Negotiating Liquid Identity Through Hair Supported by the Salon Experience

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores processes of forming fashionable identities through hair with the support of a stylist. Going beyond clothing, there is limited understanding of hair as a socially navigated element of fluid identity.

Bauman's theory of Liquid Modernity frames the destination of self-construction as 'endemically and incurably underdetermined'. Hair is an important yet constantly shifting element of identity and therefore fitting to be examined through a liquid lens. Although hair sometimes functions like dress, in terms of visual communication, it is further complicated because hair is rooted in the body. Growing continually, hair requires regular maintenance to keep it looking 'right'. Importantly, unlike fashion consumption, we usually undertake fashioning the hair with the support of a skilled professional. Hairdressers support and steward clients to navigate fashionable identity with limited resources, therefore potentially offering a model for more responsible forms of engagement with fashion.

This study seeks to answer how identities are formed and how the client and hairdresser negotiate, using interviews with clients and hairdressers, alongside autoethnographic fieldwork visits to salons in the dual role of client/researcher. This rich qualitative approach draws on the experiences of professionals, individuals and embodied experiences within the salon.

Three key themes frame the analysis and form the chapter structure:
Forming Fashionable Identity Through Hairstyling considers the relationship between identity and hair, within the context of a society where constant change is

both encouraged and inevitable. The visual symbolism of hair is complicated by the epoch of universal comparison, causing anxiety and uncertainty. Striving for stability, incremental change and goals that appear solid is a reaction to the contingent and ever-shifting nature of identity within liquidity.

Revealing and Concealing highlights the pressures women experience when navigating liquid identity through their hair. The appearance of women is incurably entangled with the ideals of beauty, which demand effortlessness - that women not only conform to unachievable standards, but also conceal the effort, energy and care they put into these practices.

Negotiation and Collective Crafting identifies how the negotiations that occur in the salon impact the formation of liquid identities. The steer, where hairdressers guide their clients towards styles that 'suit them', revealed that alongside guiding their clients through the unfamiliar terrain of fashion trends, hairdressers also enforced fashion ideals of youth and thinness. The steer is socially enacted and is more effective when performed by a hairdresser with a close relationship akin to friendship.

This thesis concludes that fashioning hair, with a hairdresser, is a supported and ultimately slow way to navigate liquid identity, offering calm and reducing fashion anxiety. This occurs through the expertise of the hairdresser, steering the client towards a version of themselves that feels stable, if only for a moment.

FOREWORD

The endeavour to understand fashion and overconsumption is a driving force behind this thesis. Let me share an anecdote as to how my thinking has developed. Several years ago, I sat in an office in Hertfordshire, stressed about the number of designs I had to produce. I worked for a men's shirting supplier on the High Street. I wondered why I needed to produce a thousand designs a month. The brands we worked with dictated our speed with their demands for newness. With panic in their eyes, salespeople were desperate to show the client more designs. You must keep up or be ejected from the race in a speeding industry. I was good at the job, yet it never felt like I was doing enough. It was no longer sustainable. The pace left no space for passion or experimentation.

The customer was always the priority. "Do you think a *Topman Man* would wear that?" A *Topman Man* was an elusive creature: young, style-conscious, fun and a 'bit of a lad.' In the eyes of the brand, if not himself, Topman gave him his identity. He was constantly changing, moulding or managing his identity by adding a 'cheeky something' to his wardrobe. Could this constant chase for identity through viscose Hawaiian shirts be as unfulfilling for him as it was for me?

I could not shake the feeling that it was detrimental to everyone involved. I was burnt out, but no one was winning. Not the customer or designers and certainly not the overseas production workers. It was all too fast, too much demand, trying to fix a problem by buying. My experiences in the fashion industry have been formative to my understanding of what we wear and who we are. The way we create our identity happens so often through consumption. Brands sell us who we want to be.

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction



Figure 1 - A hairstyle that is 'me' (c.1994)

She is deeply in focus, perhaps three years old. Her brow, although hidden behind a fringe, I know to be furrowed. It is the same face I make when I write. She palms brown paint onto a page.

The little girl in the photo is me, and her hair is like mine now. I run my finger through my bob and readjust my fringe. Of course, it is the same hair growing from the same head, but the style is similar. The bob is a haircut which has represented me for so much of my life. Despite trying other options, I always return to a bob and fringe.

Introduction

Every high street in England is lined with hairdressing salons, where women gather to have their hair cut and coloured. However, it is evidently more than just the material cutting of the hair that takes place there. This research explores how women negotiate their fashionable identity through styling their hair. Hair is positioned at an intersection of fashion(ability), the female body and selfhood/individuality. These three concepts form a framework to examine the everyday happenings in women's hairdressing salons. Alongside these three key considerations, the study uses Zygmunt Bauman's concept of liquidity (2000) to frame the context of contemporary society.

Everyone is implicated in fashion, whether they see themselves as fashionable or not. This PhD takes the perspective that constructing the individual in the eyes of others is not limited to material clothing but also includes a range of fashioning practices. While it is not alone in this perspective, academics often focus purely on clothing as an example when discussing fashioning. I investigate the process of curating the surface of the body and its adornment as the formation of identity internally and its communication to others through hair. This process happens through both social and physical work in the salon.

This study is underpinned by a concern the wastefulness of the current fashion industry. Navigating ever-changing and boundaryless identity

through clothing necessitates buying and then disposing of physical clothing. In hair, there is a ready example of an existing, commonplace and everyday way that liquid identity is navigated, without the material cost of clothing. Instead, it uses the limited and materially resistant resource of hair. Importantly, this process is undertaken with the support of a trained professional, rather than alone.

Fashioning the Self, The Female Body and Hair Within Liquidity

Fashion/ing the Self

Before I reach the topic of hair, there are several key concepts which form the backbone of this thesis. I will outline them here, before zooming in on the specifics of hair and hairdressing. These are fashion/ing the self, the female body and liquidity. These are essential to introduce upfront as I will use them throughout the thesis to better explain hair and hairdressing practices and the embodied experience of navigating them.

Fashion is a word with complex meanings.

> Fashion is (a) an intangible force (b) that is manifested in tangible products, (c) that represent newness relative to prior fashion products, (d) are

> adopted by a group of people, and (e) are reflections of society and culture. (Reilly, 2020, p. 13)

I will borrow Reilly's (2020) definitions in this thesis. He uses *dress* to mean anything worn on the body, items held in it, or modifications made to it (Reilly, 2020). He includes hairstyles within body modifications, clearly defining styling the hair as a dress practice. *A fashion* is an article of dress that has or will become popular, which he gives the example of a bobbed haircut. *The fashion* refers to the social process where an article of dress is adopted by many people. This thesis uses *fashion* as a broad term encompassing all the elements described by Reilly, but it is particularly concerned with the intangible force and the impact this has on everyday dress practices.

Work relating fashion and identity historically focuses on clothing. I will briefly explain how clothing is used to give the body identity, before moving on to discuss hair.

Sociologists like Georg Simmel (1957) and Pierre Bourdieu (1986) have long chronicled the link between fashion (clothes) and identity. Their work provides frameworks for understanding clothing, which has been built on by fashion theorists. It is widely accepted in fashion theory that clothing is an integral part of communicating about ourselves and that clothing goes beyond warmth, shelter and protection (Woodward, 2007; Wilson, 2013; Entwistle, 2015; Thomas, 2019). Joanne Entwistle (2007) describes dress and adornment as "one of the means by which bodies are made social and given meaning and identity" (p. 274). Clothing, amongst

other forms of adornment, can transform the body into a means of communication. I describe this process of socially imbuing clothing and other adornments as fashioning.

Entwistle believes that to dress the body is to prepare it for the social world, shaping it to be "appropriate, acceptable, indeed respectable and possibly even desirable" (2007, p. 274). Clothing the body is an intimate private act, which prepares the body for public presentation (Entwistle, 2015) and as such, cannot be understood outside of social context.

Sophie Woodward confirms and extends this. "Clothing mediates the relationship between the individual woman and the outside world" (2005, p. 22). Through selecting and rejecting items of clothing, women produce a vision of an individual, for others to interpret. Clothing, can be expressive of identity, including aspects of class, gender, status and more, but its communication is not always clear so is easily misunderstood (Entwistle, 2015).

While fashion theorists mainly focus on dress through material garments, the concept of dress can include a more diverse understanding that includes bodily modifications and changes to the body's surface (Roach-Higgins and Eicher, 1995; Wilson, 2013; Entwistle, 2015; Reilly, 2020). Geraldine Biddle-Perry and Sarah Cheang (2008) make the connection between fashion and hair explicit by applying Entwistle's (2007) definition of fashion to it. There is an innately human quality in adorning the hair, which is stated most simply by Sarah Vincent:

"Anthropologically speaking, hair is some of the basic stuff with which we 'do' being human" (Vincent, 2018, p. 8). Vincent identifies that hair is essential to humanity's social experience, as is said about fashion.

Discussing hair's position as innately connected to selfhood and society, Royce Mahawatte (2022) argues that hair fashions express individual agency but have a complex relationship with how the self conforms to the group. He states that fashioning the hair demonstrates the interplay between 'resistance and conformity.' This echoes Simmel's (1997 [1904]) concept of differentiation and belonging. It signals belonging to a particular social group, class or culture, while also offering the possibility to distinguish oneself from those people.

To one level or another, almost all people care for and about their hair. "One thing that is clear is that *actual* natural hair - hair that is uncut, uncombed, and unwashed – is a social impossibility." (Mahawatte, 2022, p. 45). Hair must be cared for to take part in society. It is rare, and perhaps worrying, to see an individual entirely disengaged with their haircare.

The Female Body

Discussing fashion (clothing) *can* be done without considering the body, however, theorists like Entwistle have long argued for greater inclusion of the bodies in the study of fashion. Hair cannot be separated from the

body in the same way, so provides a pressing example of how everyday fashioning and the body interact.

In *Fashion and the Fleshy Body: Dress as an Embodied Practice (2000),* Entwistle argues that humans *have* bodies, *are* bodies and *dress* bodies. In dressing the body, it is embellished, and meaning is added. Building from Simone de Beauvoir's *The second sex* (1997 [written 1949]), Keile E. Tyner and Jennifer Paff Ogle explain that the female body acts as a canvas which "cultural constructions of identity" (Tyner and Ogle, 2009, p. 98) are inscribed upon. In dressing the body, the appearance of the body is altered, blurring the boundary of dress/body.

The body itself is subject to fashions, just as clothing is (Tyner and Ogle, 2009). Further than being passively subjected to the whims of fashion trends, the body is actively shaped by discourses on fashion, and, in turn, the embodied practices of dress and bodily presentation are impacted (Entwistle, 2000). Later in this introduction, I will detail the changing fashions in hair through the 20th century, showing how those swings in fashion relate to wider swings in culture.

In addition to being a means to communicate individual identity, hair also communicates inherited identity. It carries a person's DNA, growing in a particular colour, thickness or texture to reflect their genetics. Hair is inescapably linked to the body it belongs to.

> hair can exert a magical power even greater than that of accessories and clothes, in part because it

> functions as both simultaneously [and in part because] hair belongs (or appears to belong) to the body of the person who wears it ... (Roach 2007, p. 117)

While hair is often discussed as equivalent, or at least like, clothing, it is essential to consider that it is "physically 'rooted' in the biological body" (Mahawatte, 2022, p. 45). Besides being a fashion object, hair also contains a particular set of material qualities. Hair is made from a structural protein called Keratin, which gives hair its tensile strength (McKittrick *et al.*, 2012). Hair is "shafts of circumferential layers of dead cells that have grown from follicles in the skin" (McKittrick *et al.*, 2012, p. 452).

It is this in-betweenness of body and fashion that makes hair the perfect subject matter to answer Entwistle's call for greater consideration of the body within works that connect fashion as concept to fashion as everyday practice. She argues for the importance of understanding the embodied practices of fashioning the body, alongside understanding how that body is produced in relation to the fashion system.

> understanding the body in culture requires understanding both how the textual body (the body articulated in discourses produced by texts, such as the fashion magazine) relates to the experience of embodiment (the body articulated in everyday life through experiences and practices of dress). (Entwistle, 2015, p. 217)

She argues that the body is the missing link between the cultural industry of fashion and fashion as an embodied everyday practice. "All these complex negotiations are part and parcel of the everyday experience of fashion in people's daily dress and yet there is little or no recognition of these in academic studies of fashion." (Entwistle, 2015, p. 217)

Throughout this thesis, I will also discuss beauty, which overlaps significantly with fashion. Both are the often feminised processes of working upon the outside of the body, in line with, often unspoken, cultural norms. Where fashion tends to be used more commonly to talk about clothing, beauty is used to discuss a rootedness in the (often female) body. Hair clearly overlaps these boundaries. Hair can be weaponised in the pursuit of fashion and beauty, or perhaps, become a saboteur—resisting control, defying trends, and undermining the very ideals it is meant to achieve.

Identity within Liquid Modernity

Whatever pursuits are undertaken to fashion the self and the female body, they exist within a specific cultural epoch. The culture of the time dictates the norms and practices. Zygmunt Bauman characterizes contemporary society as *Liquid Modernity*, and the sense of self within it as *Liquid Identity*. I adopt the term *liquidity*, drawing from Bauman, to encompass both concepts. Bauman's work on liquidity (2000, 2005, 2011) accounts for the individualised nature of contemporary society,

and that individualised identity as lacking solid form. While Bauman's writing extends to a wide range of disciplines, ambling poetically through sociology, philosophy, politics and more, his particular fascination with contingent individualisation within "the ephemeral state of contemporary society" (Bauman, 2000, p. 14) will be most relevant to analyse the complex factors impacting choices and experiences around styling the hair.

Bauman uses 'liquidity' as a fitting metaphor for our contemporary life. Liquid modernity, offered as an alternative to post-modernity, better highlights the intangible and fluid nature of society. "We are presently moving from the era of pre-allocated 'reference groups' into the epoch of 'universal comparison' and individuals must constantly adapt to their changing contexts" (Bauman, 2000, p. 7). Self-constructing labours, within liquidity, are "endemically and incurably undetermined" and only end with the end of the individual's life. Bauman describes that society must admit "its own incompleteness and therefore anxious to attend its own as yet un-intuited, let alone explored, possibilities" (Bauman, 2007, p. 6). Bauman's work highlights the endless and terrifying possibility of identity within liquid society.

While Bauman's work usually addresses a wider understanding of the state of society, he addresses fashion directly in *Perpetuum Mobile* (2010). This text describes modern western fashion's essentially changeable quality. He likens it to swinging like a pendulum, a "self-invigorating process" (2010, p. 55) of self-created motion. Its motion is

constant; more than that, it actively works against stability or stagnation. "The perpetuum mobile of fashion is thereby the dedicated, dexterous and seasoned destroyer of all and any standstill. Fashion casts lifestyles in the mode of permanent and principally unfinishable revolution" (Bauman, 2010, p. 57). The fluidity of self-presentation and identity is critical to this thesis. The necessity for change, we find in fashion, is visible throughout the process of self-creation through dress.

Liquidity offers insight into both fashion as an industry, a globalised, alienated and forceful power and the experiences of the individual within the fearful swell this produces. Bauman largely speaks about society as a whole, looking down on the larger picture. Hviid Jacobson (2023) suggests that Bauman can be considered a 'Pegasus[1]' sociologist – illuminating the way things are and painting the bigger picture. This is not the full scope of Bauman's work, he also applies liquidity practically to understand the individual within that system and the specifics of fashioning. As Baker Jones explains, "his accessible writings are a clear-eyed assessment of the trials and tribulations of individual humans as well as the systems humans have constructed." (2023, p. 14)

This thesis answers calls for the better use of Bauman to understand fashion and the body. Raymond L.M. Lee (2006) points to the importance of the body within liquidity. Baker Jones champions the fashion theorists using Bauman in more than a passing mention. She argues that

[1] borrowing Walter Korpi's (1990) fairytale-inspired categories

Bauman's works' transdisciplinary nature makes them well-suited for critiquing everyday life (Jones, 2023).

Seeing the individual as incurably unfinished can help to understand their experiences around their hair, which is also incurably unfinished by nature. Hair is, in some ways, a brilliant metaphor for Bauman's liquidity. The instability of identity within liquidity has parallel because hair is always in constant motion. Hair is always growing. As a result, the hair is never finished. In the salon, a haircut may be presented as finished, but it is already starting to grow out. The endeavour to keep the hair the same, requires repeated attention. All our attempts to control our hair, quicky degenerate as it grows, colours fade, curls fall. It is also worth considering the constant motion of hair. The strands fall together as one, with a fluid quality. Unlike something like makeup, which once put on the face (ideally) stays where it is put, hair moves (Holmes, 2010).

Liquidity is both a fitting metaphor for hair and a vibrant portrait of contemporary culture. Bauman's musings pave the way for my analysis and allow the critical examination of the very water we swim in, incurably unfinished and fighting for a sense of self as liquidity's currents take us.

Background and Context

Shifting Trends in Hairstyles Through the 20th Century

This section provides the critical context as a foundation for the rest of the thesis. I provide a brief background of hairstyles, hairdressing salons and the hairdressers themselves through a selection of pertinent examples. The development of different hairstyles reflects wider trends in culture and highlights the trend-driven nature of hair. Even cutting women's hair at all is a relatively recent development. Due to its everyday nature, it can be easy to assume it is a naturalistic interaction. It is pertinent to consider hairdressing as culturally situated within modernity.

I will detail several hairstyles that are relevant to understanding the development of contemporary hairdressing and, therefore, the experiences my participants have navigating fashions in hair. The examples focus on the 20th century, as it is essential to understand that the way we wear our hair now is a product of modernity. This thesis will take time to explore women's experiences with their hair within the framework of liquid modernity. Like clothing (Wilson, 2013), the way we style our hair is dictated by our capitalist society and the need to be seen in metropolitan life.

When the participants in this study make choices about what they should do with their hair, they are not doing so in a vacuum. Small ethnographic studies can be compromised by a lack of attention to the wider culture

they exist within. Like clothing, hairstyles follow trend cycles, which are impacted by the cultural zeitgeist. Illustrating how the trends in hair have moved historically demonstrates the connection between styles of hair and broader culture. Alice Beard states that "hair is always part of the narrative drive of fashion's dynamic and cyclical movement" (2022, p. 73). Understanding hair's history aids understanding hair now, and more than that, it sheds light on its importance to fashion.

Books about hair and its history often offer an overview of the meanings of hair and how they have changed over time without much criticality (Cox and Widdows, 2005; Philippon, 2013; Pivetta, 2017 (Corson, 1965; Trasko, 1994; Bryer, 2000; Vincent, 2018). There is much overlap in these books, and commonly selected examples often offer spectacular examples that are indicative of a wider property of hair. For example, Ancient Egyptian culture offers an early example of hair being a commonly used part of identity construction (Corson, 1965; Fletcher, 1995, 2016; Tassie, 2009; Fletcher and Salamone, 2016). Hair's power to demonstrate wealth and social status is shown through the eighteenth-century fashion of comically giant, impractical wigs adopted by British aristocrats (Powell and Roach, 2004; Rosenthal, 2004; Kwass, 2006; Cross, 2008; Markiewicz, 2014, 2018). The Victorian practice of keeping the hair of a loved one, often after their death, establishes hair as a morbid material (Pointon, 2009; Lutz, 2011; Vincent, 2018; Yan, 2019; Arias, 2020). Except for Philipon (2013), histories of hair do not claim to be about the hair of white people specifically but, in practice, largely omit talking about the hair of non-white people. The absence (or

brief passing mentions) of people of colour is possibly unsurprising as it reflects the broader tendency for fashion history to focus on the white, European upper classes.

Examples from the twentieth century are more useful for understanding some of the cultural forces and images the participants in this research navigate when they decide on a hairstyle. Echoes of these trends can still be seen in contemporary styles. I will use a few select examples from the history of hairstyles, where stylistic preferences changed and became iconic of an era or broader cultural value. Particularly, understanding how hairstyles have developed in line with modernity, femininity, and fashion aesthetics will be useful for this study.

The bob demonstrates the connection between hair and modernity well. Smith reports that the bob, synonymous with the 1920s, signified a break from tradition and a new fashionable ideal (Smith, 2022). The bob was both practical for women working jobs traditionally done by men and glamorous for those navigating the speed of open-topped vehicles. The sleek, streamlined style was both aesthetically and idealistically aligned with the emerging modernist ideals. Vincent argues that while the bob "gave visual expression to modernity," it also marked "a new kind of womanhood" (2018, p. 208).

The popularisation of this style marked a sudden and distinct change in how women wanted to be seen. Choosing this new short style was an entirely feminine adoption of oppositional politics of self-presentation

(Vincent, 2018). The hairstyle roused a moral panic, with the press claiming women committed suicide because of the regret of bobbing their hair (Vincent, 2018). The example of the bob highlights just how important the hair looking has seemed for the last hundred years.

The new style was met with fear, as critics believed it was associated with queerness and represented a loss of femininity (McMutrie, 2010). Suddenly, women wanted their hair cut, not simply styled. The shorter style required more regular cutting, and so the invention and popularisation of the bob were also instrumental in the development of hairdressing salons as we know them (detailed in a later 'Histories of Salons' section). The bob can still be regularly seen in hair trends in one form or another. To choose this style may still, consciously or unconsciously, signify a cool rejection of expectations.

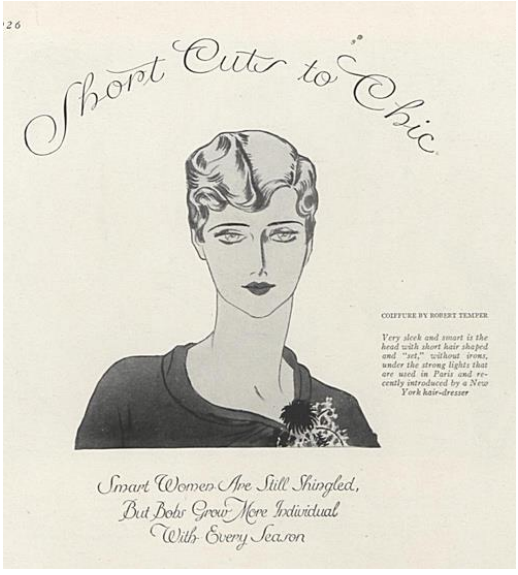


Figure 2 - Illustration from Vogue US showing a bob for the current season (1926)

Later, in the 1950s, when hair returned to a more traditional feminine silhouette and was coiffed and teased (Vincent, 2018), fashions moved towards a softer look, popularised by hairdresser Freddy French (Cox, 1999). This signalled a pendulum swing back towards a more conservative conception of femininity during the post-war period.



Figure 3 - Freddy French with his creation (c.1950)

Alice Beard describes the 'new bob' as "a dynamic balance of geometry with three angles at the nape of the neck and two on either side of the face" (Beard, 2022, p.74). Invented in the 1960s by celebrity hairdresser Vidal Sassoon, the five-point-cut style became iconic when worn by fashion designer Mary Quant and cemented the relationship between hair and fashion. Simultaneously, during the 60s, hair fashions were also influenced by the youth revolution. The Beatles inspired a trend of 'long hair' for men, which was short by today's standards but rebellious at the time (Vincent, 2018). Women also had long hair, but it was not seen as

unkempt but as a ‘crowning glory.’ Long hair became a signal of counterculture: an anti-Vietnam war, hippy, left-wing and American counterculture. The rebellious 1960s paved the way for the subcultures of the 1970s, including punks who thoroughly rejected ‘hair rules’ (Vincent, 2018) and subverted expectations about hair. Some of my participants self-describe as ’alternative’ and follow these historical examples of counterculture.



Figure 4 - Sassoon's 5-point cut (c. 1960)

The 1980s fashion for ‘big hair’ provides another pertinent example of a moment where women’s hairstyling reflects contemporary culture shifts. McCracken believes that, at that time, a blunt cut and perm symbolised success (McCracken, 1995). Accompanied by the ‘dress for success’ fashion trend, “the blunt cut exploded the gilded cage that imprisoned women in the role of gentle, bending creatures” (McCracken, 1995, p. 42) as women became at home in the corporate world. The meanings of

hair shift with the movement of fashions in clothing; Grant McCracken (1995) details the need of Brenda, a New York lawyer, to abandon her '80s perm for something more suitable for the '90s in her quest for a "new self to match the new decade" (McCracken, 1995, p. 44). Shifts in the hair are inseparable from shifts in the self, and this was particularly the case as women developed their position within capitalism.

Just looking at these examples, out of endless other possible examples, explain how hair responds to shifts in culture, fashion, self-expression, gender, which are mentioned at various points by my participants.

Origins and Formation of the Contemporary Salon

Hairdressing, unlike many other forms of fashioning, often takes place in the specific site of the hairdressing salon. The salons included in this study, are the product of a long history and facilitated the shift from 'dressed hair' to 'cut hair'. This context shows that the same reflection of culture in hairstyling is mirrored in the salons themselves. In situated ethnographic work, particularly, understanding of the research site is essential as it shapes the data. Today's salons are largely still segregated race (Willson, 2024) and split by gender (Smith, 2008), and therefore, the salons I have visited mostly reflect a female, white, heterosexual, middle-class experience.

Like the history of hair, the history of hairdressing salons reflects wider shifts in culture. Providing the context behind contemporary salons will allow a greater understanding of their evolution, which shines a light on the rituals that take place within them. I will relate the history of women's salons to the history of women's hair in the 20th Century. The contemporary UK hair and beauty industry generated £4.56bn in turnover in 2022-2023, comprising over 61,000 businesses (NHBF, 2023). It is worth looking at how such a ubiquitous industry came to be.

In pre-modern and pre-industrial societies, women's hair was rarely cut. Women with means would have a maid dress their hair in their sleeping quarters, which was a private matter (Cox, 1999). Critical moments in developing contemporary visual and material culture within modernity (Biddle-Perry, 2020a) have often been accompanied by a change in hair fashion, which has shaped our contemporary hairdressing industry.

The cultural shifts of the 1920s led to the popularity of the women's bob (detailed above). This new style required regular upkeep, which in turn created the demand for stylists with the skills to cut short hair. This profoundly modern phenomenon sent many women to barber shops. Women's hairdressers were initially apprehensive that the shorter styles would require less styling. However, they quickly realised that the shorter styles required increased trips to the salon for trims and upkeep (Smith, 2008). Increasingly, women's salons appeared to meet the demands, marking the shift from hairdressing in the private boudoir to the public space (Smith, 2022).

The development of the British salon as we know it began with the transition from booths within department stores that borrowed aesthetics from family doctor's surgeries to chic, modern open-plan salons that aimed to appear hygienic, contemporary, and cool (Gieben-Gamel 2004). In *Good Hair Days: A History of British Hairstyling* (1999), Cox follows the rise of the British hairdresser and the impact that had on salons. Starting with the bob, she traces the technological and societal changes that led to the 'guru' hairdressers such as Vidal Sassoon in the '60s. These gurus are the origin of the branded hairdressers prevalent on the high street today. The names and brands link them to capitalist aspirations. Clients began to pick salons that reflect their lifestyle, or what they would like their lifestyle to be.



Figure 5 - Women Socialising at a salon in Barnsley (1957)

There is little written about the development of hairdressing salons since the 1960s, despite salons further diversifying. Although the space age hairdryers, sets and perms have fallen out of vogue, the atmosphere, technology and services offered remain essentially unchanged. As this research looks at the negotiations between client and hairdresser, in the salon, it is essential to understand how and why salons function as they do. This will be even more important for the autoethnographic portion of the study, where I visited multiple salons.

Despite the cheaper and more convenient alternatives like an at-home hairdresser, hairdressing and beauty services on UK high streets grew by 14% between 2014 and 2018 (Office for National Statistics, 2020). In the most recent report on in-salon hair services in the UK (Fisher, 2021), Mintel reports that the Covid-19 pandemic has damaged the hairdressing industry and it is in a period of slow recovery, as many clients have become used to using at-home treatments rather than visiting the salon. The report argues that there is no substitute for expertise and that salons can distinguish themselves by offering personalised services.

Hairdressing salons are also important leisure, social and pampering spaces for women. Green (1998) discusses leisure contexts like this as essential to gendered identity construction where women can both 'mirror' and resist traditional feminine identities. Hairdressing salons are a place where visibly gendered identities are worked upon, and the body is made to conform to feminine ideals of hegemonic beauty standards.

Although beauty ideals are kept in the salon, they may also be a site of resistance to dominant ideals (Shaw, 2001), therapeutic (Little, 2013) and important relaxation for mothers and carers (Bialeschki and Michener, 1994).

The Hairdresser: More Than Just Cutting

I have established that hair functions in some ways similarly to clothing, but not in others. One of the most significant differences is the presence of the hairdresser. When purchasing clothing, the consumer is often alone, shopping online, and feeling alienated. In contrast, when styling hair, the consumer will perform daily maintenance at home but often has regular appointments with a hairdresser who works for them.

In this section, I use documentary and fictional representations of these relationships to illustrate the close, emotional and embodied relationships between a hairdresser and their clients. Academic research in this area will be detailed in the Literature Review. These examples reflect the way that hairdressers are depicted in popular culture and the elements of the role that are focused on, particularly the close female relationships and power of talking.

The BBC recently re-released an archive documentary called *Three Salons by the Seaside*. The program is a beautiful ode to the salon, giving a beautiful glimpse into these spaces, the staff and their elderly

clients. The women discuss the fates of old friends, share news, and laugh about a shared 'funeral bag' (a plain black handbag suitable to wear to a funeral, which gets passed to whoever has a funeral to attend next). These interactions are, at the same time, funny, heartwarming and boring. Despite the normalness of it all, I was also struck by how pivotal these spaces are for the women who visit them.



Figure 6 - Daily life in one of the 'Three Salons by the Seaside' (1994)



Figure 7 - A weekly set in 'Three Salons by the Seaside' (1994)



Figure 8 - Booking in a client in 'Three Salons by the Seaside' (1994)



Figure 9 - Women sharing gossip in 'Three Salons by the Seaside' (1994)

This type of salon, where older ladies visit weekly for a wash and set, is not so common any more in urban spaces. There is a stark contrast in the BBC's latest hairdressing docuseries. *Angels of The North* (BBC,

2019) also follows daily life in a Northern English salon; Longlox is a Liverpool salon, which specialises in extensions for a young, glamorous client base. The formula is closer to a reality show, focusing more on the interpersonal staff dynamics and the entrepreneurial owner. The hairdressing salon is depicted as a hyperfeminine, neoliberal, post-feminist utopia.



Figure 10 - Chatting and a blow-dry in 'Angels of the North' (2019)

Despite the differences, community and close relationships are built in all the salons through chatting, sharing and gossiping. Salons are often (but not always) spaces where women work on the hair of women. Women still gather here and enact rituals of haircare, bonding and beauty. They remain essential and powerful places, even if the salon's aesthetic and clientele are different.



Figure 11 - The salon ladies sing 'Tell Me Something I Don't Know' in 'In the Heights' (2021)

It is not just British salons which function like this. The 'salon ladies' in the musical *In The Heights* (2021) are a supporting cast that illustrates the vibrant culture of Washington Heights in New York. They call for their clients to share news from around the barrio[2]. Later, they sing, "As I cut their hair, the ladies talk and share, every day who's doing who and why." The hairdressing salon is the central community space where women share news and gossip. I have selected these examples to show that, despite their distinct cultural contexts, the salon is a 'normal' space where extraordinary things happen. Women congregate, transform and share.

When I use the word 'normal' here, I do not attempt to imply that experiences within the salon are universal, natural or inevitable. When

[2] Term meaning the Spanish-speaking neighbourhood of a US city.

describing the normality in the salon, I am not holding it in opposition to everything outside of the salon being 'abnormal'. I do intend to highlight the un-spectacular and unremarkable nature of the salon. These are everyday spaces, where women often visit routinely. I also use the word normal to imply that the salon is a space where cultural norms around feminised identity are enacted, through chatting and doing body work. Both the concept of normal, and the steps taken to appear normal through dress are socially constructed (Clarke and Miller, 2002) and enforced (Foucault, 1979), not neutral, average or generalisable. However, viewing beauty as a norm "effected various forms of exclusion for those who fall short of, exceed or violate the normative parameters or else escape the pressure to 'correct' those aspects of their body that defy the norm" (Liebelt, 2019, p. 4) and allows beauty practices to be used as a form of social mobility.



Figure 12 - Paulette, the nail lady (left) in 'Legally Blonde' (2001)

In the final example, *Legally Blonde* (2001), it is not a hairdresser but an iconic nail technician who takes a similar role. Paulette, the nail tech, immediately bonds with the main character, Elle Woods, over terrible men. They both find the strength to live authentically through their bonding and beautifying. Beauty professionals, including hairdressers, often face a sneering attitude (Gimlin, 1996). The preconception is that they are too interested in the surface and perhaps vain or gossipy.

Although this thesis will not dwell on pop culture, these examples illustrate the pivotal, feminised, yet superficial way that hairdressers are perceived. Their work may be on hair, but much of their job surrounds these close and intimate relationships crafted through conversation. The salon and what happens inside are rich and interesting spaces where women's bodies are worked upon and relationships are formed.

Research Outline

Having introduced the key concepts within this thesis and the wider context surrounding hair, the salon and hairdressers, I will now introduce the study itself. including the overarching aim, research questions and structure of the thesis.

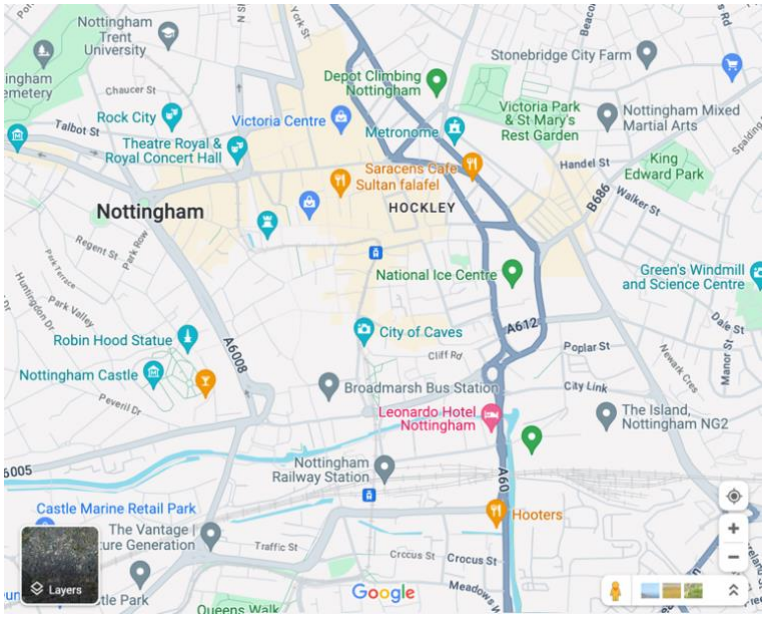


Figure 13 - A map of Nottingham showing the area considered the city centre for the purpose of this study (2024)

Research Aim & Questions

The overarching aim of this study is to examine the experiences of women within hairdressing salons that could deepen our understanding of fashion and identity within liquidity. Fashioning the hair takes place with the support and expertise of a hairdresser - unlike many other dress practices, which are conducted alone, alienated (Rippé, Smith and Dubinsky, 2018) and anxious (Clarke and Miller, 2002). This research focuses on women who use salons in Nottingham city centre. It is a qualitative study using a blend of interviews and autoethnographic methods.

The study is framed by the two core research questions:

How does hair contribute to fashionable identity, differently from clothing?

How do clients and hair stylists negotiate fashionable identities in the salon?

Overview of Thesis

The structure of my thesis is as follows:

Chapter 2 – Literature Review covers existing literature addressing key themes informing the research and analysis of findings that follow.

In **Chapter 3 – Methodology,** I discuss how I sought to answer my research questions, blending interviews and autoethnography. I detail my research approach, which is constructivist interpretivist, combining immersive fieldwork with interviews (Spradley, 1979; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). I detail the methods utilised in my three approaches. **Approach One** consisted of a series of seven semi-structured interviews with hairdressers based in Nottingham City Centre. **Approach Two** was a series of seven semi-structured interviews, this time with female clients who visited salons in the city centre. **Approach Three** was a series of autoethnographic visits where I had my hair styled at salons in Nottingham city centre.

Chapters Four – Six present findings and discussion from all three research approaches. The structure of these chapters is developed from the thematic analysis of the interviews with clients.

Chapter 4 - Forming Fashionable Identity Through Hairstyling: Differentiating and Performing a 'Fluid Self', questions how the clients experience forming their identities in the salon. I use the theoretical lens of liquidity to explore the participant's experience of navigating unstable fashionable identity through their hair. I also apply other sociologists who are commonly used to understand fashion including Simmel (1957), Goffman (1959) and Bourdieu (1986) to understand how hair functions similarly to clothing in terms of fashioning identity.

Chapter 5 – Revealing and Concealing: Beauty, Control and Effortlessness, examines hairdressing in the salons as an ongoing process of maintenance and upkeep. This chapter centres female body, using beauty to examine its rootedness. This chapter uses a feminist perspective on beauty and the work required to upkeep it, using Michel Foucault (1979), Bartky (1997) and Gill (2021, 2023). It explores where the effort and work that go into bodily maintenance is concealed or revealed.

Chapter 6 – Negotiation and Collective Crafting: Working Together, Closeness and the Steer, foregrounds the sociality in the salon. Fashionable identity through hair is not (usually) navigated alone, so here we discuss the participants' experiences negotiating with the hairdresser and how they work together to craft the hair. This chapter explores what the client and hairdresser and negotiating with, their roles

in the interactions and the purpose of closeness in those relationships. I coin ‘the steer’ to describe how the hairdressers lead their clients and question the wider cultural forces that impact the direction they are steering in.

CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

Introduction

As this thesis is concerned with presenting fashionable identity through hair, it is essential to review existing literature in this area. I will survey the existing landscape and map gaps within it. It is divided into two broad sections. The first is organised around the presentation of self. This covers a broad range of perspectives from fashion and sociology to show the importance of bodily appearance, clothing and hair in a performance of identity. It explores cultural ideas like semiotic communication, subculture, glamour and cool to understand what is at stake in the communication of selfhood.

The next section looks more specifically at literature related to hair. Some looks specifically at hair, providing a solid understanding of its interaction with identity, gender and beauty. A wider perspective on beauty looks at the experiences of women and how their bodies are maintained. It explores the work of hairdressers and existing studies in the salons, and how hairdressers are viewed.

Fashioning the Self: Communication, Fashion and Identity

Liquidity Identity: Bauman's Contingent, Fragmented and Shifting Self

This thesis favours Bauman's theories to describe our current epoch, as I believe he paints a realistic and vibrant portrait of the challenges of identity within late-stage capitalism. I have introduced his perspective in the Introduction, so here will detail how his perspective can be applied to fashioning.

Bauman uses the metaphor of a buffet table to describe the world of possibilities experienced by consumers (2000). The great woe of the diner at this table is the dishes they cannot eat rather than those they can. Similarly, the consumer, overwhelmed by choice, must leave avenues unexplored. Bauman believes this wealth of choice, rather than absence, causes consumers despair (Bauman, 2010). It is easy to see how this can be applicable, when the choices for dressing the body are seemingly endless and we are bombarded with newness.

As mentioned in the introduction, Bauman writes specifically about fashion in *Perpetuum Mobile* (2010). He describes fashion as a perpetual motion machine, a pendulum swinging from one extreme to another but always in motion. Fashion is defined by its constant need for compulsive

change. The individuals of liquid modernity are 'hunters,' where their elusive prey is identity, achieved through consumption. They replace 'gardeners' of solid modernity and 'gamekeepers' of premodernity before them.

For Bauman, the pressure to conform is enacted through consumer culture and the shifting tides of fashion. Keeping up with fashion requires a forward drive of progress.

> Progress is no longer a compulsive chase after a spinning-along, elusive utopia, instead the word implies a hard, indomitable, menacing and threatening reality: a process that cannot be stopped and whose pressures must be obeyed ('if you can't beat them, join them'); a mortal threat for the slothful, improvident and indolent; a danger that makes a lucky escape an imperative (Bauman, 2010, pp. 58–59)

Where progress was once thought to be the way to achieve a utopian society, it is now essential to avoid falling behind.

There is a seriousness and sense of urgency in the hunt, which is the addiction and obsession of contemporary society. However, there is also boundless excitement. The idea of ending the chase and the finality of the catch is, as Bauman says, 'horrifying' and a 'personal failure' - fitting metaphor for consumerism and fashion consumption, where the quest for owning outweighs the pleasure of owning.

Although Bauman's work is sometimes used by others to talk about fashion (Tseëlon, 2012a; Rocamora, 2013; Tseëlon, Crane and Leeks, 2017; Jones, 2023), it is currently unused in the academic discussion of hair. In recent work, Katie Baker Jones (2023) calls for a wider reading of Bauman in critical fashion studies to challenge and enhance understanding of contemporary everyday life. She argues that scholars should look beyond Bauman's most cited concept of liquidity, particularly to *Perpetuum Mobile*. This study attempts to reach a greater depth with the lens of liquid modernity alongside Bauman's writing that specifically pertains to fashioning.

Baker Jones' article pertains explicitly to the clothing industry and aims to address its inequalities and injustices. Bauman provides the vision to 'dismantle' the harmful and exploitative existing system "to rebuild a world in which loved things can last and consumption and joy can coexist … and the individual finds purpose in community beyond consumption" (2023, p. 28). The journey towards a slower, more sustainable industry will feel "constricting, not liberating" (2023, p. 24); Bauman assists in comprehending the challenges of this shift.

Baker Jones makes a compelling argument that the complex problem of fashion requires a creative approach to solve.

> The wicked problems of alienated citizen-consumers, sustainable fashion systems and the general challenges of liquid modernity require critical,

> untethered and imaginative thought experiments to test the boundaries of discursive limits. (Jones, 2023, p. 16)

By employing a theoretical lens of liquidity to study hairdressing practices, which I have established is an element of fashioning which sits on the peripheral of fashion as industry. This thesis will illuminate the embodied and lived experiences of the citizen-consumers as they navigate the anxiety-inducing, contingent and all-consuming desire to fashion the self, as it occurs through the hair.

Trying to create, maintain or project a fashionable identity is even more challenging within liquidity, where buying and disposing of consumer goods is used to 'find' identity (Bauman, 2010). John Hall expands upon this idea. "We are left with the structures and imaginaries of modernity, but they no longer take solid form, and they cannot be re-stabilized into some novel and enduring configuration" (Hall, 2017, NP). Liquid consumption "characterises how consumers increasingly seek ephemerality (short-term relations with possessions), access (renting goods rather than owning them), and dematerialisation (increasing immateriality) in their consumption, in contrast with 'solid consumption,' which comprises durability, stability, and possession" (Steadman, Banister and Medway, 2023).

Speaking on Bauman, Atkinson explains that individuals no longer worry about obtaining and presenting identity or finding a 'solid frame' within a social class or category. Now, they are concerned with "*which* identity to

choose and how to keep alert and vigilant so that *another* choice can be made in case the previously chosen identity is withdrawn from the market or stripped of its seductive powers" (Atkinson, 2008, p. 32). In this fluid and fast-changing environment, identity must be quickly worn and then, just as quickly, discarded. This form of negotiation of a 'seductive' identity will be vital to understanding the process of identity construction through hair.

In *The Individualized Society* (2001), Bauman argues that freedom and security are essential to choosing to live in contemporary society. "Freedom without security is bound to cause no less unhappiness than security without freedom" (Bauman, 2001, p. 42). These oppositional forces are bound, and it is challenging to find a compromise between them, "since it inevitably entails a partial sacrifice, does not guarantee happiness. Humans need both freedom and security– and the sacrifice of either is a cause of suffering" (Bauman, 2001, p. 42). Bauman highlights human desire to fit in and stand out, which fuels the fashion industry (von Busch, 2020). Baker Jones (2023) suggests that Bauman's works help think 'through and with' authors such as Simmel to provide twenty-first-century contextualisation.

Within liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000), the self cannot be re-stabilised, as it would have been possible in 'solid modernity'. Society is fluid and has a contingent quality, so the destination of self-construction is 'endemically and incurably underdetermined' (p.81). In this, the surface of the body (hair and clothing) becomes more important to communicate

with others, usually through the buying and disposal of clothing. Emma Palese explains Bauman's perspective. "The autonomous management of our corporeality, personal responsibility, which bears the "responsibility of being individuals," derives from the concept of having and not of being." (Palese, 2013, p. 1). Possessing gives some form of control in a world which lacks solidity. The convergence of identity and consumption is a feature of fluidity: "being individuals is equivalent to being consumers" (Palese, 2013, p. 2). Tseëlon develops Bauman's discussion of the loss of community in our globalised society to inspect the role of shops. "The retail space becomes a substitute for the 'town square' as a space for social engagement" (Tseëlon, 2012b, p. 135). While this is easily comprehensible for 'brick and mortar' shops, it is difficult to see how online shops could stand in for community spaces in this way. Online shopping is more accessible than in-store shopping, and it costs less time, effort, and money to get to the point of sale. This 'efficiency' allows for greater consumption (Frick and Matthies, 2020), but greater consumption is part of the problem.

While most of Bauman's writings focus on the instability of liquidity, he does make mention of the draw that alternatives give. Bauman explains that community can feel like a tempting alternative to the instability and contingency of liquidity. "It is a sweet dream, a vision of heaven: of tranquillity, bodily safety and spiritual peace" (Bauman and Vecchi, 2004, pp. 61–62). However, the same community can feel like a prison for those who struggle with the freedom of choice and self-assertion. "The point is that we are all, intermittently or simultaneously, overwhelmed

with 'too much responsibility' and desirous of 'more freedom' that cannot but add further to our responsibilities" (Bauman and Vecchi, 2004, pp. 61–62). Capitalism is trapping, in this way. We are faced with endless choice, in terms of fashioning our bodies. Even this does not feel like enough, while simultaneously overwhelming us with choice. Community can feel like a means of safety in an otherwise unstable quest for self.

However, community no longer functions like it did in solid modernity. Bauman (2001) claims that people are still uprooted culturally but never get 're-embedded'. This uncertainty means that the messages provided by visual communication can be confused. Identities within solid modernity were often dis-embedded to 're-embed' (Bauman, 2000). Memberships to different social groups, although more stable, could be gained. Within liquid modernity, "No 'beds' are furnished for 're-embedding,' and such beds as might be postulated and pursued prove fragile and often vanish before the work of 're-embedding' is complete" (Bauman, 2000, p. 33). This liquid conception of identity critiques individualisation as an unavoidable byproduct of the time rather than self-determination. Individualisation is a fate, not a choice. In the land of individual freedom of choice, the option to escape individualisation and refuse participation in the individualising game is emphatically not on the agenda (Bauman, 2000, p. 34).

The notion of stability is rarely explicitly discussed by Bauman, preferring more abstract musings, however, in *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty,* he discusses the allure of stability.

> Unable to slow the mind-boggling pace of change, let alone to predict and control its direction, we focus on things we can, or believe we can, or are assured we can influence: we try to calculate and minimize the risk that we personally, or those nearest and dearest to us at the moment, might fall victim to the uncounted and uncountable dangers which the opaque world and its uncertain future are suspected to hold instore for us. (Bauman, 2007, p. 11)

While fashioning the self, controllable factors become the focus. This allows the individual to experience the sensation of stability, looking past the dangerous and unstable reality of liquidity. "To put it in a nutshell, we dream of a reliable world, one we can trust. A secure world" (Bauman, 2007, p. 95). Stability is aspirational. A dream that sits just out of reach.

Despite the tempting fantasy of stability and security, individuals in liquidity are unable to resist the obligation of constant change. This is not because they are striving towards a 'better' version of their self, but because of the need to 'correct' what they have already done. As Bauman puts it, "The overwhelming reason to 'set sail' again was an aversion to what *had been* done, rather than the attraction of what *might yet be* done…"(2007, p. 96. Original emphasis). Here is another example of the tension caused by endless choice coupled with the responsibility to navigate the perils of those choices.

We have seen here, significance of liquidity to fashion. However, hair has both elements of fashion and body. Raymond L.M. Lee points to the importance of the body within liquidity. "Like the endless movements of contemporary society, the human body has come to represent a site of identity contests." Similarly, to clothing, the body itself offers a site of limitless reinvention. "The fluidity of identity brings with it a new sense of freedom as well as challenges to preconceived notions of institutional stability" (Lee, 2006, p. 358). Liquidity is not reserved for capitalist purchasing but also governs the experience of navigating embodies identity. Liquidity allows us to consider hair in its ability to move across contexts and categories, resisting fixed definitions of purely fashion or purely body part.

Differentiation and Belonging: 'In' and 'Out' Through Simmel's Perspective

To understand the role of hair in communicating identity, I will explore the ideas of differentiation and belonging. I look at how a physical and visual marker of hair and clothing can provide an individual with safety as part of a group or the power to distinguish themselves from it.

Dress is the principal way these comparisons, the similarities and differences between people, are communicated. Georg Simmel (Frisby and Featherstone, 1997) highlights the dualities and tensions involved in

dress practices. He explains that the history of our society reflects the conflict between our need to belong to a social group and our desire to achieve individual elevation from it. According to Simmel, imitation is a trait our ancestors evolved to cement their social groups; creating belonging through mirroring others offers us safety so we do not stand alone. Imitation removes the fear of decision-making; choices can be left up to the group, which is limiting, negating, and restraining when the individual's goal is self-elevation. Simmel (1997 [1904]) asserts that imitative appropriation from those in lower social standings stimulates innovation of cultural meanings.

The opposing forces of differentiation and imitation are at the heart of fashion and the human condition. Simmel (1991 [1908]) views fashion as no more than a form of social adaptation which satisfies social equalisation and differentiation. Adorning the body beyond its basic needs is both an altruistic and egotistic act, where decoration is for the pleasure of others but also to enhance the wearer. Simmel describes dress as "the imitation of a given pattern and thus satisfies the need for social adaptation… At the same time… it satisfies the need for distinction, the tendency toward differentiation, change and individual contrast" (Simmel in Frisby and Featherstone, 1997, p. 189 [1904]). Simmel argues that fashion holds a mirror to a fundamental problem of human existence: the tension between wanting to be part of a group and needing to distinguish yourself from it.

The opposing forces of differentiation and belonging are still key to fashioning identity within liquidity. Bauman (2010) develops Simmel's concept that fashion is about social levelling and individual uniqueness in his argument about fashion's perpetual state of becoming. He has harnessed Simmel's sense that fashioning the self is always subject to "two equally powerful and overwhelming human urges/longings" (Bauman, 2010, p. 57) to fit in a liquid modern environment and relate specifically to the fashioned self. Simmel's perspectives are widely cited in works on fashion and identity (Barnard, 2013; Cheang, 2013; Wilson, 2013; Entwistle, 2015; McNeil, 2015; Wallenberg and Kollnitz, 2019; Reilly, 2020; Worth, 2020; Kaiser and Green, 2021; Lascity, 2021; Hopkins, 2022). This formative conception of the critical social role of fashion, and therefore fashioning, will provide a foundation for this study. I will view identity formation in the salon through the lens of differentiation and belonging as a key underlying motivation in the presentation of self.

Taste and Distinction: Bourdieu's Cultural Capital

Bourdieu's ideas on taste are useful for understanding why aesthetic decisions are made. Taste is instrumental in self-representation and differentiation. Bourdieu describes it as "one of the most vital stakes in the struggles fought in the field of the dominant class and the field of cultural production" (1986, p. 3). The theory of taste has developed from assuming that good taste is a solid concept and that aesthetic truth

exists within different class fractions. He argues that cultural preferences result from upbringings and experiences rather than innate.

Taste itself can become a marker of social class and upbringing. It is used to signal those distinctions to others.

> Objectively and subjectively aesthetic stances adopted in matters like cosmetics, clothing or home decoration are opportunities to experience or assert one's position in social space, as a rank to be upheld or a distance to be kept. (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 50)

A shared taste can be demonstrated through the acquisition of consumer goods and the styling of the body, which is unifying within a social group. Bourdieu believes that both negative and positive expressions of taste are important. It is through tastes and distastes that individuals "forge the unconscious unity of a class" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 70). He explains,

> Tastes (i.e., manifested preferences) are the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference. It is no accident that, when they have to be justified, they are asserted purely negatively, by the refusal of other tastes. In matters of taste, more than anywhere else, all determination is negation; and tastes are perhaps first and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by horror or visceral intolerance

> ('sick-making') of the tastes of others. (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 49)

Critically, Bourdieu defines taste not just in terms of likes, but of dislikes. Defining the negative taste discrimination as just as critical as positive choices around taste. He believes that these aesthetic intolerances can be "terribly violent" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 49) and that the aversions to difference are one of the strongest barriers between classes.

While explaining the relationship of Bourdieu's work to fashion scholarship, Agnes Rocamora states, "The dominant culture is the culture of the dominant class, whose interest is to maintain this dominance by producing and reproducing its values and by naturalizing its good taste" (2016, p. 242). Ideas of good taste are culturally controlled by the dominant class, who benefit from their supremacy. She argues that Bourdieu's concepts, including capital and habitus, shed light on fashion's state of flux. Bourdieu believes that economic capital is the root of other forms of capital, such as social, symbolic, and cultural. Cultural capital may be inherited from parents but is also gained through education and used to demonstrate distinction. He uses the word habitus to describe a system of dispositions, a set of norms and expectations that individuals acquire through socialisation and experiences that become second nature. Janna Michael's study of young consumers of the avant-garde in *It's Really Not Hip to Be a Hipster* (2015) describes a similar sentiment in expressing individuality. "The individuality of clothing-styles might be mostly a matter of perception, but… they are visibly different from the

'anonymous' and 'boring' mass they aim to distinguish themselves from" (p. 177). She explains the relationship between individuality, taste and difference. Michael builds from Bourdieu further. "What distinguishes them [class differences] more than anything else is the capacity to apply aesthetic criteria to ordinary objects and everyday-life choices" (Michael, 2015, p. 167). Expressing differences is becoming more challenging as the speed of fashion cycles speed up.

The concept of cultural capital has been further expanded by authors like Sarah Thornton who coined the term 'subcultural capital' to include the knowledge, taste, style and status conferred by subcultural identities. Her study of club culture showed how cultures of any level are "riddled with the dynamics of distinction" (Thornton, 1995, p. 88), detailing the micro-structures of power within a social group. Dick Hebdige describes the mechanisms of subcultural communication. "The objections are lodged…at the profoundly superficial level of appearance; that is the level of signs" (Hebdige, 2003, p. 17). Creating a subcultural style starts with an incremental movement away from the 'natural order.' It ends with "the construction of a style, a gesture in defiance or contempt, in a smile or a sneer. It signals a Refusal" (Hebdige, 2003, p. 3). This is a useful to understand the experiences of the participants who align themselves with an 'alternative' style. Their choices around their hair can be an act of resistance against the norm.

Largely unconsidered in the discussion of hair is what drives people to work on their hair. Off-hand phrases like 'feel like myself' (sic) often

describe this but are challenging to unpack. Far from being an idyllic form of self-expression, communicating self through appearance can be an oppressive or tyrannical force (von Busch, 2015). Fashion's 'psychopolitics' highlight the conflicts within the social enactments of beauty and dress (von Busch, 2020). Fashion's "inherent drive towards demarcation between those who belong, or are "right," and those who do not belong, or are 'wrong'" (von Busch, 2020, p. 53) can be a source of fear (Clarke and Miller, 2002; Tseëlon, 2012b; Gill, 2023). The line between in and out becomes a moral judgment of good and bad. Von Busch likens the human urge to "seek attention and affirmation, desiring to leave an aesthetic and emotional impression on peers" (2020, p. 54), which he describes as the 'will to fashion', with the 'will to live' and the 'will to power', as a basic human draw to conflict and rivalry. The way that we style and adorn the body is rarely apolitical.

Ideas of taste, developed from Bourdieu are commonly used in fashion and wardrobe studies to better understand choices around fashioning. Sophie Woodward believes that women, through combining items create a 'personal aesthetic,' the individual is constructed in the eyes of others (2005). Clarke and Miller (2002) found when conducting 'clothing based ethnography' that women choosing their clothes "might have little to do with either the industry or its associated journalism" (Clarke and Miller, 2002, p. 192), and is instead about trying to express creativity and conformity and the fear and anxiety caused by trying to navigate these socially enacted concepts. While they are talking about consumption-based purchasing of clothing (material goods), we can consider this when

thinking about hair. A benefit of clothing, in this situation, is that it is easily changed. If the worst happens and the individual experiences a 'fashion disaster,' it is easy to never wear that item again. In some ways, this anxiety is felt more distinctly with hair. As a body part, you cannot simply ship it off to a charity shop if a mistake is made. A mistake must either be waited out until the hair has grown or tried to fix, potentially with a more drastic cut or colour. In other ways, hair is more straightforward. The pressure of 'knowing what to like' (Clarke and Miller, 2002, p. 194) is somewhat elevated in a hairdressing situation because clients are not isolated or alienated; they are receiving guidance from a professional.

Fashion as a Vehicle for Meaning and Identity

Building from the idea that the clothing we wear can communicate, not just our taste but our social standing, it is important to think about how meaning is created through clothing. To understand both fashion imagery and objects, Roland Barthes' (2009 [1957]) application of semiology to visual culture can be useful. Semiology concerns the relationship between the signifier and the signified, which are combined to form a sign. The sign as a mythical object goes beyond its physicality to represent a broader meaning.

Barthes explains how signs function in relation to fashion. Signs are presented as rhetoric in fashion magazines; for example, 'this year, short dresses are a sign of Fashion' becomes 'dresses are worn short this

year;' an arbitrary sign converted into a natural fact (Barthes, 1990). Communication through semiotic signs is essential for how fashion functions. "As soon as the signified Fashion encounters a signifier (such and such a garment), the sign becomes the year's Fashion, but thereby this Fashion dogmatically rejects the Fashion which preceded it" (Barthes, 1990, pp. 272–273). In this way, clothing can be seen as full of potential for presenting a carefully managed performance of selfhood but also a dangerous pursuit, where the wrong item can carry out-of-date messages.

Buying clothing can also be seen as buying into its semiotic symbolism. Grant McCracken's (1986) *Culture and Consumption: A Theoretical Account of the Structure and Movement of the Cultural Meaning of Consumer Goods* posits that meaning is in a constant state of transit, in a mobile state, and carried through consumer goods. He maps cultural meaning as traditionally originating in the culturally constituted world, from which it is transmitted onto consumer goods. The consumer interprets the meaning of the object. For example, a leather jacket is given the meaning of coolness from its historical association with fighter pilots and motorcycle riders. When buying a leather jacket, consumers can buy the association with coolness, becoming cool themselves. This interpretation is, of course, a simplification, but it illustrates how semiotics function in dress.

According to McCracken, the fashion industry transfers meaning to goods in three distinct ways. The first and simplest mirrors the most common

model of meaning transmission, where the culturally constituted world provides the meaning, and it is applied to the clothing. To apply this to hair, we can consider the qualities of the hair and their applied meanings, i.e. curly hair = wild and free, blondeness = femininity and sexuality.

In the second capacity, McCracken says opinion leaders, whose views are often well regarded due to their "birth, beauty or accomplishment" (1986, p. 76), can reshape and cultivate existing categories of meaning, which would have traditionally taken place through celebrity.
McCracken's final way of transmitting meaning to the fashion system is through radical reform of cultural meaning. He suggests that groups that violate existing cultural categories, for example, punks and hippies, have the power to innovate and reform the cultural mainstream. Historically, those groups who challenge cultural categories would make themselves visually distinct through their hair and clothing.

Negrin (2016) critiques fashion scholarship's focus on the semiotic reading of clothing without considering it as a tactile and embodied form. The discipline of fashion theory seeks to move beyond an aesthetic understanding of dress to evaluate the haptic and embodied experience. "Modes of self-presentation cannot be understood simply in terms of the symbolic meanings they communicate or in purely aesthetic terms but also need to be considered as an integral aspect of our bodily being-in-the-world" (Negrin, 2016, p. 125). Negrin suggests that simply relying on semiotics and aesthetics is not enough. The embodied experience is equally important and historically overlooked. This thinking can also be

applied to hair, which demands consideration of both its semiotic and embodied qualities.

Goffman's Performance of Self: Communicating to Others

In thinking about how fashion relates to the self, Goffman is especially relevant. Goffman's (1959) *Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* studies social interaction through a theatre metaphor. Goffman likens individuals to actors, playing a part for the benefit of his observers. He describes the extremes of the performance where, at one end, the individual is entirely convinced by his own 'sincere' performance. Conversely, we find a 'cynical' masquerade in which the act may be out of self-interest. Both actors adopt what Goffman (1959) terms a 'front', which can be divided into 'appearance' and 'manner'. For this study, appearance is used to create a relevant front. Appearance is a visual stimulus that informs us of the performer's social status. Goffman does not consider hair, but my study considers it an integral element in constructing a front.

The theatre metaphor can be read as suggesting that the performance of self is in some way deceptive or superficial. Goffman's (1959) work presents this means of self-expression as innate and natural. Even the 'cynical' performance of self is an essential element of social interaction, which is, in turn, necessary to being human. In the communication of

self, an individual's self-conception dictates the 'props' they use. The way they see themselves dictates the way that they perform.

There are two regions where these acts may take place, continuing the metaphor of the theatre, according to Goffman. The first is the front region or on stage. Here, the actor is performing their selfhood to an audience and may 'expressively accentuate' or 'suppress' aspects of themselves to foster the correct impression. Alternatively, the back region or 'backstage' is where the suppressed aspects may make an appearance. In this private sphere, 'illusions and impressions' are collected in the open, and the 'costume' may be adjusted and the front dropped. Goffman (1959) argues that performances of selfhood exist for the benefit of an audience, and a level of cooperation and understanding is required for successful identity performances.

Similarities between Bauman and Goffman's ideas have been noted, by authors like Micheal Hviid Jacobsen (2008). Jacobsen argues they share the opinion that it is only through others that a sense of self is produced and that the self in relation to consumption is key. Jacobsen also highlights some tensions. Bauman is concerned with how "external societal factors such as repressive coercion or consumerist seduction" cause the self to "lose[s] its moral foothold or [have] its inner moral compass destroyed." On the other hand, for "Goffman it is rather the individual actor, who, in the face of others, and in order to obtain validation, is his own worst enemy" (Hviid Jacobsen, 2008, p. 50). Goffman's work is helpful to me in establishing the visual self as a

performance, whereas Bauman's work more closely describes the current epoch.

This thesis aims to understand identity formation through the hair; therefore, it must understand existing modes of identity construction through consumption in a liquid modern world. Hair offers a similar yet fundamentally different means of identity construction. The cutting and styling of the hair are both a personal expression of something innate and a performance for the benefit of a social audience.

Acts of Beauty and Effort in Constructing Feminine Identity

Beauty and the Effort Required to Achieve it

As previously established, hair crosses boundaries of a fashion adornment and a part of the body. It is this rootedness in the body which requires that means that a fashion lens cannot fully explain the complexity of identity presentation through hair. When considering women's hair, it is impossible to detangle it from ideas of beauty, and perhaps even more importantly the work that it required and concealed to achieve that beauty.

Cultural ideas of female beauty have been linked to the male oppression of women through fostering insecurity in their bodies and requiring a significant investment of time, money and effort (Tyner and Ogle, 2009) Women's bodies, in all societies, are worked upon to change them from 'natural' to specifically cultural (Black and Sharma, 2001). Black and Sharma recognise that beauty comprises "systems that regulate and commodify the bodies of women" (Sharma and Black, 2001, p. 921). The surfaces of women's bodies are worked upon to align with beauty standards. As an industry, beauty refers to the types of businesses that work upon the bodies of (largely) women, such as hairdressers, nail salons, aestheticians, and beauty therapists.

Scholarly debates around beauty, as with many other areas, centre the polarisation of feminists, those "who underscore women's needs and rights to pleasure (emotional, bodily, sexually) *at the moment*" and "those who emphasize the need to transform male-dominated social structures" (Chancer, 2023, p. 92, original emphasis). Focusing on their appearance can be seen as a form of self-objectification. Women can be perceived as less human when their appearance is focused on (Heflick *et al.*, 2011). There is still a double standard around aesthetic capital. People perceive more natural forms of appearance transformation favourably than those considered 'fake' (Sarpila *et al.*, 2020). Women's behaviour is considered more favourably when they have aesthetic capital, but their conduct is viewed more negatively (Sarpila *et al.*, 2020).

Beauty is an oppressive force on many women, requiring them to aspire to and attempt to keep up with an unrealistic set of standards. Miliann Kang lists some of the many appearance norms expected of women: hair, makeup, body hair, body size and shape, clothing, and nails. She states that "The basic assumption that underlies all of these norms is that women's bodies must be altered in some way – that their natural state is unacceptable" (Kang, 2003, p. 55). Beauty is a gendered problem, as men are not subject to the same level of bodily control. That is not to say that men do not experience pressure to meet a hegemonic standard of attractiveness or undertake beauty treatments, but that there are standards of heterosexual attractiveness that are not ingrained with the everyday performance of beauty maintenance (Black and Sharma 2001).

It has been demonstrated repeatedly that beautiful people have advantages in life, sometimes referred to as lookism or aesthetic privilege (Hamermesh, 2011; Ramati-Ziber, Shnabel and Glick, 2020; Sarpila et al., 2020). Lookism is more pronounced for women, for whom "the evaluation of looks has been systematically bound to the asymmetries of gender as a whole" (Chancer, 2023, p. 83). Women are tied into systemic aesthetic labour to succeed.

Beauty has become one of the biggest industries (Jones, 2010), selling products and services with the "promise of good looks" (Kuipers, 2022, p. 211). Bordo uses beauty to connect the concepts of fluidity and docility.

> Through the pursuit of an ever-changing, homogenizing, elusive ideal of femininity—a pursuit without a terminus, requiring that women constantly attend to minute and often whimsical changes in fashion—female bodies become docile bodies—bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, improvement. (Bordo, 1993b, p. 166)

She proposes that producing a docile and controlled body responds to 'ever-changing,' quick-shifting ideals, connecting ideas from Foucault and Bauman.

In her review of beauty culture, Giselinde Kuipers (2022) identifies that the level of beauty work that is normalised today is extraordinary in the scope of history. Although humans have always cared about beauty, the gradual raising of cultural standards has formulated "a *beauty regime* involving new standards for social control and self-control, standards for moral and aesthetic evaluation and standards for social worth and self-worth" (Kuipers, 2022, pp. 207–208). Hairdressing is one integral element in the enactment of a beauty regime. Kuipers argues that although caring about appearance is innately human, a 'new sense of beauty' was developed with the inventions of mirrors, then photography, then television and the establishment of visual culture. Captured images extend people's understanding of what people look like beyond their social circle (Jones, 2010; Kuipers, 2022).

Kuipers defines two ways for women to 'obtain' beauty (2022): 'beauty as care' and 'beauty as enhancement'. Beauty as care "connects good looks with health, hygiene, self-care and self-control. It embeds the beauty regime in established bodily regimes: the 'civilizing' regime that equates bodily and emotional restraint with social superiority" (Kuipers, 2022, p. 212). Beauty as enhancement is "enhancing beauty through the adaptation of appearance" (Kuipers, 2022, p. 212). With the support of advertising campaigns, this strategy combats an old taboo about visible makeup. Once the remit of 'hussies' and 'unfit for ladies' in the 1800s, visibly enhancing the appearance was considered a lower-class pursuit. Both approaches to beauty share the goal of 'looking good' but have different means to achieve it. Lynn S. Chancer (2023) explains that beauty is part of a system of cultural capital. Still, it is complicated further because it involves the ascribed, the achieved, the commodified and the capitalised. The quest for beauty is innately filled with contradictions that demand the illusion of ascription.

Beauty and femininity are often equated (Willson, 2015), and there is much left to understand about the experiences of hair, fashion and femininity. Rosalind Gill and Ana Sofia Elias (2014) describe how beauty standards are increasingly enforced through a glossy, postfeminist lens. Gill and Elias (2014) identified 'love your body' discourses in advertising as instrumental to neoliberal and postfeminist beauty ideals becoming even more culturally ingrained. Beauty pressures have 'intensified and extensified' to focus on self-esteem and confidence (Gill, 2021). In these narratives, the onus for work and effort is put increasingly on the

individual woman, who is encouraged to see herself as deficient if she does not meet these growing standards.

The body has become even more prominent and a key site for women's value. The body as capital replaces earlier conceptions of femininity, which revolve around motherhood and caring.

> Scrutiny and judgment mark the contexts for inter-personal violence – including a level of harassment that should be horrifying yet is largely taken-for-granted – but also for the violence of a beauty industry intent on systematic pathologization and abnormailsation of women's bodies, designed to make girls and women (and increasingly others) feel uncomfortable, insecure and like they are failing. (Gill, 2023, p. 122)

The hairdressing industry is a subsection of the 'beauty' industry. Styling, cutting and colouring the hair is impacted not only by 'individual taste' or 'self-presentation' but also by the complex, politicised and commercialised ideals of beauty. The very concept of a woman is unstable, ill-defined, produced and maintained by political and cultural intersections (Butler, 1990). Butler established that gender is socially constructed, separating gender from the sexed biological body. Susan Brownmiller tells us specifically that hair is just one essential marker in the performance of gender, which can aid women in pulling off a cohesive and readable performance of womanhood (Brownmiller, 1984).

Debates around beauty have developed since the pandemic. Hannah McCann writes about hairdressing and beauty culture post-pandemic, particularly about navigating queer identities (McCann, 2022) and bodies in terms of connection, self-esteem and identity during the pandemic (McCann, 2023) and the potential of salons workers to respond to family violence (McCann and Myers, 2023). McCann's work is of particular interest because it reflects the zeitgeist of my research. During the Covid-19 pandemic, hair became a highly debated topic; with access to salons limited, the importance of hair and identity was illuminated. McCann's work captures the sentiment at the time.

Glamour, Cool and the Attempt to Conceal Effort

Ideas of fashion are culturally intertwined with discourses of glamour and cool. Later in the thesis, I will bring together these theories to explain the phenomenon of wanting to look effortless through the hair. I build from previous work that highlights the importance of concealing effort to both glamour and coolness.

Coolness illustrates an attitude and specific aesthetic utilised in contemporary culture and advertising (McGuigan, 2009). Vanessa Brown explains the concept of coolness by examining sunglasses as cultural objects (2020) and has defined the shifting meanings of coolness in contemporary society (2021). Coolness has been studied as an originally

American phenomenon (Dinerstein, 2017), rooted in Black masculinity (Ransaw, 2013), and a signifier of teenage ambivalence.

I am interested in cool's association with the hard-won appearance of not caring. Ulla Haselstein describes coolness as "a metaphorical term for affect control" (Haselstein, 2013, p. 1), involving control and public display of emotions. Cool's roots can be traced back to African Enslaved people in America, using their emotional imperviousness as a protective mask. Discussing Renaissance Italy, Pountain and Robins describe an 'emotional continence' or 'Aristocratic Cool.' "Sprezzatura was an attitude of aristocratic disdain, the cultivation of an appearance of effortlessness in accomplishing difficult actions (by well-rehearsed concealment of the effort that really went into them)" (Pountain and Robins, 2000, p. 53). The impact of this type of coolness can be seen in more contemporary examples like the dandies or celebs of the Britpop era who combine "narcissism, nonchalance, wit and hedonism" (Pountain and Robins, 2000, p. 54).

Similarly to coolness, glamour is a cultivation of aura, which requires an appearance of not caring. Stephen Gundle (2008) writes on the history of glamour. He identifies glamour's mystical quality. Glamour is a hard to define quality which is seen as an internal or innate quality. It is not a flashy expression of wealth, but a subtle and controlled allure. Gundle believes that although glamour is assumed to come from the aristocracy or monarchy, it is from bourgeois origins. Glamour was a mysterious quality, reinforced by the media, theatre and Hollywood. The

consumption economy then began to sell the idea of glamour through their goods, especially to women; "they bore directly on personal identity and promised the immediate realization of a transformation of the self into something different and better" (Gundle, 2008, p. 389). Glamour, like cool, had become a cultural commodity.

Carol Dyhouse (2021) explores glamour from a feminist perspective. Her work demonstrates that women's lives are shaped by fashion, celebrity, popular culture and consumerism. The sumptuous surfaces associated with glamour (e.g. fur, glitter, silk) speak to luxury, but also sensuous pleasure. She argues for glamour's power in giving agency to women. "If femininity can be seen as a form of belittlement, associated with the demure, the dainty and the unassuming, then glamour – it can be argued – could offer a route to a more assertive and powerful form of female identity" (Dyhouse, 2021, p. 2-3). She discusses the exploitative nature of the beauty industry's unreasonable claims, but balances this against the importance of time and space for themselves women find in beauty spaces.

Dyhouse paraphrases an article from *Women's Filmfair* magazine. "Glamour was not just prettiness... but a combination of slickness, smartness, perfection of detail, and personality. Anyone could look glamorous if they chose to make the effort" (Dyhouse, 2021, p. 74). Even in the 1940s, the achievability of glamour was used to tantalise women. However, she also tells us that glamour has always been about "fantasy, desire and longing" (Dyhouse, 2021, p. 162). Glamour's allure

is tied into this tension of being available with enough work and always just out of reach for most.

The most explicit mention of concealing effort comes as Nigel Thrift explains the material practices of glamour. Glamourous aesthetics are "bound up with the discovery of new alluring imaginative territories which reflect upon themselves and which though they are usually vicarious are no less real for that, and goods are part of this process of imaginative exploration" (Thrift, 2008, p. 11). The purchasing of goods and surfaces of material objects are important for exploring newness and imagining alternate selves, where allure can be cultivated.

> "The human contains all manner of objects within its envelope but does not exhaust their presence, so that objects can signal in all kinds of ways that we may only partially perceive, or perceive as 'magical' in that they provide associations, and conjunctions, dissociations and echoes to stimulate perception and imagination and indeed enjoyment."(Thrift, 2008, p. 11)

One such object, on the 'borderline' of the body and "a crucial moment in generating glamour" (Thrift, 2008, p. 20), is hair. Thrift identifies that particularly for celebrities, hair is used as a signature in the sign system of glamour.

Thrift suggests three pillars of glamour. His third pillar is the most relevant to this inquiry. "Calculation but it is calculation that must go

unnoticed. It must appear effortless" (Thrift, 2008, p. 15). He frames this element as relying on concealing both the effort of thought and labour. "Glamour betokens making what is difficult appear easy", he continues "it requires vitality but also sometimes a steely accuracy, it demands envy but also identification." (Thrift, 2008, p. 15). To achieve the 'form of allure' known as glamour, the labour required to achieve the aesthetics of glamour must be hidden.

Thrift defines the allure of glamour further. "So glamour is selling. It is manipulation. It is seduction. It is a certain form of deception. But it is something else as well, it is meticulous selection and control" (p.15). The female body becomes a site of sale, where its surface cultivates temptation, while importantly denying any attempt to tempt. The labours of glamour are intertwined with the labours of femininity. Judith Butler sees femininity as 'culturally sustained' performativity based on repetitive actions upon the female body (Butler, 1990). However, glamour masks the effort in this labour of performance.

While Thrift suggests this pillar of glamour, he does not fully articulate how the concept plays out in women's everyday lives. While he establishes hair as a material which "cling[s] to and transform[s] glamour" (Thrift, 2008, p. 10). He discusses the alluring, flowing materiality of hair. He uses the work of Joseph Roach (2007) to explain that celebrities cultivate the air of effortlessness through their body, clothes and hair, particularly by enhancing their allure based on, "physical attraction, lack of self-consciousness, and a perceived

indifference. Glamorous celebrity must be exercised effortlessly or not at all but, paradoxically, that effortlessness requires considerable effort" (Thrift, 2008, p. 18). In doing so, the celebrity becomes a "neither a person or a thing, but something in between" (Thrift, 2008, p. 19) and exists in the realm of mediated imagination.

While Thrift describes the celebrity hair as a key component in the production of the allure of glamour and how this must be achieved effortlessly, he does not extend this to the experiences of those who imagine the celebrity, those without a 'Glam Squad[3]', whose images do not appear in the pages of 'glossy magazines'. While this thesis does not seek to understand celebrities, their influence extends to the participants of this study. In their case, cultivating effortlessness may still be a goal, but its production is far more complex and difficult. This thesis considers Thrift's concept of effortlessness and highlights how it differs from performances of 'everyday' effortlessness in the salon.

Making the Body Docile: Foucauldian Power and Control

Women, in the formation of fashionable identities, experience power and control, which impacts the ways they work upon their own bodies and appearance. Michel Foucault's famous text *Discipline and Punishment*

[3] A team of hair and beauty professionals responsible for preparing a celebrity for a public appearance.

(2019 [1979]) coins the term 'docile body' to describe a body that is "subjected, used, transformed and improved" (Foucault, 1979, p. 59). He uses the example of soldiers and ballerinas and shows that their bodies are made submissive so that invisible power structures can change their form. Soldiers must be strong, physically fit, and move with mechanical precision. Ballerinas must aspire to have the same qualities of strength, fitness, and precision but in a feminised manner. The bodies are subjected, used, transformed and improved as they become' docile.' Anne Schwan and Stephen Shapiro (2011) add that making the body more docile also makes it more valuable, particularly in a capitalist society, enabling economic exploitation.

Foucault stresses that modern power networks have moved away from a centralised, top-down system with one oppressive source. Instead, a complex capillary network of control nodes contributes to subordination.

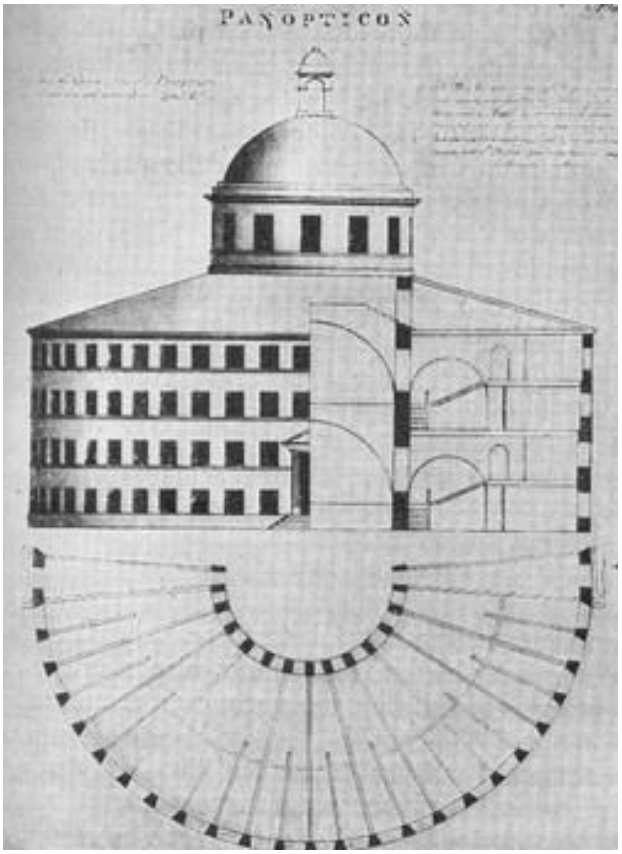


Figure 14 - A plan for Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon Prison

Foucault used the design of a 'panopticon' prison designed by Jeremy Bentham in 1787 as a metaphor. The Panopticon is a circular prison where a guard could observe prisoners from a central tower. What gives power to this design is that the prisoners never know if they are being watched. The threat of the observation is designed "to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power." (Foucault, 1979, p. 84). This arrangement means that surveillance is effective, even if no one is in the observation tower. Foucault argues that the Panopticon is a 'generalisable model' for everyday power relations. It arranges and amplifies power, intensifying existing hierarchies. Jane Tynan (2016) expands on this idea, saying the fear of observation is a more effective

control tool than the threat of physical coercion. As a result, a culture of self-policing is established, where individuals and communities reinforce norms and rules.

The expectations applied to women's appearances are the direct outcome of the complex power system in our society. According to Foucault, power no longer comes from a top-down approach, as it may have done in a pre-modern or modern time (1979). In the past, the rich and aristocrats ruled the' lower classes,' but now there is a more widely distributed network of power sources. Power is now potentially less homogenous, but it is applied from all angles, complex and overlayered. Foucault highlights the differences between historic single power structures and contemporary society's more complicated web of nodes. Like Bauman, he considers the malleability of contemporary society.

Schwan and Shapiro interpret Foucault's reading of the changes in power within post-modernity. "We are judged not based on our own achievements or transgressions but in relationship to what everyone else is doing" (Schwan and Shapiro, 2011, p. 120). The fluid quality of identity makes this form of discipline so effective. Through increasing visibility, social media increases the power of surveillance. "It is the fact of being constantly being seen, of always being seen, the maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection" (Foucault, 1979, p. 68). Young women report a pervasive sense of surveillance from social media (Gill, 2023).

Women police each other through 'peer-to-peer' surveillance or what Alison Winch terms 'the girlfriend gaze' (Winch, 2013). Winch's 'girlfriend culture' has a positive sheen where "comparison, competition, envy, identification and aspiration" (p.1) are veiled as empowerment. Female friendships can foster "intimate networks of comparison, feedback and motivation are necessary in controlling body image" (p.2). However, as well as enacting social control on their peers, the women are also trying to stand out from them. She calls these acts of power 'normative cruelties.'

Susan Bartky critiques Foucault's omission of gendered analysis. "To overlook the forms of subjection that engender the feminine body is to perpetuate the silence and powerlessness of those upon whom these disciplines have been imposed" (Bartky, 1990, p. 65). Despite the absence in the original text, Foucault's work is often used to theorise the effects of power on women's bodies. Tynan (2016) suggests that in politicising the transformation of the body, Foucault demonstrated that the body is 'fashioned' by institutions and practices. His work has been cited in critical fashion studies where the relationship between fashion, identity and the body are questioned (Ash and Wilson, 1992; Craik, 1993; Entwistle, 2000; Tynan, 2016; Johnson, 2022). Although Foucault did not write specifically about women, his understanding of the invisible, multiple and pervasive forces of power which preside over our bodies has been widely used by feminist scholars (Butler, 1989; Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993a; King, 2004; Grosz, 2020). Discussions of his ideas surrounding discipline, self-policing and docility are fundamental to much

work about the bodies of women, including mothers (Sawicki, 1999; Symonds LeBlanc, 2020), in the media (Connell, 2012; Richardson, 2021) and dieting, fatness and fitness (Duncan, 1994; Wright, O'Flynn and Macdonald, 2006; Murray, 2008; Rysst, 2010; Woolley, 2017; Morris, 2019).

Foucault's work is also represented in writing about hair. These cover subjects such as women's liberation through hairstyling (Zdatny, 1997), hair as a source of resistance (Weitz, 2001), hair and gender expression (Biddle-Perry, 2008) and expressions of discipline through hairstyle (Hecht, 2008). These papers all examine the relationship between hair, power and gender, which provides a solid foundation for me to explore how my participants build their identity with that hair.

In contemporary society, the most effective form of control, and therefore the discipline of docile bodies, is the era's scopic regime (Hecht, 2008). Thomas Hecht describes how this is enacted through hairstyling. "An acute awareness of being watched at all times creates the social pressure to be 'normal'—to behave in ways that adhere to the dominant social norms" (p. 210). Fashioning the body is one of the most straightforward ways for women to signal their loyalty to the dominant cultural systems. The feeling of being observed is a constant threat in our contemporary society. In combination with his theory of docile bodies, Foucault uses this to describe how multimodal power structures enforce bodily transformations. It is an invisible and internalised form of control experienced strongly by women. "We do not require the judgment of an

authority. We continually search for deviance, excess or fault in ourselves" (Tynan, 2016, p. 189).

In *Fashion and the Fleshy Body: Dress as Embodied Practice,* Joanne Entwistle critiques Foucault and finds his analysis problematic for the study of dress as a situated bodily practice. "Foucault's notion of discourse as well as problems stemming from his conceptualization of the body and of power, in particular his failure to acknowledge embodiment and agency" (Entwistle, 2000, p. 330). She highlights that this theoretical lens is unsuitable to gather the full picture of fashionable dress practices.

> Foucault's account of the socially processed body provides for analysis of the way in which the body is talked about and acted on; but it does not provide an account of dress as it is lived, experienced and embodied by individuals. (Entwistle, 2000, p. 330)

This critique highlights the importance understanding the experiences of the participants from an embodied and personal perspective, rather than simply applying theory to them.

Entwistle continues, critiquing the assumption that the body is passive, the failure to explain autonomous actions in fashioning and the inattention to the body as a *lived* site of the self. She believes Foucault's work is useful for understanding the structures of influence which give bodies meaning. However, to better understand dress requires both "the discursive and representational aspects of dress and the way the

body/dress is caught up in relations of power" and "embodied experience of dress and the use of dress as one means by which individuals orientate themselves to the social world" (Entwistle, 2000, p. 344).

My research aims to take Entwistle's advice to not neglect the experience of everyday dress.

> Understanding dress in everyday life requires understanding not just how the body is represented within the fashion system and its discourses on dress, but also how the body is experienced and lived and the role dress plays in the presentation of the body/self. (Entwistle, 2000, p. 344)

By applying Foucault's ideas, in tandem with an embodied methodology that allows for a greater understanding of the lived experience of styling the hair while not overlooking its bodily nature.

The Role of Hair

Communicating Fashion, Style and Culture Through Hair

Hair is an essential tool in communicating individual and group identity (Biddle-Perry and Cheang, 2008) and, therefore, a factor in the consideration of fashionable dress (Brand, 2007; Cross, 2008; Biddle-

Perry, 2020b; Beard, 2022; Mahawatte, 2022). However, writings about hair that treat it similarly to fashion are still uncommon.

In *Hair: Styling, Culture and Fashion* (2008), Biddle-Perry and Cheang collate chapters which interrogate hair and social identity. They are grouped around the histories of hair, hair and identity and hair and representation. The focus on cultural and visual meaning is unusual, providing multiple overlapping understandings of hair as an element of fashionable culture. They introduce the book by establishing that hair is dressed and adorned to participate in society, making it comparable to clothing. Hairdressing divides the culturally constructed body from the undressed body (Biddle-Perry, 2008).

More recently, Biddle-Perry has edited another collection, *A Cultural History of Hair in the Modern Age* (Biddle-Perry, 2020a). This book is the final book of a six-part anthology on the history of hair, from 'antiquity' to 'modernity.' Each book comprises nine chapters: Religion and Ritualized Belief, Self and Society, Fashion and Adornment, Production and Practice, Health and Hygiene, Gender and Sexuality, Race and Ethnicity, Class and Social Status, and Cultural Representations. While the other issues are history texts and therefore not valuable for this study, understanding the 20th-century epoch and its impact on hair is essential to understanding the culture of hair now. This book feels like a cultural history of clothing in its treatment of hair which helps the comparisons that I am drawing between hair and clothing.

Alice Beard believes that treating hairstyling as 'simply dressing' is reductive. Instead, she believes, it is "subject to constant shifts and changes in the pursuit of the new, it maintains its crucial dynamic in the transformative process of fashioning desire and identity" (2022, p. 73), emphasising the importance of hair to fashion and vice versa. While I question whether dressing can be described as 'simply dressing,' her point draws attention to the dynamic and shifting nature of hairdressing, which reflects liquidity.

Although hair is like clothing in some regards, it differs in that it is not a manufactured good. Clothing must also be maintained to a point; it is a different experience in caring for the self/body. Caring for the hair is an inescapable part of human life. There exists a body of ethnographies conducted in salons which explore the roles and practices of hairdressers (Wiesenfeld and Weis, 1979; Eayrs, 1993; Gimlin, 1996; Lee *et al.*, 2005, 2007; Holmes, 2010; Yeadon-Lee *et al.*, 2011). Two of these are particularly interesting to this study: Debra Gimlin (1996) and Helen Holmes (2010).

Pamela's Place by Debra Gimlin takes place in a small-town British salon and offers details on the experiences of the hairdressers' day-to-day experiences. It provides the fullest picture of hairdressers leading their clients. She describes how hairstylists persuade clients that they "possess special knowledge of both fashion and styling technique" (Gimlin, 1996, p. 505). She acknowledges the stylist's commitment to upholding beauty standards before quickly moving on to reviewing the

literature on beauty work. However, this is perhaps the closest that research into hair gets to talking about fashion. Later, she suggests that stylists mobile their 'superior' knowledge of 'trends in female beauty' to put themselves above their client in the 'hierarchy of beauty culture' (Gimlin, 1996, p. 511). Gimlin focuses on the hairdresser and does not extend her study to see how this enactment of beauty expertise affects the clients. My work will revisit these ideas of hairdressers as holders of fashion knowledge and the impact this has on the client's identity presentation.

It is commonly repeated that hair is both an innate biological part of us and a socially constructed, transformable adornment (Howell Jolly, 2004; Biddle-Perry and Cheang, 2008; Holmes, 2010, 2014; Biddle-Perry, 2020a; Mahawatte, 2022). This, potentially obvious, statement is at the centre of hair's importance, however it is rarely interrogated further.

Hair's materiality and transformability have been considered in previous studies. Biddle-Perry and Cheang go as far as to say that hair is the most malleable part of the body (2008). Holmes (2010) disputes this, defining hair as a resistant material that opposes change. She borrows the word 'palimpsest' from archaeology to describe the layers of process build-up on the hair. The hair's materiality does not change, no matter how hard we try. When considering the enactment of identity, it is easy to assume that hair is a changeable material. Still, while there is some opportunity to change it, the resistance of hair is equally instrumental in how it is used.

Caring for hair is an everyday practice. "The efforts which go into maintaining a person's hair, and the continual project of the body, are profoundly revealing of the complex choreographies of women's everyday lives" (Holmes, 2010, p. 225). Holmes illuminates the importance of studying everyday hair. My thesis builds upon Holmes' assertion that "on the surface, hair practices appear mundane, every day and nothing special, yet they are bound up with value systems, normative expectations, temporal rhythms, desires, struggles and motivations" (Holmes, 2010, p. 232).

Sabine Hielscher (2011, 2013, 2016) pays particular attention to the regular upkeep of the hair. She believes that socially acceptable hair is not just about the visible but also the embodied experience and time spent caring for the hair (2016). Hielscher's (2013) work delineates the difference between 'bad' shine, the natural greases of the hair and 'good' shine, where products and material work are applied to produce socially desirable hair. She states that shininess is desirable because of its symbolic meanings and must be worked to be maintained. Hielscher's work highlights how materiality and upkeep of the hair cannot be ignored when considering how the hair is styled.

Beyond hair's materiality, little is written that expands upon the simple assortation that hair is both a body part and fashion accessory. Works focus on one or the other but rarely consider their interplay.

Hair in the Performance and Maintenance of Femininity

Early anthropological and psychological works on hair follow the tradition of Sigmund Freud, who suggests hair is an example of an "unsuitable substitute for the sexual object" (Freud, 1991, p. 66) or fetishised body part. As a stand-in for the penis, Freud believes cutting the hair is akin to castration (Freud, 1955b, 1991). In *Femininity,* he claims that women have skills in plaiting and weaving to cover the shame of their 'genital deficiency' (Freud, 1955a). Charles Berg's *The Unconscious Significance of Hair* (1951) and Edmund R. Leach's *Magical Hair* (1958) also focus on the psycho-sexual symbolism of hair.

While I am critical of the psycho-sexual readings of hair, their translation into more recent work supports my understanding of the concept of beauty and the driving desire to work on visual identity. Rose Weitz (2001) argues that hairstyles are interesting to study as they are simultaneously public, personal and highly malleable to individual and cultural ideals. There is eroticism in the concealing and revealing of public and private aspects of hair. Penny Howell Jolly's book *Hair: Untangling a Social History* (2004) includes an essay on *The Ideal Woman,* which argues that long blonde hair has been a (largely) consistent signifier of feminine beauty. This idea was already pervasive in the 15th century when unmarried women would have loose hair to signify virginity, childhood and innocence. Once women were married, they

would tie back their hair (De Courtais, 1973). Loose flowing hair came to signify availability rather than chastity, and long locks became more related to sexuality, power and adult femininity (Cooper, 1971; Philippon, 2013).

Long, sleek blonde hair remains a dominant beauty ideal (Cooper, 1971; hooks, 1989; McCracken, 1995; Howell Jolly, 2004; Round, 2005; Church Gibson, 2008; Handyside, 2010; Burton, 2012). The 'blonde bombshell' became a staple of Hollywood glamour (Cooper, 1971; Howell Jolly, 2004; Gundle and Castelli, 2006; Tremper, 2006). Several works describe stereotypes related to the colour of women's hair, the cliché of the beautiful but dumb blonde, the fiery but unstable redhead and the sultry but dangerous dark-haired woman (Cooper, 1971; Tremper, 2006; Biddle-Perry and Cheang, 2008; Vincent, 2018). Discussing the hair's power to represent sexuality and gender is essential to understand what the participants are reaching for. It may illuminate areas of fashion that fuel the hunt for identity.

When studying the beauty processes performed on the bodies, it is essential to consider the feminist perspective, which has been formative in this area. Susan Bordo (1993b) defines the body, including the rituals we enact upon it and the way we clothe it, as a medium of culture. She states that beauty processes combine a ritualistic practice with a means to fashion the body. Lynn Chancer (2023) agrees that the expectations of beauty are systematic and are a social fact, with aspects that are beyond the control of the individual.

The embodied practices of selfhood and bodily care are enacted daily. Jack Douglas (2010) highlights the importance of developing "useful knowledge of the complex gamut of everyday life" (p. 43). Studying the everyday is particularly useful in understanding the pursuits of women. Sarah Pink (2004) explores the ideas of domesticity and housework in the home. She describes how her participant maintains her "housewifely identity through her everyday embodied actions and performative ascriptions to certain moral values" (Pink, 2004, p. 4). Pink explores the everyday actions, practices, and rituals in the home as a fascinating and rich area of research.

Similarly, framing studying the 'everyday' as a feminist act, Isabel Dyck (2005) argues that "we need close attention to the spaces of everyday life to keep women visible in rapidly changing world conditions, where their activities tend to slip into the shadows of dominant models in the literature" (Dyck, 2005, p. 234). Women's work is often confined to 'hidden' spaces, focusing on care work as an invisible form of feminine labour. Dyck argues for the importance of zooming in on everyday practices. Studying everyday practices in the salon can help us better understand identity formation, self-fashioning and consumer culture.

Another area concerned with the absence of hair is the psychology and nursing of people who have medical hair loss (Tucker, 2009; Aldhouse *et al.*, 2020), particularly chemotherapy-induced alopecia (Zannini *et al.*, 2012; Trusson and Pilnick, 2017; Trusson and Quincey, 2021). These

papers focus on the psychological and emotional effects of hair loss rather than the medical. Although none of my participants were in this category, it contains rich data showing the importance of hair to well-being and 'feeling like yourself,' particularly to women. This type of hair loss is not a choice, like hairdressing, but demonstrates how important hair can be to women.

According to Sabine Hielscher, "hairstyles have been 'assigned a visually communicated identity', just like fashion and dress that play a central part in any culture in relation to class, race, sexuality and gender" (Hielscher, 2013, p. 257). In the following sections, I will unpick some key elements of hair's communication of group identity, starting with gender. This study focuses on the experience of women. Hair has been understood as particularly important to women, and although this shouldn't be seen as a universal truth, it is worth considering why this might be the case in the cultural and historical contexts which inform the participants' experience.

Hairdressing itself is seen as a feminised industry, and beauty work of any type is often assumed to be feminised and frivolous to care about. Hair has been neglected in scholarly studies (Holmes, 2010), perhaps because of its association with the care of women. In 2023, 86% of UK hairdressers are female, with the number of male hairdressers slowly rising, while the number of female hairdressers declines gradually (NHBF, 2023). Many are trained through apprentice schemes, and 46% of the

workforce are 16-24 (NHBF, 2023). These statistics demonstrate that hairdressers are predominantly young women.

While the experience of hair is personal, there are some apparent gender differences in the way hair is treated. While hair is a bodily substance both men and women have, women are socialised into its importance but simultaneously deemed frivolous and trivial (Holmes, 2010, p. 246). Women's hair care practices are routine, normalised, multiple and collective (Holmes, 2010). Holmes believes caring for hair is bound to anxiety, expectations, and value systems and is driven by individual motivations, desires, and temporalities. When dealing with women's experiences of their hair, there is a combination of shared experiences as women living within a patriarchal society and individualised motivations.

Women's hair is arguably more important than men's because it is central to their social position (Weitz, 2001). For many women, appearance is a more accessible route to power than career, financial independence and political appearance; as a result, "women consciously use the culturally mandated appearance norms to achieve their personal ends" (Weitz, 2001, p. 638). Women's relationships to their appearance and the performance of femineity are central to many feminist debates.

Jacki Willson explores the way that women utilise the codes of glamour and beauty to play with and reconstitute the gaze. She believes that femininity is "self-consciously constructed" and the female body is

"painstakingly presented" (Willson, 2015, p. 24), which can be a joyful and powerful act.

The experience of femininity and womanhood now exist within a postfeminist culture, which "works in part to incorporate, assume, or naturalize aspects of feminism; crucially, it also works to commodify feminism via the figure of woman as empowered consumer" (Tasker and Negra, 2008, p. 2). Roberts argues that media, specifically television, enforce the idea that embracing gender identities and consumer culture could offer a source of emancipation. He argues that this can be just another "hegemonic strategy, a kind of propaganda or self-fulfilling prophecy" (Roberts in Tasker and Negra, 2008, p. 245). In 2008, the examples of *What Not To Wear* and *Desperate Housewives* provide particularly bleak examples. More recently, social media has become the focus of authors on postfeminism, like Rosalind Gill (2023).

Biological factors have been used to explain gender differences. For example, a woman's reproductive health is tied more closely to health and age than a man's; therefore, physical qualities, including the luxuriousness of the hair, become linked to health and age (Jackson, 1992). Psychologists believe that women's hair is instrumental in 'mate selection' (Hinsz, Matz and Patience, 2001) and that long hair is sexy on females (Bereczkei and Mesko, 2006). This suggests there are also biological drivers to care for and style the hair.

Whiteness and Enforcement of Hegemonic Standards in the Salon

When considering women's hair, I have already established that it is not possible to ignore ideas of beauty. Beauty is in inherently racialised and reflects the context (Yip, Ainsworth and Hugh, 2019). While there are many ways to achieve beauty, ideals of beauty are communicated and therefore enforced, through the reproduction of imagery of women in visual culture (Kuipers, 2022) and within the salon (Gimlin, 1996).

Maxine Craig argues that women navigating beauty are not blind to the norms of beauty in culture or duped, but navigators of beauty where "negotiations take place in unstable fields of power shaped by inequalities" (Craig, 2006, p. 166). In *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change,* Angela McRobbie (2009) critiques the 'post-feminist' cultural landscape of the early 2000s. She describes the 'post-feminist masquerade', there women are positioned as fearful subjects in the quest for perfection. Where a woman must "get herself endlessly and repetitively done up, so as to mask her rivalry with men in the world of work (i.e. her wish for masculinity) and to conceal the competition she now poses" (2009, p. 67) to remain desirable. A byproduct of women entering the workspace is that women's subjectivity has become a competitive system, where the ownness of achievement is put onto the women. However, "where in the past this was a necessity, now it is a personal choice, and male approval is sought only indirectly" (2009, pp. 67–68). While beauty was once enforced by hegemonic

masculinities, McRobbie argues that they have now been replaced by the cultural horizon of judgement provided by the fashion and beauty system.

Importantly, the post-feminist masquerade reinstates whiteness as culturally dominant within the fashion-beauty complex, as "the luminosities of femininity are unapologetically and invariably white" (McRobbie, 2009, p. 70). She describes this process:

> the idea of complete perfection embodied within this post-feminist masquerade is elusive, unviable, and beyond reach, it seems, for non-white women, unless they relinquish almost all signifiers of racial difference and subsume ethnicity into the dominant repertoire of normative white femininity (McRobbie, 2009, pp. 70–71)

Normative whiteness is enforced through the "violent exclusion of diversity" (McRobbie, 2009, p. 69) and othering which solidifies the boundaries of racial divisions. This is an example of the type of racial violence which McRobbie believes may go unnoticed, using the visual language of (white) Hollywood glamour and enforced through (white) fashion magazines.

> The retro, nostalgia for this kind of whiteness ensures that the new masquerade, if not unavailable to black or Asian women, is then only available at the cost of negating modes of style and beauty associated with

> blackness, with cultural diversity and ethnic difference (McRobbie, 2009, p. 71)

Women of colour attempting to keep up with the progress-led perfection of post-femininity, must adopt white modes of style and beauty, if they want any chance of keeping up.

Glamour is implicit in the enforcing of the ideals of whiteness within postfeminist perfection. McRobbie describes a 'nostalgia for whiteness', "where in the past whiteness was assumed, a norm without ethnicity, a norm against which everything else was different" (McRobbie, 2009, p. 42), using Dita von Teese and footballers' wives as examples of celebrity culture that celebrate whiteness. She mentions the WAG's blonde hair in passion; however, it is worth highlighting that both these examples weaponise their sexuality through sleek, glamourous, loosely curled white hair.

The dominance of white femininity is particularly pervasive, violent and treacherous. Karen Wilkes argues the invisibility and inherent privilege of whiteness as it

> continues to present itself as the unquestioned norm, against which all other ethnic groups are measured, it is made visible and desirable by performances that normalise the values, cultural capital and aesthetic tastes of the dominant white upper and middle classes (Wilkes, 2015, p. 22).

When studying the hair and beauty practices of women in the salon, it is important to note the pervasive nature of whiteness and attempt to make it visible at key moments within the data.

While whiteness is an often-unquestioned norm within postfeminism, it is not mean that postfeminism's influence applies only to white women. Simidele Dosekun argues that the postfeminist woman is one who "*can and does"* (Dosekun, 2021, p. 22), for multiple reasons that this type of woman is likely to be white. However, she highlights that this does not make postfeminist women of colour "an impossible or derivative sight" (Dosekun, 2021, p. 22).

Hairdressing salons tend to serve a racially defined clientele. In the UK, salons are often primarily staffed by and serve white women or are primarily staffed by or serve Black women (Wilson, 2024). This is true for the salons in this study – they predominantly have white staff and serve white clientele. As a result, these spaces represent the white middle class postfeminist experience of hair and beauty.

In the hairdressing salon, the racialised systems of beauty play out in particularly polarised manner. The segregation issues are contributed to by the lack of education in stylists who are primarily taught on sleek European hair types, which leads to clients with textured hair being redirected to stylists with specialist training from non-mainstream sources (Wilson, 2024). Jessica Willson concludes that the segregation in salons is symptomatic of wider practices of racial discrimination and calls

for better training in the cosmetology industry. Johanna M. Lukate explains the segregation also comes from the cultural expectations and history of the hair salon's place and role within Black communities (2021).

Black hair holds immense significance within Black culture. Feminist author, academic and social activist bell hooks' essay *Straightening our Hair* (hooks, 1989) analyses her experience of hair as a Black woman as ceremonial feminine social practices. She, then, offers the other side of the coin, interrogating the hegemonic beauty ideals centred around whiteness, which suggests 'natural hair,' afro texture hair in its natural unstraightened state, is 'ugly' and 'frightening.' The phrase 'good hair' is used in many Black communities to describe hair like white hair's texture (hooks, 1989; Badillo, 2001; Dione Rosado, 2007; Robinson, 2011). Authors have stressed the supremacy of these ideals globally, including in Ghanaian women (Amemete, 2020), Dominican women (Badillo, 2001), and British schools (Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly, 2018). Black women do not actively replicate European style, and the oppression of white supremacy in beauty ideals is instrumental in the formation of taste and style in all cultures. However, they are far more problematic for women of colour (hooks, 1989; Dabiri, 2019).

Work on Black hair has become much more prevalent since 2020. It is increasingly common to see work in this area that offers an autoethnographic perspective on Black women's hair (Riddick, 2022; Rowe, 2022; Hollingsworth and Kakooza, 2024; Mifetu and Chen, 2024).

This shift concentrates on the lived experience and compound adversity faced by Black women. The shift comes in reaction to increased awareness of the 'invisibility of whiteness' and academia's assumption of whiteness as normative.

Hairdressers' Aesthetic, Emotional and Bodily Labour

There is some work that already explores how hairdressers work. This thesis is interested in how hairdressers and clients interact, so it can build from an existing understanding of hairdressers. Existing texts tend to be wider sociologies of women's work, which can and have been directly applied to the salon and are foundational in interpreting latent meaning from the interview data and ultimately helping us to understand *how* the hairdresser's role impacts the client's negotiation of identity.

While studying the everyday events in the salon, Holmes divides the labour she observes into emotional, aesthetic, and bodily labour (Holmes, 2010a). She builds on existing work that combines the concepts of emotional and aesthetic labour and adds her idea of bodily labour.

Arlie Hochschild's concept of emotional labour (2012 [1983]) is consistently applied to hairdressers (Sharma and Black, 2001; Cohen, 2010b; Harness, Jamie and McMurray, 2021; Flanagan, 2023). In *The Managed Heart: The Commercialization of Human Emotions,* Hochschild

analyses the work culture of flight attendants. She defines emotional labour as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (Hochschild, 2012, p. 7). Hochschild argues that service workers, including air hostesses, must project an emotional front to suppress feelings and outwardly present the 'proper state of mind' in line with the employer's expectations and ensure income is maintained. The direct connection between emotional work and capital makes this type of front production different from those used in personal interactions.

Both hairdressers and flight attendants work in a predominantly female service industry and provide a service-based interaction that requires physical and mental labour. Both industries are plagued with the public impression of 'frivolousness' (Culliney, 2019). Kapp Howe's book *Pink Collar Work: Inside the World of Women's Work* (1977) chronicles job roles usually fulfilled by women, predominantly in the service industry. She includes a chapter on 'beauticians,' a term used to describe themselves by the hairdressers she studied. The book records her conversations in the salon. Although it offers little analysis, it demonstrates the hairdresser's commitment to "make the women who come in here feel good" (1977, p. 28), showing that the haircut is a deeply emotionally embedded interaction where it is not just the physicality or materiality of the hair that is worked on.

Ashley Mears explains 'aesthetic labour' as the "work in which individuals are compensated, indirectly or directly, for their own body's look and

affect" (2014, p. 1332). This type of labour is prevalent in the beauty industry, where the stylists' appearance is perceived as an advert for the service. Mears suggests presenting an aesthetic self requires working on 'perceived attractiveness,' 'dress,' 'grooming' and 'voice and affect,' which she relates to Bourdieu's cultural capital (Mears, 2014, p. 1331).

Both Gimlin (1996) and Tray Yeadon-Lee (2011) identify the role of the hairdresser as an aesthetic labourer. Gimlin further explains that aesthetic labour can involve *body work* and *beauty work* (Gimlin, 2001). Beauty work is the unpaid work employees do on their bodies and beauty. In *Body Work: Beauty and Self-Image in American Culture* (2001), Gimlin poses that working on the body means working on the self. "The self that is enacted through the body is both a social construct and …a distinctly individual possession" (Gimlin, 2001, p. 3). Enacting the self is particularly important to women as "the body is a primary indicator of the outside world" (Gimlin, 2001, p. 4), particularly for hairdressers who must guide this kind of construction of self for others.

Samantha Kwan and Mary Nell Trautner (2009) define beauty work as practices performed to elicit individual benefits, such as putting on makeup before work. It is similar to body work but seeks physical beauty specifically, not just conformality. Kwan and Trautner (2009) describe how physical beauty can lead to positive perceptions and more significant individual and institutional opportunities. Kristen Barber's (2016) work pays special attention to the aestheticisation and sexualisation of staff

through aesthetic labour, which is used to attract and keep a predominantly male client base.

The most visible work in the salon is the least discussed academically: the physical actions of working on the body. Most discussions of the work of a hairdresser concentrate on the complex social interactions and balancing of skills. Helen Holmes (2010a) addresses this gap by focusing on the materiality of hair and the 'everyday' processes it undergoes. She identifies that much of the existing work at that time focuses "only upon the labour of the salon staff, ignoring the outcomes of this labour upon the bodies and identities of their customers" (Holmes, 2010a, p. 50). Her work uniquely explores the haircut's material and physically embodied elements. A key takeaway of Holmes' thesis is that although the hairdressers oversee crafting the vitality of the hair in the salon, they leave the client to manage this alone between appointments.

The Varied Roles That Hairdressers Undertake in the Salon

Many of the sociologies of work concern the multiple roles that hairdressers perform in the salon. Many of these roles are repeated in many texts. However, they help establish the prevailing understanding of what goes on in the salon. The roles, centred around emotional closeness, are essential to understanding how clients and hairdressers interact. They are well-discussed and valuable as a foundation to build comprehension. What is critical to my understanding is the role of the

hairdresser, who describes them as skilled leaders and guides within the appointment: expert/professional and fashion icon/coach. In my quest to understand how fashionable identities are managed in the salon, it is critical to know how much influence the hairdresser has in guiding towards fashionability, what their credentials are and how they do that. These ideas come from a limited selection of texts, which all talk about the multiple roles hairdressers undertake:

Caregiver – In the 70s and 80s, several papers were published exploring the psychological potential of hairdressers as caregivers and informal helpgivers (Cowen *et al.*, 1979, 1981; Wiesenfeld and Weis, 1979). The hairdresser-client relationship differs from other service-based industries and is academically important despite the public depiction of the industry. More recently, a call has been made to upskill hairdressers to provide more formal help. For example, spaces to talk about family violence (McCann and Myers, 2023), barbers for men's mental health (NHS England, 2020) and the potential of Black salons to provide health advice (Davis, 2011; Pillay, 2011).

Salesperson – Eayrs (1993), Gimlin (1996), and Lee et al. (2007) recognise the importance of the customer to the economic survival of the stylist. There are many techniques raised in these works designed to maximise profits, including organisation of the column and time management, a delegation of minor tasks to juniors, converting 'occasional clients to 'regulars', avoiding being 'busy' by trying to encourage longer, more expensive processes like colours over cutting

and selling of products, which is always framed as helping the client rather than upselling (Eayrs, 1993; Lee *et al.*, 2007).

Friend/Confidante – Michele Eayrs (1993) and Gimlin (1996) emphasised the close emotional relationships that hairdressers develop with their clients. The terms' confidantes' and 'secret keepers' situate the other social skills of hairdressers. Holmes (2018) describes how friendships are crafted over repeated and intimate service interactions. She explains that these are deep, enduring relationships, not paid friends.

Trusting relationship – Eayrs (1993) details the formation of a trusting relationship between hairdresser and client, which is both professional and social. Danielle Soulliere (1997) adds that hairdressers' technical competence in handling the client's identity helps form trusting relationships, which may develop into long-term relationships. She believes trust is a crucial factor in creating a 'following' of loyal clients, which offers the hairdressers who rent chairs job stability in their current role or the flexibility to change salons.

Risktaker – Eayrs (1993) believes that hairdressers navigate hazards on behalf of their clients, who put their physical safety (chemicals and sharp blades near the face) and their social and emotional safety (working on identity, asking for the wrong thing) in the hands of the stylist. She focuses on the physical risk but does identify that by being entrusted with the client's appearance, hairdressers are entrusted with "the first

and most influential aspect of identity" (Eayrs 1993, 20), meaning they bear the risk of something going wrong.

Expert/professional – Gimlin (1996) explores the power dynamics in a Long Island salon that become gatekeepers of beauty ideals, providing advice and direction in managing the visual identity. However, emotional labour often undermines the hairdresser's expert status in preserving the client's feelings, frequently cutting a style they know is not flattering to safeguard the customer's emotions. Gimlin argues that the stylist's emotions are double-edged as they act as confidantes, professionals and equals of clients while, at the same time, self-sacrificing to put the client's needs first, putting themselves in a lower social position. Yeadon-Lee (Lee *et al.*, 2007; Yeadon-Lee *et al.*, 2011; Yeadon-Lee, 2012) addressed the lack of material about high-end salons in the UK. She argues these 'high-end' stylists, whose services are more expensive, have more occupational capital to sway and influence customers and are therefore considered to be more expert.

Craftsperson – Holmes initially described the hairdresser as a skilled craftsperson in her thesis (2010) and went on to flesh out this claim in the article *Transient productions; enduring encounters: the crafting of bodies and friendships in the hair salon* (2018). She theorises that their craftwork is a synthesis of mental and physical labour. It is only Holmes who talks about hairdressing in this way.

Fashion icon/coach – Caroline Cox (1999) chronicles the history of the 'genius hairdresser' of the 1950s/60s, who was given complete creative control, seen as the auteur, and the creative force behind the fashion in hair. Contemporary hairdressers have lost some of this power and control. Holmes (2010) explains that while they retain some agency over the hair, their role focuses on emotional management.

Several authors allude to the hairdresser as an arbiter of beauty and fashion. Gimlin implies the hairdresser's role as a translator of beauty's language. "The hairstylist, in essence, bridges the gap between those who pursue beauty and those who define what beauty is; she becomes the route to those standards and the embodiment of them in everyday life" (Gimlin, 1996, p. 505). Lee et al. (2007) identify that hairdressers in 'high-fashion' salons utilise their aesthetic labour and 'personal cool' to attract clients and provide hair, fashion and lifestyle advice. Rachel Sherman (2011) uses the term 'taste work' to describe roles that involve making an aesthetic judgment. 'Taste brokers,' such as concierges, depend on performing good taste in line with a particular client's desires. The coaching and taste work provided by hairdressers is absent from many analyses of their work. Holmes (2018) discusses hair's fashionability and the importance of the relationship between the hairdresser and the client in managing it.

I have demonstrated that hair is not just an accessory but instrumental in creating both selfhood and fashionability. While this is established, what is missing is any discussion of how this occurs. It is usually with the

guidance of the hairdresser, who holds power and authority in fashion and self-creation. I will interrogate how hairdressers lead their clients through this hazardous environment in this study.

Craft Literature which can Help to Understand Hairdressing Better

I have already established that hairdressers work in various roles in the salon, including as skilled craftspeople (Holmes, 2018). Here, I explain the negotiations between the client and the hairdresser by borrowing from craft research. This discipline has already defined the role of interactions and conversations in shaping the crafting process.

Von Busch (2013) challenges the traditional notion of the 'lone genius craftsman', arguing that much craft is a collaborative practice instead. He conceives of craft communities as a superorganism. The individuals' skills combine to assemble collaborative skills beyond the individual mind. The hands of a single craftsman do the 'work' but for the advancement of the collective. Collective craftsmanship "requires finding points of agreement and managing disagreement is a 'dialogic' activity and shapes a specific *socio-ability*" (von Busch, 2013, p. 140). This article is developed from the work of Richard Sennett, a sociologist famous for *The Craftsman* (2008), who places craft as an activity that goes beyond labour and is good for well-being. He also writes about cooperation, which he believes is a social skill developed through repeated rituals (Sennett, 2012).

Von Busch describes this process as 'collective craftsmanship,' a phrase which I will repurpose. I use collective craft to describe the process of communication, collaboration and craft which takes place in the salon. It is helpful to understand that both the hairdresser and the client are active participants in the formation of the haircut, despite the hands of the hairdresser being the actors of the craft skill.

Helen Holmes (2018) defines the hairdresser as a skilled craftsperson who uses crafting practices, labour and "often invisible and intangible skills" (p.137) to create intimate service interactions and friendships. She discusses the hairdresser as a craftsperson (Holmes, 2010a, 2018), and although she sees the client as having power in the relationship, she does not go as far as seeing the customer as part of this crafting. Talking in the salon has been explored in previous works on hairdressing salons (Gimlin, 1996; Pillay, 2011; Mckeown, 2015; Heinrichsmeier, 2016; McCann and Myers, 2023). However, I will also view these conversations as an element of collaborative craft.

Gaps in the Literature

In exploring the literature on hair, several notable gaps emerge, warranting further investigation. I will briefly outline these gaps in relation to the two research questions.

How does hair contribute to fashionable identity, differently from clothing?

Hair's relationship to identity is discussed in relation to group identity, or symbolic meaning is discussed, but little work considers the individual's conception of identity.

There is a gap in understanding hair's nuanced and individualised impact on fashionable identity formation and expression. Despite work connecting hair to clothing or likening it to an accessory, it falls short of critically analysing how this works or the mechanisms behind it. My thesis will look at both the *how* and the *why.* Although Alice Beard (2022) points out that hair is more than just a passive accessory, as it is active in creating fashion, this topic could be pushed further when considering contemporary hair rather than looking to the past.

Despite saying that hair functions like dress, there is little attempt to apply fashion theory to understand this similarity more clearly. Bauman's thinking is completely absent from work on hair. His work primarily concerns consumer society, so it is perhaps not the most obvious choice. However, his rich understanding of how identity functions can be extended to hair and be fruitful in understanding individualist and fashionable identity formation.

The existing literature on hair and hairdressing appears to overlook what is ultimately at stake in the seemingly everyday and often overlooked

interactions in the salon. Some work covers losing hair, for example, due to chemotherapy or alopecia (Zannini *et al.*, 2012; Trusson and Pilnick, 2017; Aldhouse *et al.*, 2020). This work explains the importance of hair when something is going 'wrong' with the hair, in moments of stress, when the 'worst' happens. It does not address what is at stake when things are going as planned. Of course, moments of trauma can shed light on the everyday, but there is little attempt to study the everyday itself. We know hair is 'powerful,' 'important' and sometimes 'mystical,' but such observations do not question the risks or potential downfalls of styling it. I will argue that the haircut holds the potential for much dysregulation, 'getting it wrong,' or mismanaging the visual self for both the hairdresser and the client.

How do clients and hair stylists negotiate fashionable identities in the salon?

Perhaps the most pressing gap is the absence of the negotiation between stylist and client in existing literature. There is a rich history of writing about the hairdresser, their skills, and the sociality they bring to their role. There is work that covers the positive effects that clients experience. However, little looks at how the backward and forward movement occurs in the salon. The concept of negotiation is entirely absent. This is a problem because it flattens the richness of the interaction and does not consider what is at stake for both parties. This concept is a core theme in my analysis of what is happening in the salon and is critical to my argument.

A small but high-quality group of texts discusses hair's materiality and maintenance. My work comes to maintenance to explain behaviour and understand clients' decisions when cutting and styling their hair. The literature on maintenance makes it clear that there is more at stake than a pure, untainted 'presentation of who I really am' in hair care. My work approaches maintenance with an identity lens rather than one of materiality. In doing so, I bring together the work of Bauman to understand liquid identities and Foucault to understand bodily docility. With this combination, we can understand how women experience insidious forms of control and their impact on their hair. I do not believe anyone has used these two thinkers in this way to discuss hair before.

In exploring the interactions between hair and beauty, a gap in the literature lies in the depth of analysis regarding how beauty standards and ideals influence hair maintenance practices and styling. While the literature may touch upon the cultural and societal expectations surrounding hair aesthetics, there may be a lack of comprehensive examination into how these expectations shape individuals' maintenance routines and perceptions of beauty.

There is a gap in understanding the role of maintenance in negotiating and expressing identity through hair, particularly concerning gender, race, and other intersecting identities. The literature does not adequately address the significance of listening to participants' experiences and perspectives in understanding the complexities of hair maintenance and

its impact on self-identity. Incorporating participant voices through qualitative research methods could provide valuable insights into the subjective meanings and practices associated with hair maintenance. Finally, there may be a gap in embodied research approaches that fully immerse researchers in the lived experiences of individuals engaging in hair maintenance practices. Embodied research methodologies, such as phenomenology or autoethnography, could offer a more holistic understanding of hair maintenance's sensory, emotional, and social dimensions.

Conclusion

This literature review first outlined works related to the presentation of self. I established my perspective on identity using the work of theorists whose work is commonly applied to fashion. Identity is portrayed as visually constructed through bodily surfaces, attire, and consumption practices. The rest of this thesis will rely on the theories of Simmel (1957), who established that visualized identity can signify group membership or set individuals apart from a group; Bauman's concept of liquidity (2000), which is introduced to provide a contemporary lens on fluid identity formations; and Goffman's (1959) view that identity is performed through (in part) attire and visual appearance. Ideas of taste (Bourdieu, 1986) and subcultural capital (Thornton, 1995) demonstrate how appearance is used to express belonging to a social stratus or group.

The second section focussed specifically on hair's role within the presentation of self. The literature showed that hair is an essential element in presenting self. Biddle-Perry and Cheang (2008) were instrumental here, as they closely link the fashion and styling of hair to the presentation of self. This is not the only quality of hair that makes it interesting to consider. Holmes' (2010) study in the salon focuses on the materiality of hair, establishing that while hair is style-able, malleable, and impacted by culture, it is also resistant and part of the body. The varied ways that hair is written about show that its boundary-crossing nature makes it a complex material to understand and for hairdressers to work on. McCann's (2022, 2023) work describes the impact of Covid-19 on hairdressing salons.

Work on hair often focuses on the hair of women and illustrates the problem of performing femininity. Foucauldian notions of power and discipline (1979) examine how power dynamics influence bodily practices, which impacted feminist perspectives on beauty. This review established how hair fits within broader discourses of gender, beauty standards, and bodily autonomy. Hairdressers undertake a wide range of roles in the salon, which have been reviewed in this chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: Methodology

The reality of everyday life further presents itself to me as an intersubjective world, a world that I share with others. This intersubjectivity sharply differentiates everyday life from other realities of which I am conscious. I am alone in the world of my dreams, but I know that the world of everyday life is as real to others as it is to myself

(Berger and Luckmann, 1990, p. 61)

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach I used to explore how everyday practices related to hair shape and reflect identity. Although hair is often treated as unimportant or overlooked, it carries deep social and cultural meaning. For many people, it is not something they think about closely. It might be a source of anxiety or simply ignored until it becomes inconvenient, yet it plays a quiet but powerful role in how people experience themselves and are seen by others. While its significance is widely assumed, it is rarely examined in detail. Paying attention to the ordinary ways people style, cut, or manage their hair can reveal how identity is lived and negotiated. To explore these subtle and personal dynamics, I developed a creative and reflexive methodological approach.

This research seeks to answer three questions: ***How does hair contribute to fashionable identity, differently from clothing? How do clients and hair stylists negotiate fashionable identities in the salon? How can understanding hairdressing benefit fashion and (over)consumption?*** It does this through a qualitative approach, blending interviews and autoethnographic fieldwork.

To begin with, I explain my broad research philosophy before zooming further into my approach, explaining the methodological decisions and how they are implemented in this study. Next, the chapter delineates the

specific methods applied. These are semi-structured interviews with both hairdressers and clients and autoethnographic fieldwork. The last section outlines the generated data sources and a cohesive map of the analysis process.

Research Philosophy

My research aligns with a relativist ontology, accepting that there are multiple and equally valid ways to see the world. I argue against the idea of objective truth, favouring the idea that context is essential. This is particularly important when studying hair. Having hair is a shared experience (almost everyone has had hair) and highly personal experience (often emotional and tied to broader cultural factors). This ontology has guided my research design, as I aim to understand the truths of my participants rather than apply a single, objective truth to their narratives.

John Ward Creswell and J. David Creswell tell us, "human beings construct meanings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (Creswell and Creswell, 2017, p. 8). I echo their constructivist perspective, believing that one's understanding of the world is shaped by multiple social factors, including culture, group belonging, socioeconomic background, and life experiences. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), the key attributes of constructionism are understanding, multiple participant meanings, social and historical construction, and theory

generation. As research questions seek to generate an understanding of what happens in the salon, spaces where people gather and enact social rituals of grooming and bonding (Holmes, 2010a), constructionism is the most appropriate epistemology.

According to Ezzy Douglas, the constructivist perspective lends itself to an inductive approach (2002). Inductive reasoning starts with a social phenomenon – in this case the cutting and styling of hair - and generates data which informs the development of broader theories about social life. Gilbert (2008) cautions that it is challenging to conduct pure inductive research as theory and personal subject matter always influence the researcher. He explains that it is more accurate to consider all research as sitting on a spectrum, with purely inductive research at one extreme and purely deductive research at the other. I use a mainly inductive approach using the social phenomenon of hair to construct knowledge about the wider way we live. However, it also relies heavily on synthesising that with existing theoretical work about fashionable identity and women's bodies, drawing on deductive elements.

My understanding of hairdressing must extend beyond the boundaries of fashion studies because hairdressing, as an industry and cultural phenomenon, is not bound by arbitrary disciplinary lines. Interdisciplinary research has risen in popularity to describe the complexity of our globalised society (Repko, 2020). The philosopher Karl Popper famously said, "We are not students of some subject matter, but students of problems. And problems may cut right across the boundaries of any

subject matter or discipline" (Popper in Parvin, 2010). He believes that real-life problems are multifaceted and do not fit neatly into the disciplinary boundaries we have carved arbitrarily. With a professional background in fashion and textile design and an academic background in fashion studies, treating hair as an extension of dress comes naturally. However, like dress, hair is more complex than simply providing a covering for the body. Hair holds varying meaning potentials across cultures and is a material in a constant state of change; I cannot consider it from a single disciplinary perspective.

My approach is built upon ethnographic principles of immersive fieldwork and interviews (Spradley, 1979; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007), combined with sociological theory, which links fashion, identity, and the body; and a fashion theory perspective to ground the research. Many theorists of sociology have either written about fashion as a social phenomenon (Spencer, 1897; Simmel, 1957; Veblen, [1899] 1994; Bauman, 2010) or developed concepts which are easily applied to dress practices (Goffman, 1959; Bourdieu, 1986; Mead, 2015).

Researcher Positionality

I continue to introduce myself and my position within this research, as reflexivity is particularly important while undertaking ethnographic, embodied and subjective research. As such, it is helpful to state my positionality at this stage.

My position as a non-hairdresser interacts with my research throughout. During the interviews, I spoke to two groups, hairdressers and clients, and my position impacts each group differently. To the hairdressers, I am an 'outsider', to use Sonia Corbin Dwyer and Jennifer L. Buckle's definition, "studying a group which [I] am not part of" (2009, p. 57). This thought was confirmed by Kim and Tom, who asked me why I was doing this research and if I had experience in hairdressing. My outsider perspective can bring my motivation into question. However, this did not impede the interviews, and I could still build rapport with the participants. Being outside of their group had some benefits. The hairdressers (often correctly) assumed my ignorance of their industry's technicalities, jargon and intricacies, which led to patience and detailed explanations.

I am an insider to the clients, but 'receiver of haircuts' is not a group people use to classify themselves. Therefore, it does not bring significant rewards to the interviews. As a woman in my 30s who cares about her hair but does not identify with being 'girly' or 'glamourous,' I formed a greater bond with some clients. I hoped this would allow open discussion where the participants did not fear looking 'vain,' but it is hard to measure if this was successful.

The insider/outsider dynamic is helpful to consider but has limitations. "Holding membership in a group does not denote complete sameness within that group. Likewise, not being a group member does not denote

complete difference" (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009, p. 60). To show my personality beyond the binary delineations of insider/outsider, I will now detail the elements of my personhood which have been particularly impactful in my motivations, approach and results during this research.

I am a white, British, 33-year-old woman from a middle-class background, which is largely a privileged position. I approach identity from a position of intersectional feminism. In the academy, whiteness has historically been considered normative. While the scope of my study does mean most of my participants are white, it does not mean that I have assumed their experience is universal. I will address the choices around race, recruitment and methods in Chapter 3 – Methodology. I believe in addressing and redistributing the hierarchies of knowledge within academia. Frequently, these structures reward the white, male, upper-middle class, privileged and privately educated without leaving space for others. My approach to research drives me to attempt accessibility and openness in my writing.

While I have never worked in hairdressing, my motivation comes partly from my previous career. Working in fast fashion has left me with a complicated relationship with fashion as a consumer, worker, sceptic, and researcher. Working as a designer and creating garments to meet the demands of the fast-paced brand and ever-changing customer shaped my understanding of 'fashioning the self.' My experience made me critical of sustainability in fashion, greenwashing and the reliance on technology to solve fashion's problems.

My Masters' research into hair as a material and its shifting meaning potentials drove me to inquire about the processes, sociality and drives for styling and cutting hair. It provided a strong foundation for a theoretical perspective on hair.

I have a relationship approaching friendship with 'my' hairdresser. I visited before and after the autoethnographic research, and I felt great relief returning to the safety she provides. In choosing autoethnographic methods, I entangled my own experience of hairdressing with the project. This is not because I believe I have an extraordinary experience, but quite the opposite. I detail my reasons in Chapter Three, but the mundanity of my experiences in the salon is as worthy of study as the extraordinary experiences. My experiences will have impacted my data analysis, and there is the potential to overlook essential themes. A rigorous process of thematic analysis and deductive thematic analysis was undertaken to minimise these drawbacks.

I live in Nottingham, just outside of the area I have defined as the city centre. I have lived here for ten years in two separate stints. I am well acquainted with the city, but I originate from the southwest of England. I selected the city centre as the context for this research partially for familiarity and convenience. I was aware of many of the salons that I visited and their reputation, but I had not visited any of them. I practised reflexivity throughout this subjective research process to interrogate how my positionality and biases impacted my data.

Research Approach

This research builds from the traditions of other works on hair, while selecting the most relevant methods to answer its specific research questions. It is common for earlier work which studied hairdressing salons to use ethnographic methods and observations (Eayrs, 1993; Soulliere, 1997; Lee *et al.*, 2005, 2007; Barber, 2008, 2016; Yeadon-Lee, 2012). This tradition is continued by two studies, which specifically use participant observations by volunteering in the role of Salon Junior (Gimlin, 1996; Holmes, 2010a). During participant observations, "a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture" (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011, p. 12). There is also a significant body of work that relies purely on interviews (Cowen et al., 1979, 1981; Cohen, 2010b; Ward and Holland, 2011; Zannini et al., 2012; Trusson and Pilnick, 2017; Barak-Brandes, 2018; Maine, 2018; Okavi-Partush, Kama and Barak-Brandes, 2018; Trusson and Quincey, 2021).

As participant observations were not possible due to access issues (which I will discuss at length in the conclusion), I undertook a blend of semi-structured interviews with autoethnographic fieldwork in the salon. This combination of methods allowed me to understand the perspective of the

client and hairdresser, while also studying the goings-on in the salon in a naturalistic and embodied manner. This consisted of three separate research approaches to generate data. Each was completed before beginning the next.

Approach One consisted of a series of seven semi-structured interviews with hairdressers based in Nottingham City Centre.
Approach Two was another set of seven semi-structured interviews, this time with female clients who visited salons in the city centre.
Approach Three was a series of nine autoethnographic visits to salons in Nottingham city centre where my hair was cut, coloured or worked upon.

To discuss these methods, I group together the two series of interviews, as they are methodologically similar, and separate out the autoethnographic fieldwork. I outline the reasons for choosing the approach, then provide a detailed account of them.

Interviews

Interviews are an established and well-documented means of qualitative research. I have selected these to analyse the perspectives of the hairdressers and the clients. I focused on open-ended questions and used 'probes' for more in-depth understanding of the participant's experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings and knowledge (Patton, 2021). Open-ended questions are useful in exploratory research and

allow space for conversations to wonder. Through careful listening, observing and consideration of the theory, I clarified responses and gained further detail about the areas of interest. These interviews were conversational and designed to support later autoethnographic fieldwork. Although this type of interview may feel casual, they were undertaken with specific research intent and helped to contextualise the participant's culture (Patton, 2021).

McCracken highlights the researcher's position as an 'instrument' in this type of conversational interview. Collecting and analysing data is:

> a kind of "rummaging" process. The investigator must use his or her experience and imagination to find (or fashion) a match for the patterns evidenced by the data. The diverse aspects of the self become a bundle of templates to be held up against the data until parallels emerge. (McCracken, 1988, p. 19)

Both the interviewer and the interviewee construct a version of themselves in relation to the interview topic. Rapley (2001) offers a further explanation; "Data gained in the specific interview begins to emerge *as just one possible version*, a version that is contingent on the specific local interactional context" (Rapley, 2001, p. 318 original emphasis). Interviews are products of their time and place and the specific and contextual interaction between participant and interviewer.

While interviews were once seen as an asymmetric experience controlled by the researcher to generate data from the subject, they have been

reconceptualised as "occasions on which animated subjects collaboratively assemble accounts of experience" (Gubrium, 2012, p. 31). In my interviews, I followed Magnusson's view that the researcher should "invite[s] the participant to tell stories about experiences, relate memories, and offer reflections and opinions" (Magnusson, 2015, p. 47). My role as the interviewer was as an active participant in the conversation, to steer the direction if it went wildly off course, and to be present and responsive in the discussions. Dialogic interviews mimic the naturalistic conversation in the salons and give the participant space and agency to share the direction of the conversation. The interviews took 45 minutes to 1h15; this allowed time to take tangents, elaborations, and sidenotes alongside answering core research questions.

The interviews conducted followed reflexive interviewing techniques, where possible. Although Pessoa et al. (2019) recommend conducting follow-up interviews as the reflexive portion of the research, it was not possible within the time constraints. Instead, I integrated reflexive techniques during the interviews, including building rapport at the start, adopting a conversational tone, building space into the interview schedule to allow tangents and asking follow-up questions to clarify.

I began the interviews in May 2021, when the Covid-19 pandemic was still a key safety consideration. All interviews took place over Microsoft Teams in accordance with the university's health and safety requirements at the time. Although safety measures had been lifted by the end of this series of interviews, the format was kept the same for the next stage for

parity. Online interviews were convenient to organise to schedule around the hairdresser's schedule, usually in the evening. The pandemic meant that most participants were familiar with Microsoft Teams or similar programs, and the use of technology caused few issues. There were some minor technical issues including patchy audio or a participant's laptop running out of battery. These were easily overcome. Online interviews can feel detached, in comparison to face-to-face interviews, so extra time was taken before the interview questions were asked to build rapport and put the participants at ease. What follows is a description of the first two approaches I took.

Approach One – Semi-structured Interviews with Hairdressers

The first research approach was a series of seven semi-structured interviews with hairdressers working in Nottingham city centre salons. All the salons selected describe themselves as 'hairdressing salons,' as opposed to 'barbershops,' and although it is not universal or made explicit, they tend to serve mainly women and specialise in longer hair. Initially, I planned to recruit eight participants, but due to time constraints, only seven participants were interviewed. My participants ranged from twenty-two to sixty-two years old, most in their mid-thirties. There were six female hairdressers and one male, and all the participants identified as white. The experience level of participants varied from those early in their careers to salon owners. To recruit participants, I began with convenience sampling, contacting hairdressers I was familiar with

from previous research and cold-calling potential participants on Instagram. From there, a snowball sampling method was adopted.

Participant Profiles – Hairdressers

When talking about the participants, it is useful to build a mental picture of their hair. All participants are pseudonymised to maintain their anonymity. As a client may do, in preparation for a consultation, I have used found images of similar hairstyles from Google Images or Pinterest. These act as visual aids to give the reader an idea and are not fully representative. I have (where possible) selected images with faces omitted and have aimed to represent only their hairstyle. These representations will be repeated when the participants are introduced into the analysis to provide context for the reader. The hairdressers are overleaf.

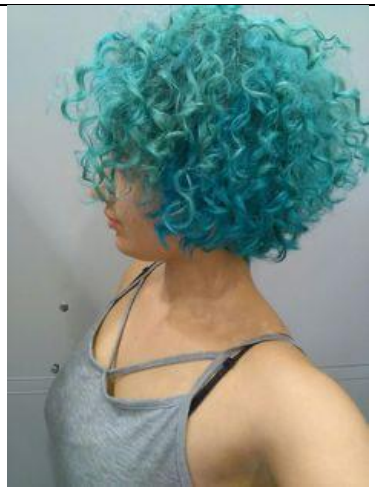


Figure 15 - Hairstyle similar to Danielle's (hairdresser)

Danielle – works at a cruelty free salon and specialises in creative colour



Figure 16 - Hairstyle similar to Bev's (hairdresser)

Bev – a salon owner who has been cutting hair for 42 years



Figure 17 - A hairstyle similar to Kim (hairdresser)

Kim – is in the process of setting up her own salon where they 'do things differently'



Figure 18 - A hairstyle similar to Jess' (hairdresser)

Jess – who splits their time between a salon and a home salon



Figure 19 - A hairstyle similar to Heather's (hairdresser)

Heather – an award-winning styling director who does both creative shots and works in a salon



Figure 20 - A hairstyle similar to Lou's (hairdresser)

Lou – a blonde balayage[4] specialist who works at a higher-price point salon largely serving 'glam-mums'



Figure 21 - A hairstyle similar to Tom's (hairdresser)

Tom – a stylist who loves to chat and learn (particularly about politics)

Approach Two - Semi-structured Interviews with Clients

Approach Two mirrors the first stage. This time, it involved seven semi-structured interviews with the clients of hairdressers in Nottingham city centre. I interviewed the clients and the hairdressers to better understand both sides of the hairdresser/client relationship independently before delving into the relationship. This stage used the same methods as the first stage. I have, therefore, only addressed divergences here. The interview schedule differed slightly from the one I used for Approach One. I tailored the questions to be more appropriate for the clients of hairdressers and reflected on the appropriateness of the questions from the previous stage.

I recruited seven participants for this stage using the connections made in the previous research stage. The hairdressers provided details of their clients who would be happy to speak to me, then I used the snowballing method to reach further hairdressing clients. The participants were between 23 and 38 years old and they all identified as female. All the participants were white except one (Faiza) who indicated she was Asian or Asian British – Indian.

[4] A technique of hair colouring where the colour is more intense at the ends of the hair and left natural towards the roots, often to achieve a more natural look.

Participant Profile - Clients

As for the hairdressers, I have selected images from the internet that represent the types of hair worn by the clients that I spoke to. The clients are overleaf.



Figure 22 - A hairstyle similar to Demelza's (client)

Demelza – enjoys experimenting with her buzzcut and runs a small business



Figure 23 - A hairstyle similar to Zoe's (client)

Zoe – hates her fine hair and changes the colour regularly. She spends a lot of time with it tied up for work



Figure 24 A hairstyle similar to Kat's (client)

Kat – has curly hair with a bright pink peekaboo and lots of tattoos. She is excited to share stories with me



Figure 25 - A hairstyle similar to Faiza's (client)

Faiza – has a bold blue balayage, but jokes that that does not mean she's a 'fun' person



Figure 26 - A hairstyle similar to Hattie's (client)

Hattie – has a purple balayage. She is a student at the end of her Masters, interested in nerd culture and drawing



Figure 27 - A hairstyle similar to Cassie's (client)

Cassie – long blonde highlighted hair which requires careful management. She is very attached to the blonde colour



Figure 28 - A hairstyle similar to Hazel's (client)

Hazel – sharp bob with a high grey percentage. She embraces a natural look

Interview Transcripts

The aim of the interview was to capture a wide understanding of the experiences of hairdressers and their clients. This provides context for the theoretical considerations of hair. It also provides specific and personal stories from those with expertise and experience in this area.

For Approaches One and Two, audio files recorded through Microsoft Teams were transcribed in full to allow the data to be translated into text. An attempt was made to transcribe the audio as accurately as possible, but some choices must be made during the process. Later in the process, where the transcribed data was used as quotations in the thesis, it was edited for sense and length. For example, filler phrases like 'I guess', 'you know?' and 'like'; repeated phrases like 'I went, I went out" and abandoned thoughts like "since I was a, when I was 10' were removed to help the flow if they did not change the sense of the sentence. The interviews largely took a question-and-answer format, where I asked a question, and the participant spoke in response. There was also a more conversational tone to the interview, where the participant and I were chatting backwards and forwards.

Autoethnographic Fieldwork

The term ethnography covers a vast range of work. I use ethnography as an overarching term to describe research which centres on people and culture and facilitates deep understanding. Some ethnography is defined by the presence of 'fieldwork;' while this is an element of my research, it is not the defining characteristic. Ethnography guides how my research explores the social world. While it is unnecessary to chronicle the discipline's history, I will introduce core concepts as they impact my methodology: Patchwork Ethnography as defined by Günel, Varma and Watanabe (2020), Autoethnography (Adams, Holman Jones and Ellis, 2014) and Reflexive Ethnography, based on the work of Charlotte Aul Davies (1999).

Within the discipline of Fashion Studies, ethnographies cover topics ranging from working in the field of fashion (Pycock and Bowers, 1996; Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006; Mears and Mears, 2011; Braithwaite, 2014; Holla, 2018), fashion consumption (Clarke and Miller, 2002; Woodward, 2014; Karpova *et al.*, 2022) and the relationship between fashioning the body and identity (Velliquette, Murray and Creyer, 1998; Sandikci and Ger, 2010; Tarlo, 2010b; Warkander, 2014), to name a few. While not directly linked to my topic of enquiry, these do provide a disciplinary precedent for my ethnographic approach. Fashion scholarship is a relatively young discipline. The academic study of fashion was hidden in other areas until the 20th century when it became known as its own discipline (Warschaw, 2017). It has no established methodological framework but provides a flexible platform for blending methods developed from other disciplines. Although fashion studies exist without

ethnography, the ethnographic elements add a level of human understanding of the relationship between clothing, people and identity.

Ethnographers adopt a "particular mode of looking, listening and thinking about social, phenomenon" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 230). I have selected this approach because it allows for the study of people in their everyday environment rather than in an environment constructed by the researcher to generate data in a more naturalistic way. Naturalism calls for research environments to be as authentic and not 'artificial' as possible, which will help me generate an understanding of hairdressing. Hairdressing usually takes place in a hairdressing salon, so there is a greater potential for richness by observing these interactions in situ. My second research question begins with 'In hairdressing salons;' therefore, it is better studied in the salon.

Patchwork Ethnography

My approach blends elements of several contemporary ethnographic practices to create a personal and individual approach that is the most appropriate for my subject matter. Patchwork Ethnography, coined by Gökçe Günel, Saiba Varma and Chika Watanabe, involves "ethnographic processes and protocols designed around short-term field visits, using fragmentary yet rigorous data, and other innovations that resist the fixity, holism, and certainty demanded in the publication process" (2020 [online]). It seeks to combat the problematic truisms of traditional

ethnography: separations between "field" and "home," the gendered (masculinist) assumptions of the always available and up-for-anything fieldworker, and anthropology's proclivities toward suffering subjects (Günel, Varma and Watanabe, 2020).

Günel, Varma and Watanabe support the personal and professional limitations of the researcher, providing "an effective, but kinder and gentler way to do research because it expands what we consider acceptable materials, tools, and objects of our analyses" (Günel, Varma and Watanabe, 2020, N.P.) by calling for short-term fieldwork from multiple sources which may be patchworked together. The inclusion of a more versatile way of working in the field makes ethnographic research more accessible and convenient to both researcher and participant, amplifying the voices of those who might not have been heard in traditional ethnography. They champion short, repeated fieldwork visits (Günel and Watanabe, 2024). Patchwork ethnography offers a new way to acknowledge and accommodate how researchers' lives, in their full complexity, shape knowledge production.

Beginning in October 2020, my research necessitated a patchwork approach because traditional long-term visits were not ideal, possible or even the best suited to explore the topic. My fieldwork visits took the amount of time taken for an appointment and were necessarily fractured in comparison to traditional ethnographic approaches. I will further detail the reasons behind this in the Approach 3 section. Patchwork ethnography helps us refigure what counts as knowledge and what does

not, what counts as research and what does not, and how we can change realities described as "limitations" and "constraints" into openings for new insights. (Günel, Varma and Watanabe, 2020, N.P.). I have created a rich tapestry of data by sewing together methodological scraps. My approach does not stray far from the traditions of ethnography. However, the patchworking facilitates a reflexive and intuitive approach that combines elements.

This patchwork approach justifies existing practices of committed anthropologies, but it was only coined in 2020. As an approach, it is well suited to a wide variety of disciplines, as is demonstrated by its early uptake. Johanna von Pezold (2024) employs a patchwork approach to bring a gentler, more flexible and more contemporary approach than traditional ethnography to bring a decolonial perspective to fashion studies. Annamaria Fratini (2022) uses it to conduct a multi-site anthropological study into death industries. For Jonatan Södergren (2022), patchwork ethnography is a method for studying authenticity in brand culture. This is not the full extent of its usage, but it provides an illustration of the range of areas that have adopted this method in a relatively short amount of time.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography "uses a researcher's personal experiences to describe and critique cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences" (Adams, Holman Jones and Ellis, 2014, p. 2). Moving away from detached, generalised and objective research has allowed researchers to undertake more intimate, ground-level methods. This methodology foregrounds personal experience and allows the illustration of insider knowledge (Adams, Holman Jones and Ellis, 2014).

Like ethnographers, autoethnographers study culture largely from the 'field.' This does not have to be a physical space but a culturally defined area (Adams, Holman Jones and Ellis, 2014). For me, the field is the hairdressing salon. The decision to conduct autoethnographic fieldwork was primarily influenced by the necessity of accessing and observing haircuts within the naturalistic environment of the salon. Haircutting is a particular action which is embodied and site-specific. Simply talking about haircuts would not provide the level of rich ethnographic data that I required. This approach granted me access to the salon in the role of 'client'.

Embedding the self in research "challenges traditional ethnography's silent authorship, which constrains the researcher" (Gobo and Molle, 2017, p. 21). Critics of autoethnography take issue with the discipline's focus on voice that centres the author, claiming that it can transform the 'cannons of rigour' into something 'essentially aesthetic' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Their point is that by centralising the author, you are producing something seductive but surface level, instead of following

the honoured traditions which upkeep the standards of ethnography. Luvaas argues that the line between autoethnography and ethnography is "a matter of degree rather than type" (Luvaas, 2019, p. 248), with autoethnography pushing reflexivity further than traditional methods. Ethnography, he posits, has always been about the self, even if unintentionally, because of the central role of the researcher and their interpretation of events. The claim of objectivity is damaging. According to Brent Luvaas, autoethnography "employs conscious becoming as a strategy for producing academic knowledge" (Luvaas, 2019, p. 245). In this fieldwork, I consciously became a customer of the hairdressers I visited, receiving the service and enacting the embodied experience of having my hair cut or coloured. The haircut I received was not limited to the fieldwork visits but was something that I lived with between fieldwork visits.

Reflexive Ethnography

Another essential process for me to conduct high-quality and rigorous ethnography that is contemporary, and creative is reflexivity. Charlotte Aul Davies begins her book *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others* by establishing that researchers must look 'outside' of themselves, and that research cannot be purely introspective. "We cannot research something with which we have no contact, from which we are completely isolated" (Aull Davies, 1999, p.

4). Ethnographic research is often complex and intertwined. Reflexivity offers "a means of turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference…the ways in which the products of research are affected by the personnel and the process of doing the research" (Aull Davies, 1999, p. 4). It provides a means to self-evaluate the research process.

Critiques of reflexivity highlight the danger of the researcher becoming self-absorbed. Delamont (2009) spotlights 'crises' from her own research, which she labels autoethnographic because they are too personal and offer no benefit to the research. She goes as far as to say, "autoethnographic self-obsession, such as my personal crises about my fieldwork as a greedy institution, intruding too much into my personal life, have no analytic mileage, and tell the readers nothing about fieldwork, or capoeira or embodiment or habitus or anything of social scientific… interest" (Delamont, 2009, p. 57). Delamont's concern highlights a critical limitation that autoethnography writing without reflexivity can be self-indulgent or even dangerous.

I would not have chosen to study hair without a personal interest in the topic. I have first-hand experience having, styling, and communicating through my hair. Although this is not unusual, it does necessarily affect my perception of situations and subjective understanding. Reflexivity is essential to foreground and begin to assess my own biases. I provide more details on how this is implemented and used as a tool for analysis later in this chapter.

Approach 3 – Autoethnographic Fieldwork

Originally, my proposed method for this stage was participant observations in hairdressing salons in Nottingham city centre, taking inspiration from Helen Holmes' (2010a) methodological approach. The pandemic created anxiety about proximity and overcrowding, which, even after lockdowns and restrictions were lifted, caused me access issues. Participating salons – who had previously agreed to be involved – felt nervous about the presence of a researcher and the potential impact this would have on their customers. After delaying the fieldwork as much as possible, it became clear that the pandemic's lasting impacts would be prohibitive to this approach.

Despite my initial frustration, redesigning my methodology was an excellent opportunity for reflexive practice. I had the chance to re-consider my research questions, data from Approach One and my personal and professional development. The previous stages of my research have highlighted the importance of consultation, which precedes hair service, the quality of the haircut, and the hairdresser's skill in understanding how to work upon the client's identity. As such, it was essential that my research included first-hand observation of the consultation and explored the haptic and sensory experiences of the appointment. Pink argues the importance of undertaking first-hand experiences. "The sensory ethnographer would not only observe and

document other people's sensory categories and behaviours but seek routes to develop experience-based empathetic understandings of what others might be experiencing and knowing" (Pink, 2015, p. 98). Putting myself into the experience allowed for in-the-moment analysis and application of my conceptual framework, where I could experience the intersection of elements, including the emotional, sensory and embodied experience of getting a haircut.

The fieldwork took place in hairdressing salons in the city centre of Nottingham. During these visits, I undertook a covert research role as a customer and had my hair cut or dyed. I conducted one pilot visit to assess the feasibility and appropriateness of the method. The main series of eight visits occurred at four salons, each of which was visited twice. The first appointment at each salon was a wash cut and blow-dry, as this is the most common type of appointment for these types of hairdressers. The second appointment was led by the conversation in the first but turned out to be a colouring service in all four salons. The appointments were scheduled for approximately monthly with some flexibility around salon business, public holidays and my timetable. Each visit's duration depended on the service, ranging from one to two hours. I identified five salons in the city centre of Nottingham that I had not previously interacted with, either personally or during this project; one became the pilot visit and the other four were the locations for the main series of visits. I selected a range of salons through word of mouth, Google Maps and the Treatwell app[5].

[5] An app used to find and book hair and beauty treatments

Taking an autoethnographic approach helped me to observe the everyday happening in the salon from a covert position. Without the knowledge that I am there to observe, the happenings in the salon will be unaltered by the presence of a researcher. I was not observing specific people or recording details about them, but to understand the general ambience of the salon, it was important for me to be there. There are differences between stylists and salons, and the repeated visits to different salons allowed me to study these distinctions. During the fieldwork, I examined the interplay of different elements, which allowed me to begin informed reflection in the field that will aid my theoretical interpretation of the interactions.

Autoethnography aids the triangulation of my previous research stages. A significant limitation of using interviews exclusively in Approaches One and Two is that they only record the recollection of an event, topic or process. There is an obvious difference in studying a recollection as opposed to the primary experience of an event that is often overlooked. While semi-structured interviews afford the culturally situated understanding of the haircut, this method can underplay the importance of sensory experience. Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy use the concept of the visceral, which "refers to the realm of internally-felt sensations, moods and states of being, which are born from sensory engagement with the material world" (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008, p. 462). They highlight the power of the senses, particularly smell and taste, which are often considered secondary to sight. Similarly, there are

visceral experiences in the salon which must be understood through the senses, the smells of the products, the touch of the hairdresser and the sights and sounds of the salon. These relations with the material world are essential for understanding the embodied experience of receiving a haircut but are often overlooked, with the notable exception of Helen Holmes (2010, 2014, 2018), whose work observes the materiality of hair and how that affects relationships in the salon.

To better understand the role hair plays in the formation of fashionable identities, autoethnography helped me to offer an embodied understanding of the process and how it feels to be in the hairdresser's chair. While this is something I had done before, doing so in the context of research, noticing and recording every element of my experience was completely different. This study also aimed to understand how interactions in the salon impact this. It was essential to not just hear about what happens in the salon but also experience it.

Fieldnotes

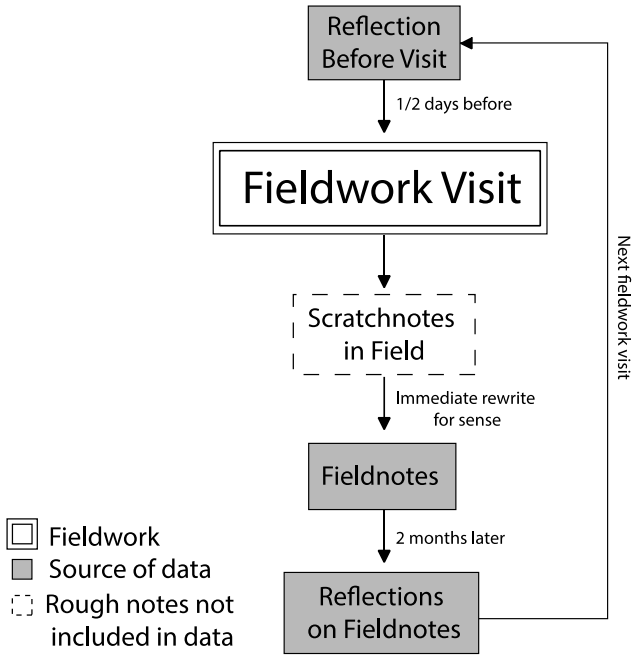


Figure 29 - Data sources produced during the fieldwork (2024) Own Diagram

The autoethnography aims to support the more narrative data from the interviews and to add sensorial, emplaced and embodied data. This is challenging to record in words as it involves sensory experiences. In trying to record these experiences, it is important to write in a creative and expressive manner. Fieldnotes are the conventional means of recording ethnographic practice. Although traditionally, ethnographers would record handwritten notes, digitally recording them has become common. For my research, recording handwritten notes was impossible, despite my romantic notions of scribbling in a Moleskine journal. Instead, I took spare moments to type into the 'Notes' app on my phone. Typing

into my phone was a discreet and fast means to record notes, but the level of detail was dictated by the time I had alone; more expedient salon services left less time for pondering and recording. These *jottings* included phrases to aid my memory, feelings and hasty analysis in the field. "As preludes to full written notes, jottings capture bits of talk and action from which the fieldworker begins to sketch social scenes, recurring incidents, local expressions and terms, member's distinctions and accounts, dialogue among those present and his own conversations" (Emerson, Shaw and Fretz, 2011, p. 31). When I got home from my fieldwork, I used my jottings as an aide-memoire when writing my full fieldnotes, frantically writing all I that could remember.

Despite Hammersley and Atkinson's (2007) call to record as much as possible, fieldnotes cannot fully capture the experiences and events of fieldwork. "Fieldnotes are always selective: it is not possible to capture everything. And there is a trade-off between breadth of focus and detail" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 142). Besides being *descriptions,* fieldnotes also act as *inscriptions:* through writing, the ethnographer transforms what they have witnessed into text. There is unavoidable framing and selection that occurs through inscription. "All writing, even seemingly straightforward, descriptive writing, is a construction. Through his choice of words, sentence style, and methods of organization, a writer presents a version of the world" (Emerson, Shaw and Fretz, 2011, p. 46). These field notes report an experience through a subjective remembering of them. Even through remembering it, I am shaping it to my own understanding. As a method that focuses on subjectivity, it is good to

highlight the position of the author in the field notes. By bringing a subjective perspective to the research, I am reporting the truth of my lived experience but also allowing a personal narrative into the research.

I originally planned to implement a proforma to organise the data generated by the fieldwork; however, during the pilot visit, it became clear that an open-ended reflection would better echo the experience. I did follow headings which follow the usual chronological format of a hairdressing appointment: Entering the salon, Consultation, Washing, Cutting/Colouring, Finishing and Other. This acted as an aide-memoire when writing up the notes and provided some structure, while also maintaining the 'fluidity' of 'getting it down quickly' (Emerson, Shaw and Fretz, 2011).

Writing of ethnographic fieldnotes cannot be seen as purely transcription or description. "Fieldnotes are a form of *representation,* that is, a way of reducing just observed events, persons and places to written accounts." (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2001, p. 353). Fieldnotes are always selective. In the process of writing down, of viewing, feeling, hearing, living, sensing, and converting that experience into solid words, the researcher makes decisions. There are even decisions in choosing what does or does not make it into the fieldnotes. Writing fieldnotes is an "active process[es] of interpretation and sense-making" (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2001, p. 353). Choices of what to focus on are already made and as such it is worth highlighting that the analysis of my autoethnographic fieldwork began in the salon and not at the point of

formal analysis. While this does not impact my approach, it is important to highlight that analysis is not limited to a process after the research has happened but instead is integrated.

The fieldnotes also include notes written during my reflective practice. I will briefly outline what was involved in that here. These reflective notes become a source of data and are treated like the fieldnotes made in the salon. Before each fieldwork visit, I took the time to reflect upon the previous fieldwork. A month after each fieldwork gave me the time to process the emotional and critical responses from fieldwork. It also allowed me to 'live' in the haircut for a month. These reflections catch my experience of having that haircut for a month, not just my initial reaction in the moment. This did not follow a proforma or framework. Instead, they are free-form amorphous pieces of writing that explore emotion and introspection: a spilling of thoughts.

The second type of reflection is a reflection on the fieldnotes. To gain some space from the fieldwork, I left it for several months before returning to reflect on the fieldnotes. I used Maharaj's list of questions to interrogate my position within my autoethnographic fieldnotes (Maharaj, 2016):

> *What do these notes suggest regarding my beliefs and values about myself, my relationships with others, and my assumptions about knowledge, power, and privilege?*

> *How do I understand my role in this setting (observer/participant, insider/outsider)?*
>
> *How well does my account align with my beliefs and values?*
>
> *Where in my notes do I seem hesitant or uncertain about my observations?*
>
> *What was guiding me in these instances?*
>
> *What kinds of words (emotions) and language (formal/informal) did I use?*
>
> *What did I leave out of my notes and why?*
>
> *How did the fact that I was taking notes impact my understanding of the situation?*
>
> *Would my understanding be any different had I been using video or audio recording instead of field notes?*
>
> *How did my presence as an observer influence others around me?*
>
> (Maharaj, 2016, p. 161)

Maharaj draws heavily on the insider/outsider narrative, which has been critiqued as mythology (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Despite this, she provides a valuable guide for the novice researcher. She reports the importance of capturing subjective experiences and the potential for analysis in moments where the "researcher's attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and impressions" (Maharaj, 2016, p. 121) influence the

methodology and interaction with the participants. Writing and reflecting are essential to ethnographic data gathering.

Analysis

Data was generated during each approach or in reflection. These all take the form of Microsoft Word documents.

	Research Approach	**Data Source**
	Approach One	Interview Transcripts with Hairdressers (7)
	Approach Two	Interview Transcripts with Clients (7)
	Approach Three	Autoethnographic Fieldnotes (1 pilot + 8)
	Approach Three	Reflections on Fieldnotes (9 pre visit reflections + 9 post visit reflections)

The three approaches (Approach 1 – interviews with hairdressers; Approach 2 – interviews with clients; and Approach 3 – autoethnographic fieldwork) were each analysed separately to begin, then brought together through written analysis. The approaches are numbered chronologically: Approach 1 was completed first, then Approach 2, then Approach 3. The analysis did not follow this pattern because, after familiarising myself with all three data sets, I identified that the interviews with clients were

particularly rich and best highlighted the perspective that was the most important to my research.

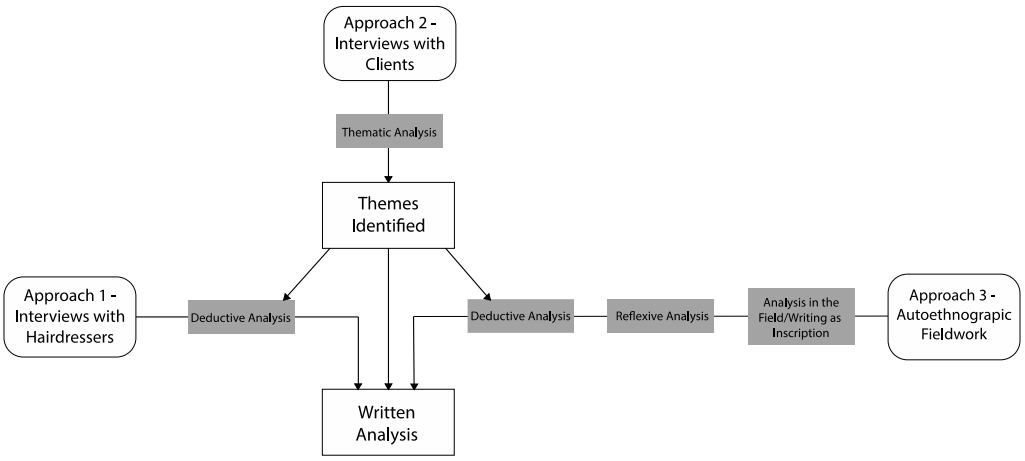


Figure 30 - Diagram showing my approach to analysis (2024) Own Diagram

Realising the importance of the interviews with clients, I used two distinct types of analysis on the datasets. First, I used thematic analysis to analyse the interviews with clients. The themes that emerged became a framework for analysing the other two Approaches (1 & 3) through deductive thematic analysis. The three main themes were Identity, Maintenance and Negotiation, each with three sub-themes (see Fig 3). This analysis structure allowed me to deal with the data in a focused way and synthesise three separate datasets into a cohesive analysis. It is worth clarifying the difference between thematic analysis and deductive thematic analysis in the following sections.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis, as discussed by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2021), is a process where codes emerge from the data. Thematic analysis is a means to systematically analyse data that is "inherently subjective and situated" (Braun and Clark, 2021, p. 8), but this is not a problem if appropriately managed. I selected this type of analysis as it synthesises well with my methodology, is useful for multiple datasets and allows rigour and subjectivity to coexist in the analysis. It also allowed me to produce a map of the topic as seen by the clients, then apply that to what was said by the hairdressers, and what I observed during the fieldwork. Doing it in this way enabled me to put the client's perspective at the centre, even when analysing other data.

The datasets were coded to actively produce themes. I followed Braun and Clarke's (2021) six phases: familiarisation, coding, generating initial themes, developing and reviewing themes, refining, defining, and naming themes, and writing up. These stages were not entirely linear and often overlapped. Familiarisation with the dataset entails a deep dive into the interview data through transcription and repeated review. Coding is a systematic organisation of data, for which I used NVivo; by applying 'code labels' to meaningful data, patterns emerge. Themes are reworked over multiple stages to craft a compelling narrative. Refinement, definition, and naming of themes allow further improvement. This stage also involves the creation of thematic maps to visualise relationships and interactions between themes. The final stage is writing up. Although Braun and Clarke encourage writing throughout the thematic analysis process, the final write-up is essential in tying the threads together.

A limitation of thematic analysis is that the iterative, multi-stage process is very time intensive. Time restraints on the project contributed to the choice to only use thematic analysis to code Approach 2 (interviews with clients) and then move to deductive thematic analysis for the remaining Approaches.

Deductive Thematic Analysis

Deductive thematic analysis allows organisational processes to be set up before the coding process. This may be theoretical, conceptual, or, in this case, organisational categories devised from earlier research stages or research questions (Vanover, Mihas and Saldaña, 2022). Deductive thematic analysis is similar to thematic analysis, but the data is organised into a pre-existing framework of codes.

The process still began with familiarisation with the data. Instead of letting the themes emerge, I categorised data in relation to the existing frameworks using NVivo. This process was a relatively fast and efficient form of analysis, which supported the timeframe of the project. It also allowed for the perspective of the customer to become the primary framing for the other two datasets.

This type of analysis may limit the chance for additional themes to emerge and inflates anything that was missed or incorrect during the

initial thematic analysis. To minimise this, I made note of moments of tension, contradictions and absences throughout the analysis process.

Reflective Analysis

Writing autoethnographic fieldnotes includes two embedded reflective practices, which are both a data source and analytical process. This section will outline their use as an analytical tool. By reflecting on each haircut and answering Maharajah's (2016) questions (as discussed in the earlier Fieldnotes section), I engaged with critical reflection. Jan Fook and Fiona Gardener define 'critical reflection' as "both a theory and a practice of uncovering the assumptions implicit in our work… Deconstructing our assumptions entails considering how they influence our practice, in this case as researchers" (Fook and Gardener in Maharaj, 2016, p. 115). By deconstructing my assumptions and interrogating my position in the research, I was able to maintain a level of rigour and avoid letting my biases go unchecked in the research. Documenting my thoughts, feelings, ideas, and hunches challenged assumptions in my work. In a research process where my perspective is central, it was important to make sure that I am not projecting my own experiences as universal. I might assume that my experience is representational.

The analysis process began in the salon, but this reflective practice ensured that I continued to critically examine my own experiences throughout the research. It provided greater details on the research

context. I was able to explore some early application of theoretical ideas and begin to craft research narratives.

Ethical Considerations

Traditionally, researchers have strived for objectivity to limit the effect of the research on the social encounter of the research. Renato Rosaldo (1989) describes the classic norms of ethnography, "Once upon a time, the Lone Ethnographer rode off into the sunset in search of 'his native.'…' After collecting 'the data,' the Lone Ethnographer returned home and wrote a 'true' account of 'the culture'" (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 30). However, this type of research preserves the portrayal of people and places as 'distant' and 'other.' In his self-appointed position of power, the Lone Ethnographer claims objectivity and gives himself an omniscient perspective. The discipline's problematic heritage must remain prescient in the mind of contemporary ethnographers to avoid disciplinary pitfalls.

The ethics of ethnography remains a present consideration in my decision-making process and research design. Contemporary ethnography favours seeing the ethnographer as a *co-constructer* alongside their participants rather than a *discoverer*, as they might have been seen by 'traditional' ethnography. I will, of course, be the one writing up and analysing the research, but the participants are also taking an active role in constructing this research.

I do not seek to uncover the one great truth, instead understanding that my job is to represent a reality and to understand it better (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). More recently, ethnographic and autoethnographic works have called for a greater reliance on subjective understanding (Mizzi, 2010; Adams and Holman Jones, 2011; Heuchert and Barann, 2019). My research answers this call and aims to add to the body of contemporary, ethical ethnography.

The project focuses on expression of self-identity and beauty practices which cannot be separated from cultural/group identity and hegemonic standards of beauty based on whiteness. It is not possible or desirable to erase race from these conversations. I selected participants based on their place of work, which were salons in Nottingham. Due to the racialised nature of hairdressing salons, those that do not explicitly serve a Black clientele, have majority white stylists and customers. My study does not involve explicitly Black salons, despite the important, established literature and the validity of performing this specific investigation in that context. This choice has been made considering my positionality and the appropriateness of methodology.

The traditions of ethnography as othering the participants and positioning the researcher as an objective omniscient outsider make it an inappropriate methodology to approach racial differences. The scale of the project, with me as single researcher, feels highly inappropriate to 'report back' on the culture of Black salons. It was obviously

inappropriate to visit Black salons during the autoethnographic portion of this study. These factors led to a decision to only recruit participants who visited hairdressing salons in the city centre, which meant the sample is not racially representative of the city.

Reflections on the Methodology

Generally, the interviews were effective, particularly when paired with the autoethnography. While I had prepared a research agenda to cover both research questions, I based the interview style on the types of free-flowing conversations in the salon. Chatting about their hair is a normalised form of feminine bonding. These interviews capitalised on how this type of conversation can quickly construct intimacy. The participants reported afterwards that they enjoyed the interviews and felt 'like therapy' to talk openly about themselves and their hair. I had to refocus the winding conversations at times, but this was a mostly successful method.

Autoethnography was a rich approach, but it produced issues when integrating the analysis, such as wondering what is personal and generalisable. However, I attempted to make the autoethnographic fieldwork as naturalistic as possible[6]. The autoethnographic fieldwork was different from visiting the hairdresser in the usual circumstances, as

[6] Undertaking the research immediately changes the dynamic of the hair appointment. Entering the salon as a researcher/client, not a client, will have an impact on the experience. A purely naturalistic experience is not possible, so the aim was to mimic an organic appointment.

there were many research considerations I would not have had in a regular haircut. You are trying to communicate what you want, or think will look good. While that was a concern for me, I also wanted to conserve a certain amount of hair because I got it cut more regularly than usual. I was hyper-aware of what role the hairdresser was taking in this interaction and tried to prompt them to guide me more than I would have in a regular appointment. I give them space to input and appear less confident with my idea than I would in my everyday life. There is a strange position I must take where I'm trying not to push too hard but not too passive. These worries do not concern 'non-research' haircuts and perhaps inhibit the naturalistic environment.

Due to its methods, this study is necessarily short reaching. I focused on creating a deeper understanding of a limited pool of participants rather than attempting to make broad generalisations. The participants were selected from a range of salons within a small geographical area, less than one kilometre squared. These salons largely had a white client base, as reflected in my sample. All participants, except for Faiza, identify as white British women. I recognise that the data represents a white understanding of identity, which is not representative of the wider population of the city or country.

One of the limitations of interviews is that they collect data on the recollection of the haircut rather than through primary observation. Clients think about their experience in the salon, but there is no actual observation. In recalling an event, their memory may be flawed, or they

may only report some of it. The participants wanted to balance an image of caring about the topic area while not appearing vain or over-caring about their appearance. The interviewees were keen to be useful to my interviews; they wanted to talk about hair and identity when asked, but at times, they had not formed a full opinion before answering. Using a patchworked approach has allowed the collection of deep and rich data, including an embodied autoethnographic understanding. The fieldwork has been particularly useful in combination with the interview data, as my personal experience sheds light on the things that might be unsaid or underemphasised in the interviews; investigating topics like beauty and identity, which are complex and invisible, provided a personal perspective.

The sample sizes and recruitment process were limiting factors for the research. The small single-gender participant sample is a limiting factor for this study. Extending this area of research to include a more diverse range of participants, including gender identities, is a worthy and exciting area for future research. Similarly, most of the participants were white and middle-class. There is scope to extend the research outside of the specific salons I recruited from, which would lead to a more diverse sample.

To recruit the hairdressers, I selected salons in Nottingham City Centre and spoke to hairdressers who work there. Then, some snowballing extended from those hairdressers to other hairdressers they know. Similarly, I began recruiting the clients of those hairdressers, then

extended the participants to clients of the initially identified city centre salons. The self-selection of participants biases the fondness and closeness of the relationship. Why would you agree to an interview about your relationship with your hairdresser if you didn't have a relationship? Many of the clients were selected through their hairdresser so that they would pick clients with a close enough relationship. Colloquially, during this research, many people have told me about the terrible haircuts they have received or the times a hairdresser has done something seemingly unconnected from what they were asking for. Maybe because of the way I recruited, they are overall very confident in the ability of their hairdresser.

Due to the timing of the interviews with hairdressers in autumn 2021, the topic of bringing the body back under control was remarkably prescient. The lockdowns in England ended in May 2021, but the pandemic was still at the forefront of many people's minds. The lockdown had deeply impacted hairdressing staff; many were self-employed and were not eligible for the furlough scheme, losing their income. Under the 'Spas, wellness centres and massage parlours' category, hairdressing salons were forced to stay closed longer than other businesses. Although salons had been open for some time, they were still experiencing the effects of the lockdowns. Hairdressers were overbooked and overworked. Appointments that would have been short and routine became long and complex. Clients wanted to talk for longer after being isolated for so long. There was a backlog of appointments from salons being closed for so long. Clients rushed to get an appointment in case the salons closed

again at short notice. Client's habits changed with the lockdowns, making them a much less predictable time for hairdressers.

As a result, several of the hairdressers identified the trend towards 'low maintenance' cuts and colours. Lou, Bev and Jess confirm the trend towards 'lower maintenance' hair. Danielle also believes that although Balayage was prevalent before, its current popularity is due to the pandemic. In this 'unprecedented time', the body being out of control was a pressing matter. During the client interviews (Autumn 2022), the looming threat of lockdowns had cleared, and Covid-19 was not impacting their lives similarly; mentions of Covid and lockdowns were much less. Their visits to the hairdresser had become more habitual again, and they did not talk about the loss of control over lockdowns.

I had to redesign the ethnographic portion of the research, due to the lasting impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. This adversity pushed me to consider less conventional methodology and led to me undertaking an autoethnographic approach. Making this decision put ‘the salon’ back at the centre of the study. It was important to me that the primary research involved being *in* the salon in some capacity.

The autoethnography was equally challenging and rich. It generated a large amount of field notes, which were largely situated in emotional responses. Balancing being both a researcher and behaving naturalistically in the salon was another challenge. I felt the pressure to question my behaviour at every moment and became hyperaware of my

own actions. Trying to record everything during the fieldwork meant the notes were often chaotic and seemingly tangential.

Often these offshoots developed into important thoughts that shaped my understanding of my interview data. Analysing this data was difficult. At times, it was hard to select the information that helps to answer the research questions, as the whole experience shaped my understanding. I do not believe I would have reached the level of criticality in this thesis without this fieldwork. I conceive of myself as the researcher at the centre of the project, fielding the interview data, theory and my own experience to understand a complex yet ubiquitous process. The interview data was often contradictory to my own experience. Questioning what the participants said allowed me to go beyond simply reporting their experiences to question the motivations behind them.

The pandemic affected the interview data, as well as the methodology. This impact was visible in the hair trends at the time. The discourse around 'embracing the grey' was particularly prevalent during the interviews with hairdressers. The interviews with clients and autoethnography were conducted later when grey hair had left the public imagination, and the treatment of grey hair was quite different in practice from what was said in the interviews.

When discussing identity, it is essential to consider intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2011). The results would likely differ if the study were extended to a wider cultural group. For example, no white participants

discussed their heritage, cultural or racial identity in their interviews. The one participant of colour does. The cultural dominance of whiteness in England means that British cultural identity and whiteness are made explicit in the data and were instead assumed as normative. It is important to highlight where the data broadly reports a white experience of fashioning the self through the hair. The white perspective is not surprising but highlights the need to expand this area of study to a wider, more inclusive sample.

Conclusion

The methods, design and methodology described above have been sewn together to make a patchwork quilt, to borrow and extend Günel, Verma and Watanabe's metaphor. The fabric used to make the patches was pre-existing, but I have selected and combined them in the most appropriate, feasible and beautiful way. A limitation, challenge and, sometimes, pleasure of patchworking, is that it is made of material that already exists. You are working with scraps, repurposing and recombining to create something new. There are always limitations; perhaps the colour you wanted is not available, or perhaps a global pandemic stops you from going to the shops, but out of limitation comes creativity. This methodology is, in some ways, a hybrid of many ideas and, in others, an entirely new creation. The combination of amalgamation and novelty allows the study of a ritual of selfhood which has been so commonly

overlooked and provides an intimate and detailed portrayal of the participants' experiences and the social landscape they inhabit.

I have chosen to undertake a blend of interviews and autoethnography to study hair, a topic that can feel too everyday to be worth studying. By collecting data that records both other's experiences of this process and my own interpretation of the situation, I have created an in-depth and rich means to study identity formation in the salon. From this point onwards, the thesis will be concerned with reporting the results of my analysis. I will return to reflect upon the methodology in the conclusion.

CHAPTER FOUR: Forming Fashionable Identity Through Hairstyling: Differentiating and Performing a 'Fluid Self'



Figure 31 - My friends dressed as me for my lockdown birthday (2021)

The pandemic has pushed my 30th birthday onto the internet. As I open Zoom, images of my friends appear, although scattered around the country. Each of them has dressed up as a 'different Elsa'. They pose with the tongue-in-cheek pout of my teenage years, and I notice that each hairstyle defines an era in my life. The styles range in colour, length, styling and cut, but I recognise each as a person I have been. Two friends have constructed paper flame crowns to commemorate a particularly disastrous experiment in my teenage years. To me, and now, I can see, to my friends too, each of these 'Elsa's' is different, and her hair defines each.

As I looked back on all the people I had been, plotted through my changing hair. Fragments of my feelings in those haircuts. The bounce of a perfect curl, the red hair my mum used to love, the bob after a breakup, the experimentation of my teen years, trying so desperately to be someone. There was joy in these haircuts, but there was also sadness. My identity has always been in motion, changing and evolving. For me, those different haircuts mark moments in who I was.

Introduction

The personal anecdote above highlights my experience that my hair feels particularly 'me' and reflects the changeability of it over the years. I have experienced my hair and its styling as both fluid and intertwined with my changing identity. This was not the case for all the participants. This chapter serves as the first of three reporting the findings from the empirical data, focusing on moments in the interviews with clients where participants link their hair to their identity.

In this chapter, I will examine the participants' opinions of the relationship between their hair and identity. This chapter largely analyses data from the interviews with clients, as this is the most relevant to the themes reported here. It is not applicable here to consider the experiences of their hairdressers in detail, so data from the interviews with hairdressers will be largely absent from this chapter. I include discussion of the autoethnographic fieldwork, where relevant, but this will become more significant in the following chapters.

The way that the participants describe their identity is varied and often mentioned casually with little elaboration. While they almost all believe that their hair is linked to their identity, when they speak about it, they find it difficult to elaborate on exactly what that means. As a result, this chapter explores moments from the interviews where they directly

discuss their identity, alongside moments where identity is implicit in the data.

Bauman's concept of liquidity is critical to the analysis in this chapter. Primarily, I argue that the instability of liquidity is experienced through the hair, like it is through clothing. However, this is not necessarily how individuals interpret that experience.

Often, the concept of identity is used interchangeably with the concept of selfhood. Participants tend to refer to an individualised sense of self rather than their identity based on cultural, local or racial traits. A substantial body of work considers hair's pivotal role in racial and cultural identity, and I do not intend to add new knowledge to this area. Ideas of group belonging are not the primary focus of my study, but it is not possible or desirable to erase them from my analysis. It is worth repeating a point made in the literature review before I begin the analysis chapter – that it is not possible or desirable to erase group identity from the discussion of individualised identity. The salons in this study serve a largely heteronomous white, female clientele, whose identity is often considered normative; the participants' conception of their own identity was often based on individualised conceptions of the self, rather than cultural or racial groups.

This chapter makes it clear that the relationship between hair and identity is complex, shifting and different from person to person. I separate three distinct areas of the data, which led to the three subthemes of this chapter: how the participants use their hair to communicate to others, how they feel that their internal self is outwardly presented and how they navigate changes in these elements.

The first subtheme, **Belonging and Distinction,** captures the experience of communicating identity through the hair as it relates to Simmel's idea of fitting into a group while distinguishing oneself as an individual (Frisby and Featherstone (eds), 1997). I use Hebdige's (2003) work on subculture to better analyse the experiences of the participants who saw themselves as 'alternative'. Hair is an essential tool in the communication of 'inness' and 'outness' of cultural groups. This is most apparent through my participant's discussion of subcultural identity. I also examine moments from the data, where participants are marked as outsiders of the culture they are visiting.

It was also striking in the data that participants were often aware of themselves constructing or performing an identity. This theme, **Consciously Presenting and Performing,** situates the individual as an active and informed participant in identity work, highlighting their deliberate efforts to shape and present their identities. The participants' reflections and stories brought this theme to life, showcasing their nuanced understanding of identity as a dynamic and performative

process. Here, we can see the decision-making process in presenting the self to others. This perspective is closely informed by *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), where Goffman describes the 'sincere' or 'cynical' construction of visual 'fronts', where identity is performed through mannerisms and visual signifiers to benefit an audience. To a greater or lesser extent, the participants describe their attention to presenting a cohesive and readable self to others. I also draw upon Bourdieu's (1986) readings of taste and class to situate the socially constructed stage upon which the performance exists.

Frequently in the interviews, both client and hairdressers discuss the power of hair to 'make you feel more like yourself', or words to that effect. This is an intriguing concept, that selfhood is not simply performed through styling the hair but enhanced. In this section, I draw upon my experiences during the autoethnography to further explore this concept.

Another finding, presented in this subtheme, is the way the participants conceive of their shifting hairstyles. They often borrow the language of journeys and appear to aspire to a fixed endpoint, where they reach a destination. I analyse this using Bauman's (2000) liquidity, which denies the possibility of a stable identity.

The final subsection, **Bad Haircuts**, considers the risk caused by the close and entangled relationship between hair and identity. Both are in a

state of constant change, it is no wonder that they do not always perfectly complement each other. Work on the body's surface is undertaken by the hairdresser, who attempts to align selfhood and hair, but this section seeks to understand what is at stake in moments where this does not go as intended.

Belonging and Distinction: Hair's Relationship to Group Identity

Belonging and Distinction is a theme identified from data excerpts where participants reported using their visual appearance to stand out and fit in. As they navigate the complexities of visual communication, their hair, like clothing, is either a marker of difference or conformity.

For my participants, hair has a powerful role. Its appearance can make people feel safe and protected by signalling their belonging to a particular social group. At the same time, it allows them to express themselves as individuals. Simmel's work on fashion explains how changes in hair can be instrumental in broadcasting the individual's position in a social group. Simmel sees the state of society as a factor in the speed of fashion. "Changes in fashion reflect the dullness of nervous impulses; the more nervous the age, the more rapidly fashions change, simply because of our desire for differentiation" (Simmel, 1957, written 1907, p. 547). Writing in 1907, he could not have known how accurate this would

become. Simmel's (1957) perspective is that one primary purpose of fashion is to signal belonging to a group and to distinguish oneself from it.

Bauman's perspective on identity is built from Simmel's ideas: "The pursuit of two values, freedom and security, both widely coveted since they are indispensable for a dignified and happy life, converge on the current identity discourse" (Bauman, 2005, p. 35). These tensions in fashion, the 'inness' and 'outness', are still pivotal within liquidity, perhaps even more so in a time where identity is more uncertain and more contingent.

All the participants refer to their hair as part of their identity or represent them, but they do not tend to elaborate or clarify what they mean by this. This section highlights the participants who offer a more detailed understanding of how their hair expressing their identity made them feel. Kat and Hattie feel a sense of belonging in a counter-cultural 'alternative' scene through their hair, whereas Faiza and Cassie feel that their hair marks them as outsiders to a social group. While I believe that all participants experience the feeling of belonging to or distinguishing themselves from a social group, it is more clearly articulated by participants who feel like they are outside of the 'social norms', for example, queer people, subcultures and people of colour.

Standing out: Signalling Belonging through Alternative Identities



Figure 32 - A hairstyle similar to Hattie's (client)



Figure 33 - A hairstyle similar to Kat's (client)

Both Kat and Hattie describe themselves as 'alternative' during their interview, where alternative is used as a cover-all term to describe a style of dress that echoes subcultural style. Their style influences are taken from various subcultural groups, including punks, goths and metalheads. Subcultures challenge the norms of hegemonic culture, often not explicitly, but through style (Hebdige, 2003). Adopting a subcultural style is frequently seen as a gesture of defiance or refusal of the 'natural order' (Hebdige, 2003).

Hattie has shoulder-length straight hair in purple ombre[7]. Hattie compares her approach to styling her hair, to her approach to clothing. She rounds up the conversation about trends by telling me about her

[7] A graduated colour, usually getting brighter towards the tips

love for printed "mash-ups" with "cute little illustrations" of characters from different characters. Her favourite is one with Pikachu and Deadpool. "I like having a little quirkiness in my T-shirts… I include my interests, of shows that I'm into or music I like" (Hattie, 2023). The mash-up tee allows Hattie to broadcast her interests and signal that she belongs to a particular social group. The sources of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) may differ within counter-cultural groups. Using the right combination of cultural references and art styles, Hattie can aim her visual communication to reach her social peers. What might appear to be an unrefined or random type of visual communication could be targeted at a group with a different frame of reference for cultural capital.

Her signalling of group belonging through her hair is sometimes hindered by her hair's materiality. During her interview, she laments that heavily layered styles like the wolf cut[8], mullet and shag cut do not suit her straight hair. The wolf cut is currently in vogue, particularly with young women with an alternative style. However, Hattie worries that the style looks best on wavy, thick hair, not her fine, straight hair. Her taste is not aligned with the material possibilities of the hair.

[8] A 70s-inspired haircut akin to the shag or the mullet. It has a long back section with lots of short choppy layers at the front.



Figure 34 - A guide to fifteen different wolf cut styles from Pinterest (2024)

She is disappointed she cannot get the style she sees other people getting on Instagram. Hattie's dyed hair makes her feel like part of an 'alternative' group or subculture, and she faces disappointment when there are trends within that social group that she cannot take part in. She values the trends within her social group rather than those heralded as trendsetters by the broader culture. She is dismissive of celebrity culture and mainstream trends, instead preferring to look towards people who share an aesthetic style with her.

Kat has a shock of wild auburn curls with a hot pink peekaboo at the back. During our interview, she had it tied up into a high ponytail, and it

cascaded over her shoulders. For Kat, her hair is about both fashionability and communicating her personality, but it is also about acceptance and distinction.

Her journey with her hair, and by extension, her identity, starts from discomfort and separation from the social group. As a child, she stood out. She was made to feel that her curly hair was not 'normal'. She is filled with emotion as she tells me about the long journey it has taken to embrace her hair as an adult. "Being an adult, whether it's opportunity or confidence or a bit of both, opportunity and confidence to celebrate difference." Whereas when you are younger, "being different makes you stand out when you don't want to stand out" (Kat, 2022). Her exclusion was probably not solely because of her hair, however, the children focused on her hair as a physical marker of difference.

Curly hair sits outside the culturally enforced norm that straight, long, glossy hair is beautiful, and hair that does not fit this ideal is often seen as deviant. In her interview, Kat expresses a lingering emotional impact of this rejection. Her experience of being marked as different is not abstract — it is lived through her body, as her hair becomes a visible site of social judgment. This judgment is internalised as a critique of her self. Talking about her hair, then, is not just about aesthetics; it is an embodied account of how she experiences her body as curly-haired in a world that devalues it.

She tells me that as she grew up, she turned her distinctive appearance from negative to positive. Kat sees her alternative aesthetic as a means of having agency over how others see her. Although she does not call it this, she is speaking about her hair's subcultural capital (Thornton, 1995). It shows she is 'in the know' with a particular social group.

Her alternative appearance brings her joy, but it has drawbacks. She still faces criticism from her family about her choices. "Everyone's got an opinion on hair, my hair, tattoos, and things. Everyone's got an opinion, even family." In accepting her distinctive appearance, Kat appears to have developed a thick skin about the opinions of those around her. "I don't give a fuck. It's my hair. It's my body. And it's a statement of who I am" (Kat, 2022). A rejection of anyone who does not like her hair is not quite the full story of Kat's relationship with the opinions of her family, which will be revisited in the next chapter. Interestingly, she strongly associates her aesthetic choices (tattoos and hair) with who she is internally.

There are tensions in what Kat tells me. She sees herself outside the normative fashion and culture; instead, she is part of a counter-cultural social group. At the same time, she believes she forges her path as an individual and prides herself on her originality. With her appearance, Kat signals that she belongs to a counterculture but takes a liquid attitude toward identity construction. She borrows and bricolages to present an individualised and personalised sense of style. Kat does not tie herself to

any subculture; instead, she treats visual signifiers as a pick-and-mix bag. In contemporary society, self-image is becoming increasingly important, and 'individuality' is used to gain symbolic capital (Michael, 2015). "Being original or idiosyncratic in a clever manner is more appreciated than following trends or sticking to a single cultural genre or discipline" (Michael, 2015, p. 166).

There is a level of knowledge and skill required to mix styles and cultural signs successfully. "Personal style in that respect becomes relevant as the symbolic expression of cultural capital and an individualistic identity" (Michael, 2015, p. 177). Here, Michael spells out that personal style and therefore consumption, as an expression of taste, is a means to distinguish oneself, while also symbolically expressing identity. Although taste and lifestyle are often assumed to be elements of the individualised self, (Bourdieu, 1986) argues that they originate from differences in social position. Showing capital through taste is a way to demonstrate your value to a specific social group.

One of the key problems of visually presenting the self is the tension between the movement of trends and the drive for authentic presentation of our 'real selves' (Michael, 2015). This tension is the conundrum at the very heart of fashion: to *be* the fashion rather than *wear* the fashion. With clothing, to keep up with the constant rejection of preceding styles that Barthes describes, the individual must always strive to buy new things. As soon as an item receives the quality of 'fashionable' it becomes

passé, and the consumer must move on to the next trend. Buying clothing is also buying fashionableness. Hair, although materially different to clothing, retains symbolic meaning and is subject to changing fashions and trends.

The cultural current pushes us without caring about our preferences. What if a shag mullet doesn't suit my hair texture? In some ways, materiality is a more pressing issue with hair than clothing, as the material of hair is biologically fixed. A major challenge in fashioning the hair is that it is at the same time rooted in the body (making it personal and resistant), and socially constructed (shaped by cultural and social environment). Unlike hair, clothing can be easily disposed of when it is out of line with fashion. Working with a limited and resistant resource in hair shows that there is potential for fashioning to be done with challenging material in a considered manner.

It is also worth noting that 'creative hair colour'[9] and tattoos are becoming increasingly mainstream. Where they would once be considered an extreme look, now they are not surprising or uncommon. In the interviews, alternative identities are framed in opposition to a 'social norm', but Kat and Hattie operate within the mainstream system. When they describe their attitude toward their hair, it sounds counter-cultural; however, Hattie and Kat are not unattractive by conventional

[9] Bright unnatural semi-permanent hair dyes

standards and do not appear shocking or outside of the limits of conventional beauty.

It is clear from both Hattie and Kat's interviews that they put great value in their hair and work to align it with their social group. Their hair is a marker of their subcultural capital and marks them as part of an alternative aesthetic while simultaneously outside of 'the norm'. The aesthetics of the hair can signal cultural belonging and help the participants stake their claims as individuals. Fashionable haircuts are formed in the salon, at least in part, to give the client a sense of creativity and conformity in relation to their social group.

Certain participants felt their hair was an integral element of their identity more strongly than others - the participants whose identity was somehow marginalised or thought they did not align fully with 'social norms'. To these participants, changing the hair is seen as a way to present their authentic self, but it is important to address that their authentic self is also aligned with a wider group or subculture.

It is possible to believe from Kat and Hattie, that styling hair is a utopian means to communicate social belonging, where a truthful and authentic vision of self can be worn on the surface of the body. However, Bauman would argue that liquid modernity births an "epoch of universal comparison" (Bauman, 2000, 7), where individuals must adapt constantly to keep up with ever-changing social contexts (Jones, 2023). Bauman

describes contemporary dreams of utopia; "all of them offer *individual* services to individuals seeking *individual* satisfaction and *individual* escape from *individually* suffered discomforts" (Bauman, 2007, 102-103 original emphasis).

Looking Out of Place: Hair Colour as Differentiation



Figure 35 - A hairstyle similar to Faiza's (client)



Figure 36 - A hairstyle similar to Cassie's (client)

While one intention of styling the hair appears to be marking belonging to a social group; it can just as quickly mark that the participants are *not* part of a social group. For both Faiza and Cassie, their hair colour led to a sense of being an outsider to the community they were visiting. Both discussions of not fitting in revolve around a sense of cultural and emplaced identity. While common in the UK, Faiza and Cassie's visual

choices around their identity made them seem out of place when entering a different culture.

Faiza is Indian British. She has sleek dark hair cut into a shoulder-length bob and fades from her dark natural colour to a vibrant dark blue. At the time of the interview, she is about to take a holiday to India and is worried about her hair marking her out as a 'foreigner'. She tells me about her sister's experiences on a previous trip. "Whether she spoke or not, they knew she was a foreigner." Faiza's sister, who did not have bright dyed hair, was already visually marked as outside Indian culture by her clothing and style. Faiza thinks her hair will make this even more pronounced: "I think me having blue hair just confirms that I'm a foreigner". She uses the phrase 'not one of them' to highlight the difference her visual appearance will cause on the trip.

For Faiza, her bright blue hair is aligned more with her British identity than her Indian identity. In the UK, she feels that her identity as Indian is visible, yet when she goes to India, she is treated as an outsider. We can see a gap between cultural identity and how she visually presents herself. Faiza feels 'othered' in any given environment as she not only has to deal with her shifting identity because of her diasporic origins but also because of the rampant and fluid trends of globalisation.

While living overseas in Italy, Cassie's blondeness, which usually is a source of confidence for her, became a marker of difference. In Italy, her

blonde hair was uncommon and immediately heralded her as outside of the local culture. In a time when Cassie felt like an outsider, often lonely and isolated, her hair enhanced that feeling of not fitting in, which was at times challenging for her. She found it challenging to be stared at, which made her feel that she stood out; no matter how good her Italian was, she would always be non-Italian. Rather than being a badge for bonding or a source of visual similarity with a group, her hair acted as a marker of difference. These experiences were linked to being physically out of place rather than solely related to identity.

The participants felt outside of the dominant culture, even if it was only for living in a different country. They talked about feeling outside of the group in a way that they did not when they were part of the group. Bauman believes that in communities, individuals feel safe, but it also creates a sense of fear if they deviate from the group. It is only when the participants feel outside of these groups that they notice the impact of group dynamics. They didn't need to change their hair to 'fit in', but their hair highlighted these moments of outsider status.

Consciously Presenting and Performing: Hair's Relationship to Self-Identity

The theme of **Consciously Presenting & Performing** is visible in crucial moments where participants have made conscious decisions about

how they present themselves and, critically, what is at stake in this performance. This theme shows how participants are conscious of presenting a version of themselves to others. It ascertains that they consider how others perceive their identity and the implications of that in the decision-making process. Some visual elements of identity do not require input or effort from the individual. For example, our hair grows in a specific colour dictated by our age, genetics, and environment. There are often ways to change them physically or chemically, but to what end?

I argue that the participants are often conscious of their hair's role in communicating selfhood to others, using *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* by Erving Goffman (1959) as a model for performative identity. It uses a socially situated perspective on identity to interrogate how fluid identities are formed for the participants within the hairdressing salon, exploring how the participants style themselves as a performance for those around them. However, Goffman wrote about a time when social boundaries were more solid. To understand how identity functions in contemporary society, I will integrate Bauman's concept of liquidity (Bauman, 2000), which dictates individualisation with or without our consent.

This chapter explores the views of most of the clients I interviewed. They all expressed a connection between their hair and sense of selfhood or identity. These performances of self were of differing sincerity. I draw on

my own experiences of presenting my self through my hair during the fieldwork.

Front Production and Fashionable Identity as a Self-Aware Performance



Figure 37 - A hairstyle similar to Demelza's (client)



Figure 38 - A hairstyle similar to Zoe's (client)

The participants all appeared to be performing the self to various degrees of sincerity. It was common for the participants to situate their haircuts to communicate individualised identity. The participants often behaved as individual actors, thinking actively about how their hair (and the rest of the body's surface) communicates their selfhood. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Goffman takes a symbolic interactionist perspective that the self can only be conceived of with other people. He uses the theatre metaphor to describe how individuals present themselves and posits that the self is always performed. The surface of

the body, its styling and clothing are essential elements of the performance of the self in everyday life.

"'Fronts' regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance" (Goffman, 1959, p. 49). Fronts can be separated into 'appearance', how you look, and 'manner', how you act. For this project's scope, we are simply interested in the appearance fronts, which can communicate a performer's social status. Goffman's fronts are more commonly used to describe fashion through clothing; however, they can also be applied to hair as fashion. The meanings of the hair go beyond the corporeal, and the cut, colour, and styling become symbolic for a wider understanding of personhood. I consider the hair an element of this front as a 'costume'. The actor utilises the aesthetic of the hair in a performance of selfhood while also acting as an audience for similar performances.

Cutting the hair is physically manufacturing a front. The concept of fronts allows us to understand the integral role of cutting and styling hair in identity construction and communication. Changing the appearance is the same as changing the front, communicating the social status differently. Changing the length, colour, texture, and style of the hair all work together to form a different type of front, expressing a different performance of social status.

Goffman considers how aware the individual is of this performance. At one extreme, you have actors fully convinced by their act; they believe what they present is reality and sincere. On the other hand, some actors do not take the performance seriously and give a cynical performance for the audience's benefit. This continuum explains why the theme of consciously presenting the self was clearly present in some interviews and absent in others. All performances of selfhood can be considered as sitting on this continuum. Cynical performances here are different from inauthentic performances. They are not trying to fool or deceive those viewing the performance but are simply self-aware of what/how they are presenting themselves. It is essential to highlight that when I use this phrase, I mean it in the same way that Goffman uses it, rather than in the conventional sense.

Kat and Demelza take a more cynical approach to identity presentation. They speak openly about using their hair as a tool to present their identity and play knowingly with cultural symbolism. I will explore Demelza's performance of self and queer identity in more detail below. Other participants, like Zoe and Hattie, did not speak about their appearance in this way. Instead, they chose styles that 'look good' or 'suit them'. They do not talk directly about their identity, but that is not to say that their identity does not come into play. Their performances, in Goffman's rhetoric, can be seen as sincere. The actors are convinced that their staging is 'real reality'. There is not the same level of self-reference with these participants. Instead of dissecting their visual presentation,

they tend to ascribe their desire to change their hair to aesthetic reasons, presented as coterminous with their sense of self.

Demelza makes sure to express her queerness actively through her hair. "I am always quite keen to make my queer identity very visual and visually communicate that. And one of the easiest ways to do that is through your hair, clothing" (Demelza, 2022). In her interview, she repeated the word statement several times to describe her hair. "It's a statement" (Demelza, 2022). The choice of words here is essential. For her, having the buzzcut is a loud and overt communication of queerness. A statement is the act of stating or declaring. In this case, the buzzcut act as a visual declaration of sexuality, and unlike some subtler queer codes, this one is easily read.

The most extreme example from the interview data of a conspicuous performance of self is when the participants change their hair as part of a literal costume. Both Cassie and Hattie told stories about the freedom they felt at Halloween. Their performance still utilises visual signifiers to communicate character, but instead of being an element of self, it is a performance of a character. Despite Cassie's feeling of security in her blonde hair, she enjoyed being able to experiment with a dark wig during a Halloween party. "I felt like a different person. Not in a bad way. It was quite lovely to change it up without it being permanent" (Cassie, 2022). In this experiment, Cassie, who by her admission does not like to change her hair much because she finds it unsettling (I will explore this further in

the next chapter), was able to wear an entirely different version of herself for the night. In this example, we can see an easily donned and shed identity. While Cassie was wearing a costume, she could pretend she was a different person, and the physically embodied change of hair colour felt like a physically embodied change of self.

Hattie shared a similar experience on Halloween. A simple change of parting made her feel quite different. She looked back on photos of her costume and was pleasantly surprised, which gave her the confidence to "just go for it", adopting the change in her day-to-day life. She explained that this was just a part of a notable change she had recently made to her hair, moving from her natural brown to a purple balayage.

Halloween is a time when costuming is socially acceptable (Shukla, 2015). Often, Halloween costumes do not cover the face or seek to disguise the wearer actively. Costumes give "psychological release" because they facilitate "projections of identity beyond what is possible through daily dress" (Shukla, 2015, p. 11). Halloween offers a safe space for the participants to play and experiment without affecting their everyday lives. This example shows how the burden of the performance of self is felt and that there is greater play and experimentation once the burden is removed.

Von Busch says that fashion is conflict which occurs in "the everyday practice of dress, in ubiquitous judgements, rivalries and rejections

between peers" (von Busch, 2020, p. 13). Halloween can be seen as a release from these conflicts, where 'in' and 'out' can be explored without (or with a lessened) fear of 'aesthetic authority'. Hattie remembers that her friends commented on how good her hair looked and that peer approval emboldened her to change her parting.

When hair is changed, it is not like changing an outfit. Hair is a limited material, and unlike clothing, you must live with the consequences of any change until the hair has grown out or undergone complex, lengthy and expensive changes in the salon. In some ways, the risk of fashioning the hair is greater than that of fashioning with clothing. Trying to dispose of a t-shirt is easier than trying to change a hairstyle. They might have to live with the consequences of any changes for months.

"Feeling Like Myself" – Enhancing Selfhood Through Hair

Strikingly, many hairdressers I spoke to told me they had made the customer feel 'more like themselves'. Although this sensation is familiar to me, the idea itself is a tricky idea to quantify. The hairdressers describe transformations they give clients as enhancing their sense of selfhood, particularly when they occur alongside significant life events. During major life changes like recovering from cancer or ending a long-term relationship, the client's sense of self may feel unbalanced or

uncomfortable. Other times, it was just a routine part of bodily maintenance in line with ageing when the client felt the need to change their aesthetic to conform to their new age or escape from the negatives of ageing. Throughout the examples provided by the hairdressers, they believe that their work on the hair helps to make the client feel happy and comfortable in their identity.

The clients largely reflected this perspective, describing feeling 'like themselves again', 'so me' and rejuvenated after a haircut. 'Feeling more like myself' is an interesting notion. How can they become *more* like something they already are? It suggests that the outside appearance of the body not only expresses something 'true' and 'internal' but can enhance what is inside. I question the truth of this, whether this is what is happening or just how the participants experience it. Perhaps the feeling of confidence is being conflated with the feeling of selfhood. It is certainly not always the case that a new haircut helped the clients 'feel like themselves' but it was clear from the interviews that the clients would hide it from the stylist if they were unhappy with their new look.

As I said, this sensation is familiar to me. I have experienced the need to 'feel more like myself'. Before starting the research, I already felt the ability to reinvent and transform myself through my hair. I believe what my hair looks like represents who I am in a particular moment or at least communicates how I want people to perceive me. I have always cared about my hair being an accurate representation of me. I have spent

much time experimenting with my hair, with greater or lesser success. What my hair says about me has always been at the forefront of my mind. In my 30s, these shifts have become less frequent or perhaps more carefully managed.

During the autoethnographic fieldwork, further problems became apparent. Getting a haircut that 'feels like me' was still important, but other factors emerged. The haircut as research was also prevalent in my mind. The autoethnographic element of this research was somewhat destabilising because the representation of selfhood became too focal. My already 'cynical' approach to identity formation is because I am even more conscious of preserving the length of my hair, observing the hairdressers' reactions and scrutinising my own behaviour.

During this research, I also had experiences of feeling like my hair did not represent me well. My experience with hairdressers before I began this research was visiting to have a transformation, long to short, change of colour, new fringe. I always wanted to feel reinvigorated after a visit to the salon. Before I began the autoethnographic fieldwork, I chose not to have my hair cut. I let it get much longer than I usually would, to have enough material to have multiple haircuts over the next eight months. I typically flip between two styles, slightly longer than shoulder length or a chin-length bob.

In the appointments during the autoethnography, this idea of preserving material is at the back of my mind. I do not want to go straight to a short bob and have nowhere to go. If this were removed from the picture, I would be pushing for a blunt chin-length bob (in fact, I have had this hairstyle since the autoethnography ended). I felt slightly out of sorts with my hair for much of this project. The effect is usually subtle, like wearing ill-fitting trousers; it is a little uncomfortable. I am aware that having hair down to my shoulders, not my chin, seems like a small difference to cause a crisis of self. This serves to illustrate just how important dressing the hair can feel internally.

There is too much in-between-ness in this process. I feel like my hair is perpetually in a state of growing out. I reflect on 'not feeling like myself'. Like my participants, I struggle to articulate what I mean by this in the fieldnotes. In hindsight, perhaps it is about how I come across to others. Perhaps the idea of 'feeling like myself' is a more straightforward answer than interrogating the forced individualisation of liquid modernity. When my clothes do not feel right, I change them. Sometimes I change multiple times before I find what feels right; other times, I change numerous times and *never* find the 'correct' answer. I do not believe this feeling is about expressing myself but about thinking about how I will be looked at in line with the oppressive forces of fashion. At the heart of fashion is 'in' versus 'out' (von Busch, 2020), a tension between 'wrong' and 'right' at the heart of all fashionable identity formation.

I think about how I present myself at the hairdresser in an unusual way in comparison with the rest of my life. While I am not usually concerned with being scruffy in public, I always make an effort when I visit the hairdresser. I want them to read me as 'cool' and a little 'edgy' and think I can pull off something a little out of the ordinary. I would hate them to think that I was dowdy or unable to pull off a particular style. I feel the need to tell them I used to have hot pink hair to show that I'm not scared. This can feel like a caricaturised performance of my identity: like I am showing a heightened version of myself to them, so they can pick a style that is me at my best rather than the casual version of my style, which is more common daily.

The fieldwork consisted of nine visits to salons; each time a hairdresser transformed my hair. I asked each hairdresser their opinion on what direction to take, but I also used my taste as guidance. I experienced a range of emotional responses to the haircuts I received. Below, I detail some styles that felt the 'most' and 'least' like me.

Styles that 'don't feel like me'



Figure 39 - My hair before I began the fieldwork visits



Figure 40 - My hair at the end of fieldwork visit 4

Too long *- I grew it this long in prep for the autoethnography*

Too pristine *– My hair would never look like this outside of the salon*

Styles that 'feel like me'

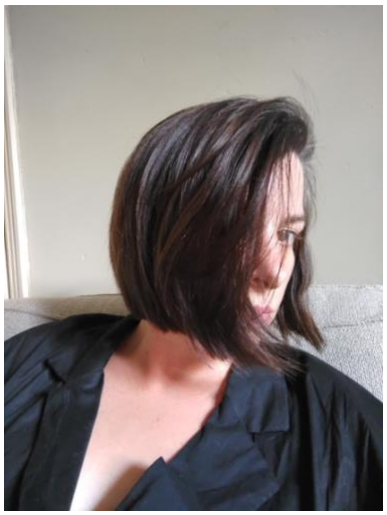


Figure 41 - My hair at the end of fieldwork visit 8



Figure 42 - My hair at the end of fieldwork visit 7

Blunt bob *– an old favourite, full of motion*

Fun pink *– playful, creative colour*

In the autoethnographic fieldnotes, I describe a haircut that I was not pleased with as "causing a separation from myself" and reflect that "I could feel that I wasn't aligned with myself". Similar comments were made by my partner who told me, "You're much more yourself" after a haircut.

It can be difficult to pinpoint what 'feels like you' when everything works as it should. It becomes more apparent when I think about what I do not want. This example of negative taste is reminiscent of how Bourdieu (1986) describes taste as distinctive. I wrote:

> I do not want a bright purple, which would cover better, but I would be happy with a pink or a red if we would go vivid. I'm unsure why I feel so averse to bright, but I do not want that. Maybe it reminds me of the awful hair of my youth, or perhaps I'm just not a purple person. Some people love purple, but I'm not one of them.

I feel a significant and immediate adverse reaction to the idea of dyeing my hair a bright purple, which the stylist suggests covering the bright orange that my hair has turned after bleaching. This reaction does not come from disliking the colour but from not wanting to look like someone who loves purple. I have made assumptions about the types of people with purple hair and marked myself as distinct from them. I am not saying that I do not want purple hair, but I do not want to look like someone who thinks purple hair is cool. The thought process of changing

my hair relies on considering how I want to be seen and how I experience my selfhood.

I do not claim to be rational. In my mind, purple hair stands for a certain type of person, who is hard to describe. Perhaps it is a lack of subtlety, a woman who wants to signify some rebellion, but does so without nuance. Perhaps it reminds me of choices in my teenage years. It is in these irrational and emotionally changed moments where taste is most visible. I cannot clearly explain why, but I can tell you that I am not a purple person.

I consider my performance of self when I discuss my hair as it turns grey. I will discuss this in detail in a later chapter, but it is also worth using as an example. I make this observation in the autoethnographic fieldnotes: "I have always had very sleek hair; this is something that I've always known about myself, but at this stage of my life, some of my fundamental beliefs about myself are tested." It may be hyperbolic to describe the texture of my hair as fundamental to my beliefs about myself. It has changed how I style and care for my hair to make it conform to my vision for myself. I have always had a picture of myself with sharp, straight hair. Whenever it departs from this, I feel like my hair is someone else's. Throughout the field notes, I talk about transitioning to see myself, not with grey hair, but with the changing texture. At the time, I wasn't fully conscious of it, but my sadness around this change was shaped by internalised ideals of smooth, sleek, shiny

hair — features long upheld as the standard within white, Eurocentric beauty norms. As a white woman, I had unconsciously aligned these traits with attractiveness and femininity.

It is worth considering how individuality works in contemporary society. Brown considers von Busch's (2020) perspective; he

> touches on the illusory nature of individuality, and the expressive freedom or aesthetic autonomy so often promised by fashion… This illusion is not …because there is no real choice (though that may sometimes be the case) but… because we are 'forced to appear' and compelled to choose (Brown, 2022, p. 86)

Although I feel that sleek dark brown hair expresses an innate element of my selfhood or represents myself, this is only an illusion. What is more likely is that I have incorporated elements of my naturalistic appearance with cultural factors and the promise of fashion.

Far from an autonomous decision, using fashion to express individuality is a product of liquidity and the 'self-as-project' demanded by neoliberal capitalism (Brown, 2022). Considering the impact of liquidity on originality and authenticity is particularly important to highlight what is at stake.

In a liquid modern society, there are still barriers to individuals building their identity freely (Bauman, 2000) because individuals constantly compare and adapt to their changing contexts (Jones, 2023). It is important to remember that "individualization is highly bound by social constraints" (Jones, 2023, p. 15). Demonstrating that although the participants feel like they are performing selfhood, it cannot be a pure expression of self. Complex comparisons, peer interactions and social requirements form it.

Identity was once a 'given', but as pre-allocated reference groups are 'melted down', identity becomes a task for the individual. I believe those moments where the participants, and I, feel more like ourselves, are moments of fleeting success in the required identity work of liquidity. Just for a moment, there is a sensation of stability. The moment of inertia before the pendulum swings again.

While participants speak of hair as a means of "feeling like themselves," this articulation resists easy theoretical framing. The tension between lived expressions of fluidity and Bauman's depiction of identity as a never-settled project within liquid modernity is not easily resolve, yet both perspectives remain true. What emerges is a model of self-styling not as pure self-expression, but as a form of ongoing self-improvement shaped by both personal desire and social expectation.

My Identity is a Journey Towards Something Stable



Figure 43 - A hairstyle similar to Lou's (hairdresser)

So far, we have a striking picture of sympathy with Bauman's conception of individualised identity within liquid modernity (2000). Still, the data also produces some contradictions around the idea of fluidity. When it feels fluid, the participants tend to speak about their identity as a short-term problem to be solved. It will become fixed once they 'get it right' and solve their identity problem. Yet Bauman believes we are in an age of "an infinity of improvement, with no 'final state' in sight and none desired" (Bauman, 2000, p. xi).

Like Goffman, Bauman used the metaphor of the theatre to explain performances of identity.

> "It is difficult, nay impossible, to sum up midway this unscripted and unfinished play with its still

> unravelling plot – a play in which we are all intermittently or simultaneously the accessories, stage props, and the acting characters" (Bauman, 2007, p. 110)

However, Bauman's depiction of the play is unpredictable, throwing the actors into a sense of chaos. It is important to consider the participants are not just performing the self, but doing so in a time where uncertainty reigns. In unstable times, their stability of self becomes increasingly important.

With this in mind, it was surprising how commonly the participants used the language of travel to describe how they felt about their hair. They represent the 'finding' of identity as similar to a long journey. Participants typify their search for selfhood as a slow process, often involving a turbulent path through the teenage years and early twenties. In a time when speed is an essential part of our consumer culture, particularly within fashion, it is interesting to contrast that with the participants' slow experience.

Participants identified the most significant changes in their identity were in childhood or their teenage years. At these life stages, the participants say they felt less stable and more prone to experimentation. As they got older, they appeared to find their identity more stable. They link the experimentation with the exploration of youth, implying that with age comes stability. Cassie is an excellent example of this. She describes a

disastrous attempt to dye her hair as a teenager. "When you're in school, hair's a big thing. Identity is a big thing in school. It was not my best work, but we had to experiment. You do when you're young." Cassie views this as a time in her life that she has moved away from, a time of experimentation into a time of stability.

She describes the experimentation of her younger years as a journey to find a visual representation of self that she is happy with. When she talks about the time, she was a brunette, it is clear that it was not a happy time to look back on. Her description of the journey implies that she has overcome a challenge in finding and sticking to her blonde style. She has been blonde "most of [her] adult life", and she describes trying out browns, pinks and purples during her colour journey. The journey Cassie has been on may not immediately stand out as a perilous one; however, as discussed earlier, her blondeness is critical to her self-image.

The word 'journey' is significant; it describes the act of travelling from point A to point B. Journeys usually have an endpoint, an ultimate destination, and a narrative progression. They have a beginning, a middle and perhaps most importantly, an end. Although Cassie describes a moment where her identity was in a state of flux, there was an implication that she found an idealised endpoint and that now her self-presentation is more fixed, a colour journey towards a stable endpoint.

For example, Lou, one of the hairdressers, describes a client who has been doing the same haircut every three weeks for the last ten years. "She never really deviates from. I've been doing the same thing the whole time I've seen her, and she's quite happy with that". Her client cares about managing a stable sense of self by keeping her hair the same rather than experimenting.

The participants see experimentation as making identity more stable over time. Their identity was uncertain, but through trying different styles, they found a stable sense of selfhood and brought their identity under control. This perspective is at odds with Bauman's reading of identity. In *Liquid Life*, he claims that "'identity,' after all, is … about the possibility of 'being born again' – of stopping being what one is and turning into someone one is not yet" (Bauman, 2005, p. 8). Bauman cites reinvention and constant change as the very definition of identity. It is not that identity is made through change and experimentation, but that identity *is* the change and experimentation. Although this can be seen as a journey, it is not yet complete – always in a state of becoming. Throughout the data, the participants situate themselves as in control of their identity. They portray themselves as actively travelling a path towards a stable, cohesive identity. They are not passive spectators or victims of cultural codes but empowered actors who are, to greater or lesser extents, literate in modes and means of visual communication. Participants widely saw themselves as in control, perhaps able to select suitable fronts or at least capable of impacting changes in their identity.

The next haircut feels like an answer, the search for stability causes liquidity.

> After all, it was the quest for the solidity of things and states that most often triggered, kept in motion and guided their liquefaction; liquidity was not an adversary, but an effect of that quest for solidity... In turn, it was the formlessness of the oozing, leaking and flowing liquid that prompted the efforts at cooling, damping and moulding (Bauman, 2000, p. ix)

It is commonplace for people to feel like they are becoming stable when perpetuating change.

In *Perpetuum Mobile*, speaking about fashioning identity, Bauman does not use the word 'journey', preferring to describe it as a 'hunt'; the 'catch' or idealised endpoint is less desirable than the exhilarating chase (Bauman, 2010). The goalposts change again as soon as a 'catch' looks imminent. It is possible to view the participants as so wrapped up in the hunt for identity that they perceive it as a finite journey, but once they near their goal, the hunt begins anew. The idea of reaching an identity end goal, a perfect hairstyle you will simply maintain, rings of modernist utopian ideals but is not feasible in liquid modernity.

The data presents experimenting with identity as either a joyful journey or a treacherous path. Personality, experiences, current circumstances, life stage, perspective in hindsight, and social status all play a role in how people approach their identity formation. When the participants talk about experimentation, it is almost always in the past tense. For example, Zoe describes a disastrous dye job. It was during a time that she was "being a little bit more experimental", she tells me with a wry smile. Commonly, the participants imply that experimentation was something they used to do but no longer (except for Kat and Demelza, who look forward to changing their hair again). I question whether this is true or if it is just harder to observe shifts in identity from inside the process and easier to identify them with hindsight.

I side with Kat and Demelza on this. I have found the potentials of liquidity mainly positive – my attitude to my hair before the fieldwork was playful and excited. I love to undergo a drastic transformation; the moments of becoming are joyous. I never see my hair as a finished project and find the idea of trying to keep my hair the same seems dull. I change my hair in line with a (sometimes impulsive) feeling of the need to change. I have never interrogated this feeling before this research, but now I wonder if this is the tide of liquidity. For me, I have never desired a permanent or long-lasting style for my hair. I have always embraced the transformative potential of hair without experiencing the need to feel balanced in myself. The times that I feel discomfort or out of sync usually

come during the moments of in-between, where my hair is neither one thing nor another.

In preparation for the autoethnographic fieldwork, I let my hair grow much longer than I liked it. Having this style made me feel unsettled and disconnected from myself. I put less time into my hair, mostly scrunching it into a messy bun on top of my head. What was worse than the style I did not connect with was feeling held back from change. I wrote in my reflections, "The need for change can be a steady building of ill-ease or crash on me unceremoniously. This time, the need to change has been building up in me." By the time I started the fieldwork visits, I only wanted to get my hair cut to my chin. I resisted this and let the hairdressers lead the consultations, with the idea of preserving the length of my hair for later visits in the back of my mind.

My experiences alongside those of the participants challenge Bauman's theories. The way they explained their identity does not align with fluidity. In describing liquidity, Bauman paints a bleak picture, one of a society forever changed by globalisation, where individualisation and freedom of expression are largely a burden. The way that the participants described their experiences to me, was not always aligned with this. The participants tell me that they are sure about themselves but have not always been. They were experimental and now they have it all figured out now. The idea that they might always be reinventing did not seem to occur to them. They were more concerned with keeping on

top of what was going on now. Really, their aim was not to constantly keep up with change, like Bauman said, but to keep themselves as stable and 'the same' as possible.

As discussed in the Literature Review, Bauman rarely discussed stability, but he does admit the draw of security. "We dream of a reliable world, one we can trust. A secure world" (Bauman, 2007, p. 95). He explains that security feels important when navigating liquidity, however, despite the desire for sameness, the often invisible power of liquidity leads to change whether or not we think we want it. Even in moments of stillness, we find ourselves with the compulsion to 'set sail' on the seas of liquidity again. Bauman describes the urge as "an aversion to what *had been* done, rather than the attraction of what *might yet be* done…" (2007, p. 96. Original emphasis). The participants, even those who claimed a need for stability, experience this urge. However, those who value stability may 'set sail' on shorter, safer journeys with less risk than those who relish the chance for reinvention.

I am one of those individuals who relish reinvention (consider the anecdote that begins the chapter). For me, changing my hair feels like the freedom to change myself. I have always seen my own identity as shifting, and actively used my hair as a means to play with the cues and codes of fashionable identity. While the participants, largely, did not see their identity as an act of constant reinvention, Demelza and Kat share my perspective. They talk of playing with styles, of quick changes in line

with shifts in self. The experiences of two participants are, of course, not enough to generalise; however, both Kat and Demelza view themselves as somewhat outside of normative feminised culture. Through their subcultural and queer identities, these participants simultaneously position themselves outside of mainstream culture and within specific cultural groups. For those who identify as culturally othered, the option to reinvent appears to offer more transformative potential. While this project cannot explore this dynamic in the depth it deserves, it signals a promising avenue for further research.

Bad Haircuts: Hair/Identity Challenges Within Liquidity

Identity within liquid modernity is self-devised and individualised, unlike modern conceptions of identity, which see it as something you are born into and is difficult to change (Jones, 2023). Bauman goes beyond saying that identity *can* be moved, instead saying that it is *always* moving and in a constant sense of flow. If his inception of individualised identity as a necessity of liquidity is true, then choice is an illusion. The illusion of choice does not appear to be how it is experienced by the participants, who feel active and empowered through their self-expression. I explore to what extent this is true and how the lived experience of identity formation is not always in line with the theoretical conceptions.

The hunt for identity is an all-consuming task within these complex webs of freedoms and constraints (Bauman, 2010). Seeking out the moments in the data where it goes wrong can shed light on its workings; this section explores the moments of peril, where participants shared worries about not getting things right when expressing themselves.

The participants had almost all experienced a 'bad' haircut. They could all remember an answer when questioned, but many brought it up before being asked. They usually explained that a bad haircut was either a haircut that did not 'suit' them, one that was technically poor or one that differed from what they requested. A bad haircut can mean a multitude of things.

If we consider the hair a front for presenting selfhood, it is easy to see why a bad haircut might be a memorable or even traumatic experience. The clients are visiting a hairdresser with the intention (conscious or otherwise) of bringing the outside of the body in line with an internal view of the self. If the conceived identity differs from what is being communicated, participants could be misperceived by others viewing their visual presentation of selfhood. The participants talked openly about having styles that did not suit them or did not feel right. Relating the negative experiences around hair to their identity formation was uncommon.

Zoe is in her early twenties, in her self-styled 'skint-post-uni-era'. She works in agriculture and divides between work, home and 'out-out'[10]. She is the most outwardly self-conscious of the participants. "I always think about what other people gonna think about me, especially if I'm in public". She articulates anxiety about being judged by those around her. Clarke and Miller (2002) found that women primarily select the clothes that they wear and, therefore, how they style themselves due to anxiety about what peers might think.

Zoe is less worried at work, home or visiting the supermarket, "but if I'm going out with friends or going into town, where I know there's gonna be a lot of people around, I change a little bit". While Zoe doesn't mind her co-workers or strangers seeing her in an un-groomed state, the idea of friends seeing her like that causes a sense of unease. For von Busch, "we exist as relational beings, caught in a net of imitation, comparisons and rivalries" (von Busch, 2020, p. 81). He believes that fashion is sold as a self-improvement and policed through social pressure and rewards from peers. These pressures may cause Zoe to try harder when around her peers; these pressures will be expanded on in the next chapter.

Zoe describes getting dressed up as her 'escape' from looking messy. There is more pressure when she goes 'out-out' to perform cohesively, get the 'right' look, or pick an outfit that 'works'. There is more at stake in those social situations than in a typical workday. Zoe worries about

[10] British slang meaning going out drinking or to a nightclub. E.g. "We're not just going out, we're going out out."

how she would be perceived if she 'got it wrong'. She hopes that her performance of self is read correctly by those around her. While she mainly talks about dress, she does include doing her hair in the ritual of getting ready. She must make sure that her hair and clothing are working in a symbiotic manner to present a cohesive and well-managed visual self. Her goal is looking good, or at least not embarrassing herself.

Zoe's fears are warranted. Managing identity presentation in a liquid society is a complex and sometimes dangerous undertaking. Fashion is a vehicle for unconscious fantasy; it balances personal desires and social constraints (Tseëlon, 2012). In contemporary society, where the boundaries of social constraints are blurred, it can be more complicated than ever to balance. Zoe fears the consequences of being seen when her appearance does not meet the standards of social constraints.

Fashion anxiety causes an "overwhelming sense of fear that an individual— even one with extensive fashion knowledge—may not actually know what they themselves like" (Clarke and Miller, 2002, p. 211). Although Clarke and Miller are discussing the purchasing of garments, the same process occurs with hair. Zoe visits hairdresser Jess, who she feels is a safe pair of hands and will guide her in the best way to avoid her feelings of anxiety and help her navigate the quest for individuality.

Zoe is not the only participant who expresses worries about how her appearance is received. Kat's experiences of feeling ostracised have heightened her awareness of how others see her. Kat attempts to grow from this unhappy time and accept the elements of her appearance that make her distinctive: "When you're younger, being different, it's just anything that's not deemed 'normal' or 'good enough'. It's the negative reasons to be the centre of attention rather than being in control of when you want to draw attention to yourself." When other people see Kat, she wants them to see things she has had 'control over'. Being heavily tattooed transitions Kat from blending in socially to standing out visually (Thompson, 2015), although it is becoming increasingly common for women to have tattoos in the UK. Publicly showing tattoos can still be met with intolerance when individuals show their 'aesthetic intolerance' to display taste and distinction (Bourdieu, 1986; Thompson, 2015).

"These are the things that I used to express my character and personality and individuality rather than somebody picking those things" (Kat, 2022). Self-expression is at the forefront of Kat's mind as she adorns herself. She names her 'character', 'personality' and 'individuality' as crucial concerns when visually expressing herself. Kat is compelled to choose but feels that decision-making is expressing her truth. Kat chooses specific style influences to communicate elements of her selfhood, taking inspiration from drag and the 1950s. She insists that this is about more than communicating her interests. It also presents her values and morals. Her love for the style of the 1950s comes from a

feminist perspective of "wanting to have that control and reclaiming your body and putting aside a time where women's bodies were just for the male gaze" (Kat, 2022). There is an apparent contradiction here that Kat feels that by leaning into traditional conceptions of femininity and domesticity but blending them with elements of metal and queer culture, she is subverting and reclaiming them. There is a post-feminist tension here, where she wants to be empowered but also feels feminine in a traditional sense.

Faiza's bright blue hair has unexpected consequences, making her 'look like a children's TV presenter,' and as a result, children want to talk to her. "I started to notice kids love me now. And I'm convinced it's because of my hair." (Faiza, 2022). While she is open to children talking to her, they are not the only ones who find it easier to approach someone with brightly dyed hair. She clarifies that she does not want strangers, particularly "men that shout at you from cars", to approach her because of her hair.

Faiza raises a similar point to Kat here. "I didn't dye my hair so that you would engage with me; I dyed it for myself." She affirms that the dyed hair is not for the benefit of anyone else, particularly men. Dyed hair is a choice to make yourself visible and noticeable; as a result, it can be perceived as an invitation to chat or something to be commented on, which is particularly problematic when uninvited sexual advances are the result.

Faiza resents the perception that she is a 'fun and colourful' person because of her 'fun and colourful' hair. "Maybe, I am portraying something that I don't want to portray or that I think I want to portray. I just want to dress how I want to dress" (Faiza, 2022). Although Faiza understands that she cannot simply stop communicating things through her hair, she wishes there was a way to separate her love for bright colours from the way others interpret them. Faiza is 'forced to appear' (von Busch, 2020, p. 13), and others have viewed and read the choices she felt were internal. The presentation of self through hair is not always easy. Still, this section has demonstrated that the intention of communication is not always what is experienced by those around the participants.

Conclusion

This chapter establishes how participants conceive of the relationship between their hair and identity. There was no uniform understanding among the participants. As a result, this chapter delved into the sometimes complex, tangled relationship between hair and identity.

Some participants report using their hair as a social marker of group belonging, particularly to subcultural groups. Other participants have felt

singled out by their hair and excluded from a group, describing painful feelings of exclusion. The participants' testimony aligns with Simmel's (1957) view that clothing choices are rooted in fitting in and standing out. In this case, these participants were concerned with their hair's relationship to their identity as part of a group. This was most clearly articulated by participants who identified as 'alternative'. Participants also expressed a feeling of othering, when their hair marked them as an outsider to the culture they were visiting.

I suggest that although differentiation and belonging are still communicated through the external appearance (clothing *and* hair) is further complicated than at the time Simmel was writing. In, to borrow Bauman's phrasing, the epoch of universal comparison, the reading of visual signals becomes increasingly complex, and the threat of observation is ever-present. This intensifies the experience of individualisation and forces those individuals to work to keep up with the ever-shifting societal requirements.

The participants who saw their hair as more connected to their sense of self, than their group identity, did so with varying levels. Goffman believed the self is a visual performance created through various 'fronts', including appearance and is done with varying levels of sincerity. Hair is one, important part of the costume worn to perform selfhood.

Interestingly, both the hairdressers and clients describe how hairdressing can make clients feel 'like myself again' or 'more like myself'. I conclude that hair is so important to an individual's sense of self that it can feel like it is enhancing the self, rather than just presenting it visually. I used my own experiences to consider when my hair made me feel 'more like myself' and stable in my identity and when it was the opposite.

Bauman plays upon Goffman's metaphor of the stage. However, the play that Bauman describes within Liquid Modernity, is unfinished and unscripted where actors must scrabble to play every role. This feels contradictory to the participants' descriptions, as they often describe their hair as a journey. They can see an endpoint, where their hair and identity are stable and the destination is researched. Perhaps they even achieve this for a moment, but I argue that, with the ever-changing nature of both hair and identity, what may feel like an ending is simply a moment of inertia, before the pendulum swings again. Practically, when the participants feel like they have reached the end of their journey, immediately the hair grows, rendering the journey unfinished again.

For Bauman, identities must be constantly changed and updated in context. As we have seen, he describes this as a 'hunt' without an end rather than a journey (Bauman, 2010). The joy is in the hunt, the act of becoming, rather than the catch. Notably, the participants described shifts in their identity in the past tense as a problem that is now fixed.

Many thought their identity was unstable in their teens, but that was fixed now.

Within liquidity, where the self is critically unstable, individuals search for ways to feel stable. This is never clearer than in the moments where the presentation of self 'went wrong'. The bad haircut was a shared experience with many of the participants, who felt destabilised by their hair and conception of selfhood being out of line.

It may seem like a simple observation, but the hair itself is changeable. It can be easily and (relatively) cheaply transformed to look very different from how it did yesterday. Quickly changing the hair is useful because as soon as the goalposts of identity are understood, they will, once again, move. However, hair also moves slowly, so living with a poor decision may be a long-term issue, waiting for the hair to grow out.

This chapter sets out a theoretical perspective on identity, which is fundamental to the rest of the thesis. Overall, this chapter highlights how hair functions similarly to clothing. To answer the research question, '***How does hair contribute to fashionable identity, differently from clothing?***' it is also important to consider how hair functions similarly to clothing. This chapter considers hair primarily as an extension of dress and an essential element of fashionable identity. While we cannot fully equate fashion and hair, we may consider the fashionable and on-trend haircut akin to the fashionable outfit (or at least the *desire* for a

fashionable haircut with the *desire* for a fashionable outfit). Although changing your hair is more laborious than swapping your shirt, hair remains integral to the visual presentation of self and "pivotal to the mechanisms of social and cultural differentiation" (Biddle-Perry and Cheang, 2008, p. 5). However, this is not the end of the story. Even when participants see their hair as a communicative tool for fashionable identity, it does not always work the same as clothing. Hair's innate link to the body makes it far more personal than clothing. It also raises challenges. What if, like Hattie, the material texture of your hair does not align with trends in your social sphere?

The next chapter turns the focus to the body. Hair is not a static material. Unlike clothing, it is constantly growing, so as soon as a style is cut in, it starts to change. Many of the participants aspire to keep their hair looking the same, which becomes a task of management and ongoing upkeep. Beauty labour, like this, is a normalised aspect of feminine life.

CHAPTER FIVE: Revealing and Concealing: Beauty, Control and Effortlessness

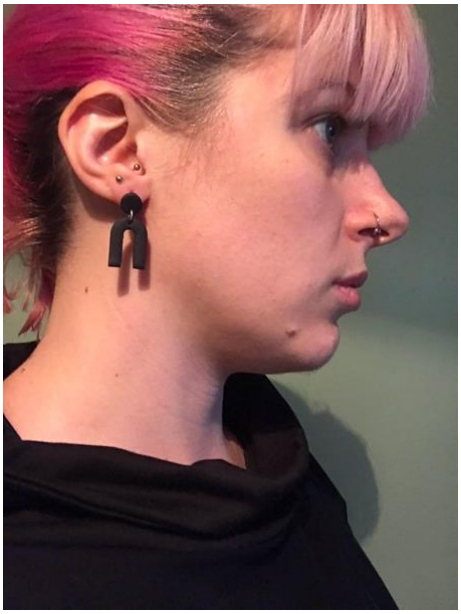


Figure 44 - My faded pink hair with dark roots (2020)

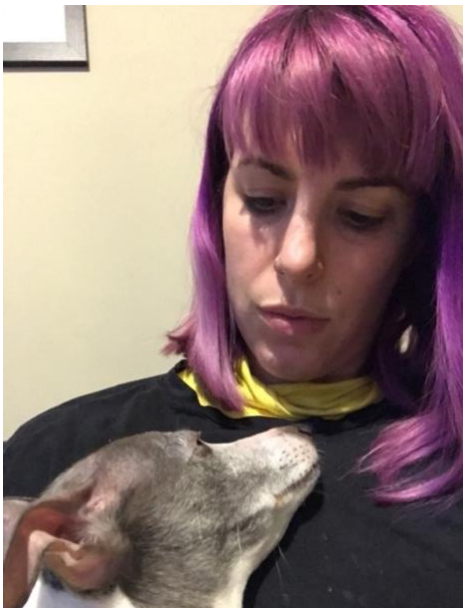


Figure 45 - Starting to shift to a darker shade (2021)

Keeping pink hair up is a lot of work. It involves root bleaching and fading dye. This was fine in lockdown. I could apply the dye before working from home and wash it out during my lunch break. As the world opened up, maintaining the colour became harder and harder. I spent more and more time with it looking patchy and peachy rather than the bold hot pink when it was freshly dyed.

Once I had decided to let my hair return to its natural colour, I knew I had to manage the transition. A thick line border of pink to brown was not the look I wanted. I wanted to blend the brown roots slightly. I transitioned from pink to indigo. The darker shade had less contrast with the brown. My laziness is less noticeable.

Introduction

A sharp bob may feel like it expresses the ideal me but will begin to lose its shape in a matter of weeks. Roots will appear. Tangles will form. The ends will split. The only way to keep the style the same is through labour and upkeep. The hairdresser's work will control hair temporarily but it returns to an unkempt state before long. This chapter explores the work required to bring hair, an unruly and ever-changing material, under control.

The maintenance of hair describes the physical act of controlling the hair through cutting, combing and styling. Physically working on the hair gives the participant control over the kind of front they are forming. As the hair grows, this task must be performed regularly. Although some participants, like Demelza and Kat, wanted to experiment with their hair repeatedly, others, like Cassie and Hattie, found a style they liked and wanted to keep it looking the same. Even if participants found a style that made them feel comfortable expressing their identity clearly, they must continue to apply constant work to keep it that way. I use Foucault's concept of 'bodily maintenance' (Foucault, 1979), where the body is worked upon to bring it in line with societal expectations, to explain these experiences.

Entwistle (2000) calls for studies of fashion that use Foucault as a lens, not to overlook the fashion's embodied and everyday nature and to not

see the fashioned body as passive. This chapter centres the experiences of the participants, particularly in relation to the work required to maintain fashionable hair, and how they reflect that back to the researcher.

Fashion, and the choices individuals make about how to style the surface of their body, are subject to powerful forces from multiple sources. Fashioning the hair, particularly, is rooted in the body in ways that fashioning through clothing is not. Hair crosses boundaries. It is relevant to consider beauty as a driving force in fashioning the hair, because it centres hair's bodily nature. I will refer to feminist work, which focuses on women's bodies. The participants in the study were all female, and the salons served women primarily. As a result, this study is explicitly concerned with women's hair. That is not to say that men and non-binary people do not experience pressure to conform to idealised standards of beauty and behaviour or that their experience of those pressures should be minimised. The pressures on men have increased, which has shrunk the gender gap in this area. Instead of fixing the issues, all are experiencing greater pressure (Kuipers, 2022).

In the previous chapter, I analysed the participants' experience of the connection between hair and identity. I found that participants strive to feel stable, which is a challenging concept within liquidity. Bauman believes that identity is contingent upon various social and cultural factors, being constantly shaped and reshaped (Bauman and Vecchi, 2004). Stability may not be possible, but the participants still aspire to

that sensation. Where the previous chapter viewed hair as an extension of dress, this chapter favours data where it is treated more like a body part. Here, the participants are not discussing changing their hair to form identity but how they can keep it the same. While authors like Biddle-Perry (2020) discuss how malleable hair is, it is essential to consider it resistant to change (Holmes, 2010) and Susan Bordo calls the body itself "malleable plastic" (1993:38).

It is helpful to think of hair like this because these distinctions have emerged from the data. The participants experience the hair growing from their heads and constantly changing. As opposed to clothing, where the material is inert or in a state of decay, hair is replacing itself. Anything done to it will fade over time or grow out. In this way, we can imagine hair as a self-replenishing or renewable resource. A product of hair's changing nature is that it requires maintenance if you want it to stay the same. Prestige surrounds styles that require more maintenance. Historically, such styles reinforced class distinctions as only those who could afford servants could achieve them (Powell and Roach, 2004).

This chapter demonstrates that the participants feel pressure to look a certain way from external forces, like family and work and internal 'self-surveillance'. While it is clear from that data that the concept of beauty impacts the choices of the clients and their hairdressers, they are reluctant to name this as a factor. Instead, the participants often conceal or minimise the labours of beauty.

The first subtheme, **The Invisible Pressures of Beauty** traces some of the forces experienced by the clients concerning their hair and appearance. I identify that the two most pertinent sources of pressure were close female family members and the need to be seen as acceptable at work. I also argue that the external experience of pressure is often internalised. Foucault's work on scopic regimes and the panopticon is used to discuss instances of self-policing, where the individual becomes the strongest enforcer of beauty and maintenance standards.

Next, **Maintenance as a Requirement and Failure Waiting to Happen** examines the requirements the participants feel about maintenance and what occurs if they do not (or feel like they do not) meet that standard. The regular upkeep of dyed hair is a clear example of regular, repeated (and often resented) maintenance work in the data. Many of the participants diagnose themselves as lazy, judging their morality based on their ability to keep up with maintenance. The connection between character and appearance is intensified by the bodily-ness of hair, which is an inherent part of the self.

Interestingly, despite the obvious effort required to maintain the hair (a task which is *never* finished), participants are keen to deny any effort. In **Looking Good is Hard Work (That You're Not Meant to See)**, I examine effortlessness as a concept and idealised state, where simply

keeping up with the maintenance of hair is not enough, but any signs of effort must be glossed over.

The Invisible Pressures of Beauty: External and Internal Factors

A strong theme emerging from the participants was **The Invisible Pressure of Beauty**, including the multiple and layered sources of power which affect the participants. Before I introduce the specific practices of the participants, it is crucial to understand the forces at play. I use Foucauldian theory, defining power as multiple nodal rather than emanating from a single source. This conception of power is built upon modernist scopic regimes (Foucault, 1979) but is still broadly relevant in liquid modern times, further complicating power networks. This section will also draw on feminist readings of Foucauldian texts, which interpret how his theories can be applied to women. Women's bodies, in particular, are subjected to maintenance as a form of social control. They are politicised sites where transformation is seen as the solution to their 'problems'.

Being pleasurable to look at has historically been a necessary concern for women. In contemporary society, women are still pressured to conform to beauty ideals (Kuipers, 2022). I will analyse moments from the data

where systems of power are made explicit concerning beauty standards and expectations surrounding hair.

The pressure to look or behave in a certain way is often enforced most strongly by the people closest to us frequently act to police these standards. Aesthetic policing is "ever-present in 'helpful' advice of remake-me narratives… Regulation is outsourced to everyday social interactions and peer-relationships" (von Busch, 2020, p. 80). The participants identified their families and work as two significant sources of pressure to conform. These are not all the sources of power experienced by the participants but two specific nodes within the widely distributed multi-nodal web of power.

Pressure to Conform: What Will Family and Work Say?

The use of a Foucauldian image of power, which is distributed and multi-nodal, allows us to investigate some of the sources of control experienced by the participants. This section will map two sources of power that the participants mentioned the most frequently and with the most significant emotional reactions: their female relatives and their jobs. Later in this section, I will look at the participants' self-surveillance, but here, I consider the outside factors of social control experienced by the participants.

For Foucault, "power lies not in political leadership, but in the production forces of everyday life… discipline and practices were for him critical to the judgements we make about ourselves and others" (Tynan, 2016). Faiza experiences social control through familial opinions of her appearance. She explains her mum's attitude to her sister's hair to illustrate the control their mother exerts. Her mum regularly mentions her sister's short hair and suggests growing it out.

Faiza credits her mum's strong views to a traditional Indian perspective on beauty. Long hair is considered beautiful and feminine in British and Indian cultures; however, she believes it is more heavily ingrained in Indian culture. Faiza is critical of these standards: "I think this idea that long hair is beautiful is a myth". She identifies that this impacted her self-image as a teenager. "I thought that's the kind of hair I was supposed to have." Faiza felt this pressure more acutely when she was a teenager; however, as an adult, she decided she was "not into it anymore". It is not to say that she no longer experiences this pressure, but that she has consciously decided not to engage with it or try to achieve it.

Faiza cannot think of a representation in the media of anyone who embodies the ideal of Indian beauty while having short hair. "My mum continues to want long hair. The way that beauty is seen in India is very different to the way beauty is seen here entirely" (Faiza, 2022). Her mother is acting as a normalising gaze, which extends "onto every

surface of our bodies are 'failing' to live up to socially constructed ideals" (Tynan, 2016, p. 189).

From a different cultural background, Demelza also experiences her family members giving her opinions on her hair. Demelza's overtly queer identity presentation can be a source of confusion for older family members. Although they are not openly critical of her shaved head, she is aware of their need to question her choices:

> [I] was hanging out with some slightly older relatives who clearly wanted to talk about my hair but didn't quite know how to bring it up. And the way that my Auntie did it, she was like, 'Oh, do you need some cream on your head? Do you want to come and sit with us in the shade? Because then you might get burned because of your hair?' I was just thinking, 'Do you want to ask me a question about it?'

Even if no harm is meant, her buzzcut hair marks her outside of normative heterosexual culture, inviting others to comment or question her choices. Short hair is considered a masculine style. To 'correctly' enact femininity, markers of masculinity must be avoided at all costs. Rejecting the feminine ideal of long and lustrous hair is incomprehensible for those who aspire to conform to beauty standards.

The boundaries of femininity are becoming broader and less clearly defined, but a more traditional enactment of gender may still be more comfortable for older relatives. Demelza pursues an alternative body

project based on queer ideals of beauty that may still be considered deviant or at least counter cultural. Lockdown particularly offered a time of 'no rules' in gendered performances as the dynamic of looking and being looked at changed (Pinheiro, 2020). Now, Demelza is experiencing the enforcement of those rules again.

Both Faiza and Demelza demonstrate the conflict of fashion (and, as a result, fashioning) is enacted through small moments. Fashion's "tension is not abstract or playing out merely in distant media channels or fashion houses". It is not something which occurs elsewhere; in fact, "everyone who is forced to appear is drawn into the conflict" (von Busch, 2020). Through their appearance in the public sphere, individuals open themselves to judgment and are, therefore, impacted by the conflict of fashion.

Kat finds that her family police her appearance through questioning her appearance. The choices she has made about her appearance have caused arguments with her family:

> Everyone's got an opinion, even family. I remember, even as an adult, family saying, 'Oh, I don't like your hair straight' and 'it's not natural', or 'I don't like your hair curly. It's, I don't like I scrunched it. It doesn't look natural.'

She appears irritated by her family members' uninvited opinions. Foucault reports that power dynamics are no longer distributed from a top-down structure. Where power was once the realm of the aristocracy,

now power comes from many sources that are not necessarily authoritarian but still exert control of the individual.

Kat spoke at length about the relationship between her hair and her work for an education charity, often visiting schools. She changed her hair from an all-over electric purple during the lockdown to something more 'appropriate' when she returned to school. She swapped to her current style, with her natural auburn brown on the top and hot pink underneath, as she was not sure how the schools that she worked with would react. Despite the open-mindedness of her workplace, Kat still experienced comments about her dyed hair. She gets comments like, 'Oh, is that your summer hair?', which she reads as a bit passive-aggressive: "Is there an undertone of 'you're gonna change it in the autumn though, right?'...Maybe it was just an innocent, meaningless comment … But clearly, that hang-up does exist." She does not believe that her dyed hair is unprofessional, inappropriate or negatively affects her job performance; however, the opinions of those around her cause enough anxiety that she curbs her appearance to fit in with their expectations.

Clarke and Miller argue that in addition to the tension between creativity and conformity, in practice, the anxiety of social embarrassment is a significant factor in how clothing is chosen (2002). They explore the appropriateness of clothing as dependent on subtle and shifting contexts. In the interviews, the theme of appropriateness emerged about work. While Clarke and Miller talk about clothing, it is essential to remember that hair is different. Although it is changeable, as part of the body, it is

not removable in the same way clothes are. As a result, the hair must be maintained mid-long term. A style must be deemed suitable or adaptable for all the different occasions the individuals will face.

Like Kat, Demelza used the Covid-19 lockdown to be more playful and experimental with their hair in a way that wasn't governed by appearing 'work-appropriate': "It gave you a bit of leeway to experiment with things that maybe people wouldn't have done before because they had to be professional." She adds that she is not the only one; many people took this opportunity. The lockdowns offered some aesthetic freedom, away from the policing of others. The difference in behaviour and how those behaviours are experienced when the participants are kept out of the public sphere demonstrates some of the power of the fear of judgment and pressures of others.

Forethought must be put into the hair. Unlike clothing, hair must be worn for all occasions and cannot be easily changed daily. Once the hair is dyed, that colour must be appropriate for all the places the participant will go. Hair must be dyed with consideration of what is 'appropriate for work'. The rules surrounding hair are perhaps policed more than with work clothing, where the rules are more clearly communicated.

Self-Surveillance: Panopticons in Hair Care Practices



Figure 46 - A hairstyle similar to Kim's (hairdresser)

This section looks at how bodily discipline becomes self-policed. I use the Foucauldian theory of panopticism to describe how women become the enforcers of their own beauty standards. In the consistent process of making their bodies docile, power is applied to the body. While this originates from a multi-nodal and dispersed system, the women themselves become enforcers by checking that they are conforming.

All the participants, except for Demelza and Faiza, talk about their hair's shortcomings. It is often brought up early in the interview and with a certainty that was sometimes lacking in the rest of the interview. They are quick to share the problems with their hair. Hazel's hair is 'a little bit dry' and a 'little bit wiry'. Kat's is too fluffy and dry. Hattie, Zoe and Cassie all worry that their hair is too flat and seek volume in it. The participants feel the need to let me know upfront that their hair falls short of their expectations. This could be a result of humility. Perhaps, they do not want to appear big-headed about their hair. However, I

suggest that this is another form of self-policing. During an interview about your hair might feel like a moment where your hair is under extra scrutiny. The participants are quick to point out how their own hair does not meet cultural ideals. There is an apologetic tone when they describe trying to tame their unruly bodies.

Foucault uses 'panopticism' to describe a method of control where the onus to conform is transferred to the individual (Foucault, 1979). This structure of power ensures that the judgment from authority becomes redundant. "We continually search for deviance, excess or fault in ourselves" (Tynan, 2016, p. 189). Instead of an external force ensuring conformity, the participants themselves were enforcing the rules of femininity and beauty standards. This is not a conscious process but insidious and systematic. Highlighting their insecurities or shortcomings is a way of demonstrating to me that they are aware of where they do not meet beauty standards but are actively trying to better themselves.

Since hair is in constant motion, it must be maintained at regular intervals throughout the day. Kim, one of the hairdressers, explained hair's movement:

> Hair moves: it's not like make-up - the skin, you can paint it on, but hair moves in the wind, and the colours change in the sun. It can be a little bit unpredictable; it's not like a piece of paper that is white, and whatever you put on it, you know what's going to go on.

As a result of hair's ever-changing material nature, it requires constant and regular maintenance. Kim is not just talking about growth, but also the movement of the hair throughout the day. Hairstyles have become largely more natural; there is less reliance on updos or hairspray than in previous decades. Most popular or day-to-day styles move. This will be more work to maintain through the day, more checking that it has not come out of place. Rather than a set style designed to stay in place, the onus of the work to keep the hair right is put on the individual. Styles that might be designed to look like they require less effort, actually need to be constantly observed and maintained.

Washing is one example of the maintenance we perform on our hair. In the autoethnographic fieldnotes, I worry about the cleanliness of my hair when visiting the hairdresser. "She will, of course, start by washing my hair. But to have unclean hair could be a point of embarrassment and disgust… It needs to be clean to visit the hairdresser." I am trying to manage my time before the visit and not wash it multiple times in the same day. I worry that she would find out "my dark secrets that sometimes my hair doesn't feel nice". There is an intimate feeling of admitting that I sometimes do not keep up with the requirements of bodily maintenance.

I was not the only one to worry about my hair appearing greasy or unmanaged. Zoe is always worried that her hair looks thin and scraggly or 'like Gollum', as her mum tells her. As a result, greasiness needs to be avoided at all costs. When hair gets greasy, it shines in an undesirable

way (Hielscher, 2013) and hangs limply. She tells me about her panic before a Zoom meeting. After already doing her make-up, she realises that her hair "really looks horrible." Despite having recently washed it, she thinks it looks flat and greasy. She rushes and leans over the bath, giving her hair a quick wash. "It really makes a difference when your hair is flat, and you can tell it's greasy and then when it's really nice and fresh." While her hair was up, it hid the undesirable grease. Zoe utilises the practices of regular maintenance to feel in control of her appearance and therefore how she is viewed by others.

For many women, being 'in control' of how they look is a means to feel 'in control' of their life. "In Europe and North America, beauty and appearance became more central to social control and self-control, repertoires of evaluation and experiences of identity and self-worth" (Kuipers, 2022, p. 220). To participate fully in society, women must work upon the surface of our bodies, to a greater or lesser extent. The unruly female body is considered lesser and conveys negative value judgements about the individual. It is important to remember here, that our hair's 'natural' state (tangled and greasy) is deemed unacceptable. Individuals must, at least, perform regular cleaning and brushing practices. The hair should be clean, styled, cut neatly and under control and ideally glossy, healthy and shiny. When in the salon, the participants received a haircut they were happy with; however, the nature of hair means that it is constantly growing and becoming dirty. From the moment they leave the salon, their hair begins to change from its manicured state to a state of disarray.

Self-policing may feel to the participants like an act of self-performance. Hazel describes the experience of when her hair does not feel 'right'. She begins by explaining that she always goes for the same hairstyle, a short bob with a fringe. She has found a style that 'suits her' and will stick to that. Although she has stopped wearing make-up, she still really cares about how her hair looks: "I'd say my hair is one thing that, when I do have it cut short, I do care about. Not today. [laughs] I feel like it feels like me when I do my hair properly… I feel that I look okay". Hazel describes the positive feelings she experiences when her hair looks 'right'. Confidence, liking her appearance, more like herself. The other side of this coin is that when her hair does not conform to her aspirations, she questions what she looks like.

Willson quotes Sawchuck, who explains, "Fashionable behaviour is never simply a question of creativity or self-expression" (Sawchuck in Wilson, 2015, p. 53). Hazel is not experiencing a pure presentation of what is or isn't 'her'. Cutting her hair is also "a mark of colonization, the 'anchoring' of our bodies, particularly the bodies of women, into specific positions, and parts of the body in the line of the gaze" (Sawchuck in Wilson, 2015, p. 53). While hairdressing as a fashionable behaviour may feel like an expression of self, it is an enactment of the power structures women experience. Hair, as it is both rooted in the body and culturally constructed, becomes a particularly contested site in the navigation of beauty. Its rootedness in the body ties it intimately to identity, race, gender, and the self, yet the spaces in which hair is shaped —

particularly the salon — often function as heteronormative sites where femininity is regulated and reproduced. Within the salon, beauty practices that appear individual or expressive are frequently mediated by dominant cultural scripts of desirability, gender conformity, and heterosexual appeal.

All the participants shared stories about times when their hair felt bad, highlighting the importance of their hair, linked to both the body and the self. Even Faiza, who 'isn't someone who cries about her hair', has cried about a bad haircut. Zoe describes a bad haircut as elevating her insecurity. These women's sense of self is made unstable when their hair is cut badly. It is not just that these women are concerned about looking bad, although that is a factor. They are presenting not just someone with a bad haircut but someone who lacks the ability to perform the basic maintenance of femininity correctly.

It is particularly difficult for women to perform femininity through their hair within liquidity. "Liquid modernity continues to define anyone who is 'not normal' or 'not ordinary' as requiring either assimilation or exclusion" (Best, 2016, p. 125). When women fail, or *feel like* they fail, to meet the standards of femininity through enacting fashionable behaviour, they either are, or *feel like* they are excluded.

Bauman demonstrates how the pressures of liquidity (within which self-surveillance occurs) lead to an increased sense of individualisation, which in turn increases the need for self-surveillance. "We are all hunters now,

either believing that being a hunter 'pays,' or we are nudged/pressed/compelled to act like hunters – on the penalty of eviction from hunting, if not of relegation to the ranks of the game" (Bauman and Haugaard, 2008, p. 113). We are compelled to emulate the hunts of those around us, or risk exclusion from the group.

Here, the peril of self-presentation is clearly visible. Even the participants who do not often seem emotional about their hair experience the peril of fashioning themselves through their hair. They must police themselves and their hair to stay in control.

Maintenance as a Requirement and Failure Waiting to Happen: Upkeep, Laziness and Expectation

This section reports on the analysis for the theme **Maintenance as a Requirement and Failure Waiting to Happen,** exploring repeated and regular work that the participants, or their hairdressers, undertake to bring their bodies in line with cultural and social norms. Women are expected to work on their bodies to make them docile or align them with societal expectations (Bartky, 1990). A docile body cannot be achieved once and ticked off as complete. Instead, it is a lifelong project, often with moving goalposts. To keep the body in line with the needs of power requires constant and regular upkeep.

In a liquid modern society, the individual must work to maintain an identity in a constant state of flux. I will analyse how they strive to control their bodies where the goalposts are unclear. This is built from feminist readings, which situate women's bodies as especially subjected to measures of social and cultural control. I begin by looking at how systems of power impact the actions and bodies of the participants. The maintenance of the hair is not always managed alone. It is usual to have the guiding hand of a trained professional. I will also discuss what the hairdressers felt their role was in maintaining the hair.

I use coloured hair as a visible example of maintenance to control the body. This theme came through in the data, where it was often used as an example by the clients and the hairdressers to illustrate their repetitive maintenance practices. This demonstrates the practices, effort and money put into maintaining the hair.

Conversely to the effort shown in how they maintain their hair, participants also frequently expressed that they did not feel like they were 'keeping up' or 'doing enough'. They frequently referred to themselves as lazy and expressed a preference for 'low maintenance' hair. It was more common for participants to talk about how they failed to maintain their hair more than when they were successful. I have already speculated about the role of humility and demonstrating that you understand the boundaries of maintenance in making negative comments about your hair. Often, these comments were made immediately after

talking in an emotional or impassioned way about their hair. Although the participants say they do not care, this did not ever result in them rejecting hair care practices but sometimes impacted their selection of appropriate haircuts.

Maintenance of Coloured Hair: An Example of Body Work and Upkeep



Figure 47 - A hairstyle similar to Danielle's (hairdresser)

Dyeing the hair is an obvious and visible change so that it can become a valuable demonstration of the type of work and thoughts behind more hidden types of labour. It may seem glaringly obvious that when your *hair* feels bad, it can make *you* feel bad. I will dig into my participants' experience of their hair affecting their emotions. I will use the ideas of systems of power-making docile bodies to explain how the surface of the body, hair, not conforming to expectations or being unruly could affect mood and emotions while destabilising concepts of selfhood.

Maintenance was a key consideration for hairdressers; they aspired to fit the client's hairstyle to their lifestyle. For Danielle, it does not matter how the client looks when they leave the salon; it is how their hair looks day to day when they are styling it themselves that matters: "If you've styled it in a way, as a professional, they then can't recreate at home, then they're going to hate it because they can't maintain that". Kim has a similar perspective: "If they're choosing a hairstyle that's only going to look good when I do it, and it's never gonna look good until the six weeks later when they come back to me, that's a little bit a bit soul-destroying". Danielle considers the client outside of the salon and uses her skill to provide a style suitable for the client's effort and skill level in terms of maintenance.

Throughout the fieldwork, I also faced the challenges of maintenance, which became further complicated as it spanned both personal and research experiences. For context, during fieldwork visit 3, hairdresser two used a semi-permanent toner with the hope of adding a copper tone without flattening the grey. Instead, she had applied a different toner that had not faded as much as I had hoped.



Figure 48 - My natural hair colour, taken before fieldwork visit 3



Figure 49 - My hair colour after the 'milkshake toner' taken after fieldwork visit 3

At the next salon, during fieldwork visit 5, the hairdresser was keen to dye all my hair dark brown (except for the tiny peekaboo at the back). I let myself be steered in a direction I was not keen on. "The colour is also much darker than I wanted it, and I am quite disappointed with it." The hairdresser was correct that dyeing my hair a uniform dark brown gave a better 'end product'. However, almost immediately, the regrowth of my hair made the greys very visible. Where her concern is how my hair will look as I leave the appointment, I must live with the resulting grow-out.

I was shocked by my reaction to these roots. I absolutely hated my hair. I will further explain my relationship with my greying hair in the next chapter, but it is also relevant here as a valuable example of the

emotional peril when the body is poorly maintained. In an excerpt from the fieldnote, I wrote:

> My grey started to grow back in almost immediately. This I hate. It felt so out of control. Instead of grey hairs being a choice and part of my chosen look, they became something that was ruining what I was trying to achieve. I personally hate the way that grey roots look. To me, it looks like your wig is lifting or you are balding. The idea that others would see my horrible roots was very uncomfortable to me… I felt like I looked like my hair was falling out.

I felt a type of panic whenever I looked in the mirror at this time. The regret rose in my throat, knowing it would be a long time until this mistake grew out, maybe years.

I would not say I liked how it looked, but the worry had more to do with what others would think. I try to give little notice to the opinions of others but cannot help worrying that people will think I am trying to hide the grey poorly. After fieldwork visit 5, I wrote: "If I chose to have grey hair, that decision is active, and I take ownership of it". It becomes as much about the performance of maintenance as about the maintenance itself. "I think it makes me look lazy or like I haven't bothered to look after myself," which is an idea which will be unpacked in the next section. Now that I am looking at this with hindsight and my hair has returned to its natural grey, it is hard to see the acute worry I was experiencing here. The amount of time when my hair looked 'bad' was

relatively short, but at that time, it was at the front of my mind. The laid-back way I would like to appear is fractured by the effort I have put in once but not adequately kept up.

Constant maintenance is required to keep the hair looking 'put together', as the participants put it. During the interviews, the questions revolved around what happened in the salon, but several participants also spoke about the time between haircuts, when hair maintenance was solely their responsibility.

There is a difficult line which must be traversed by the participants. They want to look 'good', which for Zoe is clean and for Kat and Faiza is bright. Both these things are in constant decay. With every passing moment, the hair moves away from an idealised state into a natural, more chaotic, one. To keep it in the idealised state, constant work must be applied to that hair. The work requires time, effort and often money. If they 'let themselves go' and stop caring for their appearance, they are no longer keeping up with the expectations of femininity and will be considered deviant.

Creative colours are unnatural, bold, semi-permanent dyes; they fade quickly. Kat's bright pink peekaboo fades quickly; "it will go from like a bright pink to... anything from dull pink to yellow or starts coming through from underneath. It can look a bit brassy." Keeping up the bright colour requires constant work between appointments; she 'tops the

colour up' at home or will redye it to ensure it is bright for special occasions like a music festival.

It is worth considering why the brightness matters to Kat. While hair dyed to a natural colour may go unnoticed by the untrained eye, creative colour proclaims its fakeness. A choice has been made with the appearance, which puts it under scrutiny. Hair that is a faded orange-pink signals that it was once pink but no longer. The lack of upkeep is visible and may signal that she is not 'on top' of her bodily maintenance. It may cause fear that strangers looking at her can see that she has not put *enough* care, time or effort into her appearance. Traditionally, women are told that they must edit their appearances to fit in with the idealised image of femininity. Kat rejects this ideal, instead choosing a subcultural identity and a sense of individualised identity. The choice gives Kat a sense of control over her appearance and how others see her. Her positioning of herself as outside of the norm takes place within some type of the norm. She is still participating in a vigorous beauty regime involving aesthetic labour on her body's surface.

Like Kat, Faiza laments coloured hair maintenance. She has a bright blue balayage and has learnt how much work is involved in consistently making sure it looks good. Bright blue is a relatively long-lasting creative colour compared to other shades, but it still needs regular dyeing to keep it bold, as she explains: "I'm now aware of how much hard work goes into having coloured hair. To be truly honest, if people have pastel hair, it blows my mind because how much effort you're putting in". Pastel dye

must be applied to very light hair, with the yellow toned-out of it[11]. Brighter colours will cover a slightly patchy bleach or a brassy tone, but pastel shades require a clean base. Due to its lightness, it must be topped up more regularly than other colours. When Faiza sees someone with pastel hair, she knows they must either put a lot of time into their hair, maintain it at home, or visit the hairdresser regularly. Either option requires a significant input of time, effort, skill and/or money. Hair dyed to a natural colour will still fade over time but is unlikely to lose its vibrance in the same way. Brightly dyed hair is a visible form of maintenance that many women undertake. The hair fades quickly and noticeably, which sheds light on the less obvious or visual forms of bodily maintenance women require. Coloured hair is a particularly visible form of hair maintenance and, as a result, is easily policed. Hair is always in the process of becoming and constantly moving away from the idealised state towards chaos. It is a good metaphor for liquid identity in this case.

Maintenance of coloured hair is a problem for more than just those with vivid hair. Cassie's time in Italy was discussed in the previous chapter. As well as feeling outside of the dominant culture, she faced challenges in keeping up her blonde hair colour. The blonde dye she bought in Italy was much darker: "The lightest one I could find was, said 'blonde' on the packet, but wasn't, and I turned into a strange muddy blonde, a yellow-y orange situation on my head". Cassie's hair, usually managed by her hairdresser, a 'blonde specialist' who 'knows exactly what she wants',

[11] A dyeing process to neutralise unwanted shades in the hair, usually applied at the end. For example, purple toner is used to neutralise yellow tones in blonde hair.

was thrown into disarray. It also upsets her sense of selfhood, which is partially built on her hair colour.

She does not stray far from her familiar blonde style. It is highlighted in a range of natural but dimensional tones[12]. Her hair would be aspirational for many and conforms to a traditional standard of beauty often seen reflected in the media. For Cassie, losing control of this aesthetic and instead having 'muddy blonde' appeared to be emotional to recall. She clarifies that she does not like this hair colour, but it goes beyond that. Losing the blonde causes instability in her selfhood and is a source of real grief for Cassie.

With the support of her hairdresser, her hair does not vary much and is regularly maintained to a high level. In a situation where she lacks control and power, as a cultural outsider, losing control and power over her appearance amplifies the negative feelings. To add to Cassie's feeling of ill-ease with her new hair colour, her Italian host family quickly pointed out that it did not look good. "They don't know hold back in telling you what, whether it suits you or not. So, I was told it definitely didn't suit me." She was aware that the new colour did not suit her, and having it confirmed was not a positive experience. With a roll of the eyes, Cassie says, "Thank you," making it clear she was not grateful for this interaction. Cassie is subjecting herself to self-policing, where she is critical of her own experience and immediately works to rectify the

[12] A hairdressing technique to colour hair in a way that creates an optical effect and makes it look thicker and shiner.

'mistake'. She is also actively policed by the people around her. Those around her reinforce the powers of beauty standards and ensure her conformity to them.

While she speaks very favourably of her blondeness, Cassie's hair sometimes makes her feel judged. She worries that people may have preconceived notions of what she is like based solely on her hair colour. "It's the unsaid stuff. I think people think perhaps I'm a little bit more unintelligent than I am or a little more airy-fairy. Unintelligent?" (Cassie, 2022). Growing up in Essex, Cassie felt that she needed to prove her intelligence and demonstrate her worth so that people did not assume she was less clever than she was. She identifies that this is less of a worry now, possibly because of her age, place of work or moving to a different city.

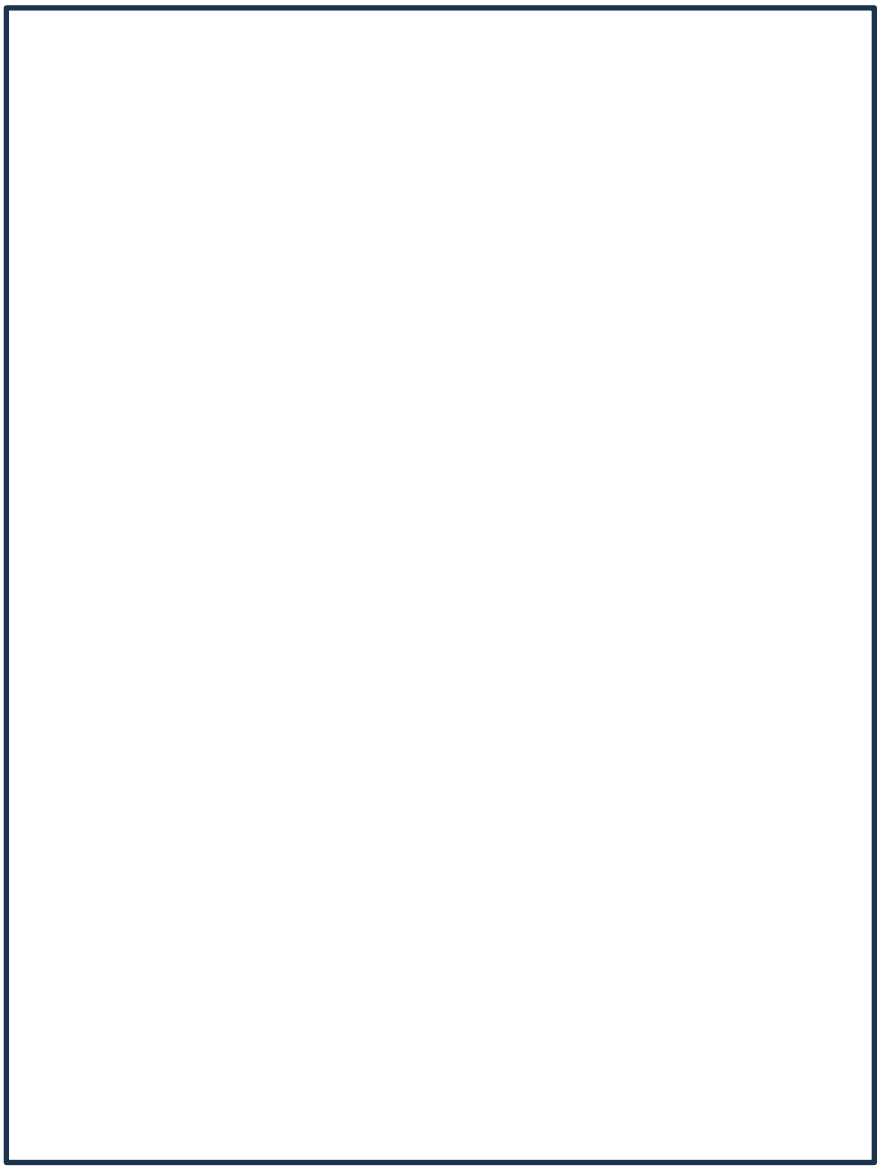


Figure 50 - Film poster for Legally Blonde (2001)

Later in the interview, she explains how much she owes to the 2001 rom-com *Legally Blonde*, in which Reese Witherspoon plays a rich, naïve blonde who, despite her vapid appearance, proves herself by attending Harvard Law School.

> It was wonderful. The film's premise is that she is blonde and could do it. She's clever and smart, and she can do what she wants. … That reflects what I

> wanted out of my hair and how I wanted to be perceived (Cassie, 2022).

To Cassie, the character represents the opportunity for blondeness, care about appearance, intelligence and academic prowess to coexist.

Carol M. Dole's analysis of *Legally Blonde* helps explain the film's appeal to Cassie. The film signalled a strand of third-wave feminism intent on reclaiming 'girlie'-ness (Dole, 2008). The lead character, Elle Woods, treads the line between hyper-femininity and feminism. At times, she demonstrates pre-feminist conceptions of womanhood, applying to Law School to win back her high school boyfriend. She receives a scholarship to Harvard, where she excels, gains independence and defies expectations: "What? Like it's hard?" Dole believes the film "acknowledges and validates the sexual power of feminine masquerade. Elle is unashamed to employ the spectacle of her adorned body to gain her ends" (Dole, 2008, p. 67). The film also recognises the dangers of flaunting femininity.

Dole summarises succinctly.

> Legally Blonde celebrates the joys of femininity but also hints at certain limits… [It] chart[s] the territory that allows a woman to be what she wants to be and get what she wants to get, the double ambition of third-wave feminism such films do show a growing acceptance of feminine womanhood (Dole, 2008, pp. 76–77)

Cassie's love for the film indicates the more considerable post-feminist argument underpinning Cassie's discussion of her blondeness. Cassie wants to be what she wants to be: beautiful, blonde, feminine while also being intelligent and powerful. The film plays with stereotypes and gives a knowing nod to the judgment women receive due to their appearance.

Blondes have long been the butt of jokes about their lack of intelligence and sexual-ness, but they also hold power (Tremper, 2006). The participants' fears of being stereotyped for their hair are visible in Cassie's experience of people jumping to conclusions about her intelligence and personality. Blondeness has a long history of being associated with feminine sexuality, dating back to Ancient Greek and Roman societies (Burton, 2012). Childhood fairytales depict beautiful but helpless blonde princesses like Sleeping Beauty or Rapunzel. The femme-fatales of Hollywood sell movies on their good looks and golden hair. The myth of blondeness centres the blonde as a passive object of male affection and as a result Blonde is considered synonymous with beauty (Church Gibson, 2008)

Choosing to dye your hair can lead to the assumption that you are choosing to also align yourself with the stereotype associated with that colour. Blondes can be assumed to be dumb, overtly sexual, self-obsessed and fickle. More positive assertions are powerful, in control, glamorous and fatally sexy. When you decide to dye your hair a specific colour, the individual is seen as buying into the mythos of the hair colour to a greater or lesser extent. For example, there is a tension in Marilyn

Monroe's legacy where she is simultaneously remembered as the stereotype of a "sexpot" but also "a wit, a subtle and profound actress, and intelligent and serious woman… against the grain of her image" (Dyer in Tremper, 2006), which her famed blondeness contributes to. Bleached and dyed hair is an easily visible aesthetic choice and "has the negative overtones of artificiality" (Biddle-Perry and Cheang, 2008, p. 248), which opens it up to criticism.[13]

For Cassie, dyeing her hair blonde meant that people read her as, at some level, buying into the idea of blondness, *into* femininity, *into* the blonde bimbo stereotype. Judging people purely by their appearance is seen as negative. It is possibly easier for individuals to judge those decisions that are an active choice. Cassie wants to avoid these stereotypes and be seen as intelligent and capable, even with bleached hair. Postmodern performances of blondeness are often plays of power that can be understood to parody the myth of blondeness (Burton, 2012). Burton argues that there is post-feminist power in the mask of blondness.

Hair colour is an interesting example because it is firstly very visible, worn on the surface of the body and always on show. Secondly, hair represents the tension between malleability and resistance (Holmes, 2010). The hair can be relatively easily changed to be a different colour, but once it is dyed, they must live with that choice. Where clothing can

[13] This is perhaps less true when the hair is dyed to cover greys or in a manner that appears natural.

be put on and taken off for different occasions, hair is enduring. Both the positive and the negative communication of the hair must be navigated, when it shows you are part of the group and when it marks you as different from it. It can be dyed again, but it gets increasingly difficult to manage the colour and may cause damage. This section demonstrates the rigorous and repetitive maintenance undertaken to upkeep dyed hair.

I'm Too Lazy: Low Maintenance Hair and Failing to Meet Standards

During the interviews, several participants describe themselves as 'lazy'; this section critiques and unpacks this description. Although the participants say they are lazy, they still participate in haircare practices. While they may feel like they are being lazy, but they are still all reaching and exceeding the minimum acceptable standards for women. I question what they are lazy in comparison to, and how they are measuring this laziness.

Often, when the participants say they are lazy, they are referring to how much time they spend on their hair day to day. They use laziness to justify choosing a style that takes little upkeep/styling day to day. I will also consider how the idea of laziness relates to cultural ideas of feminine work, bodily maintenance and beauty standards and is used as a marker of not doing enough/trying hard enough. It is worth mentioning that the hairdressers never describe any of their clients as lazy and instead talk

about the need to find a haircut that suits their lifestyle. I will suggest that feeling lazy is a result of self-policing and neoliberal femininity.

Hattie uses the word 'laziness' to explain how she chooses a hairstyle. She is looking for a style that does not require high levels of upkeep: "I'm quite a lazy person, so I don't really style it every day, so I just try and find a way to have it cut that just it can look nice with doing very little with it". Hattie's laziness relates to the amount of time and effort she is willing to spend styling her own hair. It is worth pointing out that Hattie regularly visits a hairdresser for long and presumably expensive colour treatments, where her hair is dyed a bright purple.

Hattie prioritises the quality of the cut and colour to minimise the work that must be done day to day: "The colour of it mostly because, for the cut itself, my hair is quite straight. I'm quite lazy so I don't do much with it, so the colour contributes to my style". While she may see herself as lazy, she is clearly overlooking the effort, time and money that she puts into visiting the hairdresser to maintain that colour. It is possible to see this as strategic, rather than lazy. The participants communicated a need for ease and convenience. This was at odds with the strict requirements of a set of beauty regimens which require women to be constantly maintaining and upkeeping their visual appearance to chase, if not keep up with, an unrealistic standard. I question if they think they should spend more time on their hair or believe that other women spend too long on their hair.

The beauty industry has the violent intent to pathologise women's bodies, heightening insecurities and making them feel like they are failing (Gill, 2023). When "glamour labour" is "increasingly a labor in which we are all expected to participate" (Gill, 2021, p. 16), it is easy to see how a failure to do so could be considered a moral failure. Framing the failure to meet an unrealistic target as 'laziness' situates them as the fault of the individual and is a form of autonomous self-regulation of beauty. It is not surprising, in this environment, that the participants feel they are failing in some way. This feeling manifests in the self-diagnosis of 'laziness' in response to the neoliberal belief that the problem is you.

Hazel keeps her hair short to save time on styling: "I suppose having that hair that's ready to go, it can look good… You have an extra 40 minutes maybe, in the morning. And I'd rather sit and have a coffee". Like the others, she describes herself as lazy when it comes to her hair: "I'm quite a lazy person, so I don't really style it every day, so I just try and find a way to have it cut that just it can look nice with doing very little with it". This perspective prioritises having a relaxed morning over spending that time styling the hair. As previously, Hazel prioritises a 'natural' look.

Both Hattie and Hazel chose a style that will look nice without much daily upkeep. This is a conscious choice to minimise the time spent on glamour work in their busy lives; however, they frame it as a moral failing. Their tone is jokingly self-deprecating, but there is a confessional element to these explanations of their choices. Putting themselves down can be seen

as a way that women subtly criticise other women. Strategic networks of comparisons are an enactment of the 'girlfriend gaze'. Through Winch's lens, it is possible to view the claim of laziness as a form of self-branding that invites the judgements of others (Winch, 2013). For example, I may be lazy, but at least I'm not trying *too* hard. While femininity must be policed, the girlfriend gaze also regulates it and gives the individual ways to stand out.

Zoe prefers a shorter style for ease of styling but does not categorise this as lazy: "So, if I'm really stressed at the moment, I'll probably keep it short because it's low maintenance". Her choice of hair length is related to her stress levels. When the strains on her in her everyday life are high, she does not have the headspace to think about or give time to her hair as she finds short hair easier to manage. While Zoe does not describe herself as lazy, she speaks negatively about her hair throughout the interview. She tells me it is "the love of my life, I guess. I neglect and abuse it frequently" through heat, processes and chemicals. The neglect and abuse, as she terms it, are put on the hair to attempt to make it conform to her aspirations. Her relationship with her hair is one of both love and dissatisfaction. Zoe's negativity comes from the desire for her hair to conform to something different from the way that it is.

Hair has its own materiality which is challenging to change. Helen Holmes describes it as a 'resistant material' (2010). Those born with fine hair will never be able to change that other than carefully pick a style to maximise what they have or apply expensive hair extensions. Chemical

processes like straightening, perming, bleaching and dyeing will grow out as new hair leaves the head. The roots will always return to the natural materiality of the hair.

In her mind, Zoe's hair is past saving. She believes that it looks ugly, and she cannot give the amount of effort she believes would be required to make it 'good'. Zoe is quick to tell me how bad her hair is. Kuipers argues that beyond the pressure to look good, it is now "more important to keep up with what counted as 'good looks'" (Kuipers, 2022, p. 213). As beauty becomes more important in our liquid society, it also becomes less stable. "Idealized representations of beauty became omnipresent while changing constantly" (Kuipers, 2022, p. 213). The feeling that it is harder to keep up with expectations is because it is harder to keep up. This is illustrative of the difficulties of navigating femininity and beauty within postfeminism.

Looking Good is Hard Work (That You're Not Meant to See): Beauty, Effort and Concealing Labour

All the participants talked to me about their hair for over an hour. They shared stories of joy and pain. They enthused about the close relationships they had with their hairdressers. They spoke of their families, or their childhoods, of their relationships. However, they also

told me, with surprising frequency, that they do not care about their hair. I did not leave a single interview believing that the participants did not care about their hair.

I have established that the participants feel pressured to look a certain way, which is both internally and externally enforced. They perform regular maintenance, to keep up with these standards, and if they do not feel they have kept up then they often define themselves as morally defunct. The idea of beauty is pertinent in understanding how feminised aesthetic work, trends and hair's connection to the body, however, interestingly, the participants shied away from using the word beauty when describing this.

While I have already demonstrated the pressure women face to maintain their bodies and appearance, what the participants say is sometimes at odds with this. When they say, 'I don't care,' it does not necessarily mean 'I don't care'. In this section, I suggest that the phrase 'I don't care' is not said sincerely but instead is used in the quest for the elusive quality of 'effortless'-ness. I define effortless as a carefully selected blend of glamour and coolness to balance appearing not to care, with showing that you have control.

The Absence of Beauty: Why Isn't It Discussed?



Figure 51 - A hairstyle similar to Hazel's (client)



Figure 52 - A hairstyle similar to Bev's (hairdresser)

This section examines how the concept of beauty is raised, or perhaps more importantly, not raised, in the interviews. Two clients made offhand references to beauty, and one client discussed it in an explicit, albeit negative manner. The hairdressers sometimes mention that specific styles and hair colours are beautiful but never talk about constructing beauty in their clients.

Interestingly, three of the hairdressers use the word beautiful to describe the quality of the hair, rather than the person or a quality to aspire to. Kim talks through 'babylights'[14]; the process takes a long time, but the results are beautiful. Lou and Bev use the word beautiful to describe greying hair. They use beauty/beautiful to describe the material and aesthetic quality of the hair, not beauty as a concept or ideal. None of

[14] A relatively 'new' colouring technique where the blonde is blended into the natural hair colour, giving a result between highlights and a balayage.

the hairdressers otherwise include the idea of beauty, or making their clients look or feel beautiful.

The absence of beauty as a concept, does not mean that it is unimportant; the opposite is true. I will examine where beauty is mentioned before trying to untangle the gaps left by its absence. This absence was simultaneously both surprising and expected. The participants were not asked directly about beauty (see Appendix E for interview schedule), but questions covered why the hair is important, what inspires change in it, how they pick a style, and multiple other questions that could have elicited responses about beauty.

Hazel was the only participant who overtly discussed beauty standards. She is in her early 30s and has grey hair. She notes, “Our culture in society tells us that you shouldn't have grey hair. That it's a bad thing. I actually quite enjoy being like, 'actually, it can look really good'.” She feels like she should not be proud of her grey hair, but she is. Hazel enjoys the non-conformist nature of embracing her grey hair (I will return to the idea of greying hair and empowerment in the next chapter). The hair turning grey marks ageing, which can often make it a difficult transition. The homogenous beauty standards, mainly reflected in the media, show a clear and inarguable preference for youth. Erasing visible signs of ageing is the bread and butter of the beauty industry.

Hazel directly addresses the concept of beauty’s impact on her choices: “I think a lot of things that I choose are that I don't conform to what

'beauty', what that people tell you 'beauty' is". She finds some solace in actively going against hegemonic beauty ideals. Throughout her interview, Hazel mentions her preference for looking natural or at least trying to like how she looks naturally, showing resistance against the system of power and beauty. "When women consciously reject beauty culture, it can be liberating. Women express that they are reclaiming their bodies and developing a heightened self-confidence" (Thompson, 2015, p. 51).

Kang suggests, "Even women who reject hegemonic beauty ideal participate in some form of beauty work, perhaps to achieve a different ideal" (Kang, 2003, p. 55). It is worth saying that, despite her recent rebellion against make-up, Hazel does not veer far from the hegemonic ideals of beauty. She is pretty, slim, white, and able-bodied, and although her hair is greying, it does so in a visually pleasing manner, which appears more 'cool' than 'grandma.' Even from this privileged position, she feels the pressure of hegemonic beauty standards strongly enough to revolt against them. Hazel's experiences do not discredit the importance of beauty but show its prevalence.

Now, I will attempt to explain the absence of beauty in the other interview transcripts. Firstly, beauty may be too ubiquitous to be worthy of discussion. The standards of beauty that women are expected to conform to are so culturally ingrained that they become assumed to be true. It is difficult to see the nodes of power we are surrounded by while

entrenched in that culture. Of course, I want my hair to look nice, doesn't everyone?

Secondly, beauty is an invisible aspiration. To worry about one's appearance is often considered vain, an undesirable trait. Willson uses the words of Efrat Tseëlon: "When vanity, artificiality, and extravagance in fashion are condemned, they are not seen as external behaviours but are given metaphysical meanings. They are seen as indicators of female (in) essence" (Tseëlon in Willson, 2015, p. 82). The things that are condemned in fashion are put down to the 'feminine-ness' of them. Negative gendered meaning is given to "appearance and surface appeal, because for women 'appearance and essence are intertwined'" (Willson, 2015, p. 82). Women, particularly those who consider themselves feminists, may avoid talking about beauty to avoid leaning into those stereotypes or to give power to these assumptions. "Women's extravagance has been taken to reflect their lack of a solid centre, their emptiness" (Willson, 2015, p. 82). Willson suggests that femininity can be read as "reflective of a frivolous, flimsy vacuous lack, where the sense of self is determined by the approval of others" (Willson, 2015, p. 82).

I experience this during the fieldwork. I find myself worrying more about my hair and reflect that "In these moments, the image of myself as a laid-back 'un-vain' person cracks, and I feel some guilt for worrying about something trivial." Although it is not how I feel about it consciously, there is an ingrained pride in not being 'the type of woman who worries about beauty'. I feel this internal conflict strongly, where I

truly believe in the innate importance of hair to performances of selfhood, while also experiencing the culturally ingrained and sometimes misogynistic judgement of those who engage with beauty culture sincerely.

Visible make-up and enhanced appearances were once seen as the permit of 'lower-class' women (Kuipers, 2022), which highlights the classed dimension of the beauty problem. The women I spoke to were all employed, educated and largely middle-class. For the participants, it is seen as frivolous to be concerned too much with their appearance, and they want to be assessed for other aspects of their personalities, achievements, or work.

Finally, many women who frequent beauty spaces prefer to speak of the positive aspects of mood, emotion and sociality over the enhancement of aesthetics. For Sharma and Black, "the beauty salon may be seen as the site of both compliance with and escape from, a feminine ideal" (Black and Sharma, 2001, p. 100). They are simultaneously sites where the body is transformed towards conformity and social and transformative spaces where the guise of beauty may be briefly dropped. Sharma and Black found that beauty workers did not term their bodywork as related to 'beauty'; instead, they called it grooming, pampering, or treatment. Grooming refers to regular upkeep associated with the performance of gender, whereas pampering is a luxury service that allows the client to relax. This may explain the concept of beauty's absence from the conversations with the stylists.

I communicate a sense of ill-ease around these beauty spaces throughout the autoethnographic fieldnotes.

> As I waited, I felt out of place. Although it is a little scruffy around the edges, this salon offers a range of beauty processes. It's a strange salon. It feels glamorous and hyper-feminine in places but also is messy and looks like it needs a good coat of paint (fieldwork visit 1)

In the fieldnotes, I equate effort with femininity unconsciously. I am surprised that a place which uses signifiers of femininity can also show a lack of effort and attention to detail.

In spaces created for enacting and enforcing beauty practices, it can feel alienating not to feel like you are correctly performing beauty or gender. This was different in different types of salons. When visiting a salon with a more feminised aesthetic (as described in Chapter 1), it is not just the décor but an assumption I make that the women who work there will have a better understanding and a different expectation of femininity to me.

Femininity is "self-consciously constructed. This is a 'painstakingly presented body'" (Willson, 2015, p. 24). Being in these spaces makes me feel self-conscious that I am not doing enough to perform femininity or am somehow doing it wrong. This is not to say that the salon workers are

being judgmental or unpleasant, but it is an isolating internal feeling to not feel like part of the 'in-group'. I always believe that I do not do enough to perform femininity correctly, and this is brought even more to my attention in spaces designed for that performance. I will return to this idea in more depth in the next chapter, but it is worth highlighting here that the experience of being outside of beauty norms, or at least not as proficient in beauty practices, can make the salon space feel uninviting. The enhancement of the hair is so often about trying to get closer to the elusive ideals of beauty. At the same time, pursuing beauty is often seen as a vapid and self-indulgent pastime. Women must walk a fine line of performing beauty without ever seeming to try.

This was perhaps the most surprising finding of this thesis. I thought that the participants would mention the impact of beauty. While they did not talk about it directly, its influence is peppered throughout the data. It is an often invisible force. People who are beautiful have a probably easier time, but wanting to be beautiful is often looked down on.

Looking Like I Haven't Tried: The Concept of Effortless

Although it is widely accepted that being more beautiful has benefits, *trying* to be beautiful is often looked down upon. "There is a tension between beauty as 'gift' and as 'effort'. Beauty is seen as a quality that people have or embody. Yet, beauty also refers to the pursuit of this

quality, by creating and maintaining good looks" (Kuipers, 2022, p. 218). 'Natural' beauty is distinct from beauty achieved through labour, with natural beauty deemed superior.

The only participant who talks directly about putting effort into their hair is Kat. When she was working as a teacher, her colleagues would comment on the amount of effort she put into styling her hair. They would say, "Oh, your hair looks different every day". She explains that she enjoyed styling her hair differently: "I'd do a different thing, nothing high maintenance, but a different style every day and I quite like that. Whether it's making an effort, feeling different, feeling fresh". Kat's perspective stands out in the context of the rest of the participants. She tries hard with her hair. She regularly visits the hairdresser, has a strict regime to protect her curls, tops up her colour, and tries out different styles.

With that effort comes the microaggressions of the 'girlfriend gaze' and peer surveillance. Her colleagues often commented on how much effort she put in or implied that they would not be able to allocate so much time and effort to their hair. Kat found the amount of effort relatively small but found the comments difficult to manage.

Generally, Kat is the only one who speaks positively about the upkeep and regular styling of the hair. The rest are quick to speak negatively about it. This is not to say that the other participants do not try hard or that they do not care. It is evident in the interviews that they all have a

strong emotional connection to their hair and put time, money and effort into maintaining it. This difference in behaviour and how they speak in the interviews is worth a deeper dive into. To understand this, I will be developing a concept of effortlessness. While no work on fashion that I am aware of specifically uses this term, there are ideas that got close within the studies of cool, beauty and glamour that I will build from.

The best illustration of the complexities at play here is this quote from Hazel. We were talking about her previous favourite hairstyle, a sharp bob which 'felt like her'. She turned her attention to her hair now, the same bob but slightly grown out and scrunched up in a half-bun on the top of her head: "Whereas this [gestures at hair], isn't me, it kind of looks like I can't be bothered. Which I can't. [both laugh] …But I don't like to look like someone that makes too much of an effort either." There is a lot of tension and conflicting statements in this relatively short quotation.

First, she suggests that her current hair looks like she cannot be bothered. We are conducting the interview over Microsoft Teams, so she is at home, on her sofa as I talk to her. Unsurprisingly, she has not styled her hair for the interview. She tells me that this hair does not represent her because it is not as well maintained as she would like it to be.

Second, she validates that by saying, 'Which I can't'. She has previously been worrying about having hair that doesn't represent her because it is

not well maintained but is now telling me that she can't be bothered to maintain it. This is contradictory because she has previously told me about a style that represents her well and is neat and well-maintained. She says this with a laugh, which makes me think it is a little tongue-in-cheek. There is an element of rejecting beauty culture here that I will return to shortly.

Third, she tells me, "But I don't like to look like someone that makes too much of an effort either." There is a careful balance that must be struck here. Hazel needs to put in effort to maintain her hair but aspires to a natural look where the effort taken to achieve it is hidden. Later in the interview, she explains, "I think it's about how much effort I want to put in. But I don't want to be seen as if I spend loads of time on myself". It is important to Hazel not to be seen as someone who is too concerned about her appearance. These three contradictory statements can be explained through thinking about the sociocultural factors around women and their appearance.

Hazel is keen not to be perceived as someone who cares too much about her appearance. From being considered a lower-class aesthetic, attitudes towards visible make-up have shifted, and it no longer holds the same level of taboo in contemporary British society (Kuipers, 2022). It is assumed to be a requirement that women will wear make-up and perform a beauty regime; however, despite its ubiquity, women still experience discrimination for appearing to care about their appearance. "It seems to me there is still an assumption that a woman who makes

herself sexually attractive will also be stupid, or has to make herself appear stupid in order to be found sexually attractive" (Vogue in Willson, 2015, p. 80). Hazel is middle-class and works in creative education; this is a position where her creative skills and knowledge are considered useful sources of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). There is a worry that she will undermine her expertise by appearing concerned with her appearance.

Chancer describes the tension which can lead to women asking a hairdresser to make their hair look natural. "When it comes to beauty, I sometimes try to appear *as if I were* a thing: I may be working to achieve a look that would have been the most desirable if simply ascribed *by nature*" (Chancer, 2023, p. 119). Women try to achieve a 'relatively inert look' in which their work is hidden, and the beauty achieved appears inborn.

Hazel talked about wanting to look natural at several points. When talking about how her hair looks, she expressed some of the tensions about beauty and effort. Hazel's resistance to looking like she has put in too much effort can be understood through Willson's claim that

> Women's appearance is still important, and a fashionably beautiful veneer is highly prized and sought after – and in some cases bought (if we consider plastic surgery and make-up) – even though looking good is seen to be in opposition to

> being good, or at least being competent (2015, p. 81).

We can understand this tension as an attempt to appear effortless. The ideal, at least in theory, is to achieve the prizes associated without appearing to work towards that goal.

Effortlessness achieves glamour while maintaining a cool demeanour. Cool is more than a synonym for good; it is a psychological state or attitude (Pountain and Robins, 2000). Coolness relies on "undertones of ambivalence" (Haselstein, 2013, p. 2) and performance of self-control.

This expression of self-control present in coolness can be traced back to Black Jazz musicians. "Cooling the expression of emotion, or displaying impressive control over affective response, is not just a requirement of modernity but potentially a temporary survival tactic and a cultural and political position" (Brown, 2021, p. 437). This unflappable attitude has been replicated and reproduced through numerous cultural groups and become an inherent element of coolness. Brown explains why coolness is still an attractive prospect. The "complex, contingent and precarious" experience of liquid modernity "create[s] an environment in which cool composure is increasingly necessary but difficult to achieve" (Brown, 2022, p. 90).

We can see this as at odds with the quest to be beautiful, which is seen as feminine, frivolous and concerned with the surface/appearances. "The problem is that culturally, 'femininity' has been marked as lack.

Underneath the performance and artifice of femininity, women are seen to veil a lack of substance" (Willson, 2015, p. 83). Women must navigate this post-feminist tension, where they feel drawn to enact femininity but do not want to be marked as lesser because of it.

Unlike coolness, which is rooted in an outsider perspective, glamour finds its power in traditional power structures of wealth and class. Glamour develops through "the yearning for a better, richer, more exciting, and materially lavish life accompanied the development of modern consumerism and fuelled innumerable fantasies and fictions" (Gundle, 2008, p. 388). Glamour afforded women of the aristocracy more respect.

There is power in the control of glamour, which is "a defiant acknowledgement of a shared power and pleasure that came from the spectacle of a subject who was daring to make a spectacle of herself" (Willson, 2015, p. 55). In that defiance, women must both submit to being looked at and dictate the gaze. While effortlessness does not hope to create an overt spectacle, it aims for a similar effect to glamour while hiding the work behind it. The mastery of appearance must appear to be *given* rather than *made.* It is imperative to look as if being glamorous requires no effort. Similarly, with coolness it is essential to minimise the visible labour to achieve it, because "making any effort to look cool implies a distinct lack of cool" (Brown, 2020, pp. 8–9).

The allure of an image of someone in control, and on top of the moment, is potentially signified by an unshakeable facial and bodily composure

(Goffman, 1959). This can play out through appearing in control of fashion, which demonstrates knowledge of what is now and next (Brown, 2021). This provides "context of the whole of the modern experience of the self – precarious, contingent and aware of your own lack of significance, like never before" (Brown, 2021, p. 87). Effortlessness is a product of the participants trying to appear in control.

The line of effortlessness must be carefully negotiated because, while it is important to be seen as gracefully gliding through beauty ideals, too much nonchalance can signal a lack of care, equally as worrying. Faiza conducts similar gymnastics when discussing a wedding she attended, with "friends who are school friends that I'm not that close to anymore". She was worried that a bad haircut would represent her badly: "I don't wish to portray myself as someone who can't look after their own hair". Critically, it is not the bad hair itself that she is worried about. She is worried that they will think that she is unable to look after herself.

For Faiza, she has a tension between not wanting to do too much but also not wanting to look like she does not have the skill, or energy, or care enough about herself to care for her hair properly. It is important to Faiza to be seen as someone who is 'in control' of their hair. To consider Foucault's ideas of 'control', Faiza is worried that her body will appear unruly and "a measure of shame is added to a woman's sense that the body she inhabits is deficient" (Bartky, 1990, p. 72). There is a sense of pride in appearing like someone who can take good care of themselves and present themselves in a particular way, which comes from

conforming to societal expectations. When her haircut is bad, Faiza feels like she is unable to participate in the wedding without judgment for not meeting the expectations for femininity and beauty.

As authors like Gill (2021) have previously discussed, the pressures on neoliberal women are numerous and insurmountable. The quest to look effortless underlines a critical point: that, even more than having to navigate the ever-shifting landscape of fashion, beauty and identity, women should make it look like it is easy. The work behind it must be hidden. The difficult hike should look to outsiders like a serene waltz.

Conclusion

In the previous chapter, I explored the relationship between changing the hair and fashionable identity. I found that often hair is changed in an attempt to enhance the sense of selfhood – to feel like the 'best version of me' or 'more like myself'. However, this chapter complicates this idea. It is not always as simple as changing the hair in line with the conception of self, as the process is complicated by wider cultural ideals. This chapter introduces the complexities of beauty, femininity and their enforcement into the discussion of self-expression through hair.

It is impossible to overlook how beauty, idealisation, and what women's bodies should look like interact with the internal feeling of selfhood.

Feminists have long sought to understand what is an 'empowered' and 'authentic' expression and what is an enactment of ingrained structures of patriarchal power, often so closely that it is impossible to decipher where one ends and the next begins.

I found that these structures of power were most commonly reinforced by close female family members, through off-hand comments. I also found that the participants often internalised these power structures. The participants self-policed any behaviour they believed deviated from the social norm. Throughout the interviews, all the participants were quick to point out ways that they were deviating or falling short in their own hair care, trying to keep up with what was expected of them but falling short. The participants felt this through rigorous self-comparison to others and largely found themselves lacking.

The apprehension of having to look appropriate at work also played an important role in the participants' decision-making. This illuminated a quality of hair, which is easy to overlook. Unlike clothing, hair must be worn at all times. There is no opportunity to change out of your business-formal hair into your casual hair. Hair's resistant nature (Holmes, 2010) means a greater consideration must be made to how it will function across all events/occasions.

Fashioning the self is never a pure, straightforward act of self-expression. Dressing the body is always culturally entangled, which is further intensified and destabilised by liquidity. When trying to express a

sense of self, the participants are set up to fail. The hunt for identity is never over, never completed, never won. It is possible (if not inevitable) to fall behind this constant demand.

Hair requires constant upkeep to keep it in an 'acceptable' state. Maintaining the hair is a prerequisite to participating in everyday social life, particularly for women. The most obvious example of this in the data was dyed hair, which gives very visible examples of maintenance and decay. Maintenance is not limited to dying, but this is a good example. They had not necessarily experienced negative consequences for failing to maintain their hair, but the threat of constant surveillance was enough to keep them on track. Maintaining the hair is a constant task of work that is endlessly unfinished, which makes it a fitting metaphor for identity within liquidity.

Participants describe themselves as 'lazy', which could either be taken to mean they are choosing a 'low maintenance' style, where the work is carried out primarily in the salon rather than day to day. It could also mean that they are feeling like they are falling short of how much effort they *should* be putting in, which is a product of the shift of 'glamour work' as essential to the self as a project. Vocalising their laziness is a product of neoliberal and postfeminist beauty ideals, which cause perceived deficiencies to extend to a psychological and moral level. They feel guilty or apologetic for the perceived lack of effort put into their hair. In liquidity, the hunt for beauty is 'a pursuit without a terminus'. With the

ever-shifting boundaries of idealised representations, the participants will always feel as though they are deficient.

It was striking that the participants never directly addressed beauty at any point, except for Hazel, who spoke about how she shunned beauty standards. This is not a sign that the participants did not care or were unaware. Instead, I argued that the absence may be due to beauty being too ubiquitous to be considered worthy of discussion; the participants did not want to conform to stereotypes of women who care about beauty, i.e. vapid, vain, superficial; and that to talk about beauty can be seen as devaluing beauty work, which is often about care, pampering and upkeep.

I have demonstrated both the participant's unspoken attempts to look beautiful, and also their attempts to look like they have not put effort into their appearance. I connect their attempts to look effortless with pre-existing literature on coolness (Majors and Billson, 1993; Pountain and Robins, 2000; Brown, 2021) and glamour (Thrift, 2008; Dyhouse, 2021), which describes the appeal of an unaffected attitude in cultivating allure. Their attempts to look effortless also come from a desire to reject an idea of feminised beauty, where women are depicted as vapid and self-absorbed, which has already been discussed in literature on beauty (Gill, 2021; Kuipers, 2022).

The literature's existing depiction of effortless beauty and resistant postfeminism are further complicated by my earlier discussion of

laziness, where participants declare their love and hatred for their hair, while also claiming abuse and dissatisfaction. This is a deeply emotional response to cutting the hair, which comes from a bodily connection, alongside an ability to present selfhood.

'***How does hair contribute to fashionable identity, differently from clothing?***'

This chapter explores how clothing and hair differ when constructing fashionable identities. While clothing is used to enhance allure, it is not as closely tied to ideas of beauty as hair is. This complicates the relationship between fashionable identity and hair. The urge to not appear 'frivolous' does come into decisions on clothing, but it is more acutely felt with hair, as it is part of the body. Bodies are contested sites, materially confused and objectified. The connection between hair and body leads to choices about the hair feeling very closely interconnected with your essence as a person.

It is very clear, in the interview data, that there is peril in trying to be beautiful. There are clear advantages socially and personally to being more beautiful. However, if you are seen to be too interested or trying too hard to be beautiful, it can be read as a moral deficiency. This is particularly true for women, who have historically held beauty as a chip of power when they were otherwise largely powerless. However, the women who are seen to utilise this power have been chastised for using

this form of power. While this is perhaps less overt in contemporary times, those structures of power were still visible in the interview data.

Here, I will make a point that may feel obvious but is important to highlight to answer this research question fully. Hair's of the bodyness, which makes it very different to clothing. Clothing requires some maintenance; it degrades over time. Clothes get dirty and require washing, they rip and tear and require mending or replacing. This can be likened to the everyday practices of haircare, the washing and brushing. What clothing does not do is consistently change, like hair does. Hair requires maintenance to keep it looking the same.

This core difference necessitates a situation where repeated visits are made to the hairdresser, where relationships are built as well as fashionable identity. In fostering a space where time is spent, visits are regular and bodies are touching, the environment fosters supported changes.

This allows for changes to the hair, and therefore changes to the fluid self to be made in small, managed choices and changes. In liquid modernity, when change is a requirement, finding the means to make these changes feel like a journey rather than a complete upheaval allows the women in this study to feel in control of their fluid and contingent identity.

The next chapter draws together the ideas from the previous two chapters. It will look at **Negotiations in the Salon**, to explore how the haircut is constructed through dialogue, by both the client and hairdresser, and how they manage that shared vision. The understanding of identity and maintenance already established will be essential as we see how the substantial pressures of contemporary femininity are managed by both the hairdresser and client in the salon.

CHAPTER SIX: Negotiation in the Salon: Working Together, Closeness and the Steer



Figure 53 - My first fringe since childhood (2013)

When I was an undergrad, I visited the Sassoon Training Academy in London. It was a time-consuming process, with the hairdressers stopping at every stage to receive feedback from a trainer. Is your elbow at a 45-degree angle? Are your section lines clean enough? Are your feet in line? I was fascinated by the minute details these experts were learning, and the precision required.

The cut took a long time as each snip and section was inspected. When it came to time to cut the fringe, the instructor came over to listen to the consultation. What did I want? I wasn't sure, what did they think? Without missing a beat, he told me I needed a box fringe. Was he mad? He pointed out which of my features it would complement, big eyes, high cheekbones, long face, strong chin. Although I wasn't convinced, I put my trust in him. Ever since then, when I have a fringe, this is the one I pick. That man knew what would suit me, much better than I ever did. In that moment he helped me into a hairstyle that became a staple for the next ten years.

Introduction

During a haircut, there are (usually) two actors engaged in an intimate discussion followed by the physically embodied act of the haircut or colour. In the conversations or 'consultation' is where the negotiation begins, but they often continue through the service. Anecdotally and academically, there is much evidence of the long-lasting and close relationships in the salon (Eayrs, 1993; Gimlin, 1996; Badillo, 2001; Holmes, 2010a, 2018), here I will examine the impact the closeness has on these negotiations.

Each brings a distinct set of bargaining chips to this negotiation (see diagram below). The raw material of the hair belongs to the client but will be worked upon by the stylist. Without the hair there is no styling, no cutting. They bring money in exchange for a professional service. They have a personal style and aspirations of what they want their hair to look like, which acts similarly to a design brief. Finally, they must bring trust; they put their appearance, which we have already shown to be important, in the hands of someone else.



Figure 54 - Diagram showing what both client and hairdresser bring with them into the salon (2024) Own Diagram

On the other side of the interaction, the hairdresser holds the knowledge and skill to perform the haircut physically. They have usually trained for at least two years, often completing apprenticeships. Many of the hairdressers I interviewed had many years of experience in the role and mentioned their continual professional development and ongoing training. The physical space and tools required for the cut are also managed by the hairdresser; these are often expensive and specialised. The final thing that the hairdresser holds is the risk. If something goes wrong with the cut, it is them who comes under fire or must attempt to fix it.

It is not possible to view the interaction between hairdresser and client in a vacuum. Both the client and hairdresser are independent humans, with independent frames of reference. In addition to the negotiation which takes place between the hairdresser and client, both individuals are negotiating a web of external forces, some of which are shared and some are independent. Figure 54 maps the web factors for an imagined

participant and hairdresser, while it does not cover every factor, it demonstrates the potential complexity of the negotiations at hand.

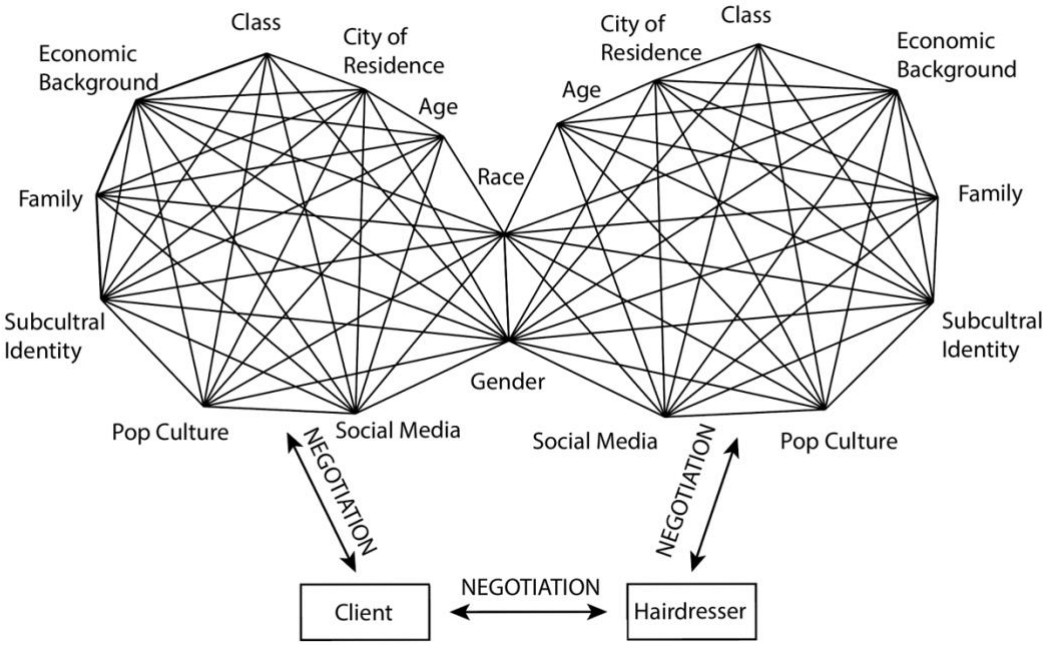


Figure 55 Example of what a complex web of factors being negotiated by the hairdresser and client could look like for two white women, who do not share other characteristics. (2025) Own Diagram

Negotiations are critical moments in the construction of fronts, where hairdressers can guide the clients to avoid disasters in their performances of self. However, this is made trickier by the ever-changing terrain of liquidity. It is not just the participants' identities that are liquid, but the society they live in is fluid and without clear boundaries. It is important to acknowledge that although the client and hairdresser are working towards a shared outcome, they are not always on the same page. Both actors have independent aspirations for the hair, which may or may not be in line. Moments were hairdresser and clients are out of line highlight the importance of the social connection in achieving a fashionable haircut.

The participants do not use the word negotiation, but I have selected it to reflect the complexity of these interactions. Negotiation is a valuable and versatile term for interrogating some of the themes present in the data. It is defined as "the process of discussing something with someone in order to reach an agreement with them, or the discussions themselves" (Cambridge Dictionary, no date). The definition provides three crucial pieces of information to understand. Firstly, negotiations are the *process*. This necessitates the study of the interactions underway rather than the end product or viewing the interaction in hindsight. Secondly, *discussion* is key. This highlights the discursive nature of negotiation. It may be enacted through action, but the power exchanges happen in the conversation. The discussions are so important that they can eclipse the outcome. Finally*, agreement* is the ideal endpoint. Both parties are working towards a compromise, but they will each bring a different perspective on what they want to achieve.

Negotiating identity is an established idea within psychology. However, I will focus on its use in fashion and the sociological understanding of identity. This encapsulates both the negotiations with the ever-shifting and challenging liquid modern society and also the granular negotiations between client and hairdresser. The term negotiation is used to describe how the performance of self is formulated and how the hairdresser and client interact.

This chapter takes three separate perspectives on the negotiations in the salon, which led to the three subthemes of this chapter: the hairdresser's perspective on the negotiation, the client's perspective on the negotiation, and what happens when these are not aligned.

The first subtheme, **The Hairdresser's Role in Negotiation** centralises the perspective of the hairdresser. Here, I introduce the concept of the steer, where hairdressers must carefully and tactfully guide their clients. Applying Sennet's concept of everyday diplomacy provides a framework for this key tactic in negotiation. However, this raises the question of what are they steering towards or away from? I critique hairdressers as agents of the State-of-Fashion, borrowing von Busch's (2020) terminology to show their implicitness in enforcing the existing 'rules' of fashion.

The other side of the negotiation is represented in **How Clients Negotiate**. While clients do not hold the same chips, in the negotiation, as the hairdressers, they are active agents in designing the haircut. They communicate with the hairdresser and collaborate materially. I discuss the participant's preference for slow and incremental change as a remedy for the motion sickness caused by liquidity.

Of course, the negotiation does not take place in a vacuum, and both the hairdresser and client are also negotiating on a wider web of cultural factors, some of which have been discussed in earlier chapters.

Challenges of Negotiation explores how closeness and talking in the salon are used to achieve a better quality of 'steer'. It draws from key moments in the data where there have been disconnects between stylist and client to demonstrate how these negotiations take place in practice. I also draw on my own experience of being steered during the autoethnography, where the negotiation tactics used by the hairdressers become visible. The disconnect between interview and fieldwork data, where the hair greying is concerned, is used to demonstrate the potentials for problems within negotiations.

The Hairdresser's Role in Negotiation: Steering & the Rules of Fashion

Before I start discussing the data, it is worth remembering that cutting hair is the hairdresser's job. Despite narratives that 'hairdressers are born and not trained', the hairdressers I spoke to were not cutting hair because of a calling from God but as an economic exchange for their career. This is important not to forget as the relationship between hairdresser and client is examined. It is easy to romanticise their interactions.

With that caveat, this section, **The Hairdresser's Role in Negotiation: Steering & the Rules of Fashion,** I will be closely examining the negotiations that take place in the salon, firstly, from the perspective of

the hairdressers. This section introduces my finding of 'the steer'. The hairdressers conceive of their part in the negotiation as 'steering the client' in the 'right direction'. The conversations that shape the haircut primarily occur in consultations. They usually happen before the hair is washed and cut but could happen in a separate meeting or via text or direct message on Instagram. I will analyse the concept of the steer by explaining how it occurs using the data. Then, I will question the concept of the steer by asking 'what are they steering towards?'

The Steer: Everyday Diplomacy and Expert Knowledge



Figure 56 - A hairstyle similar to Tom's (hairdresser)



Figure 57 - A hairstyle similar to Jess's (hairdresser)



Figure 58 - A hairstyle similar to Heather's (hairdresser)

While clients frame the negotiations with hairdressers as them *communicating* and the hairdressers *interpreting*, the hairdressers have a different perspective, framing it as *steering* or *guiding* the client. This section focuses on the hairdresser's perspective. I question their varying approaches to diplomacy and question why the clients might need steering at all. This section also includes insight from the analysis of the

Autoethnographic Fieldwork, which gives an 'inside' perspective on what it feels like to be 'steered'.

The expert status of a hairdresser is not an innate or magical skill, as Cassie suggested earlier, but has been worked upon. Hairdressers develop the knowledge and physical skills to give the 'good' hair to the client. To get the clients to where they 'need to be', as Bev says, the hairdressers must employ a diplomatic approach. Sennett describes 'everyday diplomacy' as the use of indirect and subtle gestures to guide interactions. The use of "minimal force; create social space through coded gestures... These efforts rely on suggestion rather than command" (Sennett, 2012, p. 221). Although the concept was used to understand white-collar workers on Wall Street, the concept can be used to understand the social skills used by hairdressers when 'steering'. While not commonly applied to fashion, everyday diplomacy is a useful model to understand the gentle enforcement of 'fashion rules'.

When the hairdressers think about what will look good on their clients, they are reflecting their own culturally learned taste. For white stylists, working in hairdressing salons that are mostly serving white consumers, that taste will be built upon ideals of whiteness. Salons are heteronormative spaces, where it is often just one ideal of beauty that is the stylists are steering towards, therefore enforcing hegemonic and Eurocentric ideals of beauty.

There were two distinct approaches to steering in the data. Some hairdressers speak to their clients tactfully, while others are blunt. Those who take the diplomatic route want to guide the client to make better choices independently. "You have to just be as diplomatic as possible. You don't want to shatter their dreams." Instead of giving an outright no or being negative, Danielle will offer other feasible alternatives. Instead, she will talk about the materiality of the hair and give them a different option: "You have to be as honest as you can." She highlights diplomacy and honesty as the best way to steer their clients.

It was more common for the hairdressers to take a more straightforward approach. For example, Jess answers how she would approach a client asking for a style that will not suit them. "I'm just brutally honest. It's really bad." She laughs. "I'm like, do not do that, but I will do it if you 100% want it, but it's not going to suit you." Although she says that her bluntness is bad, she is being hyperbolic. Her 'brutality' never comes at the expense of her clients' feelings. She tells me that they appreciate her honesty and straightforwardness. "I'll still talk through everything because, at the end of the day, it doesn't matter what I think. They've got to live with it on the head." Although she says if she doesn't think something will look good, she knows the client must live with their hair, so she always discusses all the options. Like Bev says, "Sometimes, they've got to try. You've got to know when you've got to back off and when you can step in". Bev practices diplomacy but also reports to knows

when to let go and allow the client to do something she thinks is a mistake.

The hairdresser's guidance is part of the paid service they offer. As Heather notes, "Clients know roughly what they want but they're coming to me as the professional to advise them, aren't they? … If I say, "Oh my god, you should definitely not have that", they genuinely won't have it." Her clients trust her direction, and 'rightly so' in her opinion. Heather is a high-level hairdresser who has won awards for her creative work. In her view, charging clients higher fees solely to agree with their decisions undermines the professional value of her guidance.

Often, the guidance and creative decision-making are enjoyable elements of the job for the hairdressers. Jess sometimes works from a home salon so that she can be pickier about her clients. She does not like working with clients who don't let her have any input. If they are completely set on what they want and it is unrealistic, she tells them, 'I'm not the hairdresser for you because I know full well, I can't get that for you'. Jess wants to work on the hair of people who will adjust their aspirations based on her advice and are willing to listen to her.

Several hairdressers volunteered that their customers do not always understand what is involved in what they ask for, particularly regarding the time required and colouring. Kim and Danielle tell stories about clients who came into the salon with box-dyed[15] black hair wanting to go

[15] Hair dyed at home, rather than in a salon, with a dye that comes in a box.

blonde (perhaps one of the most challenging transitions in hairdressing). Clients often overlook the time, number of visits, cost and risk of damage when undertaking a transformation like this. Danielle explains, "People want colours that just aren't achievable. They want it to be done really quickly." Danielle laughs about this being a meme in the hairdressing community because it "*actually* happens". The clients lack the knowledge and understanding to choose a haircut that is achievable or desirable for them. It is essential for the hairdressers as experts to guide them regarding achievability.

What Are They Steering Towards? Fashion Rules, Agents of the State and Online Aspirations

Now, I will consider what the hairdressers are steering towards. So far, I have looked at how hairdressers steer but have not discussed *why.* Kim explains that good hairdressers have "the confidence to push [themselves] and to push [their] clients". The clients might want to "play it safe", however, "sometimes that client can take something that's a little bit further, that will really make them feel good, that will suit them so much better". If Kim is pushing the client, this raises the question: *what is she pushing them towards*?

A commonly repeated idea in the interview data is that the hairdressers choose haircuts that 'suit the face'. For example, Jess tells me "some people come in with a slight idea but not completely knowing what they want. … you can say what's going to suit them". The idea of a style

suiting someone is ill-defined and loose. It can be used to mean aligned with the client's aesthetic or creates confidence but appears to more commonly be used to describe a haircut that brings out the best from the client's natural features, or perhaps to balance any features that are out of proportion.

Styles that 'suit' someone rely on the client and hairdresser having a shared, culturally learned idea of 'good'. These cultural ideals become visible as Heather explains,

> I've had clients that, this sounds awful, but they're a bit overweight, and they want like a bob, and obviously, the face is really round. It's hard to say to someone, "It's not going to suit you because your face is really round". So, I'll just say, "Have you thought about having it a little bit longer? I think it looks better with your face shape".

Heather acknowledges that what she is saying 'sounds awful' – these cultural ideals are usually left unsaid, it is poor practice to put them so bluntly. For her 'overweight clients', she is aiming to find a style which does not draw attention to the signs of their overweightness. Here, Heather reinforces the cultural idea that thinness equates to beauty. Her assumptions around what suits the client are built upon societal standards, not the choices of the client themselves. It is possible, controversially, that the client might not mind (or even like) their face looking round.

To enhance their clients' appearance, hairdressers often identify where a look diverges from prevailing beauty norms and guide them toward a more conventional aesthetic. For example, Bev describes a successful haircut that both "suits the hair" and "makes them look so much younger". Here, the measure of a successful haircut that suits someone, is one that disguises the signs of ageing. What Bev does not say here but is heavily implied is that ageing is negative, maintaining the structures of beauty that classify youthfulness as beautiful and ageing as ugly.

This is not the first time this has been observed in hairdressing salons. Gimlin (1996) observes similar sentiments in her time at *Pamela's Place*. The hairdresser tells Gimlin that "she suggests that clients with wide faces don't wear their hair 'too short near the jaw so their cheeks look bigger'". The hairdresser views this as technical advice, but "it is clearly grounded in the assumption that wide faces are unattractive" (Gimlin, 1996, p. 513). Clearly, the idea that thinner is better is ingrained in hairdressing salons since the 90s (and almost certainly before). The 'rules' of hairdressing mirror the 'rules' of fashion. Round-faced women should avoid bobs; never wear horizontal stripes or risk looking wider. These fashion 'rules,' they are often repeated without criticism or questioning. It appears from my data that largely the idea of a haircut suiting the client is about the attempt to pick a style that makes them look as young and thin as possible.

Through repeating the idea that young and thin are the ideals of beauty, hairdressers are, perhaps inadvertently, enforcing existing rules of

fashion. Von Busch is concerned with the 'rules of fashion' because they are used to enforce 'fashion as state'. Fashion as state is a descriptor of the often invisible but nevertheless powerful control fashion has over our lives. He argues that we are all the fashion police, ensuring social regulations of fashion are followed through peer relationships (von Busch, 2020). It is easy to see how this plays out in the salon from the interview data.

Von Busch (2015) argues that the fashion industry maintains a sense of self-dissatisfaction through an 'aesthetic civil war'. This highlights the Bauman-esque tensions and internal clashes, where aesthetic instability never truly ends. Despite attempts to overthrow the State-of-Fashion, internal tensions never really topple the status quo. How people feel about themselves is a source of conflict, for fashion to produce control. The hairdressers take a role as fashion police, enforcing the status quo, which is repeated and, therefore, reinforced by their clients.

Only one of the hairdressers questioned the idea of hairstyles suiting people. Interestingly, this was the only male participant. "Are there haircuts that suit people? I don't know." He finds it irritating to be asked what suits someone "because it's just so status quo". He believes that the idea is flawed and just repeated without thought. It is possible that as a man, the power structures of beauty are less ingrained in Tom than the other hairdressers I spoke to.

He says that his clients can rely on his judgment to make sure they look good. "I basically won't do what I think is going to look shit, put it that way". Here he is using his own taste levels and judgments, rather than relying on the fashion rules surrounding hairdressing. Tom's perspective shows that it is possible for the hairdressers to be complicit in dominant beauty norms or to challenge them.

We can see hairdressers in this model as agents of the state of fashion, which is welcomed by their clients. In fact, von Busch discusses this: "If we start thinking that fashion is a service relationship, not only do we have to ask who it serves, but also what cultural rules it upholds and to whom this service is outsourced" (von Busch, 2020, p. 96). Hairdressers receive formal training, not only in the skill of hairdressing, but in the rules of fashion, and it is their role to both enforce and educate the clients on these rules. In this element of their role, they are most closely aligned with personal shoppers or stylists, who act as mediators of the fashion rules. This garment shape suits this body type; vertical stripes make you look taller; never wear black and navy together. However, the closeness of the relationship gives the client personalised guidance rather than blindly following fashion rules.

Part of the hairdresser's role is to assess how fashion-forward their clients are and offer trend-based options accordingly. Hairdressers will use their ability to judge their clients to see how much they can 'push them', but in practice, they do not want you to step outside of their safety zone. As Lou notes, "If someone plays it safe or if they're not sure

about something, you can still get the impression if they're not sure, but I can push this a little bit further". She knows she must take 'baby steps' with some clients. She must guide the clients towards a more fashionable style but knows this must be carefully and slowly managed. Gimlin comments on this: hairdressers "are not only experts in the field of hairdressing but also experts in style, contemporary fads, and attractiveness more generally" (Gimlin, 1996, p. 513). However, she does not go any further than this to identify how or why they use this expertise.

The hairdressing salon not the only place that fashion rules are enforced; it is easy to find these ideas repeated online, where the clients are looking for inspiration. The image below (fig. 59) gives tips on what features to hide or enhance and gives style suggestions for each hair length. Despite the dated imagery, this is one of the first results on Google images when I searched for "haircut for face shape". Interestingly, this example identifies an oval face shape as the ideal, which can wear their hair in any way they please. Are we all trying to find a haircut that makes us look more elliptical?

FACE SHAPE	TIPS	SHORT HAIRSTYLE	MEDIUM HAIRSTYLE	LONG HAIRSTYLE
 HEART	Show your cheekbones Highlight your eyes	 Side-swept short bangs	 Shoulder length Bob	 Long waves
 SQUARE	Try to cover your sharp jawline	 Rounded Bob	 Volume Curls	 Long Curls
 ROUND	Try to contour your cheeks and choose style that creates angles.	 Short Layers cutting through cheeks	 Side-swept long bangs	 Long Layers below shoulder length
 OVAL	Any hairstyle suit this face type due its idealistic shape	 Boy cut	 Short messy curls	 Short Layers

Figure 59 - An example of the type of resource available online to work out what would 'suit' your face shape

This type of content is even more prevalent on Pinterest, which is the site my participants identified as the most influential. Women can find advice for any face shape, which may have the effect of being flattering, slimming, alluring or even adorable. Women are bombarded with advice on how to improve themselves.

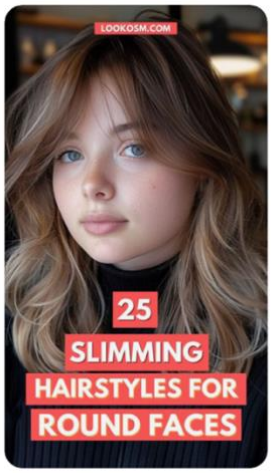


Figure 60 - A Pinterest link to an article on 'slimming' styles for a round face



Figure 61 - A Pinterest link to an article on 'flattering' styles for an oval face



Figure 62 - A Pinterest link to an article on the 'perfect' style for a heart-shaped face



Figure 63 - A Pinterest link to an article on 'adorable' styles for a diamond-shaped face



Figure 64 - A Pinterest link to an article on 'alluring' styles for a square-shaped face



Figure 65 - A Pinterest link to an article on 'best' styles for every face shape

The advice given to women on how to 'fix' their deficiencies is often contradictory. For example, two articles from the same website, which recommend 22 hairstyles for women with 'big' and 22 hairstyles for women with 'small' foreheads. The images used are of two women who look very similar, with an almost indistinguishable haircut. I do not believe either of these women have unusually big, or small foreheads. Women are taught that they should feel deviant. The primary purpose of

these adverts is not to help women hide their deficient forehead, but to convert women's insecurities into clicks and ad revenue.



Figure 66 - A Pinterest link to an article suggesting hairstyles for women with big foreheads

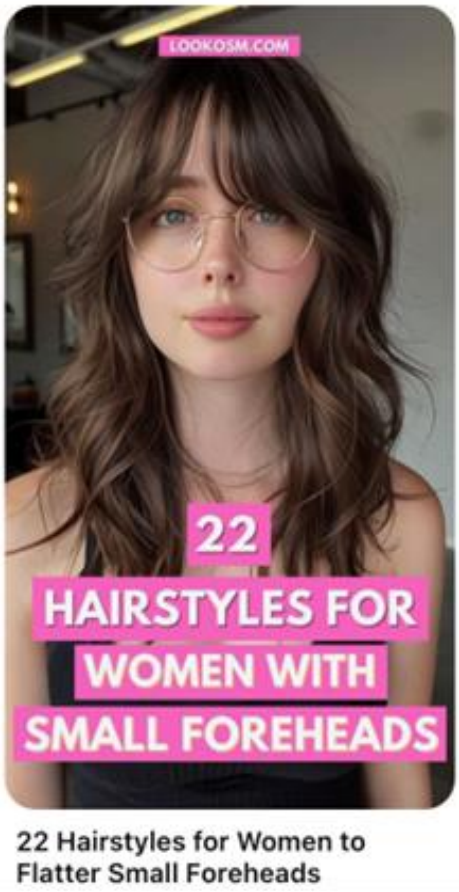


Figure 67 - A Pinterest link to an article suggesting hairstyles for women with small foreheads from the same website

Interestingly, the concept of fashion was completely absent from these conversations, which, through analysis, I see as being about the rules of fashion. The hairdressers would talk about trends, but only when explicitly asked. The consensus from the hairdressers was that we are in a time of 'anything goes' where individuality and self-expression have overtaken fashion trends. As a former high-street clothing designer, I doubt this. Within liquidity, the use of purchasing clothing *for*

individuality and self-expression *is* what fuels fashion trends. Bauman explains the effect of change on fashion:

> The 'becoming' of fashion is not only inexhaustible and seemingly unstoppable, but it acquires more and more impetus and ability to accelerate as its material, tangible impact, and the number of objects it is affecting, rises. (Bauman, 2010, p. 56)

Fashion is an ever-present but often invisible force. It is often difficult to identify fashion as we are so totally immersed in its power. In contemporary society, the pendulum of fashion swings from one thing to another so fast that it can feel like constant and uncontrolled motion. The movement of fashion but sped up to the point where it is unrecognisable from the slow trends dictated by older forms of media. The 'Princess Di' haircut was ubiquitous in the 80s and early 90s. When women saw Princess Diana on television, they went to hairdressers and asked for a haircut like hers. Now, imagery on social media, or articles found on Pinterest, moves so quickly that it is difficult for longer-term trends to take hold.

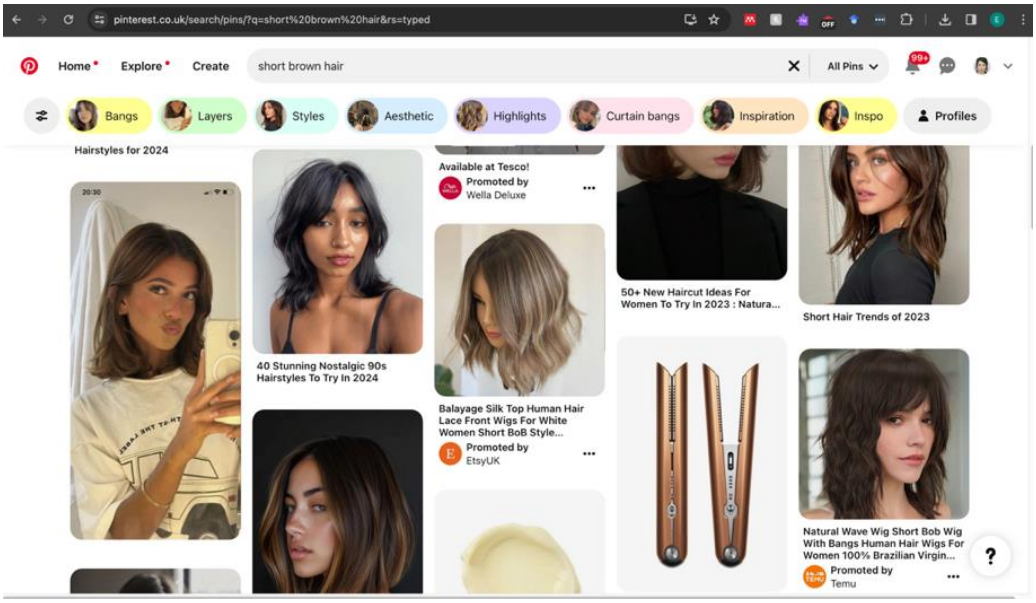


Figure 68 - The search results for 'short brown hair' on Pinterest, a common way to find hair inspiration (2024)

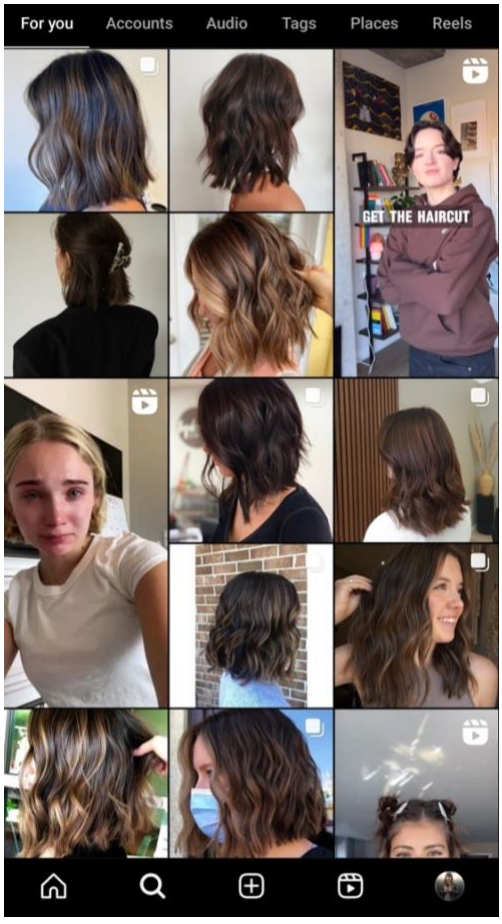


Figure 69 - The search results for 'short brown hair' on Instagram, a common way to find hair inspiration (2024)

While a visual aid helps the client communicate clearly, it can also raise the client's expectations to an unreasonable level. Pictures posted on Instagram are often edited, professional-quality images, which are hard for the client to identify. Heather explains, "I have to say to [the customer] 'That's edited. That's not even real.' And they want colours that are not even real… They're totally airbrushed. But again, you just have to point that out because they don't have a clue". These edited images cause an issue for hairdressers who must navigate the customer's expectations. Jess jokes that she, too, was taken in by edited images before she became a hairdresser. Much of the Instagram and Pinterest is edited. It is very easy to edit the colour in imagery to make the hair look at its best.

The imagery that can often become a focal point of the negotiations is simultaneously reinforcing the State-of-Fashion that women must do what they can to minimise their deficiencies, (which they may not have known were deficiencies), while also showing a literally unachievable standard – leaving the hairdresser to share the bad news, and do their best to right the wrongs of the forehead, which may or may not be too big.

How Clients Negotiate: Collaboration, Closeness and Incremental Changes

The hairdressers feel that they steer the clients towards styles that will suit them and may inadvertently reinforce the State-of-Fashion as they do. That is not to say the clients are passive. In **How Clients Negotiate: Collaboration, Closeness and Incremental Changes**, I will explore how the clients experience the negotiations, and the roles that close relationships play.

The hairdresser practically implements the haircut and can be defined as a skilled craftsperson (Holmes, 2018) and blurred ownership of the haircut. Following Holmes' (2018) classification of the hairdresser as a skilled craftsperson, I apply craft theory, to better understand how the haircut is crafted, including von Busch's (2013) notion of 'collective crafting'. This is used to explain the client's perspective that they are actively involved in crafting the haircut.

Having the intended destination of the steer, it is also important to interrogate the intentions of the clients. It was surprising to find the frequency which clients sought stability. Within liquidity, clients and hairdressers collaborate towards slow and thoughtful change, to minimise the risks of identity formation within liquidity. I reflect on my own experiences in the salon, to show how the steer and my own agency meet in moments of negotiation.

Collaboration in Crafting: Client's Agency

Despite the client not doing the physical work of cutting or colouring the hair, they are not fully passive. Clearly, for a client to receive the type of haircut they want, they must communicate this to the hairdresser. "The hairdresser may exert their influence as the knowledgeable professional in the salon environment, but the hair, and to some extent the customer, always have ways of 'acting back'" (Holmes, 2010a, p. 146). Holmes makes this point more strongly in a later article, describing it as a co-production between client and hairdresser "where the boundaries of ownership become blurred, as both store their labour in the material" (Holmes, 2018, p. 135). Neither the hairdresser nor the client has exclusive ownership of the haircut. Holmes terms these acts of co-construction 'embodied intimacy' and likens them to repetitive craft practices. The hairdresser, as a craftsperson, works upon the material hair and allows the client to gain knowledge about their own hair.

Understanding the haircut as a craft action allows me to apply craft theory. Von Busch (2013) tells us that although craftspeople are often social or work in a shared space, their actual work is usually through a single pair of hands. "Collective craftsmanship, which requires finding points of agreement and managing disagreement, is a "dialogic" activity and shapes a specific socio-ability" (von Busch, 2013, p. 140). Von Busch builds from Sennett's explanation of collaboration in crafting (2012), which is useful to understand the negotiations in the salon. I will apply

the concept of *collective crafting* to show that the haircut is neither purely the responsibility of the client, who must live with it, nor the hairdresser, who performs the physical act.

The collective nature of the haircut is visible in my interview data. Almost all the clients believed they had some level of control over the haircut they ended up with. This is clearest in Demelza and Cassie's interviews. When asked who decides how the hair looks, Cassie says, "It's a mix of both, but I know that she will always try and make it work". She describes the consultation process as "giving a brief," and the hairdresser must "make[s] it how I would want it". Similarly, Demelza believes that there is an even division in the co-construction of the haircut: "I'd probably say it's 50/50, maybe? Because you're communicating what you want, but you're leaving it up to the hairdresser's interpretation and their skill to deliver that". The clients experience some power and agency over their haircut and are often impressed by their hairdresser's ability to interpret their needs. The negotiation between the client and the hairdresser must be understood as collaborative.

Feeling like they have agency in the haircut, does not mean they do not understand or appreciate the work of the hairdressers. The clients are aware of the skill gap between themselves and their hairdressers. They employ a professional to help them achieve the hair they could not otherwise. Cassie says her hairdresser knows "exactly what I'd like and what I need and can basically translate the words that come out of my mouth as the non-professional hairdresser, and she translates that into

something that's workable and doable and manageable". She speaks particularly glowingly about her hairdresser's ability to interpret her needs, which she frames as 'magic'. There is no magic here, but the repeated practice of learnt skills and competencies.

For Demelza, the hairdresser's skill at crafting is most useful when navigating difficult periods of change. When she is growing out a very short haircut, with the potential to have an ugly in-between stage, she relies heavily on their advice. She does not mind what style she has in between because her goal is to have a haircut that looks okay while it grows out rather than being locked to a particular style:

> Probably the best haircuts are ones where you're like, 'What do you think would look best?' and an experienced professional will be able to guide you and say how you could improve it or what might suit your face.

Here, Demelza is dictating both the start point and idealised endpoint. However, she places the in-between stages in the hands of the hairdresser. In this situation, there is a risk of identity going awry or communicating something unintentional in those in-between moments. It is even more important for individuals to have the support of a professional in these moments.

The clients see their role in the haircut as *communicating*, then the hairdresser must *interpret.* There is scope for misunderstanding in this type of negotiation. Only Hazel spoke about this type of

miscommunication. She usually likes how her hairdresser cuts her hair but was unhappy with a recent cut:

> I did have it cut quite short, and he did this really weird thing at the back, which I hated, which is why I'm growing it out. Because he put layers in, and I said, 'Don't put layers in,'… The time after, I was like, 'I'm gonna grow it out, and I don't really like the layers in it'.

Hazel made her dissatisfaction with this cut clear to her hairdresser because she felt he had not done what she wanted. He became 'quite confrontational about it'. She reflects that she should have been more careful with how she worded it and that she might have reacted the same way if a client came to her with criticism of a dress she had made. This is an example of a time when communication has been a limitation on collaborative crafting.

I was surprised that there were not more stories like this in my interviews, as this is a common narrative when I talk about my research in casual conversation. *My hairdresser just does whatever she wants. I asked for this but got that. I told her I didn't want X, but she did it anyway.* The participants in this study tended to have close, relatively long-standing relationships with their hairdresser, which perhaps explains why these types of narratives were less common than in casual conversation.

Slow and Steady: Incremental Changes to Navigate Fluidity

The ability to navigate the ever-shifting landscape of fashion is treacherous, and there is no map, but with hair, at least there can be a guide. Hairdressers act as Sherpas, stepping deftly on uneven ground, climbing the ever-shifting Everest of fashion. The hairdresser provides direction beyond material styling to guide the client through the often conflicting world of self-presentation. In the negotiations, they lead their clients carefully and slowly.

Hazel is not always optimistic about her hairdresser but praises him for slowly making any changes in her hair. He tells her "We're not going to go from having hair here to here. We'll do it in stages," which she likes. She tends to say, 'fuck it' and gets it all cut off, then think 'why did I do that' in hindsight. Her hairdresser's slow steering minimises the danger of this occurring and her feeling of regret.

While supporting their clients to feel in control of their visual identity, hairdressers make small incremental changes. This is a stark contrast to how visual identity is managed through clothing, where the quest for newness, novelty and, importantly, the disposal of 'out of fashion' items (Bauman, 2010) is key. When clothing consumption is seen as a form of self-expression, impulse buying is encouraged to support rapidly shifting identities. Hairdressers encourage the slow and considered movement towards a certain appearance over many months and with the support of

a seasoned guide. Hair, as a material, is limited, therefore, any change must be lived with or slowly grown out over time. This is important because it shows how different advice on fashion might be if resources were the primary concern.

Hairdressers encourage their clients to change their hair in increments. Bev, Danielle and Heather all discussed the need to manage client expectations. They often suggest that the client undertake significant changes in multiple steps rather than all at once. This offers the benefit of letting the client acclimatise to the new style and avoid the shock of a new style before a big event. As Bev notes, "You know damn well it's going to be a shock. And I hate anybody doing anything like that the week before Christmas, or when they're going on holiday, because if they really don't like the hair, it can spoil Christmas or the holiday, you know?" Making incremental changes to the hair allows slower movement and allows the client to change their mind if they do not like it.

Several of the clients told me how much they liked this approach from their hairdresser. Cassie's hairdresser knows that a significant change from blonde to dark brown would not be something Cassie likes: "She knows that going really, really dark for winter might not be the best option and let's try a more ashy tone and then see how you get on." The hairdresser supports Cassie in making incremental changes. Cassie describes her hairdresser saying, "If in two months you like it, then we'll go darker…She gets it. She gets my mental capacity for changes and how sometimes it's best to do it slowly rather than all at once". Cassie sees

this type of guidance as a form of care. Her hairdresser knows her well enough that she will not want a significant change.

During the autoethnographic fieldwork, I experienced steering firsthand. The techniques, subtlety and effectiveness of this differed from hairdresser to hairdresser. Hairdresser 1 was particularly reluctant to lead the interaction. "I pushed for some assistance in working out what to do, but it wasn't there. I could tell that she had no interest in steering me." This young hairdresser had no interest in helping me find myself, she just wanted to do the style I wanted. She felt hesitant and a little disinterested, which is far from the joyous act of co-creation we are led to believe is the norm in hair salons.

Other visits felt more like the stereotype. Hairdresser 2 jumps straight into leading the interaction. As soon as I show any hesitation, she tells me to "leave the rest up to her" (fieldwork visit 2). My lack of direction prompts her to slip further into the role of expert. She can feel that I need someone to offer suggestions and appears to enjoy taking the lead.

The first visit to a new hairdresser is one of the trickiest. I visited each hairdresser twice, which was not long enough to foster a close emotional connection, which really highlights the difficulties. As a new client, I never reached the point where I felt like the hairdresser understood me, my personal style or what I was trying to get across. As a result, the hairdressers were very conservative with the style they gave. The

fieldwork confirms the interview findings that hairdressers prefer an incremental approach, but this has never been how I like to visit the hairdresser. I want to come out new. "I want her to be able to suggest styles without feeling worried that I will hate their hair being shorter… She is still not pushing the length too far" (fieldwork visit 6). I feel frustrated in these moments that I am being given the safest option rather than the best option.

This is demonstrated well by the dyed section of my hair. I am not a stranger to a bright colour, but the hairdressers I visited during the fieldwork were very cautious with the bright section of my hair. I have illustrated these changes over several visits.

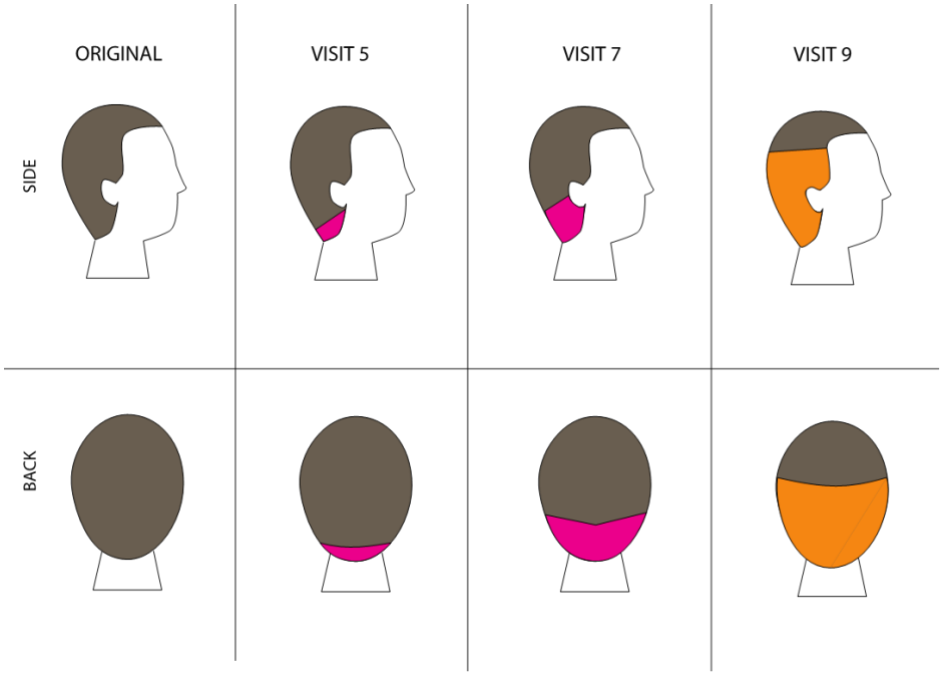


Figure 70 - A diagram showing the development of my hair colour over the course of the fieldwork (2024) Own Diagram

In fieldwork visit 5, I requested something vibrant involving a section of bleach and creative colour. We agreed on a peekaboo at the back of my neck through conversation and negotiation. As someone who has previously had all my hair hot pink, I wanted this to be subtle but visible. The section that she ended up bleaching was very small, and as someone with very thick hair, it ended up almost invisible and rather underwhelming.

During the next appointment, we decided to make it larger and change the flat part to an 'upside-down V-shaped' section, to make the dyed section more noticeable. Although we had agreed this in the first appointment, she did not want to do V-shaped section when it came to time to bleach it; she kept it to a flat section but made it slightly larger. She did not want to go above the ear as this would make it 'look strange' when my hair was tied up. The next hairdresser agreed to bring the bleached section to the front of my hair when I insisted that I wanted it to be visible from the front, not just when it was tied up. Having a bright section of the hair seems like a waste if it is not visible.

In fieldwork visit 9, the hairdresser made the section larger again. Although I hated the copper colour and immediately dyed it red when I got home, I was finally happy with the shape and visibility. The incremental changes that the hairdressers and clients speak positively about have been frustrating and expensive for me. Instead of managing the changes, it delayed me from getting to where I wanted to be.

Outside of the research context, I often get my hair cut because I crave newness. Getting the hair cut or coloured provides a sense of novelty, which makes me feel 'in control' of myself. So, unlike my participants, I do not enjoy the slow incremental changes. I want to undergo a total transformation and experiment with something new. On reflection, that search for novelty is much more important to me than the need to balance and control my visual appearance. This was a clear moment where my experience in the autoethnography differed from the experiences of the participants in the interviews.

Challenges of Negotiation: Relationships, Taste and Age

The final subtheme draws together ideas from earlier in this chapter. In **Challenges of Negotiation: Relationships, Taste and Age** I build understanding of the types of relationships built in the salon and highlight moments in the data where the client and hairdresser are unaligned.

Positioning the haircut as a collaborative endeavour highlights the importance of the relationship between client and hairdresser and allows me to analyse how closeness, trust and (something like) friendship improve the quality and experience of the haircut. I build from existing ideas that closeness, conversation and feminine bonding and trust are

essential to the hairdressers, which have been explored at some length in previous works on hairdressing salons (Cowen *et al.*, 1981; Eayrs, 1993; Gimlin, 1996; Badillo, 2001; Pillay, 2011; Mckeown, 2015; Heinrichsmeier, 2016; McCann and Myers, 2023). I will not spend time re-treading this work but show where my data confirms this common rhetoric. Despite this, my participants seem reluctant to claim friendship outrightly. While it is clear there is closeness and care, there are also moments of discomfort.

Both the stylist and client are subject to the wider cultural forces to which taste, and beauty standards are connected. Negotiations take place with cultural forces as well as within conversations. There is a temptation to romanticise the relationship between hairdresser and client. They can be feminine, intimate, embodied relationships, where lives and stories are shared over the course of many years. However, this is not always the case, even in clients with long relationships with their hairdresser.

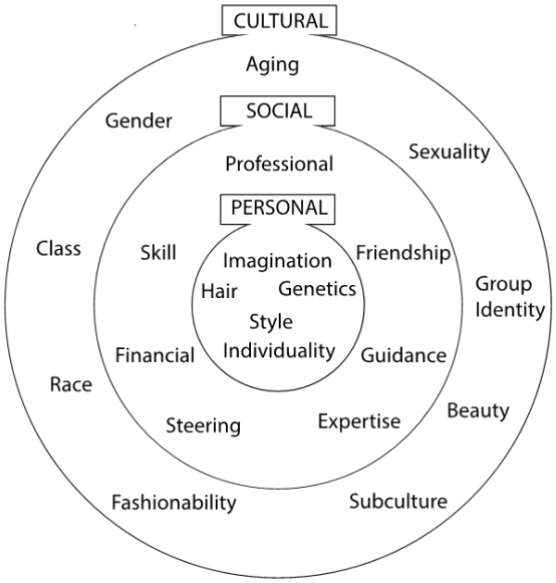


Figure 71 - A diagram mapping of factors in Hairdressing from macro cultural factors to micro personal factors (2024) Own Diagram

While working on the hair and deciding what it will look like, hairdressers are working on the minutiae of identity. We can consider this to be on a micro-scale. Cutting and colouring the hair concerns the personal, individual and small-scale enactments of identity. Their small scale does not make them unimportant. These enactments of identity construction only exist in relation to the macro-view of the wider culture. Will the exact cut of a fringe imply an unintended cultural belonging? Could the exact shade you dye your hair be indicative of a larger trend? What can appear small or personal is, in fact, a representation of wider social movements and culturally ingrained elements. To decide how the hair will look, they must consider how it will be understood in light of wider culture, particularly the ever-changing landscape of what is in or out of fashion.

In this section, I will start by demonstrating the importance of relationships in the salon, and demonstrating how closeness and something like friendship in the salon can be used to improve the haircut. However, an idyllic relationship leading to the perfect haircut is not always the reality. The next section interrogates different ideas about what looks good as a key problem for the hairdressing salon where differences between stylist and client can impede the collaborative relationship. These differences are often small but can have a large impact on the success of the working relationship and highlight the weight and importance of what is at stake in fashioning the self.

To explore this idea further, I will look at how the hair turning grey is discussed throughout the data. This was a particularly pertinent topic of conversation with the stylist because grey hair became somewhat trendy during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the lockdowns, many women were forced to miss their regularly scheduled hair appointments and, as a result, revert to their natural colour. As a result, there was an accompanying movement to 'embrace the grey' with many women becoming used to their natural colour. Grey hair has traditionally been vilified as a sign of ageing or covered as quickly and quietly as possible. Changing attitudes to this marker of age present interesting conflict between unresolved cultural norms and shifting perceptions.

Building Relationships: (Something like) Friendship, Closeness and Trust

A commonly employed stereotype of hairdressers is that they mindlessly ask about holidays to fill a space. While it is true that they demonstrate excellent conversational skills, they are open to more than surface-level small talk and gossip. Bev reflects on this stereotype: "They talk about hairdressers and holidays. We do talk about holidays, but by God, we talk about a lot more things". Bev prides herself on the depth of her relationships with her clients. These conversations function to do more than simply fill time. I will use the data to consider the role that conversation has in building closeness in the salon, then I will examine how closeness and friendship function in the salon. Finally, I will examine the role emotional labour plays and the genuineness of the salon-friendship.

Garzaniti et al. (2011) find that conversations are essential in the salon to make them comfortable and reduce stress level, however they conceive of the interactions as 'commercial friendships'. Holmes (2018) argues against this, believing the interactions are much more than just an economic interaction and become true friendships. When asked why their clients chose them, several of the hairdressers *only* talked about their communication skills rather than the actual haircuts they give. Jess distinguished herself from other hairdressers who just want to chat about soaps and go home: "I'm actually quite invested in my clients. I care about them, whereas some people, it is just a numbering system. I'm not

like that. I'm too attached to everyone". She sees other stylists communicating in a way that she believes is inauthentic and surface-level. She differentiates herself by speaking in a profound, caring manner and showing genuine affection.

Several clients mention that being listened to and remembered is important to them. Cassie explains, "I'm singing her praises because it's taken me so long to find somebody that actually cared, proper listens and cares". Cassie believes her hairdresser cares more than others. Before she met her, she had struggled to find a hairdresser that she believed cared in a convincing manner. Remembering details about the client's life can also be seen as a way of showing that they are listening and care. She is touched by the hairdresser's ability to retain details of her life. After all, "the labour of hairdressing is far more than is demonstrated by the cutting, colouring and styling of hair; it is about care for people" (Barbour, 2023, p. 41).

Lou and Heather confirm that the relationships develop over time, becoming deeper and more personal over time. Both explain that conversation with regulars reaches a greater depth and becomes more like doing a friend's hair. Lou tells me, at times the stylists do not have time to maintain their 'real' friendships, so clients become surrogate friends.

Every hairdresser I interviewed had an example of a long-lasting relationship with a client, often dating back to their training period. For

example, Bev tells me about a customer she has had for 43 years. Kim has a client who waited for her to come back from Australia.

This close relationship changes the consultation stage of the haircut. Lou describes how her approach to 'get a bit of a feel for' a new client because she knows it's a 'big deal' to visit a new hairdresser. "I would probably spend a bit more time putting them at ease, listening to what they've got to say, asking them their likes, their dislikes." A more developed relationship with the client allows her to make more assumptions about what they want, to move the conversation to more personal topics and to streamline the interaction. Similarly, Danielle finds it easier to interpret what they want from their hair.

Not all clients want a chatty hairdresser who is involved in their personal life. The first time Hazel visited Tom, he cut her hair in silence, and she thought, "I'm onto a winner". Over the six years she has been visiting him, they have built their rapport: "I feel like he talks too much now. Sometimes talks about politics or football, and he has frustration within those areas". She has no choice but to listen to his moans and leaves the haircut feeling 'a little annoyed'. When he offers to book her in again, she always says 'yes' despite considering going elsewhere. "It's really silly… I do like how he does my hair, so I suppose that is why I go back to him." It is worth pointing out that this is said with a light-hearted laugh. It is hard to say how sincere the joke is here. While many of the clients say that they like their hairdresser personally, for Hazel, the developing

closeness over many years has made her experience in the salon worse.

Despite being largely positive, there are some moments in the interviews and autoethnographic fieldwork where the depiction of friendship, closeness and conversation in the salon was less than ideal. These are largely absent from other works on hair that tend to romanticise the relationship between client and hairdresser.

Although Holmes says that relationships formed in the salon can be "enduring, genuine and significant friendships" (Holmes, 2018, p. 135), I found that there was a reluctance to use the word 'friend' without any caveats. The hairdressers classified these relationships as 'almost friendships'. They all describe the closeness of these interactions but highlight that it is *not quite* the same as friendship. Heather comes across as the most confident that the relationships she creates in the salon are friendships. Early in her interview, Heather states, "You become friends with these people. Not all of them, maybe, but a lot of them". Later in the interview, she phrases it differently: "They're like friends." She still clarifies that the friendships in the salon have a professional context, which must be observed. The client and hairdresser are engaged in a professional service interaction, where the body of the client is worked upon.

Tom would like for these to be friendships but is aware this might not be the case for all clients. "I'd like to consider my relationship with my

clients as friendships… I completely appreciate that it might not be the same for them and I'm just their hairdresser". It bothers him when clients refer to him as their hairdresser when they bump into him outside of the salon. "Just call me Tom because I am Tom once I shut that door". Tom will act in a professional way in the appointment but wants to be treated "on a friendship basis" if he sees them outside of the salon.

This is mirrored in Lou's interview: "There's definitely some clients that, I wouldn't say you're friends with, but there's definitely you're more familiar with, less formal". Lou is hesitant to use the word friendship but instead describes a closer, more familiar working relationship that becomes more casual over the years: "They do become like friends, I guess. You can spend a lot of time with clients more so than some of your friends to be honest".

The liminal sort-of friendship, as described by the hairdressers, is reflected by the clients that I interviewed. For example, Cassie begins by describing the hairdresser as a friend but finishes a description of their relationship, describing it as a 'sort of friendship': "I would say that we have a friendship. We've bonded quite a bit over the years about certain bits and pieces… She's my sort of friend, I would say." Similarly, Hattie struggles to remember the word "but it's like the in-between a stranger and a friend." They describe a relationship that is fond, close and, at times, goes beyond professional ties. It does not, however, stray into the realm of purely social or leave its professional situation.

Kat is more pragmatic about her relationship with hairdresser Jess. While she feels close to Jess, she is aware that their relationship exists inside a professional/client structure: "I'm a client, but whilst that is true, it's as close to a friendship as you could get." Despite finding Jess extremely easy to talk to, Kat is respectful of the boundaries that their type of relationship requires. Although she will communicate with her hairdresser in casual and friendly manners (like a text), she makes sure she does not expect a response outside of their working time.

In the autoethnographic fieldnotes 'conversation' was a topic for much anxious handwringing. It is clear, on reflection, that I used the quality of the conversation in the salon as one of the markers of the visit's success: hairdresser's conversational skill, finding common ground, and making me feel at ease. I was struck by both the importance of conversation to my comfort and the speed with which trust can be built with the aid of good conversation.

As each salon was only visited twice during the fieldwork, meaning there was limited time for forming relationships. This choice allows the fieldwork to shed light on the beginnings of relationships, which is a perilous point in the negotiations. Going to a new hairdresser is filled with a cocktail of worries both about the skill of the hairdresser and the sociality of the experience.

Frequently, in the fieldnotes, I worry about whether I will have anything in common with the stylist. However, I do not find much 'in common'

with any of the stylists, no shared history or passions. It becomes clear that the hairdresser's skill socially is more important. For example, stylist in the second and third fieldwork visit stood out as the most instantly likeable. She was over an hour late for both of my appointments. While this is the type of behaviour that could undermine a new professional relationship, her unflappable attitude and blanket chirpiness made it impossible to hold on to ill will.

I was struck by how quickly the feelings of safety and trust are fostered in some of the salons. Notably, it wasn't that much connected to the quality of the haircut, but more to the quality of the conversation. The final hairdresser I visited dyed my hair in the way I was least happy with. She suggested a copper colour on the bleached section, which I went with but hated so much I went home and dyed it immediately after my appointment. I look back on her as a hairdresser I would visit again. This is counterintuitive, but I liked her as a person, the conversations and the salon enough that I would prefer to visit her over some of the others, which highlights the impact of the social elements of the appointment. The social skills of hairdressers are often disregarded and assumed to be innate skills of women, whereas they practice the trio of aesthetic labour, emotional labour and bodywork (Holmes, 2010b). These skills must be developed, practised simultaneously and seamlessly.

Here, I will focus on Hochschild's (2012, written 1983) concept of emotional labour, which is often applied to hairdressing (Sharma and Black, 2001; Cohen, 2010b; Harness, Jamie and McMurray, 2021;

Flanagan, 2023). Hairdressers, like the flight attendants in Hochschild's study, are engaged in emotional labour: they must manage both their own feelings and those of their clients. Emotional labour involves the strategic concealment of internal emotions, and the performance of an emotional front designed to comfort, reassure, and uplift. As a type of host, the hairdresser is to make the client feel not only aesthetically improved but also confident in themselves and emotionally supported.

Hosts in hotels engage in different levels of emotional labour: surface, deep and genuine (Haritha, Siva and Sania, 2022). The everyday emotional labour of hairdressers, are clients are similarly performative, emotionally charged, and dramaturgical. Like hotel hosts, hairdressers must engage in surface acting (offering smiles, small talk, and reassurance, even when they feel tired, stressed, or emotionally distant). Deep acting emerges when stylists consciously try to cultivate warmth or enthusiasm, for the client's choices. In many cases, stylists may even perform genuine emotional labour, forming authentic bonds with regular clients over time. These emotional strategies are central to sustaining client satisfaction and loyalty, but they can also be personally taxing.

Emotional labour can be emotionally draining. Heather can become worn out by having the same conversation multiple times a day. As much as the sociality of the job is seen as a positive to the hairdressers, there are times when they do not feel social or in the mood to talk to other people. Danielle tells me "Sometimes, if you're having a hard day, you have to leave that behind you." She shares a story about a colleague,

> She was going through some stuff at home, and we've got a curtain that blocks off our kitchen area at the back of the salon. And she would stand there, and she'd be like 'Right. Compose' [breaths out] 'This is like my curtain to my stage'. She's like, 'I'm going to go out there, I'm going to act like everything's fine. Because I'm here to work.'

It is easy to relate this to Goffman's concept of the backstage (1959), where he separates social interactions into those that are performed for the benefit of others (onstage) or those that are conducted in private (backstage). In this example, we can see the moments where Danielle's colleague steps onto the stage and begins to perform a service interaction role. They are expected to be a source of emotional support and advice and a good listener to their clients, but in this emotional work, their emotional needs become secondary.

When it feels like emotional work is neglected, the appointment can feel awkward or uncomfortable. However, the hairdresser does not take sole responsibility for this. In this dialogic interaction, both parties are contributing. In fieldwork visit 5, the conversation falters. "We chat a little but neither of us seems to get much joy from it". I worry that she dislikes chatting and spend the appointment feeling a little on edge. In hindsight, I reflected that I may have been giving out the energy that I did not want to talk. I had had a stressful morning before this haircut, and brought this bad mood with me into the appointment. In her interview, Heather told me she can judge whether her clients are in the

mood to talk or not. Part of the emotional labour is judging what type of emotional work the client needs.

The idea that hairdressers and their clients have close relationships is not revolutionary. It was visible in the examples in the introduction and many previous works on hair. The point this section makes that is new, is that this closeness is used to give the clients a better haircut. As a generalisation, closer relationships make steering easier.

I also examined the emotional labour of hairdressers in the salon, who must work as hosts, to create relationships that are neither purely friendships nor purely paid interactions. It is important to remember that emotional labour is a dramaturgical performance as I move on to examine moment's where things go awry in the salon.

What If We Have Different Ideas About What Looks Good? Navigating Taste and Conflict

Closeness between client and hairdresser is used to ensure the perfect cut, but it doesn't always work that way. What 'looks good' is culturally learnt. While this is true for both clothing and hair, it has been written about more frequently regarding clothing. Bourdieu believes that fashion is used to express cultural distinction (1986). Taste is a mechanism to demonstrate social class distinction. Taste is not only about a 'personal' idea of what is good but about signalling conformity. Michaels (2015)

adds that the hierarchies of taste are more fluid and subtle than in Bourdieu's time. She highlights how much easier it is for her participants to demonstrate the 'hip' omnivorousness if they have been socialised into wide cultural experiences associated with middle-class life.

To avoid the pain and embarrassment of fashion exclusion, the individual must become dependent on the aesthetics of their peers. "Clothes show belonging to the group, but also signalling the *submission* to the taste of the group" (von Busch, 2020, p. 126). Von Busch tells us that "at the heart of fashion there is a conflict that we most often encounter in the colloquial terms of 'in' versus 'out', or in the many forms of expressing what is 'cool' versus 'uncool'" (von Busch, 2020, p. 12). In the previous section, I looked at hairdressers as the arbiters of fashion, steering the clients towards what 'looks good'. But what happens if their ideas of what 'looks good' are misaligned with those of the clients?

Hairdressing salons are places where the hair is worked upon, and normative feminine beauty standards are constructed. It can feel that if you are entering the space without meeting those standards, you are an outsider to the space. Kat's alternative style sometimes makes her feel out of place in hairdressing salons. She tells me that it is "nothing extreme. Not one thing I could look back on, but it's just a vibe". She perceives an atmosphere of having to have your hair done before you visit the salon. She reflects on what might cause this discomfort:

> Looking back to early adulthood, not wanting to go into a salon, not knowing what to ask for, not having

> the relationship with the hairdresser, not being able to explain what I wanted, not being able to say I didn't like it, feeling judged, feeling like I didn't fit.

Far from the idyllic vision or co-production of identity, the picture Kat paints is one of fear and discomfort. She makes it clear that she does not feel she belongs in these spaces and highlights multiple reasons for this. She lacks the knowledge to enter those negotiations and communicate clearly and doesn't know how to articulate. She knows that having a relationship with the hairdresser would aid these negotiations, but it is harder to develop when you are already feeling excluded from a space. She feels like she lacks agency in the relationship to say when she does not like something and feels like she is being judged. In this quotation, Kat mentions many of the factors that I have raised throughout this thesis but are not aligned with the opinions of hairdressers who seem to see this process as smooth.

If we see the hairdresser as an arbiter of fashion, there must be judgment. There is a necessity to hierarchise the aesthetic sensibilities, so that hairdresser can lead the client. Hairdressers are devoted to the culture of beauty, "for them, beauty…is not only one method of enacting femininity, is the essence of femininity" (Gimlin, 1996, pp. 511–512). Gimlin calls them priests and their clients the congregation. Kat does not worship at the altar of mainstream beauty. The standards of traditional or hyperfeminine beauty are not appealing to her. Instead, she conforms to a subcultural vision of beauty that not all hairdressers comprehend.

She must negotiate this difference or find a new stylist who shares the same understanding.

Kat explains why she feels uncomfortable: "In hair salons, it seems like there's a certain type of woman in there… is it that they all look the same?" She is describing a normative view of beauty that many hairdressers conform to. To Kat, this is not aspirational but makes everyone seem the same: "You have to look a certain way or makeup on and preened and looking Instagram ready?" She does question her preconceptions: "Maybe this is a bad perception on my side." What Kat is responding to is not simply personal bias — it is the emotional and embodied impact of being in a heteronormative space that privileges a narrow ideal of femininity. Her discomfort stems from feeling out of place in a setting where particular gender performances are normalised and others are made to feel deviant, excessive, or invisible.

In visiting multiple salons during the autoethnographic fieldwork, I experienced something similar. This was very dependent on the salon and the stylists in it. In salons with a higher price point and a more glamorous aesthetic, I felt underdressed and pressured to perform femininity in a specific way. In an environment where the hairdressers and their clients are very 'made-up', it is difficult not to compare and feel like you are coming up short or being judged.

Hazel says that she likes to look natural and doesn't buy into the wider trends of the beauty industry either. As a result, Hazel finds it

challenging to visit the hairdresser or have someone else do her makeup:

> I couldn't think of anything worse because they don't know you. And they're gonna do it how what they think looks good. But that inevitably is probably not what I think it looks good…maybe if you're in that world, there might be a specific thing that they're into. Or like styles that they're into, or they think that people like that sort of thing but that probably isn't what I like.

This is similar to Kat's perspective. Both Kat and Hazel are professional women in their 30s who work in jobs related to education and can be assumed to be middle class. Hairdressers tend not to attend traditional universities but to train in vocational courses or apprenticeships instead. Hairdressing is a job which is mainly performed by women (NHBF, 2023), which is reflected in the stereotypes of the role. The job is seen as having an "emphasis on feminine care, nurturing and beautification" (Hall, Hockey and Robinson, 2007, p. 541).

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that there is still much stigma around women trying to be beautiful, and this extends also to include women who perform beauty work. Gimlin (1996) explains the stereotypes of hairdressers seen in popular media. "We find frequent – rarely flattering – images of women who immerse themselves in beauty culture, who make a life out of that culture and attempt to bring the culture's practice and belief system to the lay masses" (p. 510). They are

often casual workers or self-employed and can be widely considered working class (Lindsay, 2004), although I do not know if this is how my participants would self-identify. Hairdressing is described as a pink-collar worker (Cook and Kapp Howe, 1979), a care-oriented role that is often considered 'women's work'. In both interactions, a middle-class woman worries that she may not be represented in the way that she would like by a working-class woman. This points to the ambivalence of the hairdresser's status. When functioning perfectly, they may be a cultural intermediary and part of the fashion industry. However, when cracks appear, they may quickly be demoted to being perceived as a feminine 'manual labourer'. They quickly shift from a craftsperson to an agent of subordinate, unendorsed taste.

The stereotype of the judgmental arbiter of beauty is not just experienced by the clients. Jess, who is Kat's hairdresser, experienced pressure to conform to the stereotypical aesthetic in her previous salon: "They basically want the stereotypical hairdresser… They told me things like you need to dress differently. You need to start doing this with your hair. Have you ever thought about getting filler?" Jess was told to change her appearance to fit better into the salon. Her experience of the industry is that it is very cutthroat and 'bitchy'. She faced expectations of a specific performance of aesthetic labour (Mears, 2014) that aligned with the vision of the salon, which was so unpleasant for her that she changed salons.

In Gimlin's study (1996), she identified that none of the hairdressers identified with it. "There's a low-class image and I know that I don't fit it." Instead, they "consider[s] hairstyling a respectable occupation rather than the "low-class" job portrayed in its image" and a "calling" rather than an occupation" (Gimlin, 1996, p. 511). Bauman (2000) believed that the class system was no longer relevant within liquidity, instead preferring a conception of a stratified society based on the winners and losers of capitalism. There are still clear classifications, even if class in its traditional form has dissolved.

For the hairdressers, they sometimes have clients who are adamant that they want a style that the hairdressers do not like. Heather will do what a client wants if it will make them happy, even if she thinks it's a terrible idea. She gives the example of a specific client who wanted hair inspired by a Union Jack for Brexit, to which Heather's response was:

> "You what?!." When she had finished, the client asked her if she was going to take photos for social media. "I took the photo; obviously I've put it nowhere because I'm not putting that anywhere. I don't want loads of people coming in for Brexit hair. It was awful, but she was over the moon."

There is a difference in personal taste and perhaps political alignment. I cannot speak for Heather's political alignment, but she does not appear to be pleased to be associated with this type of explicit statement of

support. She laughs through the story and shakes her head in apparent disbelief.

In rare cases, they may admit they got this wrong, like Bev. She tells me a story about a client who was adamant that she wanted to cut her shoulder-length hair to a two-inch spikey feathered cut. Despite being initially reluctant, afterwards, she was impressed by how good the cut looked. Looking back on the before and after photos, she thought, "Oh, my God, this [gestures to shoulder length] is doing nothing for you." It sometimes takes them following the advice of the client to see the vision. Despite her reluctance, Bev ended up preferring the new cut.

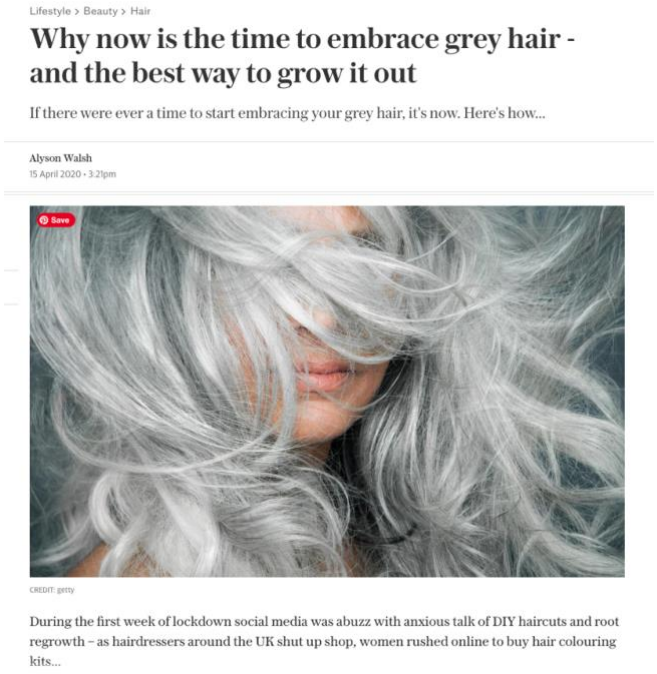
To summarise, taste is traditionally seen as a classed interaction (Bourdieu, 1986), while Bauman argues class is not relevant within liquidity, there are clear still classified interactions. The work of women, particularly within the beauty industry, has been viewed as lower class work and therefore purely surface. Taste is still clearly relevant when selecting a hairdresser, to support you in your aesthetic choices to signify your distinction, requires a shared aspiration. The times when the taste levels do not align are experienced as judgment, discomfort and feeling like an outsider. The hairdressers will sometimes go against their personal taste for the happiness of the client.

Stigma Around Ageing and Greying: Empowerment and Othering

Nowhere in the data are the challenges of negotiation move visible than when grey hair is discussed. The complex the steer, feminine beauty/aging and maintenance becomes overtly clear here, and therefore, greying hair provides one interesting example of how the invisible but powerful structures affect women navigating their hair and identity. This example does a particularly good job of highlighting the differences between abstract thought and practical experience by using the lived experience of the ethnography in comparison to the interviews.

The interviews with hairdressers were conducted at a time when 'embracing the grey' was in the cultural zeitgeist. Lou talks about the trend of increased clients being willing to "embrace the grey": "They are a lot more open to that. I think there used to be a lot of stigma for women, especially." She attributed this attitude change to the Covid-19 lockdowns but was grateful that it had facilitated such a shift in preconceptions. "Obviously, grey is lower maintenance, and people have had to go longer in between colours and whatnot." Her clients think, "If I've lasted this long, I might as well try". Many women were forced into confronting their own greyness during the lockdowns, where regular visits to the hairdresser to cover roots were not possible. Grey hair situates older people as 'outsiders' and may trigger discriminatory actions (Ward and Holland, 2011). As more women were forced to 'embrace' the grey or became 'empowered' to stop dyeing it, it became

more normalised to see grey hair. The process of embracing the grey was active and often publicly performed on social media, as opposed to just growing out the hair, which is passive and could be seen as just leaving them or failing to upkeep the body.



Lifestyle › Beauty › Hair

Why now is the time to embrace grey hair - and the best way to grow it out

If there were ever a time to start embracing your grey hair, it's now. Here's how...

Alyson Walsh
15 April 2020 • 3:21pm

Save

CREDIT: getty

During the first week of lockdown social media was abuzz with anxious talk of DIY haircuts and root regrowth – as hairdressers around the UK shut up shop, women rushed online to buy hair colouring kits...

Figure 72 - Screenshot of an article from the Telegraph showing the attitude towards grey hair in (2020)

Lou sees it as part of her role to encourage her clients to keep and embrace their grey if they are on the fence about whether to dye it. She tells them, "don't colour it. It's beautiful. Go for it. Embrace the grey". I question why it is better to 'embrace' the grey. It is less work and money for the client to upkeep, but this is not good business for Lou. In the plainest reading, we could believe that Lou wholeheartedly believes that grey hair looks more beautiful than dyed hair. While this is possible, it is difficult to imagine that the cultural stigma related to ageing, femininity and bodily maintenance was simply erased during the lockdown. I think it

is more likely that Lou is actively working to combat those existing structures and let her clients feel like they have the choice of whether to do it. Pushing the other way gives permission to do the otherwise unforgivable. Often, when women have been dyeing their greying hair to their natural colour for a long time, they will have no idea what their hair would look like if they let it grow. The hairdresser's support can help them navigate the fear of the unknown.

Generally, the hairdressers I spoke to were very positive about the hair turning grey. Danielle told me excitedly about a retired client whose hair looks 'cool', with a humbug swirl in smoky purple. It is notable that the 'cool' grey hair she talks about has creative colour in it. To borrow Pountain and Robins' definition, Cool is "a *permanent* state of *private* rebellion" (2000, p. 19, original emphasis). The client's hair is described as cool here, not because of its innate greyness but because of the client's defiance of ageing. The client has taken control of her grey and made an intentional choice to display it, an act of defiance, in this case of the 'unwritten rules' of ageing.

It is usually the role of the hairdresser to guide the client to an appropriate style for their age and gender and control: "the regulation and disciplining of the older body as well as its enhancement" (Ward and Holland, 2011, p. 289). Danielle's client could be described as having an inappropriate style for her age, which is where some of that coolness comes from. Studying older people's hair, Ward and Holland found that "divisions are created between those who feel compelled to 'defy age'

and those who reject this anti-age ideology" (Ward and Holland, 2011, p. 303). Danielle's client appears to blend these two conflicting perspectives. Bits are dyed (covering ageing, rejecting 'graceful' ageing), and bits are left natural (happy to show signs of ageing). Although this goes against some ways older women are expected to conform, it also shows a level of care and control for their appearance. The body is still disciplined while embracing a fashionable approach within their demographic.

Tom tells me about a client who did not want to 'embrace' her grey. The client told him, "I feel like shit. I feel boring. I feel old". Tom's approach is to offer a playful style to combat the negative feelings of the client. "The word fun … is a really good word to use. And language is really important in our job actually, using the word fun is quite exciting for people when they just feel a bit, a bit shitty about themselves." Tom is careful to pick words that steer the client towards a style that negates their negative feelings. "With that particular client, I'm hoping she left feeling a little bit more excited and more confident within herself to not feel old, having that bit of panelling felt a little bit trendy." This is as much about how the client feels in the hair as how it looks, and Tom utilises linguistic negotiation to help that feeling.

The oldest stylist I interviewed, Bev, had a slightly different opinion of greying. This could be because she has the most experience in both hairdressing and ageing. It could be that she is speaking less guardedly or is echoing social media less. Maybe she's just entrenched in her

thoughts. “People who've got naturally white hair, it looks beautiful, but it can be a bit ageing. And I think then they've got to have a bit of a trendy style to really pull it off. Just really advising people on boosting something up a bit.” She sees the changing of hair as something which must be carefully navigated, not just ‘embraced’ without serious thought. She is honest about trying to negate the effects of ageing. She is explicit about the balancing of greyness with something trend driven. Understanding trends requires being in the know about fashion and looking towards newness, which can balance the ageing effect of greying hair. Bev is explicit about this balancing, whereas the other stylists still encourage it (through creative colour, for example) but do not name exactly what is going on.

Of the clients that I interviewed, Kat casually mentioned that she had some greys that never ‘fazed me much’, particularly as she regularly dyes her hair. None of the other clients had or admitted to grey hair and dyeing it, except for Hazel, who thought it was an essential part of her identity. Hazel’s hair started to grey at the age of 18, “and now it’s really going for it”. Around that age, she began dyeing her hair at home. “It actually wouldn't hide the greys. So, I ended up with darker hair, and the greys standing out more, so that looked really bad.” After a brief stint dyeing it herself, she tried a professional hairdresser to maintain the grey. “[I] was like, 'I just can't afford to do this' and hated it kind of when it grew out, needing it done, but I just couldn't afford to do it. It wasn't sustainable for me.” The choice to grow out her hair wasn’t a moment born out of ‘empowerment’ or powerful femininity, but a choice

taken out of her hand by financial situation and frustration: "Over time, I've grown to love it, and I think it's me… I've got streaks kind of chunks that are pretty much white now… I don't think I'd ever dye it now. I think it's just part of me." It is worth noting that Hazel's experiences with her greys had difficult and uncomfortable moments, which is not the sunny way that greying was sold to me by the hairdressers. She now enjoys sitting outside of normative beauty standards.

> The great thing is that it's this forbidden thing, it's not a done thing that our culture in society tells us that you shouldn't have grey hair. It's a bad thing. And I quite enjoy being like, 'Actually, it can look really good'.

Going against the grain of what *should* be done gives Hazel a sense of individuality.

Of all the participants, Hazel has hair most like my own. I have also been greying since I was 18. My dark brown hair makes it very noticeable when the silver strands sprout. For several years at university, I operated a no-tolerance policy on the greys, plucking them as soon as I saw them. This soon became impossible as they overtook my hair.

I will share a story from my fieldwork that illustrates the complex and sometimes emotional experiences of navigating greying. For context, at the time of the autoethnographic fieldwork, the ends of my hair were bleached but dyed brown, the last remnants of the hot pink hair I had had in lockdown. The roots were my natural mix of brown and grey. At

the first salon I visited, the hairdresser suggested a toner to bring an orange tone to my hair. She told me it would come out brighter on the greys and look like copper highlights. I was adamant that I did not want the greys flattened. On the day, she did not have the right colour in stock and instead dyed my hair a richer brown than my natural colour. The greys were completely invisible, but I held hope it would fade like she had said. It did not.

Then, at the next salon, the hairdresser "suggests dyeing all of my hair, the brown sections too, so I get a 'better overall look.' I think she is referring to the grey roots which are noticeable now." The brown shade ended up looking almost black, and although it looked nice the day of the appointment, as the greys started to grow out, I hated how my hair looked. "Instead of grey hairs being a choice and part of my chosen look, they became something that was ruining what I was trying to achieve. I hate the way that grey roots look." I repeatedly write how much I hate it.

> I think something is going on with control and choice. If I choose to have grey hair, that decision is active, and I take ownership of it. Even having dyed hair is an active choice. What I do not like is being in the in-between. I am out of control. I cannot stop the greys growing. I think it makes me look lazy or like I haven't bothered to look after myself.

This was a big emotional response. While being very aware of the power of hair, I had not expected to experience something during the fieldwork

that had such a notable impact on my mood. I found myself frowning at myself in bathroom mirrors, worrying about whether people were judging me and finding ways to hide it with scarves or headbands. This type of insecurity about my hair is not usual for me. This is particularly interesting while thinking about control of the body and, more importantly, showing others that I am in control. The claim of empowerment also ignores the maintenance of dyed hair. If you have covered grey hair, you could feel tied into upkeep or risk the horrible growing out.

My emotional response is also interesting as it is out of line with what the hairdresser said. The idea of grey hair being empowering is commonly repeated, but I have found it to be more complicated than that. Although I like my grey hair, there are complicated feelings attached to it around ageing and being looked at. In the reflections, I consider why having grey hair felt so important to me. "I have always taken, maybe too much, pride in not being worried about my hair greying. It was, I think, a way to prove I was not vain." I held my grey hair as a mark of being easy-going and hoped it looked cool. "As I've reached my 30s, I can feel my relationship with the grey hair shifting". It is no longer as easy to feel indifferent to 'looking older than I am'. It is much easier for me to be 'unbothered' by grey hair the younger I was. The grey looked like a statement; a friend once told me, 'You have some very shiny hairs' instead of assuming my hair is greying. To feel young and borrow the signifiers of old age is very different from feeling 'older'. Grey hair becomes riskier than it was before, and thus, more emotion is attached

to it. This reveals the issue of age to be governing hair decisions throughout a person's life. The qualities of 'beauty' discussed earlier are matters of youthfulness. Again, youth is not expressly an issue, because it is assumed by most of the participants.

First, I established greying hair as socially unacceptable in line with hegemonic beauty standards. Then, I demonstrated that hairdressers spoke positively and encouraged their clients to 'embrace' the grey. They pose 'embracing' the grey as an 'empowering' action. This is, in part, because the interviews were conducted during lockdown, where greying hair was a topic of media focus and became a 'trend.' The gender rules for hair were relaxed during the lockdown; while women could not leave their homes (Pinheiro, 2020), they were (briefly) not forced to appear (von Busch, 2020). I believe that the hairdressers do believe it is empowering to choose grey hair, but it is notable that none of them have grey hair.

Despite championing grey hair, the hairdressers still try to make their clients feel 'trendy' and younger. I suggest that thinking about grey hair and navigating it are very different experiences. The examples the hairdressers gave of 'cool' grey hair were the hair of older women who had also made some choice regarding creative colour or intentional pieces. I propose that this is more about looking intentional.

Greying is just one example of the point where negotiations become tricky, but it is a particularly interesting one, as it emphasises what is

hidden underneath what people say. This is another moment where the stylists act to enforce the rules of fashion and beauty, but using soft power, communication and persuasion.

Conclusion

This chapter deals with negotiations in the salon, which draws together the ideas from the previous two chapters. Both identity and maintenance are crucial factors, that both the hairdresser and client must navigate. Negotiation is a term that deals with both the minutiae of conversations and relationships and macro-cultural factors.

Negotiations take place between two actors, the hairdresser and the client. They both view this interaction differently but work together and are both involved in crafting the hairstyle. While the clients are present in the process of *collective crafting* the hair, they do not always understand the feasibility of what they are trying to achieve. They may have ideas, but they lack the skills to know whether things are achievable. *Collective crafting* is a concept developed from von Busch (2013) through the work of Sennett (2012). Von Busch's ideas about craft can be applied to hairdressing, which is also a craft process (Holmes, 2018). Collective craft understands that crafts take place in collective discussions but are often enacted through a single set of hands. This explains the client's involvement in the haircut, where they feel they are active agents in the process, but through dialogue rather than physical interventions. Some

clients are willing to submit to the will of the hairdresser fully, but this is less common and closely tied to the build-up of trust through long-lasting and regular visits.

The hairdressers I interviewed all saw themselves as steering their clients, which they either did in a 'blunt' or 'tactful' manner. Significantly, I examined what they were steering towards and found the hairdressers to be arbiters of the rules of fashion, using their developed aesthetic knowledge to grant the clients safe passage through the tricky terrain of fashion.

The guidance that hairdressers provide takes place through close relationships formed through repeated visits and resulting in trust. While these qualities are well documented in other works on hair, there are many moments in the data that show this to be less than idyllic at times. I question whether true friendship is possible, or even desirable, in a professional relationship where money exchanges hands. Closeness and understanding the client's needs increases the hairdresser's ability to steer and how receptive the client will be.

Hairdressers, positioned as both allies of the client and arbiters of beauty norms. They must balance their social and caring role, guiding clients with practical constraints of their hair and the less tangible constraints of the state of fashion. Fashion, in liquidity, "issues attacks that systematically undermine self-esteem, pushing individual subjects/projects to continuously seek new aesthetic achievements

simply to keep up, as they will otherwise sink" (von Busch, 2015, p. 71). He argues that the fashion industry must keep consumers unhappy and engaged in an 'aesthetic civil war'. To navigate this war, hairdressers gently steer their clients slowly and incrementally, so the changes are experienced less violently. They deal in confidence, cheerleading the client to traverse the battlefield, which appears calm but is littered with unseen landmines.

After discussing the processes of negotiation, I situated them in examples of what occurs when the tastes of the client and hairdresser are misaligned, resulting in tension during the negotiations.

Finally, I used the example of greying to dip further into the negotiations to understand beyond what was explicitly stated by the participants. Although the hairdressers speak positively about grey hair, during the autoethnography, I still experienced hairdressers were keen to cover the grey. I propose that although they report to encourage individuality, they still work – unconsciously perhaps - on the side of the 'fashion police'.

Previous works define the hairdresser as a help giver (Cowen *et al.*, 1979, 1981; Wiesenfeld and Weis, 1979), but this usually means the hairdresser listens to problems and gives life advice. I found that the hairdresser also gives help acting as a guide, or costumier, guiding the individual to a cohesive performance of self. Gimlin (1996) stops just short, calling hairdressers fashion guides.

This guidance can be explained through identity theory. In the formation of the 'social self,' a concept from symbolic interactionism, "selfhood is relational, arising through social interaction at the micro level" (Scott, 2015, p. 11). Scott highlights that the self is always in a state of becoming and that the process of becoming happens in relation to others. Fashioning through hair is one of these micro-level social interactions, where a lot is said through small changes to the surface of the body. The hairdresser can act as a translator where the clients explain what they want and the hairdresser check that it is communicating what they want it to and tweak the meaning if needed.

The hairdresser is more literate in the language of beauty and visual communication. They try to stop the clients from making mistakes with their presentation of self. The participants express their trust in their hairdresser, often describing their ability as magical. Some identify their hairdresser's role in supporting them to navigate their own identity as reducing their feelings of anxiety, for example Hazel's hairdresser who stops her from making mistakes and regretting an impulsive cut. This is noteworthy because it is a stark contrast from how self-presentation through fashion is usually navigated. The alienated fashion consumer can feel lonely in their quest for identity (Rippé, Smith and Dubinsky, 2018). They are trying to manage their sense of self through clothing but doing so alone, alienated and unsupported. While individuals may be consuming and dressing alone, dress is regulated "by social inflictions, often by the smallest signals of approval or rejection" (von Busch, 2020.

p. 84) keeping a guise of sameness. Those choices made individually have social implications.

This chapter relies, largely, on theory from the previous two chapters but brings in ideas about crafting and collaborating to explain the interaction between the client and the hairdresser. Collective crafting is applied to the data to see craft as a shared, dialogic and embodied practice that often occurs through a single pair of hands. The process of collective craft happens through the conversations in the salon, which also act to build trust through repeated visits.

Besides zooming in on the interactions in the salon, this chapter also highlights where these negotiations can go awry, despite both parties' attempts to negotiate through conversations, steering and collaboration. There are plenty of moments where hairdressing to build a fashionable identity can go wrong. This is instrumental in understanding what is at stake. It cannot be overstated that identity is very hard work and that within liquidity, we, women in particular, are supposed to look effortless. By explaining how fashionable identities can be navigated through relationships and closeness, it is possible to think about how clothing choice and dress could be navigated more clearly with the support of a professional. Although it is hair, not clothing, it can help to understand fashion's power and how it can be navigated more easily with the support of a guide.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Conclusion

Summary of Research Findings

This PhD set out to reveal new knowledge about hairdressing and fashionable identity within Bauman's liquid modernity. This research offers an original perspective by investigating hairdressing salons as a site of identity work, where other studies often focus exclusively on the role or work of the hairdresser or the materiality of hair. Through a blend of interviews with hairdressers and clients alongside autoethnographic fieldwork in salons as a client, the study has examined the seemingly everyday practice of getting a haircut.

To frame the PhD's overall contribution to knowledge, I will revisit the two core research questions used to frame the study:

How does hair contribute to fashionable identity, differently from clothing?

How do clients and hair stylists negotiate fashionable identities in the salon?

While the delineations are not absolute, Chapters Four and Five primarily answer the first research question, framed around the common platitude in works about hair that hair is both a 'fashion accessory and body part'.

In Chapter Four, I identified that all the participants viewed their hair as an integral part of their identity. While there is literature that explores the significance of Black women's hair (Mercer, 2000; Cheang, 2008; Robinson, 2011) and historical perspectives on hair/hairdressing (De Courtais, 1973; Fletcher, 1995; Bryer, 2000; Powell and Roach, 2004; Kwass, 2006; Harper, 2011; Nolan, 2018), individual fluid identity is largely overlooked in the study of hair. My study addresses the gap by framing the choices participants make within liquid modernity, where nothing is stable and previously defined categories have been dissolved. To my knowledge, there are no other works that apply Bauman's thinking to hair or hairdressing.

Some participants still view their hair as a visual symbol of group belonging or distinction. For example, Kat actively considers presenting her subcultural 'alternative' identity when dying her hair bright colours, particularly when attending festivals where she will be surrounded by other 'alternative' people. She holds on to the importance of counter-cultural identity, in a time where the boundaries of identity have become less firm.

Others felt that their hair was more closely connected to their identity as an individual. Instead of considering cultural meanings, they described

how their hair contributed to their individualised sense of self, using terms like ‘it’s so me’ or ‘I feel like myself’. From these differing ways of framing hair, I have inferred that although all the participants vocalised a connection between hair and identity, what they meant by this differed.

One significant idea that came across in the interviews was that a haircut can make the participants feel ‘more like themselves’. How can this be? Somehow, appropriately cut and styled hair enhances or intensifies an individual's sense of selfhood, rather than simply signalling an interior reality externally. Feeling more like themselves was equated to feeling stable by the participants. In a liquid modern society, a stable sense of selfhood is prized; however, it is not always achievable. I found that a haircut was often seen as a significant step towards stability and feeling more impactful than the instability of both liquid modern life and the hair itself.

This chapter largely demonstrates the ways in which hair is used to contribute to a fashionable identity in a manner similar to clothing. It is necessary to illuminate the similarities between hair and clothing, before clearly delineating the differences. Hair is an essential factor in the participant’s everyday presentation of self. While there is a definite overlap in the mechanisms by which hair and clothing communicate fashionable identity, this chapter highlights two key differences. Firstly, changing the hair is more laborious than changing the clothing. The amount of work required adds stakes to dressing the hair. If you make a ‘mistake’ in clothing, reinvention is simply a shop return, or an outfit

change away. However, a similar mistake with hair, may require another expensive salon service, changing your hairdresser or months to grow out. Secondly, as hair is part of the body, the response to it is emotional in a way that differs from the response to clothing. Changing one's hair was often seen as a means to change one's identity directly, and therefore, the self. Moments where the haircut did not go as expected were intensely emotionally felt and had to be lived with, whereas clothing can be disposed of. There is no swapping outfits for different events with hair. Decisions around the hair should be carefully thought out as they must be lived with through all aspects of life.

In Chapter Five, the focus shifted to the relationship between hair and the body. Much of this chapter is framed around beauty in liquid modernity, and although fashionability and beauty are not synonymous, they are closely interrelated. Becoming beautiful, or conforming to the ideals of beauty, involves styling the body to express identity and engage with trend drive cultural ideas of appearance.

I explained that hair functions differently from clothing because of its constant growth. Both hair and clothing require a level of maintenance; they must be washed and can become damaged. While clothing degrades from the moment of purchase, hair constantly regenerates. As it grows, it requires regular upkeep just to look the same. Upkeep happens both in the salon and at home between appointments. Unlike clothing, which once purchased is fairly materially stable until disposal, hair demands ongoing, often mundane labour to manage it. What may appear obvious,

but is important, is that a fashionable haircut is achieved through managing what is already part of the body, whereas fashionable clothing, requires materials outside of the body.

Chapter Six specifically addresses the second research question, seeking better to understand the interactions between the hairdresser and client. To answer this question, I examined the negotiation from both the perspective of the hairdresser and the client, before highlighting moments where the negotiations go awry.

Hairdressers negotiate using 'steering'. This is an often invisible form of power, where they employ everyday diplomacy, to guide the client towards a fashionable hairstyle that will 'suit them'. This can be done through tactful steering or a more blunt approach and is tailored to the individual situation and client. I questioned what the steer was guiding the client towards and found that the hairdressers were largely steering towards established white, heteronormative standards of beauty, where thinness and youth were prized. By practicing the steer, hairdressers become arbiters of existing 'fashion rules'.

The clients saw their role in their haircut as a collaborative undertaking. I apply literature on craft (Sennett, 2012; von Busch, 2013), which has previously been used to understand the work of the hairdresser, to understand the shared work required to achieve a fashionable haircut. The collaborative nature of the haircut was essential for the clients to enhance their sense of self and liquid identity.

Closer relationships between hairdresser and client aid communication and allow for a more successful steer. Once the hairdresser has understood the client, they are better placed to find the style that is 'right' for them. Relationships are formed through repeated visits and talking about subjects outside of the hair. This is a form of emotional labour for the stylist who may experience genuine emotions towards the client but often stop short of calling them real friends. Taste is another crucial factor in the negotiations, when the haircut goes wrong it is often due to communications around taste being difficult to navigate within these negotiations.

Finally, I used the example of greying hair to illustrate how negotiations of a fashionable identity occur. This showed that although the hairdressers report individualised service and empowerment, often the negotiations in the salon return to well-trodden ideals of fashionability and enforcement of beauty ideals that overlook the lived experience of maintaining hair and the body.

Contributions to Knowledge

Critical Consideration of the Lived Experience of Fashionable Identity within Liquid Modernity

My work contributes to the understanding of the lived experience of fashionable identity within liquid modernity. While Bauman rightly emphasises the overall picture of the never-satisfied hunter, contingency and anxiety, I found that women styling their hair seek stability and tend to narrate their experiences in terms of the temporary stability achieved rather than the instability fundamental to the conditions of liquid modernity.

This thesis answered Baker Jones' (2023) call for the application of Bauman's writings to the study of fashionability, by applying Bauman's writings on liquidity to understand data from interviews and autoethnographic fieldwork better. By demonstrating that navigating fashionable identity through hair is inextricably linked to liquidity, the empirical data demonstrate a mismatch between how Bauman expresses the conditions of modernity and how the participants express the process of negotiating it.

Bauman's emphasis on the ceaseless and indeterminately unfinished nature of identity within liquidity was especially useful in my analysis, for two reasons. Firstly, it reflected the unfinished nature of hair, which may be styled but immediately begins to grow out, which is reminiscent of how Bauman describes the experience of liquidity: "identities are more like the spots of crust hardening time and again on the top of volcanic lava which melt and dissolve again before they have time to cool and set" (Bauman, 2000, p. 83). Here, the hair acts as a metaphorical stand-in for the experience within liquidity of temporary periods of feeling resolved.

My participants saw the islands in the lava, while seemingly unaware of the lava itself.

Secondly, it allowed me to think through the participant's experience of liquidity. They likened their experience to being on a journey, aiming for an idealised endpoint, where their hair and fashionable identity are stable. Bauman (2010) described this as 'the hunt', where individuals enjoy the chase for identity but never make 'the catch'. Even if they 'catch' stable identity for a second, this is just the moment of inertia before the pendulum swings again in the opposite direction. Bauman's writings paint a picture of freedom of expression within liquidity as a terrible burden to the individual. He focuses on the compulsion, being forced to appear, constantly having to reinvent, not even to progress, but just to keep up.

The complications surrounding navigating liquid identity, became clear in the interview data. On the one hand, the participants clearly engage with the constant effort to monitor, upkeep and control their hair. On the other hand, they do not appear to experience this as a negative. The language the participants used presented their work on their identity as a journey, a trip from point A to point B. I have found that many people use their hair to try to create a sense of stability. They felt that working on the hair was a means to remain more solid in their sense of self, rather than a tool for fast-paced re-negotiation and re-invention. The data suggested that the way the participants experienced liquidity was not always aligned with Bauman's depiction of it. Instead of endlessly

requiring ‘progress’ in “an insomnia full of nightmares of ‘being left behind’” (Bauman 2007, p.10), the participants instead saw cutting their hair as a journey towards stability, or at times, that they had achieved stability.

While the theoretical perspective on fashioning the self within liquidity and the participants' recollections were not always aligned, Bauman’s perspective remained central to the analysis. This work was novel in its application of Bauman to hair, which illuminated hair’s undetermined nature and the impossible aspiration of the individual to use hair to find stability of self. The application of Bauman’s theories to empirical data related to fashioning is somewhat rare (McRobbie, 2002; Cross, 2021).

This approach contributes to the understanding of fashioning through hair, highlighting how its connection to the body and, therefore, the sense of self gives people control over their fashionable identity. This is an important avenue for discussion because it creates a greater understanding of navigating fashion as an often overlooked element of everyday life. This thesis added to the knowledge of liquidity by applying it to the specific case of hair and my data shows that individuals who are in the midst of these reconfiguring flows may experience them as more solid, in the micro, than when viewed in the macro.

It is important to recognise that Bauman acknowledges the attraction of stability in liquid times. He discusses the allure of stability as the dream of the liquid individual (Bauman, 2007). He describes reinvention as a

route to a greater sense of stability. "The overwhelming reason to 'set sail' again was an aversion to what *had been* done, rather than the attraction of what *might yet be* done…"(2007, 96). Although Bauman spends much of his extensive writing considering liquidity, there are moments where he also considers stability. Fashioning hair has been a fitting way to explain where people are perpetually seeking a sense of having arrived. This thesis highlights that authors of fashion studies who use Bauman would benefit from recognising that although Bauman's perspective on liquidity is true, it may not be how people experience it themselves. This is particularly pertinent for ethnographers to interrogate further the things their participants say.

Defining Effortlessness as an Idealised State and Unachievable Goal in Relation to Hair

I have found that women simultaneously put effort into their hair and try to conceal that they have put effort into their hair. While effortlessness is often studied in exceptional instances of cool and glamour, for example trend-setters or celebrity images, **this study considers the concept of effortlessness through examining how ordinary women do their hair and finds a precarious *moral* balance between trying and not trying, which they are compelled to manage in the context of contemporary femininity.** While this has already been discussed in relation to glamour, cool, and beauty, I have found that due to hair's

connection to the body and identity, any failure to achieve these two seemingly oppositional states simultaneously was perceived as a moral deficiency.

Theorists have talked about something similar to effortlessness before. We might assume that effortless means simply making no effort; however, I have found that this is much more complicated than it first appears. Effortless is implicated in theories of coolness (Pountain and Robins, 2000; Haselstein, 2013; Brown, 2021) and glamour (Gundle, 2008; Thrift, 2008; Dyhouse, 2021), both complex forms of prestige.

This trickiness around ideas of effort and effortlessness emerged from the interviews with clients. They expressed that they wanted to appear like they had 'tried', but not too much. They demonstrated a careful balance between effort and lack of effort at play in their everyday hair care. While they wanted to maintain control of their unruly bodies, it was important to them that they did not appear overly concerned about their appearance. I use the word effortless, in this case, not to mean the absence of effort but the concealment of effort.

The author who comes closest to discussing effortlessness in this way is Thrift (2008). He describes one of the pillars of glamour as 'calculation without appearing calculating' (p. 15), which must appear effortless. He goes on to say that hair certainly required effort. Before applying the concept of effortlessness to celebrities, who use 'technological advances' in hair (perming, bleaching, hairdryer, shampoo) create new surfaces

and 'colourful materials', which celebrities have employed as part of their glamorous celebrity sign system (Thrift 2008). For celebrities, the air of effortlessness is used to distinguish them from non-celebrities, separating them from the masses. He describes the air of effortlessness as calculation, but it is perhaps more easily understood as a lack of anxiety.

The type of effortlessness discussed by the participants is clearly influenced by Thrift's notions of glamour, the participants aspire to the otherworldliness of celebrities. The data shows that the participants are clearly worried about looking like they have put too much effort into it. I have identified two major reasons for wanting to look like you have not tried too much. The first is out of modesty. Long-running ideals of femininity dictate that beauty is most trustworthy, and therefore aligned with moral goodness, when it appears naturally given, rather than worked on. During this research, I have been faced with several female academics who tell me with a smile and a laugh that they cannot relate to my project because they 'just don't care about their hair'. Of course, they are always well presented, with clean hair. While this is not quite the same as a modest attitude, it is a denial of effort to align oneself with a particular social group or characteristic. In this case, serious academic thought is pitted against a frivolous interest in beauty.

The second is coolness. A laidback attitude towards appearance signals a cool affect. Consider Hazel's short, brush-and-go bob, which always looked stylish, but required regular trims to keep it that way. In this

case, the effort may be minimised on a day-to-day basis; however, greater effort is required in picking the right style and ensuring it is maintained well.

It is also important to note that, unlike, Thrift's effortless celebrities, the women in this study were largely unsupported once they left the salon. This thesis illuminates the concept of effortlessness within everyday hair styling; therefore, this finding adds to the understanding of how fashion and glamour occur, through hair, in everyday life, letting us know that Thrift's story is incomplete. My participants must also balance not setting themselves too far apart.

I also found that their attempts to present their identity through hair, while also concealing the labour, were further complicated by their emotional connection to their hair. Further than an inert object, hair is a part of them. Their bodily connection to their own hair caused frustrated feelings, where deficiencies in hair are equated with moral deficiencies of self, such as laziness. As a result of these frustrations, people can react by 'abusing' their hair in an attempt to make it conform to something different from what it is.

While this study looks at hair, this type of performance of effortlessness is not limited to hair. Concealing effort appears to be a typically feminine pursuit and could be applied to many other areas related to beauty and feminine work. This type of concealment is present in fashioning through

clothing, domestic work, performances of femininity on social media and feminised crafts, to name a few.

The Potential of 'The Steer' in Making Navigating Liquid Identity Less Alienated and Anxious

This study proposes the notion of 'the steer', with which hairdressers help their clients traverse the unstable terrain of liquid fashionable identity. The steer is supportive, social and, because of the material limitations of human hair, critically incremental. This demonstrates how, with professional support, ordinary women can and do live their fashionable identity and perform their aesthetic labours within the limits of renewable natural resources and with less alienation and anxiety. **This contributes new knowledge about how fashion's challenges to the stable self are already being negotiated with the support of trained professionals, promoting a less alienated and anxious form of engaging in both self-fashioning and aesthetic labour.**

This finding builds on the previous literature in several ways. Firstly, it queries the existing ways relationships in the salon are discussed, suggesting the ways that hairdressers and clients are more complicated than previously treated. Secondly, it builds upon Holme's (2013) classification of hairdressers as craftspeople, situating the haircut as an act of 'collective crafting' that demonstrates how collaborative efforts to

style the hair are managed through close relationships. Finally, it highlights the importance of incremental changes in hair, a previously underdiscussed phenomenon, which helps enhance the participant's sense of stability in a contingent liquid world.

Other studies (Gimlin, 1996; Yeadon-Lee, 2012; Holmes, 2018) have addressed friendship between clients and hairdressers; they can be seen as going beyond 'paid friendships'. However, my study finds that hairdressers were reluctant to simply call the relationship a friendship, instead qualifying with phrases like 'something akin to friendship' or 'like friendship'. It became clear that although these relationships are long-running and close, they differ from traditional friendships. The hairdressers must act as hosts, performing significant and sometimes taxing emotional labour to manage the fluid identity of the client best.

This study also attempts to explain the purpose of closeness in the salon through the lens of liquidity. Although the hairdressers were reluctant to claim a pure friendship, but explained that over repeated visits, their closeness with clients aids them in giving them the best hair. By getting to know the clients personally, hairdressers can understand what style will suit them and their lifestyle. As guides to fashionable identity within liquidity, it is the hairdressers' role to handle the instability. They serve as guides over unstable grounds, while sharing the burden of neoliberal femininity. This finding adds an extra dimension to the existing sociologies of work in the salon.

Gimlin (1996) defines one of the hairdresser's roles as guiding their clients through beauty and fashion trends. Hairdressers use their expertise to ensure the face appears narrow or to conceal grey hair. She believes they use their expertise to create a sense of social equality between themselves and their clients. I found that hairdressers steer their clients, not just towards what is feasible, but also towards a style that would 'look good'. I found that they often referred to styles that suit specific face shapes, which is an enforcement and amplification of the existing rules of beauty, with a soft touch. Clients are used to navigating fashioning alone and alienated, so doing so with a guide removes some of the risks of getting it wrong. In addition to helping their clients, they also enforce the unwritten rules of beauty and fashion. Largely, this relationship had a positive impact which reduced the anxiety around fashioning the self.

While navigating fashioning with the support of a professional removes some of the risk attached to 'getting it wrong', new difficulties emerge. I also found that relationships in the salon were not always rosy. Eayers (1993) discusses the risks hairdressers take on, which are mostly around managing dangerous chemicals, but also more subtle risks of managing the client physically and psychologically. The non-physical risks are referred to casually, without much interrogation. Eayers does not go as far as to consider the risks associated with identity work and managing the client's sense of self in the salon.

There is a tendency for previous work to present the relationship between client and hairdressers in a positive light, for example, Holmes' (2018) assertion that trust and embodied touch are used to create relationships with the features of friendship. Other works about hairdressers often overlook the tensions. My thesis acknowledges the difficulties of navigating fashionable identity with the support of an external party. The clients and hairdressers might not be working towards the same goal as they have different ideas of what looks good. Still, there were moments when the client did not appreciate the steering of the hairdresser.

The steer does not purely happen *to* the client. It is part of an embodied, intimate interaction between client and hairdresser, where the client feels their own agency and importance. Without this collaborative element, the steer would not work. I apply the concepts of 'embodied intimacy' (Holmes, 2018) and 'everyday diplomacy' (Sennett, 2012) directly, using them to frame the collaborative and negotiated nature of salon interactions. What the salon context reveals is how these dynamics unfold through a combination of emotional labour, clashes of taste, and bodily maintenance. While I do not seek to extend these concepts theoretically, I show how they operate in bodily labour within a materially embodied space that has not previously been central to discussions of intimacy or craft.

Being steered by a hairdresser is not an antidote to the requirements or the instability of liquidity. It does not fix the problems the women in the

salon experience navigating liquid identity. However, it does help them to feel like they are supported and therefore experience a sense of stability. This research has demonstrated that largely the participants relish this support and it works to minimise anxiety and fear around fashioning. Within the aesthetic civil war that von Busch (2015), hairdressers do not remove the threat of battle, but help them to navigate the battleground safely. Hair is not the only frontline in fashioning, raising the question whether other cites of the aesthetic war, especially clothing, could benefit from the support of a guide.

It also sheds new light on the idea that people are not necessarily seeking self-invention through fast fashion. Bauman's framing of the swinging pendulum of fashion is often experienced, instead of trying to become new constantly, but as trying to tread water and stay still in a swelling ocean. This appears to be particularly acutely felt at changes in life stage and in relation to aging.

Reflections and Limitations

Reflections

When I began this research project, I was driven by the urge to understand ways to navigate fashionable identity, that do not involve the consumption of material clothing, could help better understand clothing

consumption. One research question was aimed at exploring what fashioning through hair could teach us about the endeavour to live more sustainably, with less, through clothing. As the project progressed, I decided not to major on a full exploration of this angle. Although the interview schedule was intended to facilitate discussion about clothing alongside hair, the participants did not make any spontaneous connection between their hair and clothing consumption practices. A full response to this research question was beyond the methods and timeframe of this study.

While this is not the focus of the study, I have found that hairdressing provides a model of a supported, incremental, close, emotional, embodied means to fashion the self. This is a stark contrast to the alienated, fast-paced, and detached way we consume the majority of clothing. It can feel insurmountable to make meaningful change to the negative side effects of an industry driven by cultivating the need for more.

What has become clear, in answering the other two research questions that hair is navigated differently from clothing, as the focus is on slowly and steadily navigating fluid identity. The support and emotional care of the hairdresser allows the clients to work with their identity through a limited and (slowly) renewable material. This is most apparent in material about the steer and the desire for stability rather than self-reinvention.

Methodologically, this study was designed originally to answer the research questions, however, it had to be redesigned in response to changing attitudes and regulations around the COVID-19 pandemic. The fast-changing safety and legal requirements, as well as concerns of participants, caused me to be reactive, rather than implement my existing plan. Although it led to a creative and interesting methodological approach, changing direction during the project is not ideal.

Limitations

This PhD has faced several limitations. These are generally related to either the research design or the scale of the project. A major challenge during the research was examining the unseen. I had, perhaps naively, expected the participants to draw more connections between clothing and hair without being explicitly questioned on it. I asked them where their fashion consumption habits changed after they changed their hairstyle, however, the participant found this very difficult to answer. While I tried to question around this during the semi-structured interview, it became clear that the participants did not connect their hair and fashion as clearly as I did.

This led me to question what is explicit and implicit within the data. The lack of direct comparison by the participants of clothing and hair, did not mean that fashion was absent from the data. The participants made

connections between who they are, their cultural influences, changing trends, and their liquid identities.

While I was able to spotlight the implicit moments where fashion exists in the data, on reflection, I would have changed the questions I asked the participants. As the project developed, the focus became clearer and the shortcomings in the interview schedule became more apparent. Ideally, I would have asked more explicit questions, for example, *do you see a connection between your sense of fashion and hair?* Or question further on fashion style and trends before leading into the conversation on hair. This approach could have led to more direct data and would have shown the extent to which the participants felt this connection.

On reflection, there was also a missed opportunity to ask direct questions about fashion and beauty. At the time I conducted the interviews, I had not fully explored the literature on beauty. I was focused on bodily maintenance and Foucauldian notions of control; however, as I carried on, it became clear that it was not possible to discuss this without having to navigate beauty as a concept. Once I had analysed the interview data, the absence of beauty became apparent. Ideally, I would return to the interviewees to ask some follow-up questions, but this was not within the timeframe or the ethical approval of the project.

While it would have been interesting to gather data from the participants about beauty and hair, I believe that there can be as much said in the

absence. It was interesting that the participants avoided the topic of beauty, which I have reflected on in the body of the thesis. This limitation shifted the focus from the empirical data on beauty, to exploring the literature to explain the absence.

Most of the interviews and autoethnography in this study present the views of white, European, middle-class women, in their 20s and 30s. Hairdressing salons are still widely racially segregated, with most salons in the city centre catering to a hegemonic clientele. Although this group is largely representative of the clients in the salons, I based this research in, they are not representative of the wider population. The findings are certainly reflect the limited demographic that this study explores. Expanding this study to wider demographics on a larger scale would provide a more inclusive understanding of how race, class, and cultural context shape experiences of hair and fluid identity.

The findings do not attempt to generalise the experience of the participants within their hair salons as universal; rather, they are presented as qualitative insights to inform further research and exploration. A similar study conducted with a different demographic group, salon type or geographic location would have yielded different insights.

Autoethnographic methods are a particularly subjective method, relying on personal reflections. An iterative, reflective practice was employed to

identify bias and critically evaluate the fieldnotes. Triangulation with interview methods aids the rigor of the study. The autoethnography allowed a deeper critiquie which would not have been achieved with the interviews alone.

Further Work

As I have expressed above, this study reflects the experience of a single group of people in a single city, from a single demographic, at a moment in time. While the study made no attempt to be transferable or generalisable, it would be productive to repeat the study with different demographic groups.

Bauman's liquidity has provided a critical lens to view contemporary identity performances. This work answers Jones' (2023) call to apply Bauman at a deep level to understand fashion. This framework added nuance and was particularly helpful when exploring the implicit meanings in the data. I suggest that this theoretical framework could be extended more broadly to fashioning. Clothing consumption is implicated by liquid modernity as much as hair is.

Beauty developed to be an important element of this thesis, which is often left unexplored in work on fashioning. It must be foregrounded in work on hair because of hair's rootedness in the body, however it is further applicable to all areas of fashioning. I have highlighted the participant's attempt to conceal the effort they put into their appearance.

This builds from existing understandings of coolness and glamour. The concept of effortlessness is worthy of further exploration and application to other feminine performances. This finding is applicable to practices of feminine fashion and beauty and more generally to labour women attempt to conceal. For example, feminine performances on social media, work in domestic spaces and beauty practices such as spot patches.

The steer was a particularly interesting finding. This was a key difference between fashioning through hair and clothing. In further work, this concept could be applied to other forms of fashioning to cultivate a more nurturing route to the performance of self and the formation of fronts. It is particularly interesting as a less lonely, and more considered fashioning process. Fashioning with professional support holds potential for fostering smoother, less anxious navigation of identity – which is not limited to hair. Early indications show this could have implications for fashion retail looking to foster more responsible consumption including styling, personal shopping. Audiences have reacted positively toward being steered, it is conceivable that this approach could be applied to the quest to reduce fashion consumption. I raise the question: *What would it feel like to choose clothes with the same level of care that we receive when visiting the hairdresser?*

This study found that women seek stability in liquidity through their hair. Often the changes they make are not a quest for newness or reinvention, but an anxious attempt to stay the same. The quest for stability through fashioning is worth considering in relation to clothing. *How do women use*

clothing to feel stable within liquidity? It is relevant and timely to review ideas about fashion anxiety from a liquid modern perspective.

In Summary:

Whether or not we want it, hair grows from the top of our heads unbidden. We use in the presentation of self, fashioning the hair to communicate to others who we are. I found that hair is a slow way to fashion the self, where changes must be negotiated, implemented, and then lived with. Slowness, guided through incremental changes by the hairdresser, helped the participants feel stable in the wake of liquidity.

The hairdressers steer their participants through the treacherous terrain of self-presentation, towards an aesthetic that feels stable. However, in doing so, they often act to enforce the unwritten laws of fashion and beauty. This study provides new understanding of how fashionable identities are formed through hair, with the expert support of a hairdresser.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Participant Information Sheet

Negotiating fashion and identity through hair and the salon: implications for sustainability and fashion

Document Type: Participant Information Sheet
Researcher Name: Elsa Ball
Interview – Stage One

Invitation and Purpose
You are invited to take part in a research study looking at hair stylists and their clients. You will be asked about the hair, identity and relationships in the salon. The study is being conducted by me, Elsa Ball, a doctoral candidate at Nottingham Trent University's School of Art and Design The project is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). Please read the following information carefully before you decide whether or not to take part. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Why have I been asked to participate?
You have been approached about this study because your professional or personal opinion is considered relevant to the study.

Do I have to take part?
Taking part in this research is voluntary. If you would prefer not to take part, you do not have to give any reason. If you change your mind at any point, you should contact me. Up to 2 weeks after the interview date, I can guarantee withdrawal from the study. If you withdraw after this point your data may be retained as part of the study

What will taking part involve?
I will ask a series of questions about hair, identity, and relationships in the salon. The interview will take place in MS Teams and last 30-60 minutes. I will record the interview on MS Teams, with your consent. This allows me to accurately reflect what has been said.

How will the data be used?
The interview will be used to inform my thesis, and potentially following journal articles and presentations – which will be publicly available.

How will my confidentiality be protected?
I will ensure that you, anything you say, your workplace, and clients will not be identifiable from this research. Video will be recorded via MS Teams. Immediately after the interview the file will be converted to audio only and the video file will be destroyed. The audio file will be transcribed (written out), with any names or identifying information removed. You will be given a pseudonym (fake name) during the research. A key connecting your real information to the pseudonym will be stored securely during the research, which will only I can access. This allows linkage between this interview with later research stages, if you chose to participate. Data will be stored on NTU secure servers and only members of the research team will have access to anonymised recordings, transcripts and observation notes during the project using their NTU login details.

Any quotes that I use will be fully anonymised, which means that they cannot be linked to you, your workplace or clients in any publications, thesis or following reports. Fully anonymised data may be made available to other researchers after the end of the project. Confidentiality would only be broken if there is a risk of harm to you or someone else. In this instance, I am obliged to report this information to the relevant agency that can provide assistance.

What will happen to my data during the study and once the study is over?
NTU will be responsible for all the data during the study. Once the study is over, interview audio recordings, any identifiable information and pseudonym key will be destroyed. Fully anonymised data may be made available after the study is over. This will allow anyone else (including researchers, businesses, governments, charities, and the general public) to use the anonymised data for any purpose that they wish, providing they credit the University and research team as the original creators.

Negotiating fashion and identity through hair and the salon: implications for sustainability and fashion

Document Type: Participant Information Sheet
Researcher Name: Elsa Ball
Interview – Stage One

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?
While I do not foresee the content of the interview to be upsetting or personal, there is a low risk that sensitive topics may come up. Please know, you will not be under any pressure to answer questions or talk about topics that you prefer not to discuss, and you can choose to halt the interview and withdraw at any point.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
There are no direct benefits of taking part although some people enjoy the opportunity to share their experiences.

Legal Basis for Research Studies
The University undertakes research as part of its function for the community under its legal status. Data protection allows us to use personal data for research with appropriate safeguards in place under the legal basis of public tasks that are in the public interest. All University research is reviewed to ensure that participants are treated appropriately, and their rights respected. This study has been approved by Art, Architecture, Design and Humanities Research Ethics Committee. Further information can be found at: https://www.ntu.ac.uk/research/research-environment-and-governance/governance-and-integrity

Who can I contact if I have any questions or concerns about the study?

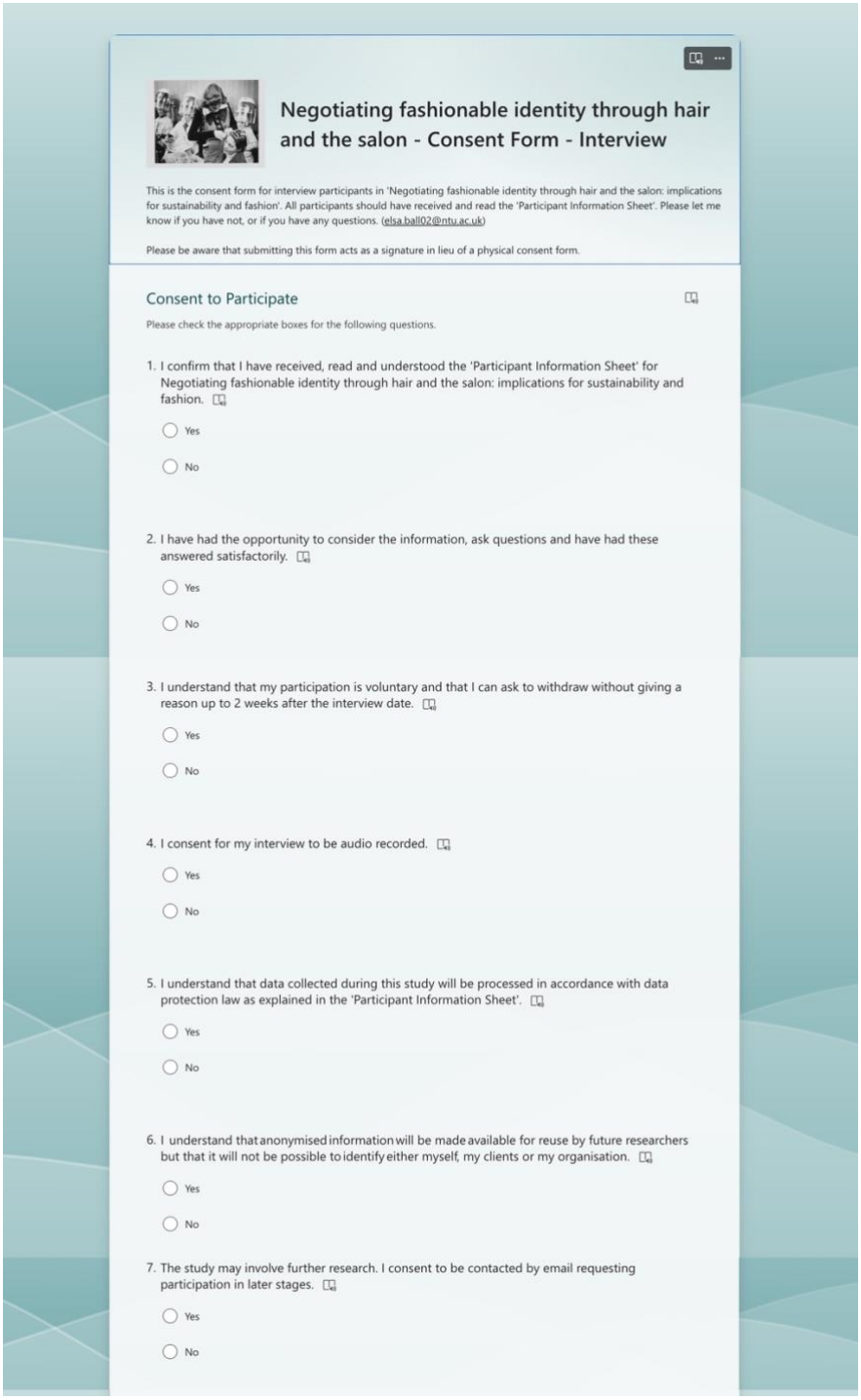
You should contact the Data Protection Officer, Tracey Landon (DPO@ntu.ac.uk), if:	**You should contact the Chair of the REC if:**
• you have a query about how your data is used by the University • you would like to report a data security breach (e.g. if you think your personal data has been lost or disclosed inappropriately) • you would like to complain about how the University has used your personal data	• you have concerns with how the research was undertaken or how you were treated

Contacts for further information:
Elsa Ball (Researcher)
N0030969@ntu.ac.uk
07951845?1

Vanessa Brown (Director of Study)
Vanessa.brown@ntu.ac.uk
0115 848 8454

Thank you for taking the time to read this information. If you consent to take part in this project, please complete the Informed Consent Form.

Appendix B - Consent Form



Negotiating fashionable identity through hair and the salon - Consent Form - Interview

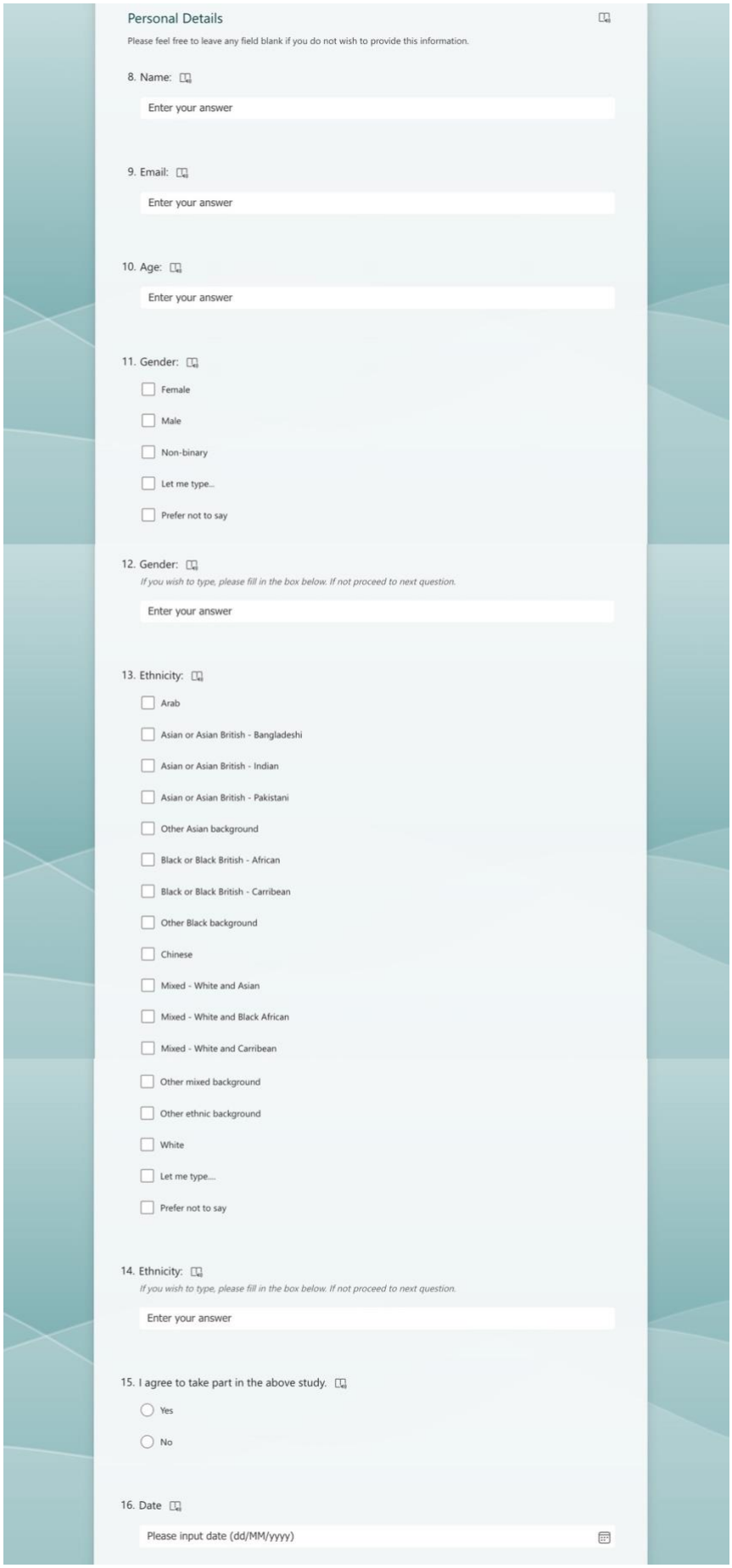
This is the consent form for interview participants in 'Negotiating fashionable identity through hair and the salon: implications for sustainability and fashion'. All participants should have received and read the 'Participant Information Sheet'. Please let me know if you have not, or if you have any questions. (elsa.ball02@ntu.ac.uk)

Please be aware that submitting this form acts as a signature in lieu of a physical consent form.

Consent to Participate

Please check the appropriate boxes for the following questions.

1. I confirm that I have received, read and understood the 'Participant Information Sheet' for Negotiating fashionable identity through hair and the salon: implications for sustainability and fashion.
   - Yes
   - No
2. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
   - Yes
   - No
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can ask to withdraw without giving a reason up to 2 weeks after the interview date.
   - Yes
   - No
4. I consent for my interview to be audio recorded.
   - Yes
   - No
5. I understand that data collected during this study will be processed in accordance with data protection law as explained in the 'Participant Information Sheet'.
   - Yes
   - No
6. I understand that anonymised information will be made available for reuse by future researchers but that it will not be possible to identify either myself, my clients or my organisation.
   - Yes
   - No
7. The study may involve further research. I consent to be contacted by email requesting participation in later stages.
   - Yes
   - No



Personal Details

Please feel free to leave any field blank if you do not wish to provide this information.

8. Name:

Enter your answer

9. Email:

Enter your answer

10. Age:

Enter your answer

11. Gender:

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary
- Let me type...
- Prefer not to say

12. Gender:

If you wish to type, please fill in the box below. If not proceed to next question.

Enter your answer

13. Ethnicity:

- Arab
- Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi
- Asian or Asian British - Indian
- Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
- Other Asian background
- Black or Black British - African
- Black or Black British - Carribean
- Other Black background
- Chinese
- Mixed - White and Asian
- Mixed - White and Black African
- Mixed - White and Carribean
- Other mixed background
- Other ethnic background
- White
- Let me type....
- Prefer not to say

14. Ethnicity:

If you wish to type, please fill in the box below. If not proceed to next question.

Enter your answer

15. I agree to take part in the above study.

- Yes
- No

16. Date

Please input date (dd/MM/yyyy)

Appendix C - Interview Schedule (Hairdressers)

Negotiating fashionable identity through hair and the salon: implications for sustainability and fashion

Document Type: Interview Schedule 2 (Hairdressers)
Researcher Name: Elsa Ball
Interview Time: 30-60mins

Introduction:
Introduction to the interview to establish repoire and put the participant at ease

Researcher to introduce self, the project and format of the interview. Reiterate ethics and acquire informed consent.

Gather personal information – Name, contact details, the business that they work for, position in that business, working background, age, gender

Entry questions to establish repour and put the participant at ease
How did you get into the hairdressing career?
Can you tell me about a typical day at your job?
Tell me about hair… What is it like working with it?
What are your favourite/least favourite parts of the job?

Main Interview:
Researcher to explore themes related to the research questions in more detail

Managing the expectations of the client
Can you tell me about a time that a client has asked for a haircut that doesn't suit them?
How did you manage that situation?
How do you think clients feel after receiving a haircut?

Interactions with clients/relationships
Can you tell me about the client you have had the longest?
How would you describe your relationship with your long-term clients?
What sort of things do you talk about with clients?
Why do your clients choose to see you rather than another hairdresser?

Transforming/managing fashionable identities
Can you give me a specific example of a transformational hair cut you have given?
What do you look for to give a client a haircut that suits them?
How much input do you have in choosing what the hair looks like?
What is your favourite style to cut?
Tell me about the tools you use to do your job…

Conclusion:
Finish the interview with some wider questions to wrap up

Is there anything else you'd like to add?
Is there anything you thought I'd ask today that I haven't?
Have you got any amusing anecdotes, about hair, that you would like to tell me?

Thank participant

Appendix D - Example Transcript (Hairdressers - Lou)

Elsa Ball 00:05
So, could you start by telling me just saying your name and where it is you work?

Lou 00:10
So my name is Lou. And I work at the Hidden Valley, which is a salon in [suburban Nottingham].

Elsa Ball 00:19
Okay And how did you get into hairdressing?

Lou 00:24
Erm, probably is a bit of a long story actually, I've always worked with Botanica, which is the brand that the salon works with. Urm, when I was at school, I worked with Botanica sort of part time after school during the holidays, etc. And then long story short, urm, I ended up leaving um the salon because I eventually went from working in a retail environment to a - sorry, my battery's just turned loose - to a salon. And then I kind of was continuing my studies, went to uni, quit uni and went back to the salon full-time with a view to, sort of, figure out what I was going to do with my life and then ended up leaving the salon and realising, actually, I want to do hair. So yeah, I kind of, didn't take the conventional route into hair.

Elsa Ball 01:27
And how long ago was that?

Lou 01:29
Um, so I've been doing hair for about 13 years now.

Elsa Ball 01:35
And can you tell me about a typical day at work?

Lou 01:38
Um, most days are usually, um fully booked with clients, to be fair. Um, and that can vary from colour clients, cutting, gents. It just is very varied in our particular salon, um I do cutting and colouring, so it can be completely varied. It's usually about an eight hour day, on average. And yeah, like I say, most of the time, I'm lucky enough to be fully booked, you know, the majority of the time.

Elsa Ball 02:18
Yeah. And what are your favourite things about being a hairdresser?

Lou 02:24
I love the contact and meeting new people, like I really enjoy, I'm a people person. So I love that aspect. And the creativity of the job is really important to me as well. Um and I just loved the variety really. I love seeing my clients, like my regular clients over the years, as well and like building up that relationship. Um, but yeah, I suppose the main thing for me is just having that freedom with the creativity and just meeting a real variety of people.

Elsa Ball 03:00
Yeah, what do you think are the most creative aspects of it?

Lou 03:06
Prob-, Again, it can vary. Urm, for me personally, at the moment, I would say, I've feel like I've got more creativity within the colour, um, element of the job. Urm, yeah, there's definitely, I think, a bit more scope at the, with that, in terms of transforming people, you know, with the colour aspect of things, but just generally speaking, it's just a nice varied creative job really so and a lot of people do put their trust in you and give you a bit of a free, free rein a lot of the time when you've built up that rapport with people.

Elsa Ball 03:45
Do you have clients who ask for your opinion?

Lou 03:49
Yeah, and I'm quite honest. [laughs] I'm very honest, in fact, urm yeah, I will be completely honest, if I if I don't think it's gonna work, or if I don't think it'll suit them. Or if they're on the fence about

things, I'll be the first to sort of encourage if I think it's the right direction to go in as well. So I'm quite an honest stylist really. I don't, don't sit on the fence really.

Elsa Ball 04:12
Do you think people like that about you?

Lou 04:15
Yeah, I definitely think, I mean, I think with hairdressing, generally speaking, you do gel with people more than others, and I'm not everyone's cup of tea. But I think the majority of the clients that are regulars for me come and see me because part of my personality. I don't want that sound conceited, but I do think that's definitely a pull. But like I say, I'm not everybody's cup of tea as well, on the same, same breath.

Elsa Ball 04:44
Yeah, it's a two way street, isn't it?

Lou 04:46
It is

Elsa Ball 04:50
So one of my questions was going to be 'Why do your clients choose you?', but do you think that's fully personality based or Are there other things?

Lou 04:58
I think regulars, it probably is to do with personality and I think they're most like what I do. Urm, I think on the flip side, if it's a new client wanting to book in with you, sometimes it will be, what level you're at, how experienced you are. And they will be like, 'Oh, I just want to be with someone that's the most experienced or the middle of the road'. And so that definitely plays a part in how they book an appointment and who they book an appointment with. Urm, again, I think it just depends whether it's a regular client or someone that's new to the salon.

Elsa Ball 05:32
Mmhmm. And with, if you're seeing a regular client or someone new, are there different ways you'd go about talking to them? And...

Lou 05:40
Oh, yeah, definitely. Like, with regular clients, you're sort of building up a rapport. And I mean, there's some clients that I've been doing for years who you don't even really go into much detail with consultation, etc. Because the majority of the time, they're just put in, you know, their trust in you. And they know that you've kind of know where you're going with things. And you might have had a conversation over years and know the direction in you going, some of them just want to have the same old, some of them want to change things up. And you've just sort of built that rapport in that relationship, so you know. When it's a newer client, I think, for me, I want them to feel comfortable. Urm, with me, first and foremost, so because some people it's, it is a big deal, you know, and it can be really nerve wracking. Urm, so I would probably spend a bit more time putting them at ease, listening to what they, you know, they've got to say, asking them their likes, their dislikes. I'd go into a lot more detail, um, in the consultation with a newer client and just get a bit of a feel for them.

Elsa Ball 06:45
Yeah. Do you think you're quite good at, sort of, sounding people out?

Lou 06:48
Yes [laughs]. I think so. Yeah. [laughs] Yeah, I'd say.

Elsa Ball 06:54
Hairdressers are like tarot card readers

Lou 06:55
You kind of have to judge it. Like, you know, if someone's a little bit, plays it safe or, some people, if they're not sure about something, you can still get the impression of 'oh what they're not sure, but I can push this a little bit further', whereas other people are like, 'No, I'm going to play this completely safe'. Because, you know, I need to take baby steps with them. So yeah, you've definitely got to have a bit of a sense of people. Definitely. There's a lot of psychology in hairdressing and counselling as well. [laughs]

Elsa Ball 07:26
Can you tell me about one of the clients you've had for the longest?

Lou 07:32

Urm, oh, gosh, you should have choose? So one of my ladies, Fiona, I've been doing her hair gosh, for probably the maj- a good 10 years. I used to do it in my old salon. Urm and she followed me and I do my hair every three weeks without fail. She doesn't need to come in that often. But she does. Um, probably because well, mainly because it just makes her feel good to be honest. And I think it's just, it's something for her and she just enjoys that. Um, and yeah, I mean, yeah, she's a lovely lady. She just completely, she never really deviates from, I've been doing the same thing for, you know, the whole time I've seen her. And she's quite happy with that. She doesn't really deviate much and yeah, she's, she's probably my longest client to date.

Elsa Ball 08:29
Are you close with her?

Lou 08:31
Yes. Like, there's definitely some clients that, I wouldn't say you're friends with, but there's definitely like, um, you're more familiar with, less, less formal. Like, she contacts me personally. She'll send me, you know, videos and messages in between, but and yeah, there's definitely, um, someone that I bend over backwards for. I'm quite, I like to kind of put myself out for my clients, full stop. But then there's certain clients that I would just go that extra mile for and she's definitely one of them.

Elsa Ball 09:07
You've got the kind of two way loyalty?

Lou 09:09
Yeah, definitely.

Elsa Ball 09:15
Can you, sorry, I just have got a list of questions at the side.

Lou 09:19
That's alright

Elsa Ball 09:20
I always find it really awkward because I stop talking and read.

Lou 09:23
No don't worry. I'm a talker aswell. aren't I. So, I've probably like going off on a tangent.

Elsa Ball 09:30
Oh, yeah. I went to a conference and I was talking about this research and someone said, 'Oh, do you find it difficult? like talking about something so every day' and I was like, 'hairdressers they're great at talking'. [both laugh]

Lou 09:42
We were so used to it. We're so used to it.

Elsa Ball 09:44
You're the right people to interview because you very, very good at talking.

Lou 09:48
Can't shut us up.

Elsa Ball 09:54
What sort of things do you talk about with your clients?

Lou 09:57
Oh my gosh, again, it varies. So you do have all those monotonous sorts of, how's your day been? How's your week going? Are you going away? Obviously, at the moment, there's a lot of COVID talk, every conversation is dominated by that, to be fair, but then your clients that you do see more regularly, you know, you have a lot more personal conversations with them, you talk about their life in general, you know, it can get really personal at times, like, clients do really open up to hairdressers a lot. Like we know their deepest and darkest, darkest secrets really. So it can, again, vary dramatically between client to client. But yeah, I have quite a lot of personal conversations actually, that aren't necessarily, I don't really instigate them. It's the client that's instigating them. But yeah, it varies very drastically, to be fair.

10:55
Do they go both ways? The personal conversations, or did they tend to be..?

Lou 10:58
Well, with some, yeah, with some clients, there's one of my clients who we, I've shared a lot with her as well. We've been very, I think it's because you, the more you talk to people, you realise that

actually, as much as you don't necessarily have a lot in common on face value, then when you'd kind of spend more time with them over the years, you realise that we have actually got similar experiences, and definitely open up both ways. So yeah, there's probably quite a few of my clients actually, that I'm quite open with. But again, it's clients that I've known for a long time.

Elsa Ball 11:35
What do you think causes the, that openness with hairdressers?

Lou 11:39
[exhales] I think because we are, well, we do just chat and we are quite approachable people. I think, generally speaking, I'm sure there's a few exceptions. But yeah, I think it is just because people, they usually see you regularly. So it's like, these are people that, you know, on average, you're seeing every four to six weeks and have been for years if it's regulars. So they do become like friends, I guess. And yeah, you can spend a lot of time with clients more so than some of your friends to be honest. So I think they just feel comfortable. And maybe because they're relaxed, and you know, they're being pampered and they're just in a you know, they're letting their barriers down because of that. And I mean, I'm sure it depends on the hairstylist, but I think a lot of us are quite approachable by our nature anyway.

Elsa Ball 12:20
The job attracts people who, or maybe people who aren't good at talking don't last in the job.

Lou 12:44
Maybe Yeah, maybe.

Elsa Ball 12:49
Can you tell me about a time a client asked for a haircut that doesn't suit them?

Lou 12:54
Hmm. That's good question that. If they've asked for, I mean, if they ask for something, and I don't think it's going to see them, I will just be perfectly honest. I mean, I had, I'm trying to think of an example and I can only think of a colour example off the top of my head. I had one lady who I've been doing for quite a few years, since the start-, since I've been at this recent salon and she, um, wanted her hair, she was like all I'm thinking I'll have it dyed black. And my response to that was just absolutely not. Oh no.

13:40
[Lou's laptop dies] [long pause] [lou gets readmitted into meeting]

Lou 17:29
Oh my gosh. I'm so sorry!

Elsa Ball 17:33
Don't worry

Lou 17:34
My laptop said it was low so I plugged it in, but didn't actually plug it into the bloody laptop, just onto the wall. [Elsa laughs] I'm so sorry.

Elsa Ball 17:43
No, don't worry.

Lou 17:43
I've just been a nightmare for you.

Elsa Ball 17:45
Oh, you know, I've been teaching online this year so this every problem, I've had it.

Lou 17:51
I can't believe that happened. Oh my gosh, I'm so sorry. Do you want me to just carry on as if nothing has happened? Or do you need to start something up?

Elsa Ball 18:01
It’s alright, what were we saying, oh, we were talking about, err, the time a client asked for a haircut that didn't suit them.

Lou 18:08
Yeah, so sorry. I was, I sort of, was thinking about a colour. And the lady said that she wanted to have black highlights. And I basically just shut it down straightaway. And I was like, absolutely not. And that was my blunt response. Um, but this is a client who, again, I think A. It comes with experience, because you do just become more confident in saying to clients. 'Yes, no.' And you you

just have that confidence as, as experience grows. And also the fact that it was someone that I'd, you know, done numerous times. So again, you feel a bit more comfortable and that you can just be like, 'no, that's not gonna work'. In terms of a cut, again, it would just be the same scenario, but I can't specifically think of a cut scenario where I've had to, I mean, I'm sure there's been plenty, but I would just be like, 'no, that's not going to work for these reasons'.

Elsa Ball 19:09
What sort of reasons might not work for?

Lou 19:12
So, if their hair texture is not right. Urm, a lot of people will show you pictures, which is great, because at least you can see if you're on the same page in terms of things, urm, but you can be like, well, that person's got a lot more hair or a lot less hair. So that's gonna work for you or it won't work for you. Um, texture, you know, if your hair is naturally curly or naturally straight, that can impact on what style, you know, it's going to work for you. The way that they style their hair day to day, again, that can impact and just their general lifestyle and what's going to work for them. You know what they want from something, if they want low maintenance, then you've got to you know, you've got to make sure that the style is going to work for that.

Elsa Ball 20:03
Thank you, um, what sort of images do people bring to you?

Lou 20:08
Urmm a lot of Pinterest nowadays, that tends to be the go to. Urm just any images really like, some of them tend to be celebrity images. Urm, they can be colour, cutting, you know, any image really, that, it can be the colour that works for them or the technique, urm, numerous things, but there tends to be a lot of Pinterest images that are the go to at the moment, like, yeah, it's just easier I think.

Elsa Ball 20:46
If you get celebrities, do you have any that come up a lot at the moment?

Lou 20:49
Urrmm, JLo comes up quite a lot, for colour and I just think because people yeah, think oh, 'I'll have that. And then I might look a bit like JLo'. And yeah, JLo. God.

Elsa Ball 21:05
She's come back., hasn't she? JLo?

Lou 21:07
Say that again? Sorry.

Elsa Ball 21:09
She's come back.

Lou 21:10
She, she has. She's like defy-, yeah, some elixir that she's taking because she's defining oh, define reality.

Elsa Ball 21:19
It it JLo's hair that you want or JLo's eternal youth?

Lou 21:23
Exactly. Exactly. [both laugh] Um, who else do I get? Again, the just vary, like there's no one more so than another really, for me personally, that I've I've been getting. A lot of ladies are actually willing to embrace grey nowadays. They're are a lot more open to that. I think there used to be a lot of stigma, stigma in terms of that, for women especially. But I've noticed that more people are sort of embracing the, the grey naturally. And I'm very much, I do encourage that like um, I'm one of those stylists that will be like, if someone comes in and they're naturally grey in the umming and ahhing, about colouring I'm like, 'Don't colour it. It's beautiful. Go for it. Embrace the grey'. So that's something that I'm quite glad is becoming more prominent now as well. And that women are embracing that. And I suppose, what I have noticed over the last 18 months, I suppose particularly since COVID, is that people are going for more natural styles and lower maintenance cuts and colours. So that's been quite a big change since COVID, really, and I think part of that is, obviously grey is lower maintenance, and people have had to go longer in between colours and whatnot. So it's like, well, if I've lasted this long, I might as well try, it's now or never to try and go for it.

Elsa Ball 22:52
Yeah.

Lou 22:52

So that's been a big thing that I've noticed recently.

22:57
Yeah, and there's, do you think that's because of the access to hairdressers being so on and off?

Lou 23:02
Yeah, definitely. I think because we're still in limbo so much as well, people are just like, 'Oh, you know, I'm gonna go for lower maintenance, because you never know what's going to happen'. So that's definitely impacting people's decisions at the moment.

Elsa Ball 23:16
Brilliant. Are there any other sort of any styles that are, for want of a better word on trend at the moment? What are you doing a lot of at the moment?

Lou 23:28
Umm, a lot of balayage still colour-wise. Urm, and there's different variations on that. But again, because it's lower maintenance, um, that's been a really big thing still, and that's been ongoing for a few years now. But it's still very much on trend. Um, I think people, like I say the grey is very much on trend still. And pastels. People sort of experimenting a bit more with temporary colours, which is nice. In terms of cutting. Urmm, this is always a tricky one, especially when clients ask me like 'what's on trend?', I feel like, for me, personally, there's not so much of 'this is on trend', 'that's on trend', whereas I think years ago, it used to be very much like 'oh fringes were in' or, you know, 'Bob's were in' and I don't think it's so much of that nowadays. I feel like there is, um, it's more freedom really with what people, it's not so constrained and that, maybe that's just me because I'm quite like that as a stylist anyway, I don't really follow trends. It's just not my vibe. Urm, and maybe that, I kind of impose that on my clients without realising. I don't know. But um, erm, yeah, I would say there's not really like balayage but for cutting? Hmm, I don't know I genuinely not sure on that one.

Elsa Ball 24:59
Do your clients often ask you what's on trend?

Lou 25:01
Occasionally, occasionally. Erm, yeah, they do, they do. Um, not on a daily basis or anything like that. It's not that frequent. But yes, we do, I do, get asked, erm, what's on trend.

Elsa Ball 25:18
You have specific clients that ask you? is it like, are there people that come in that want a change in something trend driven?

Lou 25:27
That's a good question actually. Urmm, no, I wouldn't say so. I mean, sort of digressing slightly, you'll get certain clients who are very much, how do I say it, they, there's no way they're gonna ever stop, they're not going to ever stop having their hair coloured. Like image is very important to them. And I think, ultimately, [pause] you, I've realised that, especially with since COVID, I'm not, you think people are coming to see you because of image. And yes, of course, that's a big factor. But actually, a lot of people, it's just something for them. It's like a change of scenery. It's a bit of pampering, it's, you know, just a bit of time out from the kids or from work. And actually, that's a big factor, not just, oh, I want to look the best I can look. Urm, so I feel like a lot of my clients are actually quite low maintenance. Like, me personally, I don't have many [pause], highly strung, um real sort of fanatical clients, like, they're quite laid back. Um, I'm sure some of my colleagues would differ, but for me personally, like, and yeah, I do feel like they are quite low maintenance, generally speaking.

Elsa Ball 27:05
And do you think that's because of your personality have acquired...?

Lou 27:08
Maybe? Yeah, maybe? [laughs] I'm sure it has. Yeah, I'm sure that has something to do with that. Definitely.

Elsa Ball 27:17
Could you tell me about a time you've given a client a transformational haircut?

Lou 27:23
Oh, yeah, um, I do like doing that actually. It's really nice to actually, someone comes in and, and you just completely transform it. Urm, I had one lady that springs to mind. This is a few years ago, and she was so nervous, like, really, really nervous. And I just knew, she'd said to me, 'oh, I'm gonna have it cut short. I want a pixie cut'. And her hair was in a bob before this. But she was really, really nervous. And I just knew it would look so good on her. Like I was convinced, I thought she was going to look younger, she's going to feel great. Urm, and no, I didn't know that well, I'd been

doing, erm, she used to go to one of my colleagues, and then she went on maternity leave. So I've sort of taken over from her. So there might have been a point where I'd been like, right, well think about it a bit more, because she was so nervous, bless her, but because I knew it was gonna look so good, I just thought, no, I'm gonna go for it, I'm just gonna do this. And I did. And even after I've done it, like, she was so, so nervous, and she came back about six weeks later, and she was like, 'I love it. I love it'. She's like, 'I want to go shorter'. And she was so worried about what her husband was gonna say, which is quite a common thing, actually. Urm, it's, they worry about other people as so much, you know, not so much what they're gonna, you know, their thoughts are on it. And she got that validation from her husband, as soon as she went home. She said that he was like 'oh I loved it', and she could then relax. Urm, and she loved it then as well. So she, that's an example of someone that was a big transformation, was very nervous. And yeah, was actually really pleased afterwards.

Elsa Ball 29:17
Do you think it took a little while to get used to it?

Lou 29:19
Yeah, yeah, definitely. Um, and to be fair, most people when they're like, 'Oh, you know, I'm not sure'. 'So and so thinks this' or 'so and so thinks that' I'll always say, 'but what do you like? What do you want?' And I suppose I'm quite opinionated like that. So I'm like, well, it's not their hair, its yours. So if you want to go for it, if you don't, don't do it, like, you know, it's your decision you, for every 10 people you ask, there's gonna be five that say do it and five that say don't, so just go for it, sort of thing. I'm quite like that.

Elsa Ball 29:57
Yeah, I've always been of the opinion, with my hair, like, it grows.

Lou 30:01
Exactly. Yeah, I'm quite laid back, but I have to appreciate not everybody's like that.

Elsa Ball 30:07
I mean, I've had a few conversations with hairdressers where I've been, like, 'hack it all up up to here'. And they've been like, [shocked face]

Lou 30:13
But that's the thing. I think a lot of hairdressers, from what I've been told, can be like that, whereas I'm not unless I think that's not going to look right. 'I'll be like, Great. Let's do that. Let's, you know, let's get stuck in'.

Elsa Ball 30:26
I think when I was younger as well, I never went to one hairdresser. Like, I moved and went to different people. So I'd just come in and they'd have no.

Lou 30:34
Yeah.

Elsa Ball 30:34
Now I'm like, they have no idea about me.

Lou 30:37
About your personality. Yeah.

Elsa Ball 30:40
No idea that I often grew my hair out and then..

Lou 30:43
chopped it all off.

Elsa Ball 30:45
Yeah, bored now. Something new? Urm, what do you look for in a client to give them a haircut that suits them? I think we've talked about this a bit. But if...

Lou 30:55
Umm, so face shape, um, their style, um, their lifestyle. Um, you know how capable they are in styling. Like, if they you know, do they want to spend ages in the morning styling it or whatever, you know, I suppose they're the main factors. Yeah, they'd be the main factors.

Elsa Ball 31:20
Yeah. If someone, if someone walked in and said, change my hair, you can do whatever with it. Would there be a thought process you went through with that?

Lou 31:31
Yes, I dig a bit deeper, because a lot of the time people say 'oh, you can do whatever you want'. It's actually quite hard when people give you nothing? Because, you just, to say 'oh do what you want. I don't know. Like, yeah, she, I would definitely just get it, I'd have to get into more of a conversation with them and just figure a bit more out because, um, yeah, it's not, it's just not as simple as that. Most of the time anyway. Yeah, you do kind of need to dig a little bit deeper and find out a bit more information before you just get stuck in really. Yeah, I'd have to dig a bit deeper personally.

Elsa Ball 32:17
It doesn't always mean [both laugh] doesn't always mean you can do whatever you want.

Lou 32:22
Exactly.

Elsa Ball 32:24
How much? How much input do you have in choosing what the hair looks like?

Lou 32:31
Erm, I think quite a lot to be fair. I mean, I'll always say to my clients, like how, I try and do something that they're, I don't want them to, I don't want them to get home and not be able to do it. You know, it's got to ,they want, I want them to feel like them still, but like the best version of them. Urm, and obviously, when you come to the salon, you want it to be as polished as possible. Urm, but really, I tried to listen to them as much as possible, but with my sort of, like expertise and my, like honesty, I guess, in into what's going to work. Urm, but I do think the majority of clients will just be like, right, I'm in your hands, you're the professional. So I do think we get, you know, the main sort of, I suppose the deciding factor on it really, on what's going to happen. But yeah, ultimately, I want my clients to be, to be happy. And that's the main thing really,

Elsa Ball 33:38
How do you think they feel when they leave?

Lou 33:40
The majority of them, I think, are just smiling, happy, feel a million dollars feel, you know, the best they can feel, hopefully feel educated with, you know, after care and you know, what they need to do when they're out of the salon. And, but yeah, I think most people just feel great, you know, they're just so happy and grateful to have just had that time in the salon. And yeah, it's, it's a really big deal actually, that we do make people feel so much better about themselves, which is lovely. The majority of people.

Elsa Ball 34:19
You used the word [laughs] educated there. You said, so do you feel like there's a teaching part of your job?

Lou 34:27
Definitely. Like, I feel like I wouldn't be doing my job to its full potential, if I didn't educate, you know, how you should be styling your hair to keep the integrity of it. Like, for me personally, the integrity of your hair is such an important thing. Like that's one of the main things and, and I have just always feel like say for example, someone comes in for a colour and they're spending a lot of money, and then they're going out and just putting for want of a better expression, you know, supermarket crap on their hair. And you just think 'God, what a waste' like you've just come in had decent quality products put on your hair, and you know, we've done a good job and then you're going to go out there and put something that's really going to be almost detrimental to your hair. You know, to use it, so the aftercare I think is really important. And also like people that don't really know, know how to style their hair, or how to get the full potential out of their hair, it's, it's my job to, you know, try and educate them in that and you know, to the best of my ability as well. So, I definitely think that's an important part of the job definitely.

Elsa Ball 35:42
What do you mean by integrity of the hair?

Lou 35:45
Um, so the condition, the strength, you know, if, there's so many different factors that especially nowadays that you know, impact on the hair in a negative way, you know, just simple things like environmental aggressors, pollution, the sun, just brushing your hair, combing your hair, just silly things like that, it all impacts in a negative way on the hair. So I want to keep the hair as strong as possible and as healthy as possible. So that's what I mean by keeping the integrity of the hair.

Elsa Ball 36:22
Earlier you said you'd like to help people be the best version of themselves? Do you think the hair does that?

Lou 36:29
I definitely I think it contributes. Urm, I just think people feel more confident when their hair is done and they're happy with their hair. Urm, I think it's almost like, I guess an armour almost, like a uniform like, you know, if you go to an interview or you go for a meeting or whatever I think you know, I know what I'm like, like day to day this is what my hair looks like, scraped back to within an inch of its life. I'm low maintenance, I, but if I was going you know, to a meeting or an interview, I would make an effort to style my hair better and I just think when other people do it, it's even nicer like, you just, it's you know, it's great when someone else can do that ,your hair for you and I just think people yeah do feel so much nicer and more confidence and when their hair is done

Elsa Ball 37:29
Thank you. Do you cut ladies and gents hair?

Lou 37:34
I do, reluctantly cut gents because I actually find gents higher maintenance. Had a gentleman in today and oh my gosh, he was high maintenance, urm, yeah, Gents is not my forte to be honest. I just don't enjoy doing gents, urm, but I do, yeah, I do do women and gents hair

Elsa Ball 37:56
What's the ratio of your clients?

Lou 37:58
For me personally, god I would say 90% women, even 95% women and 5% men. I don't do many men's hair at all.

Elsa Ball 38:08
Is your salon on a unisex?

Lou 38:10
It is and I think the salon generally is about 20% men roughly. So we do do the majority of women but yeah, some men

Elsa Ball 38:20
Do you have anyone who's a, sort of, barber or you ...?

Lou 38:23
No, no. No, we don't. We don't.

Elsa Ball 38:29
Interesting. Sorry. [laughs]

Lou 38:32
No, no, it's interesting. I always because that for me personally, I mean, not that I'm trying to discourage men from coming into the salon because, absolutely not. And there's a lot you know, some of them my colleagues who actually really enjoy doing men's hair, um, but I always think 'why don't they just go to a barbers?' like it's cheaper. Um, you know, barbers are specialised in men's hair, like it is a real skill. Umm, but then I think that some men just prefer that setting and an XXX salon, you normally pre COVID would get a scalp massage. And it is just a bit more in-depth. And I think actually a lot of men quite like that. So that's probably the reasoning behind it. But yeah,

Elsa Ball 39:16
I have a friend who always visited like, women's women's salons because he liked the head massages.

Lou 39:22
Yeah. Yeah, I think that is there. So you know, there's just you know, a lot of men that do enjoy that. So fair enough.

Elsa Ball 39:30
It's strange, that kind of immediate like, 'why?' then your like [shrugs]

Lou 39:33
Yeah, yeah, I suppose it's the same reason why we would go to the Botanica salon because the points of difference and whatnot. So yeah, it's fair enough. But I suppose Yeah, everyone's different, aren't they?

Elsa Ball 39:47
Yeah. And what tools do you use in your job?

Lou 39:52

Um, scissors combs, all sorts of combs. So you'd have your cutting combs, you would have your pin tail combs which you'd use for highlighting and colouring, um, brushes. Some, I mean, me personally, some salons use razors. I don't do razor cutting really. Um, what else? Hairdryers, straighteners, wands and clippers. Trying to think if I've missed anything off, I think that's pretty much it.

Elsa Ball 40:32
How'd you find? How'd you find using the mirror that you work with?

Lou 40:36
I probably don't use it as much as I should, to be fair. Yeah, I mean, you just, you just get used to it, it's almost like you don't, there's certain aspects, like with every job, where it just becomes second nature, you don't really know. I'm probably using them a lot more than I realise. And it is a really important part of the job, like, the equipment, as in your chair, your mirrors, etc. Because when I do hair out of work, which I don't do a lot of because, for that reason, actually because I really don't feel like it's as professional. You don't have the equipment's not the same, as in you your mirrors and your chair. So, actually in the salon environment, it's really important for me personally. Yeah, all that is really important.

Elsa Ball 41:29
Brilliant, um, I'm just gonna check there's nothing that I've missed of the list. Is there anything that you thought I was gonna ask you today that I haven't? I don't think so. No, no. A deceptively, deceptively simple one to finish with: what skills do you think you have to have to be a hairdresser?

Lou 41:58
Creativity, um, think you have to be quite patient, um, definitely a people person, good communicator, good listener, um, quite tolerant, in fact, very tolerant. Um, yeah, like communication skills, I guess is like a really big thing as well. Yeah, really big thing. And I'd say they're the main, main pointers. Yeah.

Elsa Ball 42:38
Great. Thanks. That's everything on here, so I'll just stop the recording quickly.

Appendix E - Interview Schedule (Clients)

Negotiating fashionable identity through hair and the salon: implications for sustainability and fashion

Document Type: Interview Schedule 1 (Clients)
Researcher Name: Elsa Ball
Interview Time: 30-60mins

Introduction:
Introduction to the interview to establish repoire and put the participant at ease

Researcher to introduce self, the project and format of the interview. Reiterate ethics and acquire informed consent.

Gather personal information – Name, contact details, age, gender

Entry questions to establish repour and put the participant at ease
Which hairdresser do you visit? How frequently?
Tell me about your hair? What is it like? How do you feel about it?

Main Interview:
Researcher to explore themes related to the research questions in more detail

Hair
Tell me about your hair?
Is your hair important to you?
How often do you change your hair?
What is your favourite style you've had your hair in?
When does your hair feel the best?
Can you give me a specific example of when your hair has changed how you feel?
Have you ever had a haircut that didn't suit you? How did you manage that situation?
How do you feel after getting a haircut?
Does it feel different to have a new haircut?
Do you change up your hairstyle or keep it the same?
Do you think your hair represents your identity?
Which celebrity's hair do you like? Does that inspire your own choices?
Do you actively notice other people's hair?

Hairdresser
Who is your hairdresser? How long have you seen them for?
How would you describe your relationship with your hairdresser?
What sort of things do you talk about?
How do you pick you hairstyle?
What do you ask your hairdresser for?
Can you describe what happens with the hairdresser before your hair is cut?
How much input do you have in choosing what the hair looks like?
Do you use visual aide when you are at the hairdresser?
Do you actively look for inspiration for your hair?
Can you describe the salon you visit like?
What do you talk to your hairdresser about?

Fashion
How would you describe your sense of style? Does your hair contribute to that?
Is there a connection between your clothing and your identity?
Do you find you dress differently when your hair is different?
Do you ever style your hair based on clothing?
Have you noticed any changes to your shopping habits when you change your hair?

Conclusion:
Finish the interview with some wider questions to wrap up

Is there anything else you'd like to add?
Is there anything you thought I'd ask today that I haven't?
Have you got any amusing anecdotes, about hair, that you can tell me?

Thank participant

Appendix F - Example Transcript (Client - Kat)

Elsa Ball 00:25

So could you start off by telling me a little bit about your hair? Yeah.

Kat 00:34

Yeah. Umm, where to start really? I suppose the overriding thing, I would say, this sounds really negative. Actually, I've hated my hair for most of my life. There's definitely my earliest memories of just, always, my hair being different to everybody else's. It didn't look like it was supposed to. And it's that whole thing of, you're just conditioned to think that there's something wrong with your hair. Because it doesn't look like what you saw on telly. Even as a kid, I remember that. Maybe not consciously, but it's definitely a reflection, like, whether that was to do with it being curly. Or, you know, back then I would, I would have just said it was 'frizzy'. People would call it 'frizzy' and 'fluffy'. And yeah, it just, it just always felt like there was something wrong with it. And it was something that was quite a, a barrier to not, a part of not fitting in, I'd say even at, like, I'm talking primary school, even. I distinctly remember, it just didn't seem like. Oh, why is my hair crap? And then even at a secondary school, like, I would say, yeah, I'd say it was probably bullied. And it wasn't explicitly because of my hair. But my hair was one of the things that the bully would bring into it as something to comment on. So, when I was, when I was really young, and growing up, very much at the drive of my mom, she wanted me to have long hair, it was very much mom's thing. She wanted me to keep it as long as possible. And it had to just be cut very straight. So always had long hair. And then, so, I'd wear it, like, by secondary school, I was probably wearing it in a, just a ponytail, just all brushed back and in a in a ponytail. So because it was a long ponytail, it would be, like, I dunno, the comments would be like 'horse's hair', because it was, it was, you know, curly fluffy, frizzy, whatever, as well. And so that led to like a whole raft of stuff at secondary school as well. And which then I think, I think that then drove, drove me to want to change it, to want to cut it, to want to do different things with it, which is probably true of a lot of things about my identity, I'd say. But I think all of those are driving factors that I don't think about a lot with my hair. But as I stop and think they're definitely poignant things looking back, I also used to swim really extensively as a kid, so like competitively. I'd be swimming most days. So it just made having long hair a massive barrier as well. Like, it just brought more negativity to the table because my hair was longer than everyone else's. So it looked stupid in a swimming cap. My hair took ages to wash after swimming, it took ages to dry after swimming. I couldn't plait it myself, I couldn't do it myself. And so I think a lot of my early memories or like from childhood to teens are definitely negative around hair. But then I could say now like the total opposite is true, like hairs, my hair's something now that people compliment me on it's a way that I express myself. It's, I like that it's different. My hair does all sorts of stuff that my mates' hair doesn't and it's like a full circle moment, really.

Elsa Ball 04:13

Yeah. What do you think's changed?

Kat 04:16

My attitude towards it. Absolutely, my attitude. [I'm] Not there are other things, you know, because so much of what I said, what I've said is true in terms of like, body image and all of that stuff. [I'm] Not, not there on that journey towards loving myself in that way. But um yeah, it's just acceptance. Possibly helped by seeing more people with hair like mine and thinking, 'that looks cool. I really like that.' And having more opportunity, being an adult, whether it's opportunity or confidence or a bit of both, but opportunity and confidence to celebrate difference rather than, you know when you're younger, being different, it makes you stand out when perhaps you don't wanna stand out. And certainly not for things that. Yeah, when you're younger being, being different, it's just, uh, anything that's not deemed 'normal' or 'good enough', or, you know, it's the negative reasons to be the centre of attention rather than being in control of when you want to draw attention to yourself.

Elsa Ball 05:35

Sorry, that was really interesting, the idea of, kind of, controlling when you're seen and not seen.

Kat 05:40

Yeah, and for what you've seen for. Yeah, so it's definitely, uh, I mean, I'm pretty covered in tattoos, like head to toe. And it's part of, I think that's part of it, too. That would be a bit of a tangent to go off on, but it's similar thing its, its having control over those things, I think. And being recognised for like, I choose to do these things. These are, these are the things that I used to express my, my character and personality and individuality rather than somebody picking those things, like the hair when I was younger, and it just been well, 'what's wrong with that?' That doesn't look normal.

Elsa Ball 06:21

Yeah, no. Reclaiming something, a bit?

Kat 06:23

Yeah, yeah, definitely. Yeah.

Elsa Ball 06:26

It is, it is a, kind of, a symptom of growing up, isn't it? The cruelty of school children and the, kind of, realising that you can embrace those differences. Could you, kind of, describe what your hair's like now to me?

Kat 06:44

In terms of, like uh, condition? Or?

Elsa Ball 06:48

Yeah, texture cut, colour, condition...

Kat 06:51

Umm, it's changed quite a bit since I've been going to Jess, who obviously connected us up, um, so prior to that, so we're probably talking a year and a half ago it was I hadn't been to a hairdresser for quite a while; probably a few years. So it was really long, always straightened out, like to within an inch of its life. I mean, glassy, straightened, and box dyed really, sort of, dark black, brown-black. And then through going to Jess, we gradually lightened it and it went full, really vivid purple, and blue on the ends. And then I got bored of that. So it's now it's, sort of, more of a natural colour on the top with them this pink underneath. This is, this is literally just dried. I haven't put anything on it. I just, bad hair day, not out going anywhere. I'll just tie it up. And so yeah, it's really really, really curly, you can tell. Is that auburn-y colour your natural colour, then? Yeah

Elsa Ball 07:56

It's lovely.

Kat 07:57

Thanks.

Elsa Ball 07:59

It's great too.

Kat 08:00

Umm, yeah, really naturally curly. But to, if I'm gonna do it curly, I tend to use a product on it, because it goes, its still, it can look a bit fluffy, like, I like it like this. But if I was gonna go out and want it nice I'd perhaps, like, scrunch it and make it look a bit more defined. It does get dry. I think it's, do you remember that, um 'Sun In' spray from the 90s?

Elsa Ball 08:30

Yes I do [laughs]

Kat 08:32

Oh my god. I think I completely knackered my hair and I swear it, it could be unrelated but I swear that it, I think it's damaged my hair, but maybe the pores that your hair comes out of, because that, that seemed to send, where I put it on the top of my hair. The hair on the top of my head is really different to the hair underneath. I think you can even tell now. Like these curls here on the top are really tight curls. But the curls underneath are much, they're looser and the hair isn't as dry and damaged. So whether that's just natural sun damage or... Something changed somewhere along the lines. It never used to be like that.

Elsa Ball 09:13

Yeah. Or even environmental, like, things like pollution can affect the hair that's on the top.

Kat 09:19

Yeah. Yeah, maybe? Yeah, so I have to be, it's partly why I try not to straighten it too much, now. I do still straighten it sometimes. But way less than I used to. Probably, like, once a, once a week once a fortnight, because it is quite damaged and where is Jess has lightened it up.

Elsa Ball 09:20

Yeah

Kat 09:20

Even doing it gradually and carefully with toners and treatments, its still bleach, its still lightening my hair. So we've had to do that really carefully to not damage it further and like I'm going to her next week and I know she'll say if, if say I was like 'I want to lighten it up again and go a different colour, if she thinks it's too damaged, she won't do it. And that's a really like that.

Elsa Ball 10:06

You know, she's looking after your hair.

Kat 10:08

Yeah, yeah, she won't do it if she thinks it's too damaged, she'll, she'll just say, like, 'we'll lift it up next time, we need to give it a bit more time'. I've had a lot of it. I mean, obviously, I said it was really long as a kid. I mean, like past my bum. It, it's probably varied from teen years from being like shoulder length to a bit longer. It's now, I had a good bit cut off last time, actually. So it's sort of just sits on my shoulders at the moment. But I think I'll grow it a bit more now. I like to change. [laughs]

Elsa Ball 10:42

How often do you change it? Is it every time you go in? Or do you try and leave it?

Kat 10:47

Umm, no. I'd say, big changes, perhaps, really big changes, like the dark brown to the, it really was like proper vivid purple. It took me about a year to get there. And then probably kept it that way for six months, nine months, and then we've gone for pink. Yeah, maybe six months-ish, nine months, because now I'm thinking the pink is on the way to, I'd like to do like orange sort of, orangey yellow bits on the end maybe?

Elsa Ball 11:20

Something fiery?

Kat 11:21

Yeah, yeah.

Elsa Ball 11:24

And do you know, like, what makes you want to change it?

Kat 11:28

[pause] I don't know really. I think a lot of things, I think you draw, I draw a lot of inspiration for what I see, like maybe social media, what I follow, my accounts are all just consumed with like Hair and Tattoo, sort of, culture. I love, I love looking at stuff just for inspiration, like, I have regular tattooists that I go to, but I follow a lot of artists because I just love to see the art that they're producing. Then it inspires me to think, what, what version of that might, can I relate to? And I think it's the same with hair, like you're always looking and thinking that's new. That's different. That's yeah, it's, it's, I think, it's partly just wanting to express myself, maybe partly just getting bored and wanting to do something new, something exciting. I just like variety as well, I try and it's part of the thing, reason I love my hair now. Whereas it used to want to just straighten it all the time and even go back to being a kid. As I said, it didn't look the same. And that's what I didn't like. Now I think I love that I can, I could straighten that, I could wash this in the morning and straighten it and it looks completely different to how it does now. And I really like that. I used to, to be a teacher, up until just before COVID, in a secondary school. And all my mates in the department I taught and actually it was a bit of a thing like, 'Oh, your hair looks different every day.' I'd do a different thing, like, nothing high maintenance, but a different style every day and they just, I quite like that. Whether it's feeling, I don't know, making an effort, feeling different; feeling fresh.

Elsa Ball 13:21

Yeah, a bit of versatility as well.

Kat 13:23

Yeah, yeah. I think a lot of factors.

Elsa Ball 13:26

Yeah, um, just to circle back something you said. You're talking about, sort of, tattoo artists and their artistry. I mean, it's in the words, isn't it? But um, do you think there's an equivalent artistry in hairdressing?

Kat 13:38

Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah, it's why I actively sought out Jess because again, social media and started following people that were really, seem to be experts in doing vivid colour because I knew that's what I wanted. I wanted someone who looks like they had

experience doing different types of hair, like like mine. It's not easy hair to, it does weird things with colour, it grabs some colour and it won't take other colours. And so yeah, I actively sought out somebody who I thought had the expertise and the passion for it. And it's why I've kept going to Jess because, you know, I didn't know her. She's changed salons twice since I went to her. So it certainly wasn't the reputation of the salon that drew me in. And I keep going back to her because she's got that passion. She likes a challenge. She likes doing new, new and exciting things. It's that is definitely a big factor in why I keep going back because, you know, there's like say this is someone that a few years ago was happy just box dye in black. It costs a lot of money to get your hair done and so in the same way with tattoos, I pay a lot of money for those because I want the quality. It's gonna, it's gonna be on my body and it's the same with my hair. If I'm gonna pay to get it done then I want it done by someone who, who's passionate about what they're doing and I can tell that they're excited by, by what they're creating and what the outcome's going to be and thinking what we'll do next time and yeah, it's definitely a big part of it.

Elsa Ball 15:23

Right. What's the favourite style you've had your hair in over the years?

Kat 15:32

Like a one off, or day to day favourite?

Elsa Ball 15:36

Either, or both.

Kat 15:42

Probably my, like, a favourite and I've never done it since, but had it done once years ago, where it was all, it was like a mo- what do you call it? a mohawk or like a Mohican. It was all pulled up to the back but then a big massive curly sort of Mohawk thing that went a big Quiff here [gestures to forehead] and then all down there [gestures along crown of head] and then some curls down the back. I'll check no one's listening. So much so that I would envisage having something similar for my wedding next year. So, just I really loved that it was different. I think it will show off the, all the colour. Whatever colour I've got then, it will show it off really nicely. Umm, day to day. It changes. I think. With what my face, [laughs] what my face looks like. Yeah, maybe just scrunched, scrunched naturally. And I do, I do this a lot a clip there. [Kat's fringe is swept into a small quiff with a clip in] I've got I've actually got a fringe cut in at the moment.

Elsa Ball 16:40

Just for the audio, it's a little, sort of, fringe up in a little quiff at the front.

Kat 16:45

Yeah,, yeah, a little quiff. I'd say, I'll put a little Quiff in with most styles whether it's like this in a ponytail, or I'll do a quiff and then have it down, whether it's down and straight or down and curly. Yeah, a quiff is a - yeah I suppose that is definitely most days, common feature.

Elsa Ball 17:05

My friends call it 'the swoop' [Kat laughs] Like, 'put the swoop in'

Kat 17:10

Yeah [laughs]

Elsa Ball 17:14

I guess that, kind of, leads me... Sorry, I'm just, maybe where are we go in next? How do you feel after getting a haircut?

Kat 17:29

After getting it cut? Yeah, good. It feels fresh. It feels, always feels healthier to have a haircut, get rid of the dead ends.

Elsa Ball 17:42

and in yourself Do you feel any different?

Kat 17:44

Uh, yeah, I'd say more so to do with having it coloured than cut. Cuts for me, I suppose feel like just a bit of a necessity. Ironically, I'd like my hand to be longer now, but I've cut it a bit more certainly since I've gone to Jess to get rid of, like, a lot of the damaged hair, the older hair. So I'd like it to be longer, so cut so just a necessity to keep it healthy. But colour, definitely feel, feel great when it's been coloured. I've got, I have got, like, it's not probably obvious now. But I've got a lot of grey coming through, just all over I'd say, more so on my scalp line. And then just behind my scalp line actually I've got like a patch of really almost white. It's not something that was there all along it is just grey hair, but it's really concentrated, so naturally then, having it coloured, all of that is gone and you, it does look nice. Not that grey hairs really bother me much at all. I've had the odd grey hair since mid 20s and I'm 38 now so it's it's never something that's fazed me much but it does look nice when it's it's freshly done. Especially if I, when I straighten it um, and say, I've got it parted and I'll sometimes do it up in two high bunches, so you can obviously, the front parting line is quite prominent. So, you know, you can see my greys there when I've not had it done for a while . Which again, its not, it doesn't bother me but I feel nicer when it's been done, I feel like it looks really really good when it's, and when the colours are brighter. Um, I don't know if it's relevant but I like where the pink is or the brighter colours, I'll, like, top that up myself whether it's with a colour mask, a conditioning colour mask or with the same colours that Jess uses. She'll tell me and I'll buy them and I'll I'll top it up and when it's more vibrant when the pink is really bright, like, say like I've just been to a festival at the weekend, a metal festival, so I wanted to redo my hair, redo the colour on the Thursday night because then it was really bright for the festival and yeah, I definitely feel good when it's, when it's brightly coloured.

Elsa Ball 20:18

Like you're looking your best?

Kat 20:20

Yeah, yeah. Because it does fade, with having the bright colours, like, it does fade quickly. So it will go from like a bright pink to... anything from like a dull pink to like the yellow or starts coming through from underneath. It can look a bit brassy.

Elsa Ball 20:38

Yeah, I had mine quite similar pink in lockdown. And the fading is so quick. It's so much upkeep. I loved it. But as soon as I went back into the 'real world' and wasn't working from home where I could sit with my hair, with dye on my hair all day. Yeah, it's slightly less practical. Do you think that your hair represents your identity?

Kat 21:07

Yeah. Yeah. And by that, I suppose again, I've come back to tattoos a lot. Because it's another big part of, ... As you look at me, I suppose, I suppose those are the things that stand out the most. Yeah, whether I'm trying to convey an outgoing nature or a confidence or a [short pause] certainty of who I am, I'd say, that I don't know if I had in earlier years of my life, is why I like to have the bright hair, the tattoos and things it's... Yeah, yeah, a lot of the things I've said prior, I think, having control over standing out for the things I want to stand out for, reclaiming those things. You know,

they're for me, and I kinda like that, you know, everyone's got an opinion on hair, my hair and tattoos and things. Yeah, everyone's got an opinion, even family, you know, well, I remember, even as an adult, like family, perhaps saying, 'Oh, I don't like your hair straight. And it's not natural', or 'I don't like your hair curly. It's, I don't like I scrunched it. It doesn't look natural'. Now it's just like, pardon the language, but I don't give a fuck. It's my hair. It's my body. And it's, it's, yeah, it's a statement of who I am. And if you don't like it, well, I'm not for you and...

Elsa Ball 22:44

There's something really lovely about having that, kind of, enough confidence to be like, 'that's fine. That's fine if you don't like it'.

Kat 22:51

Yeah.

Elsa Ball 22:52

Yeah, that's yeah, really nice and cathartic. And, so just a few questions about your hairdresser and the kind of relationship you have. So I think you've said that you've been seeing Jess for a few years, did you say?

Kat 23:09

Umm, it's probably somewhere between, in fact, I think October will be two years, when I first went for like a consultation with her.

Elsa Ball 23:20

Did you, started after lockdown? Or was it before? Yeah.

Kat 23:26

Yeah, yeah. It must, yeah, we were just coming out of. Yes, it was. Yeah. The would explain why your hair was long. [both laugh] Yeah. Yeah.

Elsa Ball 23:38

How would you describe your relationship with Jess?

Kat 23:40

Umm, being realistic, because, it's the same with, as I say, I talk about tattoos a lot, its the same with the artists I go to you for that. I think, I'm very realistic that, its Jess' job. And I'm a client. But whilst that is true, I'd say it's as close to a friendship as, as you could get really, you know. We're, we don't see each other socially. But if that was to happen, that would be quite normal. Like say, there was the opportunity. And I like that, having that friendship there. Yeah, I find, I find her extremely easy to talk to, very genuine. We have really, really quite open, honest conversations where we probably both overshare which isn't really typical for me, I'd say, yeah. I have a small close knit group of friends and not the sort of person that has a really wide circle of friends. But she's just a person that, because she's so open and honest within herself, and lets you see her vulnerabilities. It makes you. well, it makes me, want to be open as well. It's like a massively non judgmental space for both of us, which is something that in previous years has really put me off, massively put me off going to a salon.

Elsa Ball 25:16

Have you had bad experiences in a...?

Kat 25:18

Nothing extreme, like, not one thing I could look back on, but it's just a vibe. It's just an atmosphere in every hair salon that I've been in, you know, it's that whole thing of like, 'oh, I can't go to the salon without my hair done or without makeup on it'. It's so ridiculous, isn't it? Like, I'm going to have my hair done. Why would it be done beforehand? But yeah, I definitely think looking back to early adulthood, not wanting to go into a salon, not knowing what to ask for, not having the relationship with the hairdresser. Not being able to explain what I wanted, not being able to say I didn't like it, feeling judged, feeling like, I didn't fit- again, all that stuff of not feeling like I fitted in.

Elsa Ball 26:09

Do you think being, sort of, someone who's, I mean, jumping to conclusions here, but, like, you like metal music, you have piercings and tattoos, someone who's a bit alternative? Do you think that has anything to do with feeling uncomfortable in hairdressing salons? Or no?

Kat 26:24

Umm, a little bit? I mean, yeah, I get stared at a lot, say like tattoos, especially in the summer. And I tend not to notice that too much. It's, it's more... in hair salons. I don't know. It's more that, it seems like there's a certain type of woman in there. Maybe this is a bad perception on my side. It seems like there's a certain, maybe the, everyone in there, I don't know, is it that they all look the same? Is that my perception? They all want to do the same thing. Like yeah, again, you have to look a certain way or makeup on and preened and looking, you know, Instagram ready?

Elsa Ball 27:13

Mmhmm, yeah.

Kat 27:15

And I think the contrast with Jess is that I, you know, we even joked one time she was like, 'Kat, you could rock up in your pyjamas and it wouldn't matter', and it genuinely wouldn't.

Elsa Ball 27:26

Yeah.

Kat 27:27

It's perhaps worth saying as well, like, Jess works in a Nottingham city centre salon and a home salon. I've been to both but I far prefer the home salon. It's, it's definitely a big thing for me to be able to go and it just be me and her. Because we can talk freely. I think I probably would go in my pyjamas or joggers, like, that's just the kind of laid back atmosphere. Whereas, the thought of going into a salon with jogging bottoms on you- no. I just feel like you can't do that. Yeah, it

Elsa Ball 28:04

It doesn't matter what your hairdresser says. There's -

Kat 28:07

Yeah.

Elsa Ball 28:07

- all the other hairdressers

Kat 28:09

But the salon that, where I first met her, she only did my hair there once and then she moved salon. But it really typified there, exactly what I don't like, and I could sense it there. And she was very professional, never said anything to me until the next time I saw her, which then was at a new salon and she had moved. But it's that sense of judgement, people looking at you, I could tell that she wasn't comfortable. I could tell she was being... othered by the other staff there. She didn't fit in with them. And I was like, 'wow, I can see, in you, what I don't like about salons. I don't feel like I fit in here. And I don't think you feel that you fit in either'. So then I think that when we actually both then were open about that the next time we saw each other, then that's where this kind of relationship stemmed from where we're both, you know, we both talked a lot about sort of childhood experiences and things.

Elsa Ball 29:15

And, and she's very good at what she does, which always makes you a little bit of a target, as well doesn't it. [both laugh] If you don't fit in and you're getting loads of customers, and everyone's coming back again, it makes you stand out a bit, doesn't it?

Kat 29:31

Yeah, yeah, exactly. Yeah.

Elsa Ball 29:33

Yeah. And so can you just talk me through, you've rocked up to the salon, either the home salon or, or the one in Nottingham, either. Can you talk me through that, kind of, the bit before you get started with the actual haircut or colour? The kind of consultation process. How does that usually go?

Kat 29:56

I mean, with Jess, we've probably done that before over messaging each other. In fact, yeah, I'd say, all the time, I don't think we've ever decided or we finished the conversation on the day. But it's always something we've, we'll just chat, we'll message each other. So she'll ask me in advance, what are we doing? You know, what, what are you thinking colour wise, send me a few pictures you might send me some. We might chat about what's going to be needed, whether we'll need to lift it or not. So, on the day, it's either she knows and we'll just crack straight on, she'll, you know, she'll hand me a coffee and we'll get straight on. Or it might just be a case of she'll bring me some colours over, she'll have bought, based on our conversation, she'll have perhaps bought four or five different bottles of colours, and she'll bring them over and we'll just have a quick look at those, pick out the ones we're gonna go with. And, yeah, pretty much crack straight on.

Elsa Ball 30:59

Perfect. So yeah, kind of, all done through, through Instagram, I guess.

Kat 31:04

Yeah. Yeah. Instagram messaging. Yeah.

Elsa Ball 31:09

And you kind of mentioned looking online for inspiration, for hair inspiration. Is there anywhere other than Instagram you go do that?

Kat 31:23

No, not really. I pretty much just use the Instagram just for looking, like I say looking at hair, tattoos, like, that sort of-

Elsa Ball 31:32

Yeah. Are there any accounts in particular that you follow? That you can, off the top of your head?

Kat 31:37

[Unintelligible] No. Oh, maybe, I suppose I do use Pinterest. I didn't, uh, well, I did years ago. And then since I got engaged, I've started to do the typical thing of setting up like a wedding board and I pin stuff to that, so I couldn't tell you where the pins are from that a pin but I've definitely like there's a lot of hair stuff gone on there. I've been thinking, there have been things, like you know, different colours, different- I've seen lots of different versions of this, sort of Mohawk type of hair-do thing. I tend to follow more tattoo artists on Instagram. It was actually, I remember now, the way that I first came across Jess' account was that one of my tattooist, a regular tattooist, um, she was having her's, like, a pale pink and it always just looked really nice and I noticed that she'd been to Jess and I think that's why I started following Jess' account

Elsa Ball 32:40

Yeah, the kind of network of people on Instagram

Kat 32:44

Yeah, yeah

Elsa Ball 32:45

That have a similar taste level

Kat 32:47

Yeah, I think it is that.

Elsa Ball 32:50

Cool. Are there any celebrities whose hair you particularly like?

Kat 32:55

I'm a bit rubbish with celebrity culture actually. I'm the same with, um, like, yeah, any form of celebrity, whether it's actors and actresses, models and I don't, I don't tend to remember names, like, umm, yeah, nothing is springing mind. I watch, I really like Drag Race, you know, RuPaul's Drag Race. Like, massive, massive, massive, turbo-geek [laughs] with Drag Race, so, um, a different type of thing, I think. But to me, like, that's the, that's the celebrity culture that I follow, like, I love see what looks the queens are doing.

Elsa Ball 33:46

Are there any drag queens whose hair you particularly like? [laughs]

Kat 33:49

Oh, I mean, they all change so often, but yeah, it tends to be the Queen's that do, would do, like, wigs that are colourful, as opposed to just blonde and brunette, natural coloured wigs. They, yeah, they change so often, but it might be more, like, are there particular looks that a drag queens done that sticks in my mind? Yeah, so many. I couldn't I couldn't pick out one, one individual look but it would definitely be, I always get drawn to like when they're doing the runway challenges at the end. I'm always

drawn to, say, a brightly coloured hair that matches in with the outfit, whether it's through colour or style. I like, sort of, 50s fashion and style as well. So, that's not always but, that, you know, for some of the Queen's that's a big part of their, their drag style. So where, where the two come together I quite like and that might be, maybe, more inspiration for me than like a particular celebrities hair.

Elsa Ball 35:01

Yeah. I mean, it's a, it's a different facet of celebrity culture, isn't it?

Kat 35:06

Yeah, yeah, it is.

Elsa Ball 35:07

It's not the 'heat magazine' celebrities, but it's, like, there's, they're still very famous.

Kat 35:13

Yeah.

Elsa Ball 35:16

What sort of things, and I think we talked about this a little bit, but what sort of things do you talk to Jess about?

Kat 35:20

Oh my God, everything. Yeah, literally everything and anything, whether it's, so we've talked about, yeah, quite quite personal things, quite deep things like experiences from childhood, relationships but on a, I'm sure that's a common response, but I'd say on quite a deep level, quite an honest level. I'd probably share more with her than, and her so as well. I know, she'll say, 'oh, you know, I talk at you loads. And I'll, I tell you stuff that I perhaps wouldn't tell other people'. But yeah, perhaps, I wonder if part of that just comes from, I'm obviously a little bit older than her. And when I might, say, share recollections that I want her to know. I'm a real big advocate, and feminist in terms of I'm not ashamed of the past and everything is a learning experience, and I wish I'd known then what I know now. And so I'm, I tend to be, especially with, yeah, with Jess I'll be quite open, say, about past experiences, past relationships, what I've learned from them and genuinely, why I think they've all led to me being where I am now.

Elsa Ball 36:55

Yeah.

Kat 36:57

Yeah, friendships a lot, we've both talked about, um. Yeah, I think just the current things that we're both going through, say, I'll arrive with something that's been going on at that particular time. Like I was, for example, I mentioned I was getting married next year. And I think when I saw her a couple of times ago, I was having a bit of difficulty with one of my friends that have asked to be a bridesmaid. And she said, we talked about that a lot. And then she remembered next time I went and we were, she'd asked how that was going, but then another time, maybe I'll go in and something's kicked off in her life. And so we might end up talking about that quite extensively. And you know, and sometimes that will lead into us messaging a bit more after the appointment, checking in on each other. What, you know, what's happened since? Are you alright? Stuff with the salon, as well. Ambitions that I know Jess has got for her career, things like that. We'll talk about a lot as well. So as I say, I'm always respectful with her, tattoo, all of it, that this is somebody's job, and they need to be mindful of that it's their time. They need to be able to shut off. I think this is the ex-teacher in me. You can't be doing your job all hours of the evening and I recognise

that whilst I do view it as a friendship, but I'm never going to expect my hairdresser or my tattoo artist to text me back at nine o'clock because it's still their job. And I say that a lot to Jess, and, and I suppose try and whilst I do see her as a friend and I think our relationship is a friend-based one, but I'll be, always be respectful of that. Because yeah, it's a job and I'm a massive advocate for work-life balance and having those healthy boundaries.

Elsa Ball 38:57

Yeah, I mean, as an ex-teacher, [laughs] you know better than most

Kat 39:02

the key word being 'ex' [both laugh]

Elsa Ball 39:07

Okay, so the final section is just a little bit about, kind of, more generally appearance-related stuff. So look a little bit about clothing. Just a few questions. So how would you describe your sense of style?

Kat 39:28

Yeah, alternative, which is a broad, a massively broad term, isn't it? Because even within that and even within, the like, say like, say, I went to a metal festival, I'd still say, there's a lot of variety within that. And I like to still be different to that. So, perhaps I'd say alternative but I like my appearance to show all the different facets of things that I'm into. So there will be little, for me anyway, I don't know if anyone else recognises it. But I know that in the way I dress, there might be, maybe the quiff, like, that probably stems from, liking 50s style inspired dress.

Elsa Ball 40:17

Do you know, I thought that as soon as you said it, I was like, that's why you've got the [gestures to quiff]

Kat 40:22

Yeah, yeah, it's exactly that. And I very rarely wear a dress. But if I do, it will be a swing dress, it will be a petticoat and a swing dress. Definitely. There'll be little facets of, of drag that I like and would try and mimic, say, say, in my hair or my makeup. Or it might just be something as simple as wearing a Drag Race t shirt when everyone else is wearing a metal t shirt. So yeah, I think it's, it's definitely a way for me to, to represent the things that, that have inspired me through my look.

Elsa Ball 41:05

To wear a little bit of, a little bit of your interests on you?

Kat 41:09

Yeah, yeah. But then, maybe then, even more so than just interests. Like, I'm not just into Drag Race, because it's a brilliant programme, which it is. It's entertaining. It's great comedy, there's really talented people on there. The fashion is amazing, all of that stuff. But it's clearly so much more than that, that draws me to watching that programme. Its, it's learning about the LGBT community, understanding the challenges that people go through that I've had the privilege of not having to go through. It's learning more so that I can be a better ally, learning more so that I can challenge intolerance or, or prejudice. And whilst that's just one, you know, one of the few things that inspire, perhaps the way I want to look, that's probably true with a lot of the things I like. Like, the whole 50s thing, there's definitely something with, like I said, being a strong feminist, there's something there as well. And wanting to have that control and reclaiming your body and putting a, putting aside a time where women's bodies were just for the male gaze. And actually, no, we have control over that. If we

want to wear something really revealing, then we'll wear it and if we don't, we don't. You don't have the right to sexualize us. And there's there's probably some deeper, something there in everything that's important to me that I try it, whether it is in a conscious way or subconscious way, that I'll like to try and bring through in the way I look.

Elsa Ball 42:52

Yeah, that's really interesting. I mean, the next question was, 'does your hair contribute to that?' which I, [kat laughs] feel like we've kind of covered quite a lot, actually, in this, this, kind of, push for individuality and these like, that, kind of, power that like, it seems like your hair is really powerful. That, kind of, has come across quite a lot to me in this interview that, like, I mean, even starting by saying 'I hated it'.

Kat 43:24

I genuinely did.

Elsa Ball 43:26

Yeah, it's a really, kind of, seems like quite a big thing.

Kat 43:31

Yeah.

Elsa Ball 43:31

I feel like, it sounds like you put, not a lot of effort in like a, but it sounds like you do a lot of different things with your hair.

Kat 43:43

Yeah, yeah, it's definitely been a journey. And I couldn't pinpoint one moment where it wasn't like that, where it's just like, 'Oh, I'm going to stop hating my hair'. It's complicated, isn't it? You know, I suppose this is a lot of what you're delving into and unpicking and researching and things. But yeah, lots of different factors. But it definitely is a big, a very big part of appearance, how I want to come across, how I how I feel, how I want to look.

Elsa Ball 44:14

Yeah. Another question is, kind of, two questions. So do you find that you dress differently when your hair is different, or style your hair differently when you dress differently? Do you find the way you dress affects your hair and vice versa?

Kat 44:39

Yeah, more by probably just more, more by need. So I still work in the education sector. I work for a charity. So I work in school partnerships. So if I have a school meeting, I'm probably not going to wear it up in bunches on the top of my head, which, you know, partly annoys me as well because I think 'Why are some hairstyles deemed professional and some aren't?'. But I definitely do, do it differently. And like I say, if I'm going, going to a festival or going to a gig or something, I'll, I'll definitely make a conscious effort to think 'Oh, when I, when I wash it, before, the time before I go, I'll stick some colour around'. So it's even colour, not just style, like, I'll, I'll tailor to what I'm doing and where I'm going. But work could definitely be a more sensible style perhaps.

Elsa Ball 45:38

What do you think makes a professional, a professional hairstyle? Maybe it's easier to say what makes an unprofessional...

Kat 45:46

I suppose the things that I do that might be deemed unprofessional. Like, it's things like I think, as a woman in my late 30, when you hair's in hairstyles that are deemed 'childish', perhaps. So, pigtails, whether that's, you know, I'll very often, like plait, have them plaited or just pigtails in bobbles and my hair loose, or buns up on, like bunches, anything like that. I would probably feel, I still, yeah, maybe that's a hang up? Like, I'd still consider that unprofessional, now. Or, I think others would consider it unprofessional. In younger years, and I'd say when I'm saying younger years, what do I mean? Maybe? Maybe in my 20s, if someone had said, 'Oh, don't you think you're a bit old to wear your hair like that?' Which my ex probably did. That would have been pretty par for the course, you know, that I would have still done it. But it bothered me. And my mom would have said things like that as well. You know, the whole, its the hair version of 'mutton dressed as lamb' which I hate. Such a, no, let's, let's not! Put that in the bin, shall we? Yeah, let's put that one in the bin. You can do your hair or you want and you can wear what you want. But yeah, that's a whole other rant. But there's probably that, still hang up of that, that I think that affects what what's deemed professional. Obviously colour. I, I did still have periods that through my teaching career, I was a teacher for 13 years, and I still did have brightly coloured hair for some of that, and tattoos. It's never something that's stopped me from expressing myself. But I've perhaps reined it in a bit. And like now see, I've got this darker section on the top or a more natural coloured section on the top, so that when I do go into schools, maybe I'll part it and wear it down, in in a bobble at the back, so you can't see as much of the pink. And that bright purple that I said had that was all over, full colour. And that was through lockdown and then, at the end of lockdown, or at the end of the full, whole COVID shebang. When, when it looked like I'd be going back into schools in person, that's when I've had this more natural colour on the top. I wouldn't say it was the main driving force. Partly, if I'm honest, it's like I say this top hair is a bit more damaged. And I didn't want to keep lightening it up. That was the main factor. But I can't say it wasn't a slight factor that I was thinking. I am going to be going back into schools and I'm not sure how, how it will go down if I've literally got like vivid purple or pink hair. And whilst I work for a very, very forward thinking charity, I would say. They're very inclusive. Very, yeah, very forward thinking with all aspects of inclusion and identity. But even then, even on a few like Teams chats people, I got the odd 'Oh, is that your summer hair, Kat?'. I'd be and there was a little bit of ooh, is that a bit passive aggressive? Is that like 'your summer hair'? Is there an undertone of 'you're gonna change it in the autumn though, right? When schools reopen?'

Elsa Ball 49:14

'You should have sorted that by now?'

Kat 49:15

Yeah, yeah, maybe. Maybe it was just an innocent, meaningless comment, but I think yeah, I think the, definitely the colour, I don't think it's unprofessional. It's ridiculous to think that hair colour or whether my skin has tattoos on it or not would affect my ability to do my job. But there clearly is still, that hang up does exist and yeah, I definitely try and wear, I'll probably wear it down lower like either down are in a lower ponytail to cover up more of the bright pink when I go into schools. Yeah, maybe even my fringe down.

Elsa Ball 49:55

Yeah, it's quite versatile having the colour underneath though

Kat 49:58

It really is

Elsa Ball 49:59

No one needs to know. Yeah. Umm. So that's all of my questions. There was one, this might might be a little bit abstract but right at the start you said, like, that one of the reasons you had to hated your hair was the it didn't look like what, it didn't look 'like

it's supposed to'. And I was just, like, wondering if you could describe what, like, what the hair that 'is supposed to look like', what, kind of, as a young person, ideally would have looked like, in your mind?

Kat 50:38

Bright, shiny. They're the main things I'd say. In the fashionable style, you know, the 'Rachel cut', clearly, like, my hair, naturally curly was never going to do that. And putting any layers and shortening curly hair is gonna make it go [gestures outwards from head]

Elsa Ball 50:59

Yeah

Kat 51:00

bigger and yeah,

Elsa Ball 51:01

It's not the cut for curly hair

Kat 51:03

I think, I think those are definitely the things that come to mind straight, shiny. Because clearly hair, it doesn't, doesn't, yeah, it doesn't look the same, does it? It doesn't have that same reflective, reflecting light in the same way. And just the way hair falls, as well, I think, is that, does that make sense? Like, around the face and things and on your, on your skin, the way it sits? My hairs thick, quite brittle. It doesn't move in the same way.

Elsa Ball 51:46

Yeah, yeah, I understand that. Yeah. Flowing?

Kat 51:51

Yeah. Yeah All of that stuff.

Elsa Ball 51:54

Curly hair has a bit of a, an agency of its own where it's it's going where it wants to go, not where it should neatly fall.

Kat 52:02

Yeah.

Elsa Ball 52:05

Brilliant. Those are all of my questions. So I'm just going to stop the transcription

Appendix G - Example Fieldnotes (Haircut 1 - Pilot)

Before Haircut 1

I've worn my hair in low bunches today. I never wear my hair like this. Maybe it is just because I'm going to change my hair that I feel the confidence to play with the style. There isn't the same feeling of attachment to my hair. At that moment, it is not my hair. There is a sense of separation from myself in bunches. While I am already in a state of flux, there is nothing at state in playing with my appearance. The bunches hang forward over my shoulders showing all its sins. The traces of previous colours have left me with a strange flat shade of blonde at the end of my hair. The line is not blended. Instead, there is a stark difference between the hair that was once pink and the hair that is untreated, dark brown but speckled with greys. The bleach not only changes the colour. The material quality of the hair is changed forever too. It feels somehow more elastic and more fragile at the same time. It tends to knot easier and break as I try to brush it. The bleached hair has fallen from the crown of my hair to about halfway down. I can't wait until it is all removed, and I can feel what my hair is really like. The ends are the bit we touch.

Because of the greys: What is problematic to me at the moment is the amount of flyway hairs I have. As the grey overtakes the rest of my hair, more and more hairs spring up from my scalp in a direction of their own choosing. I have always had very sleek hair, this is something that I've always known about myself but at this stage of my life, some of my fundamental beliefs about myself are tested. (perhaps this sounds a little melodramatic, but there is some truth in the slightly hyperbolic wording).

I've been waiting to start this process for a long time. My hair has grown lank and tired. The wait has gone beyond my usual schedule for haircare.

My schedule is usually dictated more by feeling than by time. The need for change can be a steady building of ill-ease, or crash on me unceremoniously. This time the need to change has been building up in me.

My hair doesn't feel like me at the moment, it hangs limp with an unfamiliar wave at the bottom. It knots immediately. I find tangles hidden in its depths. My hair feels foreign. My hair has always been straight, thick and strong. It is not prone to knotting and tangling. An old bleaching, the turn to grey and it being longer than I would like all play a part in it tangling. It bothers me. It is an irritation.

It is not the first time I have had it this length. It is not something I choose, so usually happens when I am too busy, distracted or anxious to get it cut. The longer my hair, the more I feel is at stake. I feel anxious about getting a haircut after so long. What if they mess it up? Visiting a new hairdresser can be a tense experience at the best of the time. Will they get me? Will the conversation flow? What if they aren't any good? These are my personal concerns. Although this is a research methodology, it is my own hair that is being cut. It is me that must deal with a bad haircut. It is me that will have to find a way to be happy in what I have. It is me that has to wear the hair.

That is without the pressure of undertaking a new methodology. This adds another layer of worry. I am doing something which is already a somewhat nervous process and making it an essential part of my PhD study. The PhD is a constant and total source of stress. My proposed methodology breaking down has been a long-running concern. The start of this autoethnography is filled with unknown. I'm doing one visit as a pilot, but that only alleviates a bit of the worry. A haircut is easy to imagine, but a haircut as a research method is harder to get my head around. How will it work in practice? I worry about having to reflect on it. What if I don't remember everything. What about if I don't have any reflections? What if I'm thinking about the recording and reflecting so much that I don't act like a normal human? I have to watch haircuts from

the outside while also being embedded in it enough not to come across as distracted. What if I'm bad at it? What if it doesn't work?

I held off getting it cut to grow enough material to undergo a series of haircuts. What I really want to do is get it all cut off – slashed down to chin level. But I must bear in mind how many I have left. Conserving some material so there is enough for the next stylist to work upon. It's a strange way to think about my hair. As a material for research, a limited resource is needed to finish my study. It is frustrating in its own way, that I've turned something very personal into a part of my project. There is a tension between what I want personally and what facilitates my research.

Yesterday, I got home from a run and realised I needed to wash my hair before I go to the hairdresser. She will, of course, start by washing my hair. But to have unclean hair could be a point of embarrassment and disgust. I co-wash my hair, instead of using shampoo to try to get every bit of moisture into my dry and damaged hair. This means that it lasts longer between washes than traditional wash methods. But it needed to be *clean* to visit the hairdresser. I went even further than this. I applied a hair mask. The idea of a hairdresser seeing the state that my hair was in was a thought filled with fear. She would know my dark secrets that sometimes my hair doesn't feel nice. Admittedly, it feels softer and less knotted today, but it is still far from shiny and vital.

Reflexive Questions

- What do these notes suggest regarding my beliefs and values about myself, my relationships with others, and my assumptions about knowledge, power, and privilege?

These notes suggest I give a lot of power to my hair. There is a lot of insecurity visible and the reflections before I start feel very anxious. My values about myself maybe appear that I have more concerns about my appearance than I think I do.

The privilege that is visible is my ability to have such concerns about something which is in no way critical or life-threatening. There is significant safety in my life to allow me to worry about my hair like that. There is privilege that allow me to research at all, let alone in a funded situation. There is also a narrative of whiteness in my worries about my hair being flyaway. Hegemonic beauty standards tell us that hair should be smooth, and signs of curliness is akin to deviance from the standards of whiteness.

- How do I understand my role in this setting (observer/participant, insider/outsider)?

This account is before I enter the salon, but I don't think I have considered this. There is a bit of concern about my role in the salon, but this is centred around my own anxiety, instead of being critical about my position. There is something important about verbalising my concerns, but they could consider the wider environment, rather than just worrying. I think this is fairly normal before starting the research.

- How well does my account align with my beliefs and values?

I think this account covers some of my beliefs well. It portrays my thought process about how I was feeling about my hair, before beginning, in an honest way. There are elements of my values and the importance I put in the concept of visual appearance here. At the same time, it portrays a more vulnerable and worried research than I am. I think this entry edges too far into the self-indulgent. It is my first attempt at reflecting, and I believe I need to get out some of these thoughts about my concerns, after I've had a difficult time working out how to conduct the research. This entry comes at the culmination of 6months of very stressful reorganising my PhD methodology so is bound to be wrapped up in that stress.

Articulating it, I hope, will allow me to move on and focus my future reflections more on the subject at hand.

- Where in my notes do I seem hesitant or uncertain about my observations? What was guiding me in these instances?

I don't know. I think this question will be easier to answer when I'm in the salon. The final paragraph, about washing my hair, feels unconvincing and superfluous. I think I was worrying about 'writing enough and including all of my thoughts, even if not directly relevant.

- What kinds of words (emotions) and language (formal/informal) did I use?

This reflection is written in a lot of questions, as it is before the main body of my research began. I question every aspect without offering any answers. These are not critical questions but emotional questions, raining my own emotional concerns.

- What did I leave out of my notes and why?

I jump in like the reader already knows all about my hair, which is a bit of a jolt reading back. I'm trying to catch my feelings in the moment, rather than writing for an audience. At the time I was not thinking about the form or outcome of the writing, purely about getting all the thoughts out of my head and onto paper.

Haircut 1 - Pilot

Date: 25/10/22

Salon: 1

Hairdresser: 1

Found & Booked: Treatwell

Service: Restyle (wash, cut and blow-dry)

Cost: £35

Time: 1h10

Waiting

This trip to the salon had a strange start. When I put the name of the salon into google maps, two different salons showed up. Confusing. While I was rushing to get to my appointment on time, I had to stop and check the booking confirmation to make sure that I had the right salon. I found the salon by picking a random one on the Treatwell app. This was my first time using this service and despite knowing it was fine, I couldn't help worrying that it was a bit sketchy. I usually wouldn't go to a salon I had never seen or had a recommendation for.

When I arrived at the correct salon, it struck me as a bit weird. There were 4 chairs, only one occupied by a client and her hairdresser standing behind her. It made the salon, which was already small, feel very empty. It was certainly lacking ambience. The padded velvet reception desk sat empty, and the place was silent. When the hairdresser found a natural break what she was doing she came up and informed me that my hairdresser would be up in a minute. And it really was only a minute.

The salon interior spoke of glamour in an unconvincing manner. The stations where you sit were placed in front of silver scroll legged vanity desks. It's all slightly baroque in feeling, but not in execution. The walls are painted what was intended to be a sophisticated dark grey, but they are patchy. It shows up all of the cracks and bumps. There are fake plants dotted around, all looking a little bit tired. Did I mention the padded velvet reception desk? Like a luxury headboard.

Consultation

Hairdresser 1 instructs me to pop my coat on the rack and follow her to one of the empty chairs. She is young, which, while not a problem, does leave me wondering whether we will struggle to find common ground. She must be in her early 20's and I'm 32. She has blonde hair pulled back in a high ponytail, with strands framing her face. She is dressed in the uniform of hairdressers everywhere, black t-shirt and leggings. Her tone is instructive as she asks the necessary questions and no more. 'What are we doing today?" and flicks my hair forward over my shoulders. "Oh, I don't know. I've just had enough of it at the moment and want a change…', she stares back at me, '…I mean, I'd like to keep the length, nothing too drastic, but yeah a change'. I can feel myself trying to fill the silence as she looks at me. She has a slightly bemused face, like it is very strange of me to come to a hairdresser without a strong idea of what I want. We settle on taking a good 3-inches off. 'Do you want it blunt or layers?" "oh, I don't know, what would look better', 'well have you had layers before?' 'Yeah' 'and did you like them?" 'yeah' 'ok we'll do some layers. This makes me smile. The hairdresser has no time for my romantic notions of co-constructing identity. She just wants to give me the haircut I want. She seems reluctant to give advice. I feel like I'm

hitting her the ball, and she is letting it drop to the ground. I become more twittery when I think people do not have the time for my particular brand of awkwardness.

Washing

Almost immediately, I'm led to get my hair washed down a set of stairs. The pseudo-opulence of upstairs is carried on here. The chairs you sit in to have your hair washed are leather and have studs all around them, which give them a feeling of tasteless bling. This salon is not to my taste. It manages to look both very glam and very cheap. I don't think it successfully pulling off what it is trying to achieve. As I'm having my hair washed the ceiling above me is lumpy and discoloured in places. I wonder whether this detail would have stood out to me so much if I wasn't so actively observing the salon. I have put myself in a strange hyper-observant state where I am sweeping my gaze over everything, trying to commit it to memory. Still, it looks bad and makes the shiny touches throughout the salon feel a little empty.

Hairdresser 1 washes my hair. She is a little rough and I never quite know when I'm meant to be lifting my head or not. She makes little effort to make me feel comfortable. And there is a definite air of awkwardness as we attempt some small talk. She asks me what I do, if I like it, how long I've done it, but it does not feel like she really cares about the answers. I get the feeling she's had this conversation before. I knock the questions back to her, she's been cutting hair for 2 years, and she likes it (maybe she is 18 or 20, straight out of school). The small talk is very very small today.

Hairdresser 1 really lights up when she asks me 'what are you having for tea?'. She laughs as she tells me she always asks

this. She's known for it. Her friends laugh about it. I don't know what I'm having for tea and the excitement in her voice catches me a little off guard. She isn't sure what she's having for tea either but hopes its creamy mushroom pasta. She's had this at ASK or Bella Italia once and thinks it's amazing. This seems like her way to get the conversation flowing.

We cover much of the standard fare of small talk while she washes my hair, do you watch the soaps? At this point I'm a little worried the awkwardness will carry on as she asks me about tv shows I know nothing about. What are we going to talk about for the rest of the hour? I feel awkward and although this is not unusual for me, this situation of being forced into an hour-long conversation with a stranger brings it out of me more than usual. Am I excited for 'I'm a celebrity'? She tells me that she is looking forward to it because Mick Carter is going to be in it. She asks if I know Mick Carter. I don't. She tells me he's in Eastenders, and he's really famous. As we talk it becomes clear she is talking about the actor Danny Dyer, who plays a character called Mick Carter in Eastenders. This really makes me laugh.

My hair is knotty, and she tugs at it. This is not quite painful, but it certainly isn't comfortable. I apologise for the state of it 'oh it's just the bleach' she tells me as she fights the soggy tangles. I hate the idea of someone else brushing my hair when it's knotty. I want to offer to take it from her and sort it out. I don't do that, that would be weird. She asks if I'm growing the bleach out 'yes, accidentally'. I mention that I thought I'd give a new salon a go. She then asks me where I used to go. This feels like an invasion somehow. I fob her off with an 'I haven't been anywhere for ages'. I don't want to tell her I still think of my hairdresser as my hairdresser, that

outside of my research I visit another salon close by that I love. That I am cheating on that hairdresser. The conversation moves on.

This bit of the service is usually relaxing but I didn't find it so. None of the products she used seemed to leave any smell on my head. This isn't a salon linked to a brand where they are trying to sell their products, so it probably matters less to them. The wash is a perfunctory service, rather than a relaxing or pampering experience. There is no space for luxury here.

When I told her that I teach fashion at Textiles at NTU, tells me that she had a fashion student in earlier for highlights. I said she may well be one of mine. She laughs because she has several clients from the fashion course, and they all have blonde, blonde, blonde highlights.

The Cut

There is no ritual or ceremony made of the cutting process. No products or potions. Instead, she implements the cut we discussed earlier. She does it quickly. The conversation goes cold, and I listen to the lady in the chair next to me, who is wearing leather trousers and has foils in her hair sing the praises of 4 sessions of Pilates a week 'I like me Pilates, I do', as her stylist quizzes her on her exercise regimen. Their conversation is flowing better than ours; maybe they have known each other longer. It is halfway through the cut that the other stylist turns music on, and I realise that the salon has been near silent, perhaps this has added to the awkward atmosphere. The cut was functional. She went through the steps of cutting for length, adding layers and then shaping around the front. All shaping had grown out of my hair, so she cut the front sections shorter to frame my face better and to

add texture. She is focused on what she is doing but does not seem too worried about the finer details.

The Styling

Drying my hair seemed to take forever. Where the cut was done quickly, the blow-dry takes an eternity. I'm not sure why it was taking so long but it was largely silent other than the hum of the dryer. The tugging was beginning to give me a headache. Somehow, she was still finding tangles in my hair. I'm not sure if this is to do with the quality of the hair or how she is handling it. It feels like she is taking very big chunks of hair when she dries and not making fast progress. When it is finally dried, she paused to check I was ok with how it was looking while it was straight. The cut is not ground-breaking or out of my comfort zone. I have got the cut I asked for, but I'm not left oohing and ahhing and a glamourous new look. She asks how I want it styled, and we decide on a curl. I love my hair curled but hate doing it myself as it's so thick. Curls feel glamorous and bouncy in a way my hair on a normal day does not. She curls it with straighteners and without the sound of the hairdryer, we chat again. Dogs, a safe topic. She tells me all about her dog, who she loves. There are moments in this interaction where she tells me about things she loves, and the awkwardness is completely gone. The moments where she talks about something she cares about, (dogs/dinner) she is animated and excited.

The reveal

Once she is finished, I do not like the curls that she's put in. They are a little tighter and more ordered than I would like. They are giving me child star ringlets, not tousled waves. (They fall out nicely over the next 2 hours to something I feel a

little more comfortable in. By the time I've walked home it is full of motion and bounce.)

She offers to photograph the back for me so I can see, rather than the two-mirror trick I am used to. The back looks lovely, and my hair feels sleek. Although the process of the haircut was not one akin to pampering, but rather to functionality. This is probably to be expected. The cut is cheaper than many nearby salons. Hairdresser 1 is relatively new to the role, and I booked it through an app rather than picking a hairdresser who I thought suited me. The experience was pleasant enough and I like the cut currently.

I did not, however, enjoy having it cut here. I pushed for some assistance in working out what to do but it wasn't there. Hairdresser 1 did not want to be an active partner in the negotiations. She wanted me to lead the discussion and her to implement it. At the end, I asked for some styling advice. The front of my hair is often lifeless and falls over my face limply, she suggested blow-drying it upside-down and then over to the wrong side for the front bits.

I would not be rushing back to this salon, but I knew that from the moment I stepped in. It was not that there was anything wrong with the salon, but I could feel that it wasn't aligned with how I see myself. I found the décor a bit tacky and fake plants always puts me off a place. It speaks to desiring an aesthetic enough to overlook the purpose. Plants are living, they aerate a space, they are pleasant to look at but also improve the environment. They do, however, require some effort, expertise and upkeep to stop them dying.

As I walked home, I kept touching my hair, as I always do once I've had it cut. Feeling the difference in it, but at the same time trying to tease out some of the curls. While she didn't use much product on my hair, just some heat protection and hairspray, my hair feels slippery, and my fingers are left feeling greasy.

- What do these notes suggest regarding my beliefs and values about myself, my relationships with others, and my assumptions about knowledge, power, and privilege?

I think there is a classed perspective within these notes. It is particularly visible when I discuss the décor of the salon. This style of slightly gaudy-glam is a largely working-class aesthetic. Although I still believe it was not successful in achieving the look it was trying to achieve, the salon was also not trying to appeal to me as a target consumer. This salon does not align with how I see myself. I am not aiming to be glamorous in that way (or any way, most of the time). This type of luxury-inspired glamour is not for me.

I assumed that I would have nothing in common with the hairdresser. This was true, but it can be a damaging assumption to the way I interact. I could be immediately giving off a negative or un-open energy to her, which adds to the awkwardness of the encounter. It was difficult to make conversation in the appointment. At times it felt like when she was asking me questions it was just out of politeness when actually she just wanted to talk about her dog.

- How do I understand my role in this setting (observer/participant, insider/outsider)?

I felt very much like an outsider in this salon. With the styling of the salon, and a hairdresser that I did not feel at ease with,

I felt a little out of place. In some ways I was the paying customer, I was in the right place. I was an insider of that interaction. But in a bigger way, MY emotional response was that I was still an outsider in that space. I have felt like an outsider in salons before beginning this research. Particularly when in hyper feminine high-end salons. Although I take real joy in beauty treatments, I am not a traditional 'girly-girl' and I can feel othered in places that idolise a particular type of beauty. This is not what is happening here. The salon has the slight feeling of a village pub, where you are the only one who doesn't know anyone.

- How well does my account align with my beliefs and values?

The account lines up well with my beliefs. It presents an account of some of the thoughts and feelings in the salon. However, it strays from my values in places as it reads a little like a rant. I think it is important to capture the uncomfortable and negative moments, but it is a little challenging to read back as I sound like I am moaning rather than being critical.

- Where in my notes do I seem hesitant or uncertain about my observations? What was guiding me in these instances?

I can see some hesitance in trying to write something positive, or useful, while also adequately capturing the truth of my feelings. I don't want or need to pass opinions on the hairdresser, just to capture my responses to the things that happened. How I felt in the moment.

- What kinds of words (emotions) and language (formal/informal) did I use?

The language is very informal. I have edited out some of the really chatty bits, as it was reading like a blog post. The emotions all speak of uncomfortableness, awkwardness, and being on edge. The experience was, although not bad, not

good. There was nothing wrong but my language in the field notes speaks to a general feeling of ill ease throughout.

- What did I leave out of my notes and why?

I forgot about the Mick Carter story. I'll add it in now.

- How did the fact that I was taking notes impact my understanding of the situation? Would my understanding be any different had I been using video or audio recording instead of field notes?

In this cut there was not much time for me to make notes. I tried to type things in my phone, but they were very short notes to aide my memory rather than fully formed sentences or field notes. I was also intent on remembering every detail. I think if I had been recording in other means I would have been able to relax into the process more and let go of the need to remember everything. As this the pilot visit, it is even more heightened. As I do more this feeling becomes less engulfing/present at the front of my mind. I grow in confidence about it.

- How did my presence as an observer influence others around me?

My presence as an observer is covert. My presence is very active in shaping the way the haircut goes, the atmosphere, how much we talk etc. I think in this cut I was worried about pushing the data too far. As it goes on, I feel happier being a bit more present and active in the conversation, as without that there is not conversation at all. Part of the awkward atmosphere certainly comes from me trying to learn my place in these interactions.

Reflection Haircut 1 after 4 Weeks

I have lived in this haircut for a little while now. The haircut was such a relief; it was the start of my ethnography, I had been waiting for months for it, and my hair was in such bad condition that I had been itching to change it. There was tension in me at the haircut because what I wanted to do was so cut short and I knew that would make it difficult to carry out the rest of my research. These things and the nerves I was feeling about doing the first bit of ethnography made the feeling of relief after the cut outweigh the feelings of awkwardness and my lack of confidence in the hairdresser.

In terms of the style, I got layers put in, which is not something I have enjoyed in the past. Historically my hair oscillates between a mid-length sharp bob, then a single-length long style. Layers are out of my comfort zone. Having very straight hair naturally, layers tend to look much more choppy on my hair than they would on someone who has a natural wave to it. I worry about looking like Rod Stewart.

There is something about the way that Hairdresser 1 did the layers that I do not like. I've received compliments about my hair and the new cut, but to me, the layers look blunt and steppy. I don't really like the way it looks, when she cut it, she curled it nicely but when I wash it and leave it, my usual routine, it doesn't sit right. There is always a period of adjustment to a new cut, I think this has gone beyond that window. It is easy to dislike a haircut because it doesn't suit you, look how you expected or work with your image, however, this cut, I do not feel comfortable in because of the skill of the cut.