in case*:

- 8 **Timega:** if you're content with yourself but you're so anorexic that you're about to die **then**
 9 obviously not
 10 **K:** okay=
 11 **Timega:** =but like **if** you're happy with yourself=
 12 **Winnie:** =but **if** you're anorexic you can't be content with yourself=
 13 **Sophie:** =ja=
 14 **Timega:** =ja well maybe [you will get to that]
 15 **Hayley:** [**if** you're happy with what you are] **if** you're having a good life and you're anorexic
 16 **then** I know it sounds horrible but then rather have a good life for a short period of time then
 17 be unhappy for the rest of your life=
 18 **Winnie:** =but Hayle what anorexic could have a good life?
 19 **Hayley:** [But the thing is just in case]
 20 **Winnie:** [they're constantly worried about what they're eating]

In line 3:32 below Winnie contradicts Timega's previous statements equating fatness with unhappiness. Her use of present tense and, particularly her emphasis on the verb *are* carries high expressive modality. Timega emphatically agrees (*ja!* in 3:33) with this statement, despite the contradiction between the anti-fat position she espouses in 3:23–31 and her current position. However, her use of the subjective modality markers, *I don't think* (3:33), and *I think* (3:37) and the qualifying adverbials *really* (3:33) and *generally* (3:37) encode low expressive modality:

- 32 **Winnie:** =some people are just happy though=
 33 **Timega:** =ja! so I don't think it really has [a lot to do with]
 34 **Winnie:** [I don't think teenagers] that are fat are happy
 35 [but like once you've got like past]
 36 **Timega:** [weight that makes you] happy or not
 37 I think generally if you are have the tendency to be a happy person you will be happy
 38 [whether you're fat or skinny]

Timega's use of the present tense to describe what she perceives is a universally valid truth (*you're healthy when you're skinny...you're not really healthy...then you're not healthy either*), the use of the adverbial *obviously* (3:69) and the absence of qualifiers or subjective modality markers all indicate high expressive modality, i.e. her commitment to the truth value of this position. Winnie's confirmatory remarks also realise high expressive modality in the form of present tense propositions, the emphatic use of *dangerous* (3:70) and the absence of qualifiers:

- 62 **Timega:** I think it's more of a mindset and [the only reason you might]
 63 **Winnie:** [it is though]
 64 **Timega:** and the only reason you might be happier when you're [fat is well not necessarily 65
 fat is]
 66 **Winnie:** [it's just like about trying to control things]
 67 **Timega:** but just because you're healthy like when you're skinny like that you're not really
 68 healthy so it's harder it takes up a lot of energy to smile and like be happy and but like
 69 obviously you musn't be like a fat ass but like
 70 **Winnie:** ((laughs)) [ja cause that's also dangerous]
 71 **Timega:** [ja cause then you're not healthy either]

Connective values: How are sentences linked together?

- What logical connectors are used?

The adversative conjunction *but* introduces a qualifying statement to the assertion below ie. it specifies the conditions in which you should be content with yourself (to distinguish between being content and suffering from a life-threatening eating disorder and being content and *healthy*):

6 **Timega:** just content with yourself **but** in a healthy way [because]

The adversative conjunction *but* below encodes Winnie's opposition to Timega's statement in 3:11. In all these examples, *but* foregrounds the start of an alternative view being presented:

12 **Winnie:** =**but** if you're anorexic you can't be content with yourself=

18 **Winnie:** =**but** Hayle what anorexic could have a good life?

19 **Hayley:** [**But** the thing is just in case]

The conjunctions *so* and *and* below encode a causal link between being unhealthy and being unhappy. In 3:68 *but* introduces a condition to her statement – Timega qualifies that, while one mustn't be too thin, one equally mustn't be too fat. Both participants go on to construct a causal link (evident in their use of the logical connector *cause* in 3:70 and 3:71) between excess weight and poor health. Since both being too fat and being too thin are constructed as unhealthy, the participants appear to be implicitly endorsing a balance, a moderate body size and associated eating habits:

67 **Timega:** **but** just because you're healthy like when you're skinny like that you're not really

68 healthy **so** it's harder it takes up a lot of energy to smile **and** like be happy and **but** like

69 obviously you mustn't be like a fat ass but like

70 **Winnie:** ((laughs)) [ja **cause** that's also dangerous]

71 **Timega:** [ja **cause** then you're not healthy either]

3. Textual structures

Turn-taking structures

Timega (19 turns) and Winnie (20 turns) dominate the conversation as they negotiate whether being happy is dependent on one's body size or whether it's a predisposition. Since there is disagreement between these two participants I would classify many of the overlaps as violative as each participant tries to have their point of view heard. Each is vying for the floor to contest the other's claim. However, in the sections where they are collaborating to construct a particular ideology (eg. 3:32–38 and 3:62–71), the overlaps and latched utterances are supportive, evidence of a collaborative floor. They are attending closely to each other's contributions and building on or confirming them.

Sophie only speaks 6 times and her contributions are in the form of minimal responses and clarificatory remarks, rather than original contributions or topic changes. She tries to contribute in 3:22 but is interrupted by Timega. The other girls identified Sophie as a new girl whom they'd only known for a year so it may be that her reticence is due to the fact that she is a relatively new member to the group and doesn't have access to the shared knowledge that the others do. Hayley only speaks five times and one of her utterances is a confirmatory remark, confirming Timega's statement (3:28). She asks for clarification towards the end (3:49) and in 3:15–19 she makes a controversial statement about anorexics, which is quickly contested by Winnie in 3:18. Winnie's rather mocking remark may have caused Hayley's subsequent silence and limited contribution to the rest of the conversation.