The London School of Economics and Political Science

Negotiating complex senses of self: a study of girlhood and privilege through the lens of fashion

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Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the MPhil/PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

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Abstract

This thesis explores everyday uses and experiences of fashion and dress amongst teenage girls. I position fashion as a site through which girls both explore and mediate their identities. The core sociological concern is to explore how creative processes of fashion intersect with relations of power in everyday interactions. I employ both material and cultural approaches to the study of fashion. I focus on how girls negotiate a complex sense of self and identity on the terrain of fashion through different aspects of consuming clothes such as money and finance, forms of knowledge, management of judgements and understanding the body. Many of these are evidenced in second-hand clothing consumption, requiring knowledge and a specific skill set which provides the possibility for symbolic reward in ways which also highlight class privilege. Fashion provides a useful framework to explore (re)productions of hierarchies in girls practices. I argue girls' uses of fashion are highly political, reliant on understanding wider social codes to navigate social spaces successfully.

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In memory of Anne Westrope (née Le Voi) who completed her sociology degree in 1956.

Introduction

Prelude: The politician's daughter

I met 15-year-old Jessica through Lizzie, who I had previously spoken to with her friends Tabby, Kate, and Beth over zoom in early May 2020. Jessica goes to the same school as the others but is in a different friendship group. She and Lizzie are close both in proximity to each other's houses and their friendship status outside of school. I spoke with Jessica and Zoe in a separate conversation and had a follow-up interview with Jessica shortly after in the summer of 2020. I enjoyed my conversations with Jessica, and I think the feeling was mutual; she also commented on enjoying the chats and conversations feeling easy. Although it would be hard to confirm, I believe Jessica was probably part of 'the popular group' at school. It is hard to confirm precisely because it would be decidedly uncool to declare oneself popular, coolness instead a kind of 'tame non-conformity' and a general humility and disinterestedness (Pichler 2009). However, a few indications were weaved within our conversations; her calm attitude when telling stories about boys making fun of her outfits, suggesting a confidence in herself that comes from knowing you're well-liked; telling me about how she got made fun of on anonymous comment sites, only to read out comments which appeared hugely complementary 'you're so gorgeous and I'm really happy because I feel like we're getting closer'. Another indication came from a separate conversation I had with Kate. When I asked Kate who she would trust to pick an outfit for her, she said Jessica. Since Jessica was not a specific friend of Kate, this choice wasn't about trusting her to know what Kate would like, but aspirational in that she saw Jessica as having cool style. It could thus be inferred that Jessica holds a position at the school that at least Kate, and potentially others, look up to.

The other person Kate mentioned as having cool style was someone she hadn't met but who, until that point, operated on the popular social media site TikTok under the name '420BandoBaby'. '420BandoBaby' had a popular following on TikTok with teenage girls and was known for; taking TikToks (short videos) in her messy, darkly lit room with walls covered in graffiti and some political signals such as a communist poster; her oversized scruffy-looking clothes and winged eyeliner; smoking weed ('420' being a reference to cannabis culture); and discussions of being 'broke' (a 'bando baby' is defined on urban dictionary as a baby born in

either poor or neglected conditions, to addict or dealer parents, and living an unstable life). About the time I spoke with Kate, '420BandoBaby' had become a source of public conversation after it became known that they were, in fact, the daughter of Michael Gove, a senior member of the Conservative party. B Gove had become a minor influencer on TikTok for middle-class teenage girls. A style inspiration that Kate described as 'iconic'. Although she wasn't entirely sure who Michael Gove was or what party he belonged to, Kate had the vague sense that he was on the 'wrong' side of politics. B. Gove conversely expressed more liberal, pro-LGBTQ+ attitudes that did not conform to her father's conservative position, thus earning her status as 'iconic'. If we break this down, we see a material style of oversized clothing and an aesthetic built upon a style of, in essence, poverty, characterised by oversized, ill-fitting clothing and a general scruffy style. Graffiti on the walls of her room connotes the image of rebellion or non-conformity, as well as being more commonly attributed with 'poorer' areas. We also see a political aesthetic in communist posters, open discussions of group rights and sexuality, and the smoking of weed, again indicative of non-conformity and a more general 'liberal' position (Kehily and Pattman 2006). All of this, in the household of her conservative parents, renders her 'iconic'. The reason why B Gove had become a topic of public discussion, however, was precisely in the nuances of this aesthetic. The open smoking of illegal substances provoked a 'one rule for them' response from some (non-white, non-elite) who might be subject to legal caution if caught doing the same thing. Moreover, the alignment of herself as 'broke' triggered much public discussion and ridicule from many upon finding out she, in fact, lives in a large house in London with her politically elite parents. This wider public attention resulted in Gove deleting her TikTok account.

The discussions of B Gove were fairly public at the time of my fieldwork, having come across the debates myself when scrolling through Twitter, and more generally, she had been a popular influence of style on TikTok for some of the girls I spoke with. Kate had cited both her and Jessica as style influences. When I later met with Jessica in an interview, we discussed the different style groups Jessica perceived. She brought up 'West London Girls' who are both mocked and revered on TikTok for their 'alternative' style. 'West London Girls' were defined as both rich girls with expensive clothing and dressing like they're homeless, prompting me to bring up the case of B Gove as she seemed to fit with this typology. Jessica found it funny that I mentioned her because, as it so happens, she is friends with Gove's

younger brother and had been at their house just a few days before. She can't help but tell me that the house is really big but that this is nonchalant; they don't discuss it, and it's not a big deal. Jessica, too described B Gove as having quirky, cool style and noted her popularity on TikTok. Jessica had also copied a top she had seen her wearing in a TikTok, which she got from the 'fast fashion' online outlet AliExpress. As far as Jessica knew, the Gove children were not much affiliated with their dad's political world, and in that sense, shouldn't be held to them

> as far as I've heard from him he like doesn't really talk about politics with his dad or anything he's just, doesn't really like.. he's really oblivious to it all [laughs]. He was saying she was like, there's this massive thing, it's really difficult for her, because obviously she's 17 or something and then there's a whole like *everyone* like the fact that even, like, people your age and adults are finding out about all of her stuff, and she's literally just 17 year old girl like trying to do her or whatever

Jessica felt for B, as it had been really difficult for her, as a 17-year-old girl, to be subject to such wide public discussion and attack; this was further dichotomised by the differentiation drawn between B as a child and those in the public as adults. The general sense of the mockery was of the white West London rich girl who pretends to be poor. Jessica thinks it's all mean because she's just living her life, and she's not an adult. It bugs her when people take the joke too far. Jessica also disagreed with any negative terminology and was resistant to people being labelled in any way or 'put in a box'. For her, what was being defined as 'homeless' style was more aligned with clothes that were comfortable. Reflections on the aesthetics of class were minimal, and where they did exist remained around resistance to public scrutiny.

> People just wear trackies…trackies and a baggy t shirt just because it's comfy. I don't know… but then if like all the rich people decided to wear like super designer and like flexing it all the time, then people would have a problem with that as well

Jessica discusses a general sentiment that the wealthy can be 'damned if they do, damned if they don't' and desires to let people be comfortable. What is articulated here is the support for other young women (with whom they feel an affinity). What is perhaps missing is any reflection on how it might not be appropriate for wealthier young people to appropriate the aesthetics of poverty. Particularly when, whether they asked for it or not, they are systemically benefitting from such inequality. I raised the question of - while understanding her point, particularly regarding the toxicity of online trolling and vilification of a young woman - I understood why there might be issues with people saying they can't afford things when living in multi-million-pound houses. Jessica's response was to tell me that you don't know how much some people have personally compared to their parents and that it's possible she didn't get any money from her parents. She furthers her point by clarifying that both Gove's children attend a state school, implying that private schooling is an indicator of privilege. In this case, the elite status of B Gove is downplayed in her attending an 'ordinary' school (uhem, a very good local state school, in a very wealthy area). This case study points to issues of fashion, aesthetics, politics, privilege and girlhood. My thesis offers a detailed qualitative analysis of what we can disentangle from girls' social worlds through the study of fashion, and how it can inform broader sociological concerns.

Research questions and context

This thesis is an empirical exploration of the everyday uses and experiences of fashion, which I view as a tool to understand the social lives of teenage girls. The guiding research questions have been:

What does looking at fashion tell us about the social lives of teenage girls?

And how can we link relative ideas of practice and power in pursuit of this?

My research took place in March-September 2020 with 24 teenage girls aged 15-17. I conducted eight discussion groups within the girls' friendship groups and eleven follow-up individual interviews. The above case study does, to some extent, represent quite an extreme example – the girls who took part in this study were not 'TikTok' famous, with family members in the public eye, let alone leading politicians – and thus should not be overstated.

However, the case relates strongly to the main arguments of this thesis in which Jessica (and presumably B Gove) negotiate a complex sense of self and how forms of fashion and dress mediate social relationships. Their social positions are complex – being young and female yet privileged in their class positioning. As this thesis develops, I will explore the complex nature of their class positionings which are contextual and relational. The case highlights the solidarity within fractions of girlhood, in this case, young middle-class women. For regardless of everything else, B Gove *is* also a 17-year-old girl who has to contend with all the things a teenage girl has to deal with, and on top of that has a conservative father - who is and has faced public reckoning for conservative plans and policies - while also identifying as LGBTQ+. Amongst those, Kate and Jessica included, who defended B Gove, the argument was that she should not be defined by what her parents do. According to Kate, her dissociation from her Tory roots makes her 'iconic', as opposed to a privileged kid appropriating poverty. Therefore there are also issues of how it is possible to map sociological understandings of social class, particularly on young people of pre-working ages. Social class here is understood as relating to economic, cultural, and social positions reflected through emotional and relational experiences (Savage et al. 2001; Karademir Hazır 2017; Reay 2005). This is particularly important in the social worlds of teenagers, who are constantly negotiating who they are through relational and reflexive means. The focus then is on exploring the processes *as they occur* in the lifeworlds of teenagers. As this case illustrates, there is a performed separation from parental positions, which involves a narrative of autonomy central to how the girls view themselves alongside their understanding of their position within wider social landscapes. This kind of individuation is prevalent in their consumption habits, as will be demonstrated in how they relay their ability to consume (literally, how they pay for things) and their preferences for an individualised style that allow for more ambiguous social positionings. I employ the term ordinary to mediate between these ambiguous positions, as the conception of ordinary has been taken up in class analysis (Savage et al. 2001) and in individuals' relationships to clothing (Woodward and Miller 2012). That is, the term ordinary offers the opportunity to understand the girls' performances and senses of self that navigate terrains of practice and power. The case of B Gove is the first attempt to explore how fashion and dress offer opportunities to play with aesthetic codes of 'non-conformity', political and social knowledges, and performances of gender and class.

This study is at the nexus of fashion, consumption, and relationships of gender and class as mediated by teenage girls. The research presented in this thesis outlines how the study of fashion can illuminate everyday social processes with greater possibilities for broader understandings of political and socio-economic dynamics, including them as sites of struggle that can be personally and interpersonally negotiated. The case study above highlights there is a tension between relationships to practice and power in which middle-class girls occupy complex positions. Girls have been argued to be positioned as 'ideal subjects' in consumer culture (McRobbie 2008), leaving a lot for girls to navigate within the spaces most available to them. The complex power relationships will be explored through a lens of post-feminist and Bourdieusian concerns. More specifically, the 'emerging cultural forms' of class (Prieur and Savage 2013) and concerns about the depoliticising of girlhood through neoliberal subjectivities- encouraging girls to strive for individual success and the affective constructions of girls as 'fun' (Coulter 2021). McRobbie (2016) reflects on the wider creativity *dispositif* as a means of pointing to how creativity has become a part of the neoliberal economy, with increased 'self-reliance' narratives in line with a decline of the welfare state and an increase of precarious employment, and a shift towards creative, 'passionate' work (McRobbie 2016). All of this has a lot of bearing for young people, who stand to make less than their parents, have a harder time getting stable jobs, on the property ladder or have any of the more traditional forms of 'security'. The bank of mum and dad[1] has seen increased sociological attention, documented as one of the few ways to get on the property ladder or pursue 'dream jobs' with a safety net (Toft and Friedman 2020; Moor and Friedman 2021). At the same time, disparities in familial wealth are growing (Piketty 2014; Savage 2021). I argue that further exploration is needed into how these wider social constructs operate in everyday ways and how they are negotiated. My final argument is that a stronger relationship needs to be made between these cultural reproductions and the relative economics of privilege and how this becomes a mediating factor. Articulated here in B Gove's TikTok performances of her 'brokeness' and how Jessica distances B Gove from an elite or privileged position because she attends a state school. That money, too, is a factor in practices of fashion consumption which draw on discourses of 'excess' as a means of mediating positions away from privilege

[1] The bank of mum and dad is a colloquial term to refer to those who are able to borrow or receive money from their parents rather than through loans and debt organisations. This is turn creates inequities, for instance in access to the housing market or the ability to pursue 'dream' jobs in times of increasing precarity within the labour market.

and in favour of ordinary or even low-income performances of consumption. This thesis argues that girls' practices are highly political in that they negotiate complex social positions and their own senses of self through their relationships with fashion and consumption. What I will demonstrate are the ways in which the girls utilise fashion and dress as a means of negotiating complex positions highlighting the calculated and political nature of their practices, involving performances of self that require a relationship to 'ordinary' yet somehow 'successful' in their negotiation of style and spaces.

Theoretical frameworks

I introduce the above case study not because I want to overstate the relevance of this particular case but because, in a certain way, the case highlights some of the specific tensions at play in this thesis. As sociologists, our understandings of people differ from their own. It is important to understand how to navigate this academically while respecting peoples' interpretations and performances of self. I argue that fashion is an underrated tool for sociological enquiry that bridges the gap between human and material studies, allowing for an approach that can account for nuances in meanings, interactions and identity formation. Moreover, using fashion as a site of enquiry can provide important insights into cultural *and* economic landscapes (e.g. Entwistle 2009). The study of fashion provides the opportunity to uncover how girls can actively perform and mediate their identities. At the same time, sociologically, this can connect relationships between bodies and embodiment, enabling reflection across academic concerns of class, race, gender and material relationships. In taking this approach, this thesis identifies subtle processes which underpin how experiences are both formed – in relation to their wider social environments - and formative in their everyday affects. In this thesis, I argue that fashion offers the possibility for understanding everyday practices and senses of self in which the girls demonstrate complex negotiations of their social positions. The complexity has necessitated the deployment of various theoretical perspectives to capture the nuances of these experiences. Initially, by conceptualising forms of cultural production, through the theoretical perspective of Pierre Bourdieu to capture cultural productions of class and the relationship to the embodied form, which has influenced much work on fashion. I will combine this with cultural studies with a specific focus on fashion and girlhood; I view Angela McRobbie as being at the forefront of

presenting fashion as a political, cultural mechanism and technology of the self. I will bridge these with material culture studies to account for individual relationships with fashion as this allows for exploration of the ways girls affect wider social relationships, are affected by them and how dress mediates social relations. Rather than seeing these as diametrical opposites, I would prefer to view these as productive tensions to address the multifaceted relationships in and between fashion. Therefore, I adjudicate between the differing perspectives to foreground the complexities of power and practice, as they are interrelated in the everyday lives of teenage girls. I have felt this to be particularly important when discussing teenage girls, who are all too easily dismissed or denigrated in wider public (and academic) discourse. The following sections offer key concepts and positions that require contextualisation for the thesis.

Bourdieu offered conceptual frameworks to sociology to understand how inequalities are produced and reproduced through interactions and reflect on how these relate to everyday practices (1977; 1984). As a brief introduction, Bourdieu conceptualises three key modes of capital; economic, cultural and social. The accumulation of these relates to one's social positioning, which he views as hierarchical and unequal. Economic capital is "immediately and directly convertible into money" (Bourdieu 1986: 16), whilst cultural capital can be accumulated through material resources (objectified), inherited through the family (embodied) and institutionalised through educational qualifications (ibid). Cultural capital can be converted into and is largely rooted in economic capital (ibid: 24). A prerequisite of capital's value is that it can hold widespread legitimacy (Friedman et al. 2015). Class position fluctuates and is not readily articulated but can be "defined by the distribution of economic and cultural capital" (Bourdieu 1984: 260). I here think about the 'middle' class position not as set but related to 'comfortable' economic and social situations and possibilities for future opportunities. To varying degrees, forms of capital accumulate throughout the life course in what Bourdieu refers to as habitus. Habitus is "instilled by the childhood learning that treats the body as a living memory pad, an automation that leads the mind unconsciously along with it" (1980: 68). That is, a naturalised form of cultural inculcation and knowledge in which individuals are shaped by their circumstances and also shape those around them. Thus, early years are crucial for future opportunities, particularly embodied forms. As these forms of capital are unequal, so too are their reproductions.

There is much scope within elements of Bourdieu's work to foreground some of the issues at stake, such as the means through which class is (re)produced through interactions and in relation to objects. Bourdieu's work has been pivotal in positioning people's relationships to objects and offers insights into how positions of class are produced and maintained. Within this, there have been wider debates about the cultural mechanisms which unequally afford opportunities in labour markets (Friedman and Laurison 2019; Puwar 2004), particularly in cultural spheres such as fashion which require legitimation (Entwistle 2015; Rocamora 2002 McRobbie 1998). More broadly, fashion and dress have been linked to perceptions and experiences of cultural 'fit' and inclusion in the workplace (Friedman and Laurison 2019), yet frustratingly rarely discussed as ever more than a side note. Meanwhile, concepts of habitus, embodiment and cultural capital have been taken up in understanding women's everyday relationships to clothing (Karademir Hazır 2017;2020). However, as the above case study makes clear, the girls in this study did not readily identify with their families regarding their understanding of their social positions. If you look at a politician's daughter, statistically or historically, we could make educated guesses about their future trajectories. Yet historically, teenage daughters have not been able to take to social media and command so much attention from their peers that they can publicly perform separation from their family values. Therein lies the complexity between adopting approaches that aim to account for naturalised privileges and for one's senses and performances of self. Recent uses of Bourdieu's work have made this more apparent, focusing on 'emerging forms of capital'. They pay more attention to practices which do not fit into the kinds of traditional hierarchies Bourdieu presented in the 1970s (see van Eijck & Knulst 2005; Warde et al. 2007; Prieur and Savage 2013; Prieur et al. 2023). The context of this thesis develops further reflection on the specific location of girls in wider sociological debates and material cultures.

I draw on the work of Angela McRobbie to frame the wider feminist issues at stake. In engaging with McRobbie's earlier work, this thesis takes the broader youth cultural perspective, which identifies relationships between young people and popular culture as sites for meaning-making, forging social relationships and identity formation (Hall and Jefferson 1976; Hebdige 1979; Willis 1990; Thornton 1995). In her earlier works, McRobbie is already in conversation with work on youth cultures, at first as a means for arguing for the more visible place of girls and later to reenvisage these subcultures as they relate to cultural production

and market spaces. Her work on second-hand dresses is formative in arguing against the notion that youth-subcultural spaces are somehow distinct from wider market practices. In the specific context of second-hand clothing, McRobbie (1989) argues for exploring practices of buying and selling beyond the moment of diffusion. Her work iterates the political and cultural scope of fashion. She goes on to reimagine our understanding of femininity in response to the changing role of women in public and economic spaces, which is extended to problematise feminism in an age of neoliberalism. Her focus moves on to considering labour in the creative economy. McRobbie's work, therefore, combines some of the key issues I am contending with here; popular cultural forms, specifically fashion, and their creative processes through a critical lens which considers the political culture of neoliberalism. I contribute to this with my interests in what they mean in the context of girls' everyday uses of fashion, and how fashion is used to mediate social relationships. In this sense, the girls occupy complex spaces of inequality on account of their gender, age, privilege, and their economic positions. All of these have a bearing on their practices which underpin their forms of dress and consumption.

I want to emphasise that in a discussion of uses and experiences of fashion, is a need to discuss individuals' sense-making, as it is reasonable to presume that the everyday teen does not analyse their choices in line with sociological debates of neoliberalism or accumulated capital. Miller and Clarke (2002) explore the experiences of anxiety among women in their clothing choices. They argued that in their pursuit for reassurance, women reach out not just to family and friends but also to mail-order catalogues and businesses which offer 'rational' fashion advice in terms of 'what fits' to alleviate the anxiety of 'getting it wrong', and the 'imagined gaze' from others (Woodward 2005). This research led Miller and Clarke to conclude that it's not just abstract influences of class position, as posited by Bourdieu, that influence fashion choices but also everyday aesthetic choices – social networks become bigger everyday influences than wider social pressures. With the increasing documentation of outfits via social media, we could also reasonably assume that now the online world and social media would extend where women may go to seek reassurance for their dress. Moreover, the work of both Daniel Miller and Sophie Woodward continually demonstrates how an individual's relationships with objects are often key to how they see themselves. All of this creates a tension in fashion and dress in which individuals mediate their dress to

coordinate individual style with fitting into their environments. Women have also been shown to navigate self-perception against broader understandings of femininity and ideal body types (Woodward 2007). Individuals may also mediate between personal style and wider trends. A trend is a certain style or behaviour that has been adopted by a significant number of people within a social group. Trends can respond to, or indicate, changes in cultural, social and economic environments. Trends are ephemeral, yet can indicate future directions for fashion (Welters and Lillethun 2007). Individual responses to fashion trends can involve tensions and fitting in and standing out, and encompass wider issues of legitimacy and hierarchy.

Fashion in an everyday context is interpersonal, in which individuals concern themselves with their representations to avoid perceived scrutiny. Friendships and social networks are important means through which this is mediated. In this sense, fashion and dress are relational, not something one does by or for themselves. Fashion is then political for the very tension between culture and experience, if nothing else. Although I will conceptualise what is meant by fashion and dress, on a more everyday level, fashion is where lots of social relationships are played out – youth cultures have documented this concerning subcultures (e.g. Willis 1990; Hebdige 1979); it also underpins much of friendship and family dynamics (e.g. Croghan et al. 2006; Appleford 2014). I will argue that this is where there are possibilities for linking everyday power dynamics. I will demonstrate this through micro-logical levels, such as in formations of friendships amongst girls, within family dynamics, and more institutionally through school regulations on dress. This, in turn, has consequences for the everyday practices of girls, wherein dress is informed by and mediated by girls' social relationships. All of this corroborates with the 'micrological level of dispute and contestation' (McRobbie 1994: 159) that occurs in girl cultures and tensions of fitting in and standing out. The next section will outline the structure of this thesis and how I will take forward the debates discussed above into the empirical chapters.

Thesis structure

The first chapter builds on the above reflections of conflicting theoretical positionings to present the sociological relevance of fashion as a tool to capture insight into relationships and social lives. The second chapter then reflects on this more explicitly in terms of the social

lives of teenage girls. The empirical chapters are largely descriptive. I have ordered them so that they each build on each other, in which I aim to paint a comprehensive picture of the aesthetic life of privileged girls, including the complicated positions they occupy on account of these social markers, which demonstrate intersections between power and practice as conveyed through social relationships and sense of self.

Chapter one: Reconciling practice and power: fashion and consumption

The first chapter sketches out debates on fashion and consumption and how they relate to sociological concerns of power and practice. I stake out my interest in adjudicating between material relationships and inequality perspectives. I do this by drawing on the concept of embodiment as one which can reflect hierarchy and everyday relationships with the body. Fashion is conceptualised using Entwistle's (2015) term *situated bodily practice* in recognition that fashion and dress are interconnected. I utilise the concept assemblage to present the wider infrastructures of both fashion and brands – from production to consumption, in which girls take from and influence. I draw on the concept of the ordinary to explore class and material relationships. Having teased out some of the complexities of unequal power relationships as explored through theory and in everyday practices in relation to fashion, I move on to outlining sociological considerations in the practices of fashion consumption. I specifically focus on the means to consume (money) and the practices of consuming (shopping), particularly second-hand consumption, as a sociological area of enquiry that can bridge economic and cultural aspects of consumption practices. Utilising the work of Zelizer (2017), I will frame money as a social process which offers both freedom and control. Second-hand is exemplified as a means of fashion practice while it has also been aligned more generally with arguments that only the 'rich' can afford to look poor (McRobbie 1994; Skeggs 1997). Thus, further illustrating tensions between power and practice, second-hand clothing will be explored throughout the thesis.

Chapter two: Practice and power in the social lives of teenage girls

Girls are argued to be held up as ideal neoliberal subjects, focused on their forms of self-improvement, self-investment and reliance, which reduces forms of female solidarity. The construction of the 'can-do girl' (Harris 2004), on the one hand, seems to uphold and

reproduce heteronormative ideas of femininity. On the other hand, it is illustrative of the difficult landscape of 'growing up girl' in which girls have to negotiate expectations that they should be 'pretty', 'fun' and live up to a standard of 'perfect'. All of these necessitate an appeasing demeanour that does not lend itself well to feminism in what Coulter (2019) refers to as the depoliticisation of girlhood through consumer culture. Therefore I argue for framing the messy realities as lived by girls in which they must negotiate these terrains in their everyday practices. I also highlight how schools act as a space for everyday governmentality of girls' dress and bodies. I will consider how fashion and dress frame everyday social relationships with friends, peers and mothers in girls' social worlds. I also introduce debates on social media into this as I argue social media offers opportunities for collective meaning-making and circulation of not only trends but also political resources.

Chapter three: Methods

This chapter will provide more detail about the specifics of my research methods and data collection as well as some empirical reflections of the groups of girls who took part in this project. Over the course I fieldwork, I conducted eight discussion groups and eleven follow-up interviews with girls aged between 15-17. I discuss the complications I faced in the early stages of fieldwork in shopping centres and the need to adjust my research methods in 2020. Owing to the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, I shifted my methods to online discussion groups and interviews to 'capture the moment'. I also utilise this chapter to introduce the girls within their friendships, providing some details of my impressions or their descriptions of each other, which I believe will be useful information for the empirical chapters. In doing so, I am also able to reflect on the research process and ethics, which further informed the reflexive thematic analysis approach to analysing the data. As well as, more broadly, the methodological approach of 'story worlding' as a tool for capturing both individuals' understandings of themselves while situating these in broader and, at times, contradictory debates (Dennis and Zhao 2022).

Chapter four: Negotiating relationships

This chapter is the first of the four empirical chapters. The chapter highlights the strategies and calculations the girls use to negotiate their wider relationships, with a particular focus on

unequal power relationships in which girls can be subjected to and subject others to judgements. The chapter offers details of the girls' social relationships and how dress is used to mediate their positions within different social spaces. I cover experiences of regulation and control of their bodies and dress in schools and among families. I then outline how friendships offer a safe space for the girls to 'be themselves', offering a discussion of the participants' social anxieties through an 'imagined gaze' and discussions of the meanings of 'Chav'. All of these contribute to tensions of fitting in and standing out and highlight a conflict between what is in style within their social circles and what is felt to be 'acceptable' in certain spaces.

Chapter five: Performing separation

The second findings chapter focuses on how the girls carve out space for their own autonomy. In particular, the reflexive ways in which they position themselves as girls – distinct from boys - as distinct from their younger selves, and in their individuality from others in which I focus on issues of friends copying outfits. These processes of individuation illustrate interpersonal power dynamics and reveal further tensions between desires to fit in and stand out. The second part of this chapter reflects more specifically on *how* the girls consume clothing. I uncover the tensions between their developing autonomy and independence, yet how they remain somewhat dependent on their parents. Money offers insight into the pragmatic relationship to fashion and consumption and indicates tensions between autonomy and control amongst this particular social group of teenage girls (Zelizer 2017). All of which demonstrates the everyday tensions between practice and power in the girls' lives.

Chapter six: Mediating privilege

My third findings chapter turns to the ways in which the girls use fashion and dress to mediate their privilege. I focus on modes of embodiment in which I draw together how the girls understand what 'looks good', much of which is underpinned by a specific narrative of embodied style in clothing and in wearing clothes with confidence. The narrative weaved throughout was surprisingly related to brands as 'cost symbols' (Yuran 2016), in which 'brands' offered insight into the girls' relationships to and mediations of wealth. Conversely,

second-hand offered a cheaper, more 'humble' form of consumption. I draw on conceptions of the ordinary as means that articulate the girls' consumption which prefers ambiguity of social position. This conception of the ordinary is then examined through the case study of joggers.

Chapter seven: Personal politics of appearance

The final empirical chapter reflects on the political rationale through which girls' consumption practices rely and their preferences for second-hand consumption. This is referred to as *informed* practice. I introduce TikTok as a commonly used site to engage with trends and news information. I argue that TikTok and Instagram are where many social justice issues seem to circulate for the girls. I reflect on knowingness in dress in which girls feel they should 'dress for their bodies', which aligns with heteronormative ideas of femininity. Issues of bodies are further reflected on in a case study of Brandy Melville as a 'one size' store that also illustrates how the girls construct 'basic' style and consumption, which denigrates the high street as lacking creativity. Second-hand is argued to offer a mediated form of consumption, in which the girls can engage in fashion and trends without consuming from 'unethical' high-street stores. In this, it is possible to illustrate moral boundaries formulated in consumption, through which performing political knowledge in consumption and dress is legitimised.

Chapter eight: Conclusions

The conclusions revisit the research questions, in which I surmise that in asking 'what can fashion tell us about the social lives of teenage girls', there is much to be learned about the political and social landscapes that girls inhabit. Their social lives are imbued with power dynamics, from regulations of their bodies to their own assertions of power in the judgements made about others. All of which inform their practices, from consumption to dress. In conclusion, my key comments are that girls' fashion practices are shown to be highly political in that they negotiate interpersonal regulations of their bodies but also wider political landscapes. I argue that the thesis demonstrates the multifaceted ways in which the girls position themselves and ringfence room for autonomy. I highlight that these 'autonomous' positions may conversely result in further difficulties in how to deconstruct

these cultural hierarchies that the girls are attuned to and benefit from. Their practices also appear to have a market influence in which trends of second-hand and reuse enter market practices. Moreover, this extends to their discussions of money, particularly performances of being 'broke', which leads me to argue that future studies of girls and relations of class more broadly should also look to reintegrate discussions of money to mediate privilege.

1. Reconciling practice and power: fashion and consumption

This chapter will provide the theoretical framework for the rest of the thesis. I present debates on cultural and social practices in fashion and consumption and their reproductions, specifically highlighting how power relationships can influence practices and how hierarchies are reproduced. I draw on the theoretical perspective of Bourdieu and how this has been utilised in studies of fashion to establish power relationships, cultural productions and what constitutes legitimacy in the uses of fashion. I then map these alongside perspective in material culture studies, which give more nuance to people's relationships to fashion and recognise that individuals sense-making is often at odds with broader theoretical measurements. The thesis is situated within a bigger theoretical tension between sociological understandings of power and practice. That is, the material studies focus on practices and kinships (see for example Miller and Woodward 2012 on jeans), and inequality perspectives which focus on power relationships (see for example McRobbie 1989 on second-hand dresses). I seek to avoid a standoff between a focus on material relationships or power relationships and attempt an account of how we make sense of girls' lives, which can make space for the complex and often ambiguous positionalities they inhabit. Thus, I utilise material culture perspectives to understand the ambiguous, complex and co-constructive ways in which girls connect to material items, and ask in what ways power relationships are present within these. It is my understanding, and I draw on McRobbie's (1997) seminal work on 'bridging the gap' between material and cultural perspectives on fashion, that material and cultural perspectives often lack conversation between each other. Thus I draw on both perspectives, to provide nuanced insight into how practices can be a means of negotiating and reproducing power relationships while also understanding that these relationships are complex, ambiguous and at times at odds with how individuals view their own practices. My approach contributes to bridging the gap between perspectives which focus on practices and the ways in which good mediate relationships, and perspectives which focus on relationships of class or gender. In doing so, I allow for reflection on practices as complex and multifaceted, while leaving space to understand how power relationships are made and unmade, negotiated and reproduced through practices. This will be developed throughout this chapter. To present girls as complex social actors who can occupy positions of localised power and wider inequality. I do not intend to situate the girls in reductive forms, which

cannot account for how they contribute to and are constrained by inequalities as they relate to consumer culture. It is, therefore, imperative to establish my uses of differing perspectives to account for how fashion becomes a means of mediating these positions.

Fashion is a complex ephemeral form for academic enquiry, so I turn to specific studies which conceptualise fashion as an aesthetic *system* of dress, informing the temporal popularity of styles. I draw on differing perspectives which elucidate social relationships as they relate to everyday practices and cultural productions of legitimacy which incorporate class privileges. I illustrate fashion as a complex system of practice and power. I then move on to highlight these debates with a more specific focus on contemporary debates in social class. Class is an often-contested category that also highlights tensions between Bourdieu and material perspectives. I draw on the concept of ordinary to demonstrate how we can attempt to adjudicate between the two positions. I argue that while specific class categories may be difficult to demarcate, it is clear that social hierarchies are produced in various forms. I then turn to focus on how consumption practices relate to girls' fashion and dress. I argue that cultural perspectives on consumption and shopping need to pay closer attention to economic logics, particularly the role of money in consumption practices. I end by outlining the relationships of practice and power in the consumption of second-hand fashion. Second-hand fashion will be demonstrated to illuminate such relationships over the course of this thesis. In each section, I endeavour to outline the conceptual frameworks I am working with and provide examples of how they link to contemporary debates on girls, fashion and consumption. The following chapter will then more closely consider these relationships of class, fashion and consumption in the everyday lives of teenage girls.

Conceptualising fashion

Theoretically, fashion can be understood as material culture and a symbolic system (Kawamura 2005; Rocamora and Smelik 2016). In this sense, fashion acts as a mediation point between studies of material relationships, cultural processes, and identity politics. In which it is possible to account for tensions between material and cultural debates and encompass issues of performativity, temporality, ambivalence, and inequality. This mediation point can be useful for studying social relationships, senses of self, construction of identity, and how fashion is a means of negotiating these. In the context of this thesis, fashion is

explored as it relates to clothing and dress. I will follow Joanne Entwistle in seeing fashion as an aesthetic system that sets the parameters of dress. Although dress and fashion can be seen as distinct; dress is ultimately the embodiment of fashion, wherein fashion only becomes so through the popularity of a style of dress. Dress articulates the body in a way that makes it both social and identifiable, whilst fashion consistently changes how meaning is conveyed. Entwistle coins the term *situated bodily practice* to address the theoretical and methodological framework for the complex dynamic relationship between body, dress and culture (2015: 11). The fashion system provides a 'raw material' of choices. Still, it cannot be understood without exploration of everyday practices and in the context of lived experience (ibid).

Fashion as an aesthetic system comprises an assemblage of actors, producers, designers, cultural intermediaries and consumers (Entwistle 2015). Viewing fashion as a complex system – an assemblage – that spans production to consumption can provide rich insights into social worlds, making it a strong sociological tool to better understand multifaceted constructions of self, labour, identity and social relations (see Black et al. 2013; Rocamora and Smelik 2016; Entwistle and Wissinger 2006; Crane 2000). I utilise the framework provided by Angela McRobbie (1997a) to help to unpack the complexities within this. McRobbie links the issues of inequality in the production process, from exploitation in the production of garments to unequal access to consumption. In essence, an approach that can look at who exactly is buying products and who is selling them. Inequality, she argues, is multifaceted in which exploitation, symbolic violence, and unequal access to resources are overlapping, as well as inextricably linked to other experiences of fashion and consumer cultures, such as social networking, enjoyment and status. These can be gendered, as those exploited in labour are often women and children (McRobbie 1997a). But this is no simple area of enquiry, for those who are exploited are also consumers (ibid). McRobbie argues that studies on the history of consumption have largely focused on the white middle-class female. Little feminist attention has been paid to how these women can also contribute to inequality in such contexts as much as men. However, she argues that this materialist feminist approach equally does not consider what happens after consumption, how meaning is made through choices and how these might differ from intended meanings.

The cultural production of fashion is argued to be increasingly important, as "culture itself is now appearing not as text but textile" (Brown 2010: 64). This points to the embodied forms of culture and fashion, which I will draw on more in the following section. But first, I focus on theoretically how we understand these productions of fashion – as an aesthetic system – to (re)produce ideas of value and style. I turn here to Bourdieu and fashion scholars who have used his work to think through fashion in terms of its relationship to cultural processes and what we understand as constituting 'legitimate' style. The theoretical perspective of Bourdieu also lends itself well to the study of fashion (Rocamora 2002; Entwistle 2015). I will turn to the more specificities of relationships between class, fashion and consumption later, but first, I will outline the ways in which Bourdieu has contributed to the field of fashion studies. I use these contributions to introduce key concepts for this study, accounting for issues of cultural reproductions and legitimacy before considering his specific form of embodied cultural capital alongside material understandings of embodiment as a means for understanding fashion as a material and symbolic system.

Although Bourdieu did not often write explicitly on fashion, and where he did his work focused more on 'highbrow' haute couture fashion, much of his broader works on the production of culture, hierarchies in the studies of objects, and everyday cultural practices can be applied to studies of fashion (Rocamora 2016). For one thing, Bourdieu pointed to the denigration of fashion studies as 'unworthy' in academic contexts in favour of more 'legitimate' fields such as work (ibid). He also pointed to the tensions between acknowledging the material and symbolic productions of cultural goods (Bourdieu 1993a). There is scope to integrate his work into studies of fashion, for example, Joanne Entwistle's work which sought to ground fashion studies more clearly in sociological terms, resisting structural approaches which all but left behind issues of embodiment (Entwistle 2015: Rocamora and Smelik 2016). Moreover, I will later reflect on the work of Karademir Hazır (2020), who combines Goffman's concept of 'body idiom' with Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' to explore embodied evaluations and experiences of class more acutely through fashion.

Utilising the work of Entwistle, it is possible to think with Bourdieu in terms of who is involved in creative processes. Entwistle has, over many years, documented how, whether it be from the 'look' of a model, or the progression of a stylist, to the success of a fashion journalist,

success comes from having an 'eye' for fashion. Entwistle argues that this 'eye' is based on disposition, that being the habitus of those 'in the know'. Disposition refers to the inculcation of values through primary socialisation. Although dispositions can be moulded and affected in other ways, social reality is ultimately influenced by surroundings (Atkinson 2010a). In that sense, Entwistle argues that success in this field is about having a certain level of cultural knowledge which may well be dictated by social positioning. There is, therefore, continuity between production and consumption, but it also points to the unequal valuation of appreciation with regard to fashion. It is extended further by thinking about how appreciation is more widely constructed. Having the right 'eye' becomes important regarding who gets recognised within the field of fashion. From a Bourdieusian position, having the 'right' kinds of cultural knowledge is important for having an 'eye' for fashion - cultural knowledge, which young people are more likely to be afforded from privileged dispositions. There are, therefore, wider connections of fashion to the economics of aesthetics, the relationship between embodiment and markets, and how networked relationships are formulated through fashion.

Fashion scholars and studies of fashion have attempted to theoretically unpack the developments of trends and connect this with issues of legitimation in the industry – how something becomes fashionable in the consecration of fashion. McRobbie argued this required 'a rejection of the idea of commerce' (1998: 13), which she exemplifies through fashion students' drawing on inspirations from the art world. Melkumova-Renolds (2021) pays attention to the element of 'discovery' in her work on the consecration of the new 'it' bag. This notion of organic discovery will also have implications for later discussions of the thrills of shopping, particularly second-hand. In this, Melkumova-Renolds argues that the process of 'discovery.'

> "is more gratifying than the prosaic and unabashedly economy-driven act of receiving a catalogue from the sales agent, visiting the agent's office, and placing an order. It brings to our attention that, in Bourdieu's words, "the disavowal of 'the economy' is placed at the very heart of the field [of culture], as the principle governing its functioning and transformation." (2021: 419)

Drawing together studies of fashion in this way, I would argue that consecration involves playing with forms beyond function or intention (McRobbie 1998) and necessitates not only a an 'eye' (Entwistle 2015), but affective and creative performance and skill. What this foregrounds but does not touch on is the ways in which these are played out in everyday ways. Moreover, Bourdieu's work has been criticised for the lack of engagement with young people (see the discussion in Prieur et al. (2023), who attempt to redress this problem), which is particularly disconcerting given the emphasis on disposition which outlines inculcations of cultural knowledges and economic privileges from birth, and which change over the life course. The same can be said for many studies of fashion productions and processes, which often fail to recognise the specific influence of youth (and girls) cultures influence in wider fashion processes.

The interrelated dynamics of fashion are also influenced by styles that 'bubble up' (Polhemus 1994). McRobbie (1994) has argued that mainstream fashion has much to thank youth subcultures for. The symbolic work of young people can influence or be appropriated by the fashion industry in ways which demonstrate the interactive spheres of influence. As I will outline, girls are particularly key to this, in which they are both viewed as ideal consumer subjects but are for all intents and purposes vanguards of popular culture. My study draws upon a framing that sees girls at the forefront of spearheading new trends, readily appropriated by fashion industries. An example of this is through intermediary positions such as the 'cool hunter' whose primary job is to scope out new 'looks' and styles on the streets, of which girls are a key source of influence (McRobbie 1989). Girls' practices span production and consumption as their consumption practices influence fashion designers and buyers and contribute to the consecration of fashion. In her work on second-hand dresses (which will be explored later), McRobbie positions girls as the drivers of many fashion trends, which was not readily acknowledged. "Despite being at the vanguard of style in this respect, these young women have been passed over or eclipsed in the fashion pages" (McRobbie 1989: 48). Unfortunately, there is little evidence of a substantial shift in this respect. Fashion is both relational and performative, influenced by its surroundings. The next section focuses on these relational aspects as they relate to everyday life and how these inform and are informed by consumption practices, social networks, dress and the body. I will then consider more closely how they relate to the uses of fashion by teenage girls.

Embodiment as a conceptual tool to reconcile power and practice?

Fashion is an embodied practice (Entwistle 2015; Rocamora and Smelik 2016), and our relationships to clothing are often embodied and material; in that sense, they become difficult to articulate (Woodward 2010). The concept of embodiment is a useful means of addressing both material and inequality approaches to fashion and practices of consumption. In doing so, we can recognise the social relationship to the body in which "Neither our personal bodies nor our social bodies may be seen as natural, in the sense of existing outside the self creating process called human labour" (Haraway 1991: 10). That is to say, the body is not 'natural' but subject to much "management, maintenance and work" (Coffey and Watson 2015: 193). What we wear and how we wear it has much capacity for understanding how people situate themselves in their social environments.

The body is a site where identity is socially produced, which can account for lived experiences of class (Skeggs 1997; Walkerdine et al. 2001), race and the invisibility of whiteness (Ali 2004; Nayak 2003), gender (Nayak and Kehily 2003) and sexuality (Ringrose 2011) as interpersonal subjectivities and senses of self. Moreover, Coffey and Watson (2015) argue that it is imperative in the context of childhood and youth to view the body as a site of discipline. They argue that "Investigating children and young people from a lived body perspective enables the imprinting of sociocultural signifiers (or embodiment) on material bodies to be explored" (ibid: 185), yet the ways in which such structural factors become embodied are often underexplored. But there is tension in academic debate about discrepancies between individual relationships to material goods and their relationships to cultural productions of inequality. On the one hand, issues of class, taste and 'domination' can overstate the role of class in people's everyday material relationships. On the other hand, material studies can present overly romantic views of relationships to clothing, which do not always relate to wider sociological debates on normative expectations of bodies. 'Embodied' could run the risk of being vague if it does not also consider how it relates to social structures and concerns for legitimacy. These processes are always relational. As Bourdieu (1984) asserted, taste does not reflect one's wealth but what they have been taught to desire. Meanwhile, Miller and Clarke (2002) more directly consider close social networks as a means of mediating anxiety in choices. Embodiment can be used conceptually as a conjuncture between social positions,

which simultaneously allows for the recognition of the direct relationship between fashion, dress and the body. These next sections will outline this through engaging with a Bourdieusian understanding of embodiment and material approaches to fashion to map out common ground between them.

Embodiment, in Bourdieusian terms, relates to disposition and is exemplified in the embodied form of cultural capital – the "long lasting dispositions of the mind and the body" (1986: 243). Disposition draws attention to the relationship with the body as a means of expressing aesthetic and material preferences, which indicate particular forms of 'taste' and judgements. 'Taste' is a specific tension between debates of relations of class and relations of material goods. The problem, as identified by material scholarship, is that individuals do not readily articulate 'taste' on the ground of fashion, relationships to clothing are often ambiguous and ephemeral, linked to temporalities of age (Blanchard-Emmerson 2022b; Twigg 2013) and social networks (Woodward 2005). In this, Woodward argues that concern for the imagined critical gaze of others influences women's everyday practices of 'getting dressed'. On the face of it, taste could be simply defined as 'just liking it' (Wilk 1997), in which individuals would reject the notion they like what they do on account of identity politics. Moreover, research on material relationships and practice find it is often easier for people to articulate what they don't like than what they do (ibid). There has been a shift in Bourdieusian analysis to consider the more 'omnivorous' consumption choices, particularly of young people, which disrupts the traditional forms of 'high' and 'low' brow 'taste' Bourdieu referred to. Embodied forms have been most emphatically taken up by scholars of the 'emerging forms of capital' which understand traditional cultural hierarchies of high- and low-brow have diluted, with a wider engagement with popular cultural practices, and point to increased subtleties in how class is identified with and performed (Friedman et al. 2015). Although distinct in the sense that emerging forms of capital explores more specifically the new and differing forms of capital and class reproductions in younger generations compared to Bourdieu's findings in the 1970s, the increased attention of embodied forms of capital is worthy of note. The implications of the embodiment of class, which is less defined in objectified ways (i.e.. in the *how* as opposed to the *what* of clothes worn) create new challenges for understanding young people's relationships to class and our understanding of class (re)productions. The point of using the concept of embodiment as a starting point is to

address some of the complexities of understanding the uses and articulations of fashion while leaving scope to explore its relationship to issues of inequality. Embodiment should not imply a fixed positioning but the relationship between fashion and the body, which is ongoing and subject to change but still accounts for issues of judgment and scrutiny. Shilling (2012) has connected this with Bourdieu's theory of practice to conceptualise the 'unfinishedness' of the body. Ultimately providing possibilities for connecting Bourdieu's work on embodiment and practice with material perspectives which account for ambivalences, contradictions, and the 'unfinished' processes of entities. The body becomes a site of identity, a means of personal expression, which is also an 'unfinished' process.

There is overlap in discussions of embodiment, fashion, and dress in the general conception of outfit constructions, which require forms of embodied knowledge to 'get it right'. From Entwistle, we can understand that "aesthetic knowledge is tied to the body, enacted upon it, communicated through it and thus performative, it is market knowledge that is embodied and expressive" (2009:168). Despite many discussions of 'getting it right', exactly what 'it' is, is hard to elucidate, but for the purposes of this thesis, I would argue 'it' is style. As style seems to incorporate tensions of being stylistically and aesthetically 'oneself' with what is considered as being fashionable subject to wider productions which require legitimation – from those who have power in the specific field of fashion or the cultural confidence to assert judgements. I will explain how individuals navigate the anxieties associated with this shortly. The concern here, then, is on marrying up these material relationships to goods and subjective experiences of clothing, with cultural productions of legitimacy – in what is 'right'. This narrative also relates to individualising discourse in which individuals are accountable for their own self-regulation (Coffey and Watson 2014) and that it is their responsibility to live as though they have the freedom to make choices, regardless of any structural barriers or modes of inequality they may face (McRobbie 2009). But as Skeggs suggests, this is an unequal process in which "representations are not dispositions, and since symbolic appearances need to be converted into symbolic capital through being legitimated by those with power, those lacking the necessary resources will never be capable of knowing what getting it right really means" (1997: 86). Thus, fashion can act as a tool to explore these relationships to the body, as they relate to experiences of class gender and race in ways which also intersect and overlap. These are addressed in Karademir Hazır's work on the

narratives of getting it right amongst Turkish women. She combines the concept of *body idiom* (Goffman 1959) to explore dress as a means of performance and how this is read by audiences, with *habitus* (Bourdieu 1980) to account for what shapes these performances – and in turn how they reproduce social codes in society. The argument is that "bodily experiences, including dispositions, the knowhow of self-fashioning, and emotional effects, should be taken into consideration in our attempt to understand the lived experience of ordinary clothing" (2020: 149). Her argument pertains to what is read as legitimate in forms of dress. She reflects on issues of authenticity, temporality and environment in demonstrating the embodied principles of appearing natural. Being both age and place appropriate dictate women's definition of good taste in dress, which reflects what they 'saw' during their own upbringings. She concluded the importance of habitus in reading legitimate forms of dress. These, too, offer internal codes in how women identify with each other. Thus, there are broader social dynamics in embodied practices, in which anxieties for 'getting it right' regarding fashion and dress should also consider concerns for legitimacy and the symbolic judgements surrounding these.

Embodiment can also account for the relationship between the body and the materiality of dress, wherein "fashion articulates the body, producing discourses on the body which are translated into dress through the bodily practices of dressing" (Entwistle 2015: 4). More recently, it has been argued that posting pictures on social media fits in with the use of clothing for expression in which pictures chosen to take time and care, are used to communicate an image of self (Walsh 2018), creating more of an assemblage when it comes to the visual expression of identity through style, as it can now include the taking of selfies. But the body is also subject to scrutiny. In 'The Fashioned Self', Joanne Finkelstein (1991) relates the body and fashion styles to judgements about moral character. She begins by taking the reader through studies of physiognomy - the practice of assessing character from outer appearance - which have historically traced links between facial and bodily form to moral character. From nose shape to eye colour, these have been argued to portray intimate details about disposition and temperament. Moreover, we can relate the human body to 'other manufactured objects' in how it can be used as a commodity to display prestige, power and status. Finkelstein argues that we subscribe to physiognomic interpretations in which we constantly adhere to these standards and thus reinforce them. For example, the

body can be marked out as the bearer of social status in a number of ways, from finishing school to the acquisition of traits learned at a young age with increasing discipline on well 'trained' fitness bodies (Finkelstein 1991). These judgements are often racialised as well as classed. What I want to highlight is the unspoken whiteness of bodies in debates about legitimacy. I would also argue that it is likely that the rise of social media further reinforces notions of 'acceptable' bodies along lines of class, race and gender (Carah and Shaul 2016; Pitcan et al. 2018).

Marion and Nairn (2011) explore teenage girls' experiences of fashion, understanding teenage years as a formative time of identity play (McRobbie 2004). They draw on various concepts to view the teenager as a tactician who produces their own meaning through assembling and arranging collections of clothing to construct their evolving identities. They draw on the concept of bricolage, also used in early subcultural studies as a means of describing practices that are both opportunistic and creative, that redefine the original purposes of an intended item for the needs of the moment. That is the resourceful reconstruction of the meaning of objects by using what is available to create something new. These bricolages are used to construct narrative identity – bearing in mind the past, present, and future and constantly fluctuating between sameness, selfhood, and otherness (Marion and Nairn 2011: 52). They argue that when "consumers speak of fashion they employ materials from the broad discursive systems that pervade consumer culture for making sense of the complexity of their self-identity" to construct personalised stories about themselves (Marion and Nairn 2011: 33; Thompson and Haytko 1997). They draw on Ricoeur (1992) to argue that stories make understanding the elusive and ephemeral ways in which people make sense of themselves more easily interpretable. Thus, fashion is argued to be a useful tool through which to explore identity formation as it is constructed in relation to how one sees themselves and how one compares against the 'other' – fashion becomes a means of telling the story of self, embodying experiences, aspirations and responding to their wider social structures. Further documented elsewhere in how tween girls utilised fashion as a means of understanding and 'acting' their age, comparable to their past younger selves and their life course (Blanchard-Emmerson 2022a). Identity, as explored through fashion, is an ongoing process. Moreover, it also requires levels of reflexivity in which children have been found to use consumer knowledge skilfully in their presentations of self. These practices are

also informed by their understanding of where they fit in the social and generational order (Pilcher 2011).

Contextualising the place of brands in debates on fashion and youth

Brands have been explored in material culture as an interface between production and consumption (Lury 2004) or as a means of explicating the assemblage of a social actor, such as a model (Entwistle and Slater 2012). My interest in brands is in how they are read and negotiated and their place in how girls make sense of themselves. Much like fashion, brands are a 'collaborative construction of many parties' (Wilk 2006). Their front-of-face imagery as 'logos of the global economy' (Lury 2004) has particular consequences for how they are read. In the context of production, brands can be about communicating with consumers, building up loyalty and creating emotional connections (Holt 2004). Brands are complex, dynamic and fluid 'objects' suspended across networks (Lury 2004), making them elusive; diffuse in their realities, origin and meaning. Brands remain ambiguous in how they connect to systems and practices, dependent on circumstance (Slater 2014). Both the construction of fashionable and branded items by producers, the relation of these by intermediaries and the ways in which they are utilised in everyday practices span vast webs of communications and ideas that, in some instances, do not align with their intended purposes. We can also consider the ways in which brands are argued to invade public spaces and infiltrate everyday life, often underpinned by exploitative production practices (see Carah and Shaul 2016; Arvidsson 2005). Brands have been argued to respond to this with brand activism simultaneously, and this has been a way in which brands can engage with or drive socio-political issues such as exploitative or environmentally unfriendly practices or as seen in recent responses to the Black Lives Matter movement (Vredenburg et al. 2020; Moorman 2020; Sarkar and Kotler 2018). However, the authenticity of these responses is subject to scrutiny in which some do not align with company practices and are therefore more closely associated with 'woke washing' than actual practice (Holt 2004; Vredenburg et al. 2020). Power dynamics are at play within these spheres, from the exploitation of labour, and access to goods, to control of the narrative.

Although distinct in terms of how they have been viewed sociologically, fashion and brands can overlap when conceptualised as assemblages in terms of production and consumption.

What perhaps differentiates the brand most strongly from fashion is the narrative principles which underpin a 'brand' (Holt 2004). While diffuse in origin and subject to change and subversion (Moor 2007), 'brands' are socially embedded stories which create relationships between producers and consumers. However, as my research shows, brands are also used in articulating and negotiating how young people understand their social positions. The narrative extends beyond this in how brands are read and negotiated in youth cultures as a means of understanding the self and social relationships. I also want to put forward that in the mediations of narrative in the assemblages of social actors, forms of social and economic valuations exist. On the one hand, we can understand a brand as a 'social object that serves as a point of exchange' (Lury 2004). On the other hand, Yuran (2016) argues we can trace the brand back further by applying a Veblenian approach, understanding brands as cost symbols, which can articulate social identities and relations. Brands as familiar 'logos' offer more opportunities for being read concerning their provincial costs, historical and social narratives of the company, and co-constructed narratives of what it means to consume them. Moreover, this is part of broader debates on 'ethical consumption' in which what is consumed is linked to forms of moral superiority (see Littler 2009; Steward 2017; Tse and Gheorghiu 2022). Branded clothing and shoes have been linked to youth issues of bullying, poverty shaming, vying for status amongst peers (Elliott and Leonard 2004; O'Cass and Frost 2002) and young people's understandings of their opportunities for social mobility (see Archer et al. 2007). Some work has established ties between fashion, brands, and elite subcultures by exploring Jack Wills (King and Smith 2018). That is to say young people have been shown to contextualise their understandings of wider social structures and barriers through narratives of brands.

I also argue social media extends the relationship between brands and consumers and the concept of 'prosumers' (Arvidsson 2006). Instagram represents a social site where brands can interact with and learn from their consumers, further complicating the brand as an assemblage. Central to the argument of Carah and Shaul (2016) is that with the infiltration of brands within our everyday lives and the naturalisation of brands on the site (particularly because advertising started without an 'official' platform), brands reproduce gendered scripts and work to promote certain bodies. As Miszczynski and Tomaszewski (2014) exemplify in their work on young people's consumption of rap music in Poland, brands are a part of

everyday life. The authors suggest brands are used to "reproduce and renegotiate broader social values and attitudes" (ibid: 749) in which meaning can be renegotiated in line with individual and collective values. Brands are used not only as a point of exchange but also as aspirational commodities. These internal codes, as young people reproduce them, are difficult to define and consistently subject to change. It is in these relational aspects that I want to establish brands whose interactive properties extend to their everyday reading of them and contributes to how young people make sense of social life and their places within this. Specifically, in the context of my data, the narrative means of investing and divesting in relationships to class and wealth. The next section will position these conceptions of class within contemporary debates in ways which also elucidate ongoing tensions between studies of power and practice.

Tensions of fitting in and standing out: debates on the ordinary

Studies of fashion have often accounted for or taken up issues of class and culture (see: Entwistle 2009; Rocamora 2002), yet fashion has not been taken up with equal measure in studies of class. I want to establish class as an ambivalent sociological concept, both in terms of how it is defined and individuals' relationships with it. What I have so far established is Bourdieu's contributions to the field of fashion studies in ways which consider issues of legitimation through disposition and accumulated capital – for the purpose of arguments here, as they relate to class positions. This connection between culture, economics, everyday life and material relationships foregrounds important understandings of reproductions of inequality in many Western societies. Yet the empirical and theoretical salience of class today is consistently subject to debate. Theoretically, 'class' has been difficult to define, while empirical studies demonstrate a reluctance to identify with specific categories of class. As Savage et al. (2001) argued, people's relationships with class are ambivalent and sometimes defensive, raising epistemological questions of how exactly to measure and articulate class. Class can evoke emotional and affective reactions of ambivalence, inferiority and superiority, visceral aversions, as well as recognition and abjection in what Reay (2005) calls the 'psychic landscape' of class. Indeed, Pichler (2009) discussed private school girls' use of language as a way to disassociate from their privilege, distancing themselves from others at their school who take for granted the privileges wealth affords as 'uncool'. More recently, with specific

attention to fashion and dress amongst women in Turkey, Karademir Hazır (2017) argues emotional responses vary depending on levels of cultural capital between resentment, aspiration and indifference, to self-confidence, superiority and complacency. Dressed bodies can elicit different emotional responses; some seem to acquire more respect and approval, while for others, dressing can be more emotionally stressful.

These subjective readings and identifications of class complicate structural debates on what it means to be situated in a specific category of class. Even Bourdieu (1984) discussed class as that which can be discussed but not demarcated, and as Savage et al. (2001) say, the feeling was that it would be a category mistake to place oneself in terms of class 'position'. Thus, "invoking ordinariness is a strategy that people can draw on to try to evade social fixing" (2001: 889), and the invocation itself can lead to defensiveness. What I will aim to establish here is that while class inequalities on account of economic and cultural factors are ever present, identifying with class positions is complex in which positions of 'rich' and 'poor' are both subject to a range of affective responses, leading to what Skeggs (1997) would call dis-identification. I will therefore focus on forms of privilege as exemplified through discussions of legitimacy as opposed to attempting to locate precise class positions. This ambivalence, though, makes a good case for combining inequalities and material approaches, in which it is important not to ignore people's own constructions of themselves. I will exemplify this through a discussion of the material study of jeans as 'ordinary' and what possibilities this has for extension into class analysis.

Constructions of ordinary can too allow for mediating between class and material analysis. As I have highlighted, class remains relevant in contemporary debates on issues of youth and fashion yet remains somewhat difficult to define, in part owing to a lack of personal identification in categories of class. Savage et al. (2001) discuss this as the 'individualised ethic' in which they argue class 'pollutes' people's sense of individuality so that class as a category of social identity is more associated in affective terms of ambivalence, defensiveness or in favour of being ordinary. This conception of the ordinary was felt to leave more scope for autonomy regarding life chances, in which anyone can do anything as long as they work hard enough. On the other hand, ordinary can relate to desires of fitting in. In postmodernity, we have increased flexibility to choose our style; hemlines are no longer fixed

for example (Miller and Clarke 2002). With this in mind, there is anxiety in consumption, as choice implicates the self (Slater 1997: 85). Choices available within fashion increase anxiety as individuals navigate the imagined critical gaze of others (Woodward 2005) and how this fits with their sense of self. Miller and Clarke (2002) explore the experience of anxiety amongst women in their clothing choices, finding that in their pursuit of reassurance, they reach out not just to family and friends but also to mail-order catalogues and businesses which offer 'rational' fashion advice in terms of 'what fits' to alleviate the anxiety of 'getting it wrong'. Social systems are arguably more complex, and disposition doesn't readily answer why people might think one way but feel constrained to act in a specific social situation (Lahire 2003). With the increasing documentation of outfits via social media, we could also reasonably assume that the online world and social media would extend where women may seek reassurance for their dress. Miller and Clarke (2002) concluded that it is not just abstract influences of class position, as posited by Bourdieu, that influence fashion choices but also everyday aesthetic choices – social networks become bigger everyday influences than wider social pressures. I would still assert that owing to the relatively homophilous nature of social networks (see Kossinets and Watts 2009), including in girls' friendships (Hey 1997) and on social media (Skeggs and Yuill 2016), if one were concerned with issues of cultural reproduction, there would be lines to draw between disposition and forms of mediation. But the point is that this would not entirely account for states of anxiety and conditions of comfort. What is noteworthy is the articulated anxieties associated with getting choices 'right' and how social networks can be used to alleviate this.

The case of jeans

The study of jeans offers insight into material relationships and mediations of anxiety and systematic and subjective experiences of inequality. Miller and Woodward (2012) argued in their research on blue jeans that jeans have become 'post semiotic' to the extent that they are seen as both ordinary and capable of use for most social situations and, as such, can also be used to provide a sense of anonymity, comfort or relatability. Able to be dressed up and dressed down, blue jeans are worn out of comfort and safety; so ordinary, they reduce the risk of 'getting it wrong' while also allowing for creativity with other clothing in conjunction with the 'safety' of jeans. Jeans offer opportunities to fit in the North London space in which

the research takes place. To mediate cultural differences amongst migrants and 'locals', and in that sense, provide an understanding of common ground between people. This 'melting pot' analysis is not without its flaws. While they utilise the work of Bourdieu, in particular, his suggestion that the most 'second nature', ubiquitous objects of life should be given more significance than the ones we are more aware of, their position departs in not centring social identities of class, gender and race in analysis. Although they claimed to prefer to document where these felt naturally occurring, they also run the risk of not seeing power dynamics in material relations. But the point is that material goods can tell a story and help individuals alleviate tensions about fitting in, in all kinds of manners. Moreover, jeans have been established as material items which can allow the tracing of production processes, including issues of exploitation and environmental damage (Pettinger 2015). Relationships to material goods such as jeans can afford a lot of insight into the mundane, routine processes of dress, as well as emotional and social considerations, and to evade the same kinds of social fixings Savage et al. (2001) highlight.

A feel for the game?

Far from the Veblenian days of 'conspicuous consumption', more recent debates about relationships between consumption and class have demonstrated that lines which have been traditionally quite strong have become more obscured. Some Bourdieusian scholars have reassessed traditional cultural hierarchies and paid more attention to emerging forms of capital, which give more attention to embodied forms (Steward 2017). Debates in sociological enquiry which consider cultural preferences, particularly amongst young people, argue cultural consumption is becoming more omnivorous (Peterson and Kern 1996; Emmison 2003; van Eijck & Knulst 2005; Warde et al. 2007). Young people no longer necessarily care about traditional notions of 'taste' nor do they fit into neatly constructed categories of taste dependent on disposition, and this exemplifies our neoliberal society in which identity is not fixed but free. Individuals can be whatever they want to be. The ability to 'play' with forms, and to consume across previous divisions along the lines of class and gender, have led some to discuss consumption as becoming more. The 'cultural omnivore' thesis relates to the enjoyment of varying cultural practices which do not align with the traditional capital hierarchy (Peterson and Kern 1996; Emmison 2003; van Eijck & Knulst

2005; Warde et al. 2007). Although this does point to change in the way in which patterns of social hierarchies are observed, it is clear that this has not led to an overall decline in cultural hierarchies, but more that they now exist in more subtle ways. Therefore there are wider debates in which fashion – in particular forms of valuation – relies on an embodiment, an ability to play with forms while still performing a knowingness with regards to style, trends and 'rules' of what counts as authentic (Crane 2000; Steward 2017). Authenticity remains a particularly important concept in youth studies (McRobbie 1994), in which I would also argue there are links with what constitutes legitimacy in practices and styles. Although vague and varied in definition to some extent, 'authenticity' can be understood as a quality of genuineness as opposed to fake or pretentious (Grazian 2010, Steward 2017), and in some cases, necessitate a level of embodiment or ambivalence (Banet-Weiser 2013) which require a certain indifference in order to be authentic.

As part of a wider study into girls' relationships with gender and its intersections with social divisions such as class, race, disability and sexuality, Francombe-Webb and Silk (2016) argue that despite contestations over the role of social class in everyday interactions in line with neoliberal principles of individualised responsibility, young girls middle class positions are embodied in their constructions of style and in opposition to 'Chav'. Within this, 'Chav' is constructed as a pathologised workless other, everything the self-sufficient girl should not be. There is a roughness that is anti-feminine, antithetic to success, and activated through critiques of clothing articulated as lacking authenticity based on having made poor choices (Francombe-Webb and Silk 2016; Pichler 2009). This has been taken up sociologically to explore the significant class-based discrimination of the term as it applies to everyday practice (see Tyler 2008). Poor choices are often positioned as excessive and 'vulgar'. Vulgarity, in this way, has been predicated in popular discourse on indiscretion by way of excess; too much visibly branded sports clothing; too much jewellery of the wrong kind; too much skin on display (Lawler 2005; Hayward and Yar 2006; McDowell 2007; Tyler 2008; Adams and Raisborough 2011). The work of Marion and Nairn (2011) also reflects this drawing on Ricœur's concept of narrative identity wherein the narrative is in part constructed in relation to an 'other'.

These social codes have been related to fashion, in which Jolles (2012) has argued that the ability to break the rules, or social codes of fashion, is a privilege. Jolles also attributes to post-feminist concerns for self-invention and self-regulation (Budgeon 2011). Although these debates will be considered in further detail in the next chapter, Jolles articulates postfeminism as a detachment to social codes which she refers to as 'breaking the rules' and the people who follow them, and that this detachment is an iteration of class privilege. All of which demonstrate the intersection of class and gender for debates of fashion and legitimation. For the purposes of this section, it is worth noting the specific relationship between post-feminist sentimentalities of individualised 'successful femininity' and class privilege. Dyer also argued relates this to whiteness in "the right not to conform, to be different and get away with it" (1997:12). Meanwhile, Prieur et al. (2023) argue with regard to young people that those with more economic capital downplay privilege while still appearing to 'know how to play the game'. Where I depart more strongly from these positions is in viewing these codes as 'strategies' of anything other than individual sense-making. Perhaps they are strategies in which young people respond to perceptions on the grounds of class, gender, and race, but as I will argue in this thesis, these would be more perverse outcomes than specific modes of domination. Forms of cultural hierarchies are shown to be much more subtle in process, relating more to regulations and judgements dictated by 'moral values' than 'strategies' of intent and consequence. Taking what material cultural studies offer in establishing the anxieties of getting dressed and choosing outfits and how social relationships mediate these anxieties, it would stand to reason that practices are underpinned more by mediating social environments. Therefore, the concern for finding items that allow individuals to perform a self is aligned with their understanding of acceptability and respectability rather than a specific strategy of domination. It is not to dismiss the relevance of cultural hierarchies or that dress cannot be used to mediate positions on account of class, race or gender, but that these cultural reproductions ought to consider imagined critical gazes and moral physiognomies in their accounts. The discussion of class can still be found in spontaneous conversation, as shown in more recent studies on linguistics show how class is implicit and explicit (Pichler 2009). There is a continued relevance of social class. The challenge is in the nuances and exploring the implicit associations. Relationships should also consider tensions of fitting in and standing out, which can still account for wider social inequalities.

So far, these sections have attempted to produce conceptual frameworks that draw on the tensions between material and cultural studies. They aim to use these productively to foreground the empirical concerns of considering the complex positions girls occupy in their everyday lives. So far, what has been missing is how consumption practices relate to everyday uses of fashion. The following sections will introduce the landscape of consumption that girls inhabit, as it relates to fashion, in which second-hand consumption had real salience. I will first briefly introduce shopping as a practice before linking this with the underdeveloped discussion of consumption and money – in which I argue more attention needs to be paid to how people consume things. All of which foregrounds discussion of second-hand clothing in which I bring together issues of ethics and enterprise to consider the ways second-hand consumption practices often require a level of privilege – a distance from abject poverty, to be legitimate.

Consuming clothing

I will here reflect on practices of consumption, as looking at fashion in the everyday lives of teenage girls necessitates a reflection on how clothing is used and consumed. As Lury (1996) argues, consumer culture is a specific type of material culture. 'Consumption' is broad in scope, both material and immaterial, aspirational, embodying many forms of consumption from texts to material goods to leisure activities and necessitates both cultural and economic considerations. But most of all is considered here as a practice, both agentic and informed by wider social relationships. In considering young people more closely, youth cultural studies perspectives have offered the most comprehensive accounts of young people's uses of consumption. Young people are shown to be active consumers – as opposed to passive – and have documented much of this in line with post-war opportunities for young people to earn money (see Abrams 1959; Willis 1977; Hebdige 1979). Disproportionately this was true of boys, and girls were either presumed to engage with practices in the same way or ignored altogether (McRobbie and Garber 1976). Consumption has become a part of everyday life in which practices are evident regardless of economic position. The work of Elizabeth Chin (2001) on black children from poor and low-income backgrounds, which focuses primarily on the lives of three girls in New Haven, USA, is exemplary and unique in illustrating consumption as a practice that can be both exploitative and empowering. Chin's research

demonstrates the agentic ways in which the girls approach consumption, borrowing, sharing and bartering where possible. Chin found children can also engage with consumption through looking, advertising and fantasising, even if particular commodities are out of reach. Moreover, media consumption extended engagement, for example, in the knowledge of goods from their advertisements, through to aspirations, which Chin argued were brought about through media consumption and become commodities in themselves in the way dreams were bought into (Chin 2001). In this way, Willis (1990) has argued aspirations circulate as much as commodities.

A brief note on shopping

As I have previously mentioned, I see Angela McRobbie's work as pivotal in bringing the discussion of fashion and girls to wider cultural studies debates, demonstrating the political salience of fashion more broadly. In her work on second-hand dresses, McRobbie (1989) addresses how consumption – particularly the activity of shopping - in all its capacity of buying and browsing, even choosing - was taken for granted in cultural analysis. It is partly because of its feminine associations but also at the expense of seeing shopping as purely transactional; material goods are simply being exchanged for cash. Shopping, instead, was seen largely as a private, domestic task with little room for pleasure, with very few exceptions looking beyond this (see Carter 1979). McRobbie has been at the forefront of these discussions, so although her work should be addressed in relation to more recent works, it deserves acknowledgement.

Since then, studies of consumption have also sought to view shopping as more than a market or transactional 'moment' but part of what makes up practice. As Miller puts it, "shopping is not just approached as a thing in itself. It is found to be a means to uncover, through the close observation of people's practices, something about their relationships" (1998: 4). These relationships are what Miller focuses on in his theory of shopping, and how these are ritualistic, related to love and care, devotion and sacrifice. Shopping can therefore be thought of as relational; in sharing new style ideas and encouraging playing with forms of dress, alongside Miller and Clarke's (2002) assertion that women often rely on friends for opinions, girls too may rely on friends and mothers (e.g. Appleford 2014). These, however, play up romanticised notions of shopping, particularly amongst mothers, and don't necessarily

recognise the competitive or creative 'prowess' that should also be considered. As I mentioned earlier, Melkumova-Renolds' (2021) work on the process of 'discovery' incites images of thrill and excitement in the finding of something new and interesting, while McRobbie (1989) has considered how the hunt for the 'right' clothing can take on a predatory form. Moreover, sites for these moments to occur, such as malls, offer more than just 'shopping' (Underhill 2004). They are used for 'relational work' (Zelizer 2005; Stillerman and Salcedo 2012), such as meeting friends, eating and people-watching (Vanderbeck and Johnson 2000). I would also argue that for teenage girls, the spaces which offer shopping will likely offer forms of protection and security.

For young people specifically, as Katz (1998) would put it, malls are a space where young people can engage in stimulating and autonomous development, learning independence and peer group socialising. Shopping is a means of money management and understanding markets, informed by often shrewd and enterprising tactics to make the most of what they have, and this should also be considered alongside the construction of styles. In this sense, shopping involves calculations regarding cost, but also for specific items; how will one item 'fit' in the context of a wardrobe, and drawing on Sophie Woodward's (2007) work, how individuals imagine their presentation of self while wearing the item. With this in mind, it is also important not to overstate the cultural experience of shopping or the view of 'rituals' as some sort of idealistic practice at the expense of economic logic. As Chin (2001) exemplifies, the amount of money young people have in their pockets influences their relationship to practices. Shopping is a 'thing' unto itself that dedicates time, informs relationships, and offers opportunities for pleasure and possibilities for creative imaginings of the self. Shopping also requires considerations and valuations on account of cost and affordability.

The role of money

When it comes to discussions of consumption, there seems to be a shying away from the discussion of money. This shying away may be due to a focus on practices or because it is a sensitive topic that can be harder to retrieve from participants. But what it points to is that consumption has been seen as a largely cultural movement. But there is a need to discuss how (and if) people pay for things. It is also important in discussions of class and culture. Despite economic dimensions being key to class divisions, they remain largely underexplored

in this context. To some extent, Bourdieu's concept of economic capital can account for financial and wealth inequalities, but everyday experiences and uses of money remain more elusive. Thus, studies of consumption should reintegrate culture and economics (see Evans 2020; 2021). There are also implications for studies of fashion, as fashion practices are interrelated in their position to consumption. Too little attention is paid to precisely *how* things are consumed, which invariably has consequences for what is consumed and the uses of these, as well as for market processes. Again, it is complex and not something I can exhaustively explore in this thesis, but I endeavour to outline in this section how I address money in the context of this thesis.

It should also be noted that there is a significant gap in understanding how young people get money, so the following is more a case of offering some theoretical perspective and foregrounding the role of money in how girls consume clothes. Money represents a significant dichotomy of power and practice, and teenagers (particularly the middle-class girls in this study) make a great case for further research in this respect on account of occupying positions involving some forms of employment but remaining somewhat dependent on parents. In her book 'The Social Meaning of Money', Zelizer (2017) interrogates conceptions of currency as standardised. Instead, she argues that the concept of a homogenous currency through which markets operate is undermined by the social processes which underpin money. Money is instead diverse in how it is used, accumulated, and spent. She illustrates this by exploring 1920s housewives who- dependent on their husband's wages- ring-fenced rooms for financial freedoms through multiple means such as keeping leftover change, falsifying or duplicating bills, or even stealing from the pockets of their sleeping husbands. Their capacity for learning to organise their money varied greatly from that which would be learned in the conventional labour market. The point is that money is not colourless, not uniform, and subject to all sorts of social attributions and appropriations. That is, "money is attached to a variety of social relations rather than to individuals" (ibid: 25). Moreover, monies are imbued with social meanings; this is demonstrated through how money is often earmarked for various purposes, which involves constraining the *uses* of portions of money. This is shown through domestic uses of monies in which housewives must split allowances between various bills and weekly spending for groceries, clothing and children's activities. Zelizer concludes that "people invest a great deal of effort in creating monies designed to

manage complex social relations that express intimacy, but also inequality, love but also power, care, but also control, solidarity, but also conflict" (Zelizer 2017: 204). In this sense, money can provide freedom but also a social constraint. All of which necessarily illustrates the complexities of money as more than a means of exchange.

1920s housewives were not the only social group documented to mediate their finances to leave some room for independence. Children were also documented as attempting to keep some of their earnings 'off the books' in order to buy their own goods.

> "Tantalised by the attractions of a consumer culture, children increasingly withheld or manipulated their earnings. David Nasaw found that, in the early part of this century, wage-earning children "who were obedient in every other regard did what they had to preserve some part of their earning for themselves. They lied, they cheated, they hid away their nickels and dimes, they doctored their pay envelopes" (Zelizer 2017: 58-9)

It was particularly the case with tips, as it was harder for parents to keep track of additional cash children may have been given. Nasaw had commented that boys were more likely to withhold some of their money, but this was not always the case. This focus on boys and money has continued through to post-war explorations of youth culture, in which predominantly males were studied regarding youth cultural practices alongside increased opportunities to earn money and for independence. McRobbie (2000) argues that women were often left out of our understanding of youth culture in part because girls were not seen to have the same share in this new access to financial independence.

Although the work of Zelizer foregrounds discussions of the relational and power dynamics that exist with regard to incomes, and the possibilities for young people to use creative methods to extend their finances, the topic as a whole is understudied in sociological terms. Perhaps in part because children have been assumed to be subsumed under their parents' consumption practices, in part because they do not yet have access to the labour market (Cook 2008). But drawing on other studies such as Miller's work on shopping which highlights the sacrificial natures of mothers shopping, and research which highlights the intimacies of power dynamics between, for example, mothers and daughters on issues such as what is

appropriate to wear (see next chapter for developments on this), it is not hard to imagine that parents and teenagers' relationships with money will share similar qualities. Some preliminary work of Miller and Yung (1990) on adolescent's allowances describes the ambivalence parents felt in giving money to children but the sense of pressure to give money in line with what other adolescents' parents were doing. Household discussions and arguments about children's household responsibilities and what constitutes 'responsible' purchases also contributed to these tensions. Meanwhile, the adolescents did not view this money as educational or an opportunity for self-reliance but rather an entitlement which was therefore not subject to obligation, or as individually earned. However, these different modes were accompanied by varying levels of autonomy. Meanwhile, Chin's (2001) work on purchasing power and consumption practices in everyday life for children growing up in low-income and poor families are premised around borrowing, sharing, bartering, and managing expectations. Often, what was most desired was food. The children knew how much they cost the family and may have matured faster than children from higher-income families. All of this suggests the varied and fragmented ways young people receive and perceive money. What really seems to occur is a difference in how money is accumulated. Without established income – more creative methods must be used.

In the segmenting of money come unequal power relations. Zelizer (2005) depicts the separations of currencies described as 'domestic, gift and charitable' monies. In these cases, Zelizer argues that these separations of currencies work to reinforce the dependency of women, children and the poor (2017: 210). Nevertheless, such groups find ways to work around this and carve out means to engage in consumption practices. The following sections discuss forms of shopping as they relate to issues of ethics, enterprise and accessibility in more detail.

Fast fashion

'Fast fashion' entered public discourse as a means to describe 'commercially aggressive' fashion retailers increasing turnover of 'on trend' clothing which steers predominantly towards the young female market (Horton 2018)—for example, large conglomerates such as H&M and Zara. Lower-end budget stores such as Primark have made it easier for lower-income women to engage in fashionable consumption practices (Buckley and Clark 2012).

The sphere of fashion changes from a more high-low brow trickle-down aesthetic, as Bourdieu (1984) may have initially described, but a broad engagement with fashion trends over varying price points between luxury and basic (Horton 2018). In the past few years, we have seen an increase in public concerns for the environment and climate change, documentaries such as David Attenborough's 'Our Planet' and Stacey Dooley's Fashion's Dirty Secret' sparked much public debate about the negative effects of capitalist production on the environment. Increasing awareness also prompted the group Extinction Rebellion to protest against climate change, which included many young, often middle-class, protestors. Fashion is no stranger to environmental problems, as "Fashion production makes up 10% of humanity's carbon emissions, dries up water sources, and pollutes rivers and streams. What's more, 85% of all textiles go to the dump each year (UNECE 2018), and washing some types of clothes sends a significant amount of microplastics into the ocean" (Geneva Environment Network 2023). There has been a kind of 'ethical turn' (Horton 2018) in which consumers respond to the environmental problems of the fashion industry. Narratives around this often focus on individualised responses in which it is up to the 'consumer' to adapt their practices in favour of more ethical or caring consumption. These responsibilities are often left up to women (Horton 2018). Horton (2018) argues particular attention is paid to the practices of young women who are presumed to consume uncritically. There is a specific onus on women to 'care' for their appearances and simultaneously their own practices in which their engagement with 'fast fashion' is pathologised (ibid). As I will demonstrate throughout this thesis, second-hand consumption is often instrumentalised to respond to the perceived ills of the fashion industry.

Second-hand consumption: issues of ethics and enterprise

Second-hand is introduced here as a means of engaging in fashion consumption - considering varied access to money and the opportunities for discovery and socialising that shopping can offer – that will be further explored throughout the empirical chapters of this thesis. Second-hand consumption is outlined as a particular practice of the privileged, which focuses on this popularity as a means of both 'ethical' and 'sustainable' consumption and enterprising opportunities for not only buying but selling clothing.

McRobbie's (1989) work on second-hand dresses and the rag market detailed an exploration of the emergence of retro style. Second-hand was seen as part of specific post-war era consumption. This seminal work brought second-hand fashion into broader discussions, situating it within the economic climate of recession in the 1980s. Second-hand fashion holds a particular nostalgic sentiment, but in an ahistorical way, clothing becomes a mismatch of various periods, creating something disparate and forming a 'DIY' approach to fashion and 'looks' (ibid). Thus, second-hand consumption offers possibilities for creative freedoms and engaging with materials 'from the past' while also offering opportunities to engage in consumption for those from lower incomes. From this perspective, second-hand spaces (such as car-boot sales, thrift stores and charity shops) could be a space in markets that were more than just transactional but community based too (McRobbie 1989; Gregson and Crewe 2003). More generally, second-hand holds appeal across an axis of cost, historical narratives, or the one-off appeal of items, and the ability to exercise skill in consumption, which is seen as less prescribed than the high street (Gregson and Crewe 2003). But it should not be seen as completely distinct from the high street. For one, McRobbie (1989) points to how street market trends influence the high street, from clothing to store designs in which spaces are developed to appear more market-like and less uniform. Moreover, the clothing engaged with in second-hand consumption is at times directly related to the high street; 'brands' are often engaged with and can be used for assurance of quality (Gregson and Crewe 2003). Thus, second-hand and high street remain interrelated, in which second-hand cannot be discussed without relation to wider markets. There are also debates between 'second-hand', 'retro' and 'vintage', which can be appropriated by markets by selling clothing that draws on vintage or retro aesthetics. There are particular conceptions of retro and vintage in which 'retro' brands offer authenticity through conceptualisations of ambiguity as young people learn to express their identities. Thus, retro brands are seen to influence young people's consumption practices as a means for negotiating identity and belongingness in which young people can position themselves as non-conformist; against 'mass' consumption (Hemetsberger et al. 2011).

Interest in second-hand consumption may in part be due to a resistance to the 'wasteful' nature of high street fashion, in which McRobbie (1989) documented the appropriation of certain street styles in which the high street takes these and reproduces them using poor

quality materials as it attempts to mass produce and mass market these styles. There are wider cultural implications in which the appropriation becomes "mechanisms through which this predatory relation reproduces itself" (McRobbie 1989: 28). Moreover, these mass-produced versions are argued to be poorly made, 'ready for the dustbins' after just a few wears (McRobbie 1989). Second-hand thus offers an opportunity to engage in fashion trends and consumption practices while resisting mass consumerism. Fashion, after all, does provide opportunities for the expression of the self. In that sense, fashion trends are circular; sometimes, clothes don't stay in the wardrobe for more than a season. Returning or donating to a charity shop leaves room for the movement of trends (Gregson and Crewe 2003). In some respects, this may reduce material attachment when it comes to fashion and create more room for fluctuation of trends which is not all that disparate from the high street. Gregson and Crewe (2003) also note that the 'charity' element is less important than the items themselves – maintaining a focus on style and aesthetics. Geographies are important to consider here, as better stock and bargains will likely be found in wealthier areas, where people can afford to donate 'nicer' things. As second-hand is not 'new', additional assessments of clothing take place; buyers consider the intimate nature of the clothing in question, cleanliness, and the relative 'newness' of the clothing not in terms of design but materiality (Gregson and Crewe 2003). In that sense, it can be seen as a form of subversive or discerning consumption.

Moreover, with regards to youth cultural practices that employ second-hand fashion as both political and economic statements, McRobbie employs the term 'enterprise culture' to explore the dynamics under which young people could build on these subcultures, buying and selling items to other young people. Attention should be paid to the entrepreneurial infrastructure within youth cultures and ways second-hand can be a means of participating in the fashion scene during a recession. (McRobbie 1989). Yet, it can also be a concept which ties previous youth cultural perspectives which focus on DIY principles of style in an age of recession with newer economic and political issues of austerity and neoliberalism. McRobbie (1989) distinguished enterprise subcultures as being distinct from the DIY of punk precisely because it was more prevalent in "relatively privileged metropolitan spaces" (McRobbie 1989: 39). There are questions of who is allowed to buy and sell second-hand and studies have shown a specific policing of working-class spaces in which certain forms of markets such

as car boot sales were subject to more regulation (Gregson and Crewe 2003; see also Phil Cohen on 'policing the working-class city'). As I will demonstrate throughout this section, there are clear tensions between second-hand consumption and forms of creativity and privilege.

Second-hand consumption allows for the reappropriating of materials for performing the self, in which girls, in particular, can utilise fashion consumption as a means of creativity and self-expression. This may be because "it is still much easier for girls to develop skills in those fields which are less contested by men than it is in those occupied by them" (McRobbie 1989: 37). To an extent, second-hand fashion also plays with forms of gender. McRobbie discusses how the more DIY nature of second-hand allowed girls to play with masculine forms, wear men's clothing, and more generally utilise clothing in ways which may have differed from initial origins. However, she is also critical of how these forms are never true androgyny but still mostly embrace the female form. Thus, second-hand consumption can be multifaceted along the lines of performances of self, creative expression and politically charged. The 'new' and 'old' can be juxtaposed and fashion can be transformed (Gregson and Crewe 2003) but also a continuation of normative gendered forms and shopping practices. Suppose we understand that material goods are often key to how individuals see themselves (Woodward 2005). In that case, we can take that engagement in second-hand consumption represents, in part, a conflicting relationship between political and social values and desires for individuality and playing with forms of both privilege and gender.

There is a growing body of literature concerning second-hand consumption and thrifting, particularly related to issues of ethics and sustainability amid increased attention to the climate crisis (Carfagna et al. 2014). These are often framed in ways which relate to the gendered nature of environmentally conscious forms of consumption – in which women are often left with the additional domestic labour of finding alternative, more sustainable, less wasteful forms of consumption (see for example Horton 2018). Gram-Hassan (2021) argues that this should be included in the analysis of performing and carrying practices of sustainable consumption. Women disproportionately bear the burden of shaping consumption practices in response to climate change. It is instructive to note that as the "impetus for changes in fashion and in contemporary consumer culture…comes from below"

(McRobbie 1989: 48), we should credit women and girls for this shift in focus. However, these shifts have been demonstrated to relate to privilege in which certain moral positions of 'ethical' consumption are often distinguished as 'better' than shopping on the high street. In this, it becomes clear that second-hand consumption must be enacted as a choice (rather than out of necessity) and engaged with as a political response to social and environmental concerns (McRobbie 1989).

By the same token, thrift stores or charity shops tend to be accessible spaces in terms of location within few prohibitions on entering in terms of expectations and cost, offering multiple forms of consumption in a single space (Isla 2013). These low-cost items are 'saved' from landfill. Yet they have a particular appeal amongst certain privileged groups (Steward 2017; Amer and Vincent 2013). The relationship between consumption and discernment amongst some shoppers deserves closer attention in that it is associated with a particular moral high ground on account of its more 'sustainable' practice. Thus, perhaps reducing the inclusivity of the space, creating predatory forms of consumption within it. Other works have also shown how forms of morality and superiority can be tied up in consumption practices (e.g. Sayer 2005; Steward 2017). Gregson and Crewe (2003) argue that while second-hand consumption involves more work in finding the 'right' items, it can also be enjoyable. However, this was more evident amongst those who utilised second-hand consumption by choice, as opposed to those on tight budgets. Similarly, this can be seen in McRobbie's work, in which she argued

> "the apparent democracy of the market, from which nobody is excluded on the grounds of cost, is tempered by the very precise tastes and desires of the second-hand searchers. Second-hand style continually emphasizes its distance from second-hand clothing" (1989: 29)

Thus, what becomes clear is that second-hand is symbolically offered up not simply as a creative form of consumption which resists to mass-consumerism of the high street, but as a means of valuation in style reliant on work and choice, reliant on a 'knowingness' (ibid).

Second-hand consumption has also been a site for those more privileged to play with their relationship to wealth in which they almost disavow it (McRobbie 1989). McRobbie (1989)

cites Tom Wolfe as at the forefront of cultural commentary in relation to music and popular culture away from frivolous or youthfulness. Wolfe poked fun at the 'arriviste' young middle-class Americans "who could afford to play around with the idea of looking poor" (McRobbie 1989: 26-7). This points to forms of appropriation of working-class identities and establishing value (Casey 2010; Skeggs 2004; Steward 2017) that are readily picked up on in cultural commentaries in which working-class cultures are fetishised by privileged counterparts (e.g. Foster 2017). Forms of appropriation are reflected in the items chosen, such as boiler suits with their blue-collar associations, cheap or shabby-looking items, "and wearing 'jeans of the people'" (McRobbie 1989: 45). Nevertheless, the appropriative forms of these were "designed to mark out a distance from both the 'straight' and conventional dress, and from the shabby greyness of genuine poverty" (McRobbie 1989: 26). Such forms made them distinctive and carved out a space for privileged young people to play with ideas of class in what she called an "an act of unintended class condescension" (ibid: 27). This becomes like a performative subversion of class which only goes dress deep.

It is perhaps unsurprising that scholars are drawing on Bourdieu to make connections to ethical consumption. Steward (2017) explores 'thrift store consumption as cultural capital' by discussing the symbolic meaning behind consumption choices. Steward discusses the move towards seeing second-hand consumption through understanding the relation with the embodiment of cultural knowledge. In short, thrifting becomes a specific way of exercising market knowledge. She splits this into broadly two categories: the "thrift seekers", whose primary focus she seems as searching for bargains, and the "creativists" who utilise second-hand consumption as their primary means in opposition to more 'commercial' consumption. However, I take some issue with this grouping of consumption for the reasons already outlined as to the multifaceted motivations and obligations that can underpin consumption practices. As Steward's results are based on four months of ethnographically observing and exploring thrift store consumption, reducing consumption into two typologies seems counterintuitive and perhaps highlights a flaw in viewing consumption solely in terms of 'cultural capital' or indeed one thing more generally. However, to look at this productively, we can think about the economic and creative values of second-hand fashion consumption – how second-hand offers a rejection of formalised and commercial consumption and provides opportunities for both cheap and individual pieces. Ethical consumption has also been

identified as a form of 'eco-habitus' and readily tied to practices of 'high-cultural capital' (Carfagna et al. 2014). In this context, consumption practices have a collective nature, as opposed to individualised environmental 'responsibility' (ibid). That is the cultural production of consumption. However, as Gram-Hassan (2021) establishes, this approaches habitus as the mediation point between actor and structures rather than placing practices at the centre. In that sense it seems to stop short analysis of second-hand consumption; as a means for community building, bargain buying and enterprising opportunities. Moreover, the analysis along the lines of 'cultural capital' as a reason for second-hand consumption misses nuances between social groups, particularly concerning gender in relation to ethics of care (ibid) and aforementioned modes of pleasure or discovery. Moreover, what are the specificities of second-hand consumption regarding age, as mentioned in McRobbie's analysis of enterprising cultures? Thus second-hand consumption should be first and foremost viewed as a practice, which also leaves space for exploration of appropriation and legitimation.

Chapter comments

This chapter has outlined the complexities of approaching fashion and consumption while mediating debates on practice and power. I have outlined how Bourdieu remains useful to our understanding of how privileges are culturally (re)produced and the power dynamics that underpin issues of legitimation and consecration in the field of fashion. I argue embodiment is a useful tool to understand these cultural productions as they are inscribed on the body in ways which can account for individuals' subjectivities of class, gender and race. Moreover, fashion is positioned as an embodied practice which necessitates reflections on how individuals make sense of their social realities in which in the everyday concerns for scrutiny from others, dress is a way of mediating anxiety. I have then extended issues of practice and power in fashion consumption through discussions of the tensions between privilege and poverty in second-hand consumption and how young people are understood to access money. There are times when I will overlap on the following terms because fashion, consumption, meaning making, and inequality are all inextricably linked, and further dissection of 'fashion' in this context only serves to dismiss its relevance. Fashion and consumption offer possibilities for understanding and performing the self when concerning political and social issues. There is greater flexibility to consider relationships between

practices and power in which inequalities can be reproduced, consumption and fashion are argued to have an important role within markets. Fashion, too, is a site in which styles and trends can be readily appropriated and exclusionary, which will be demonstrated in this thesis through the consumption practices of teenage girls. Fashion is an underrated tool for studies of power and practice. Thus, I position my study as that of evaluating the everyday practices of fashion and its close relationship to consumption through teenage girls uses and experiences of fashion. The next section outlines more closely issues of practice and power in the social lives of teenage girls.

2. Practice and power in the social lives of teenage girls

As the previous chapter acknowledges, class is often ambivalent, difficult to identify and not readily done so. Yet the specific challenges of being a girl have been documented, with McRobbie's early research on girls finding that while class was rarely mentioned, being a girl 'overdetermined their every moment' (1982: 48). Yet as Skeggs (1997) outlines in her work on young working-class women and understandings of respectability, gendered expectations are also classed. There is, therefore, a further tension in documenting everyday experiences, wherein gender is perhaps more readily identified with than categories of class. This is perhaps particularly true for middle-class women who do not experience the same affects of class (see Skeggs 1997). Moreover, there are specific concerns in studies of girlhood, which point to not only normative gendered expectations but how they are reproduced - this has been well articulated through postfeminist analysis of consumer culture and 'female' practices of shopping, fashion, and makeup. While my focus remains on fashion and dress, I acknowledge that makeup practices are also ritualistic, contributing to performances of self and transitional senses of 'growing up' (e.g. Gentina et al. 2012). Girls navigate normative gendered expectations and their own subjectivities. My interests are in how these are negotiated, as I will reflect on in current debates. I will first contextualise the landscape of gendered expectation, as debated through postfeminism and critiques of consumer culture. I will then move on to consider practices and power as they relate to girls' social lives, with a specific focus on the everyday forms of interaction that were most often referenced in this research; schools, family and friendships. In this, power dynamics are evident where at an institutional level, girls' bodies and dress are subject to much regulation. In contrast, at a more local level, girls negotiate these complex power dynamics in their everyday friendships.

Much postfeminist focus has been on the influences of consumer culture on girls' senses of self. More recent works have sought to account for the 'stages' of girlhood more adequately; not quite a 'child' not quite a 'teen' has been dubbed the 'tweenage' years (Kearney 2007). 'Teenage' is also a varied term in girlhood, with various experiences and pressures. It is also a time which is more fraught with desires to 'fit in' with peers, while as they reach teenage life alongside more relative freedoms, there is more room for autonomy and difference (Croghan et al. 2006). Teenage years are then a space in which girls learn to navigate their increasing

freedoms and autonomy; choosing more of their own subjects and how this relates to their envisioned futures selves; later curfews; opportunities for paid employment, yet still living at home under the influence and dependencies of parents and in the institutional regulations of schools. I demonstrate the value of looking at debates on style as a means for teenagers to navigate such tensions of fitting in, standing out and developing autonomy. My focus remains on the specificities of these teenage experiences, while it should be acknowledged that these are reflexive of past and future visions of self. This chapter, therefore, sets out the 'messy realities' of girlhood in which issues of localised and institutional power relationships are implicated in their fashion and consumption practices.

Mapping postfeminist concerns

This section reflects on the social and cultural landscape in which the girls inhabit. I take a post-feminist approach to this as a means of exploring both the political landscape of feminism and gendered experiences, and the ways in which these relate to the wider political landscape of neo-liberalism. Postfeminism is primarily a political concept developed in the 1990s which explores how feminism has been repudiated as many of the primary goals for female equality were felt to have been achieved, and that female 'success' is now taken up in more individual ways. Moreover, for the purposes of this project, postfeminism offers nuanced exploration of the ways in which neoliberal ideologies have become embedded in political and popular culture, and how girls have been positioned as ideal neoliberal subjects (Harris 2004; McRobbie 2008). This project then questions how girls are positioned in fashion spaces, and importantly for this thesis, how they negotiate this. Where feminism has been repudiated by their preceding generation of women, what does this mean for this generation of girls? This section will focus on postfeminist concerns in popular culture, primarily through consumption. I will outline normative expectations of girls to be 'fun' and 'pretty' and how this is reflected in consumer products for girls, which is also seen as consequential for the possibilities for feminism. I will then position my arguments in the context of this thesis that these wider issues should also be explored from the perspective of how these are negotiated in everyday interactions.

After a period of feminist disavowal, there has been a form of feminist resurgence (McRobbie 2015). Activist forms of feminism have been culturally appropriated (McRobbie 2015), now

more dominantly found as a performance of feminism by donning feminist slogans on t-shirts and via social media. Recent arguments suggest that feminism as a political project is undermined by 'consumer culture' in which forms of empowerment and activism are subsumed under capitalism (Keller 2015; Coulter 2021). The focus is on women as in control of their own successes, striving for 'perfection', which leaves little room for error, and individualised forms of blame rather than a focus on continual structural inequalities. McRobbie (2015) situates this argument within debates on neoliberal ideas of competition and enterprise, in which this 'unattainable standard' is argued to be a particular disease of the middle class. Bodies have become a part of this consumption concerning class and femininity; the reduction of working-class roles, which involve manual strain on the body, has been replaced with more aesthetic forms of work in the beauty and fitness industries (McRobbie 2015).

Girls have been argued to be ideal subjects of consumer culture (McRobbie 2008), and they have taken on a special focus within the market (Harris 2004). The focus remains on a 'can-do" attitude (Harris 2004) that makes 'appropriate market choices' (McRobbie 2009) in which girls should work on themselves; to be happy, to be responsible, to be confident (Harris 2004; Favaro 2017). These arguments have largely been constructed alongside Foucauldian analyses of power and governmentality. The concept of governmentality observes the interaction of objectifying technologies of interaction and the subjectifying technologies of the self (Foucault 1988; Favaro 2017). Regarding femininity, feminist scholars have pointed to these new modes of feminism and femininity, which prefer the 'perfect' – the often unrealistic and unattainable image and the necessity to live the 'good life' (Berlant 2011; McRobbie 2015). For example, 'love your body' movements that respond to the objectification and need for perfection, which underpin heteronormative images of female bodies, suggest the onus has fallen on women to love their bodies *in spite* of that. Favaro (2017) has argued that the 'just be confident' rhetoric in love your body movements in magazines can, on the one hand, be seen as a response to unrealistic beauty standards but equally places the onus on women to constantly 'work' on themselves. In this context, aesthetic labour constructs consumption as a form of work that requires women to present success through market competence, performing hegemonic femininity and self-regulation. McRobbie argues that feminism has a formal and informal life, but in which male domination

remains largely overlooked. She argues that having secured some of the basic tenets for equality in wider realms of domestic and paid labour; the movement also seems to have become somewhat extricated from masculine domination

> "women themselves are self-beautifying subjects, doing it for themselves not at the behest of men. Women, therefore, only have themselves to blame if they become victim to this beauty apparatus, or indeed if they simply submit to its daily rhythms and routines. In so doing, they also more or less remove themselves from the real sites of political power and decision-making, leaving it once again free for their male counterparts to continue uninterrupted. So the Symbolic proves itself able to adapt to emerging social conditions such as women's desire for equality, but, paradoxically, in order to ensure the stability of 'masculine domination' (Bourdieu 2002)." (2015: 10-11)

There is then a requirement of a competitive spirit which is problematic in the senses that it reduces female solidarity, but also because of how it becomes internalised. The internalisation is in part because existing hierarchies mean there is less room for open competition with male counterparts, but there remain opportunities for individual women to 'be the best they can be' (McRobbie 2015). There are important questions about the future of feminism and equality and re-engaging with critical thinking (McRobbie 2004). Yet more important in the contexts of this thesis is the retreat into the feminine; utilising spaces that are female-dominated yet also perhaps limited by these is surely a complicated debate which should also consider reasons why these spaces are seen as separate and not at the behest of men. Moreover, as McRobbie has long illustrated, fashion has the capacity to act as a political tool and should not be reduced to mere aesthetics.

McRobbie (2015) argues that this seclusion of females in 'feminine fields' of beauty and fashion should not be constructed as female complicity, as this still demonstrates female inequality more broadly. The focus should be on the ways the feminist movement has been co-opted in public and commercial spheres and diluted in favour of individual 'success' amongst already privileged women. This view of success speaks to the everyday governmentality, which has individuals focused on 'work'. Work too, has become embedded

in the daily lives of women; aside from more long-lasting expectations of domestic work, how the body has to be manipulated in forms of aesthetic labour to live up to the model of the 'perfect', to connote self-care, self-control and self-pride outwardly regardless of the crushing internal struggles that might be going on. To get work, maintain a position or just generally be 'acceptable'. Moreover, as I will argue here, the forms of fashion and femininity that should be reserved for fun have also become forms of work. Creativity is employed as a tool utilised to enjoy the good life, to have work that one is passionate about (McRobbie 2016), and to dress in ways which express this 'front stage' identity which requires constant self-regulation to be respectable. My interests are in how such forms of aesthetic work might also be explored in the context of girlhood and youth, which also encompasses temporalities of age, biographical reflexivity and future imaginaries. The question then becomes how girls navigate these cultural and social landscapes and what can looking at consumption tell us about how these expectations are reproduced, renegotiated and even resisted. The next sections explore some of these pressures and challenges related to discourses and social spaces.

'Fun' girls

As I have introduced, girls are continually constructed as "flexible, adaptable, compliant, enthusiastic, intelligent, and energetic participants in commodity consumption, personal responsibility, and mobile work" (Harris 2004: 6), embodying positive 'can-do' attitudes. For example, this was analysed in popular media consumption. McRobbie argued 90s magazines had "shifted decisively away from this kind of docile sensibility, replacing it instead with the 'fun-seeking' female subjectivity" (1997b: 195). In analysing discourses of 'fun' through tween store Justice, Coulter (2021) argues fun is a pressure, gendered, from an affective point of view, it promotes happiness through living life in an unchallenging way (Ahmed 2010). Being the fun girl avoids the reputation of killjoy (Ahmed 2010; Ringrose and Renold 2016). Commercially, the construction of fun "operates as a means to depoliticize girlhood and position tween girls as ideal neoliberal subjects." (Coulter 2021: 488) as eluding to the pleasures of consumption while diffusing the threat of feminist action. Moreover, "fun allows the tween marketplace to distance itself from the sexualization of girls and instead maintains a perception of innocence that appeals to the middle-class parent" (Coulter 2021: 494). Thus,

fun serves to present girls as innocent and unthreatening. Although Coulter is here referring to 'tween' girls and the materiality of what is desired will be changeable in relation to age (Blanchard-Emmerson 2022a), the means of depoliticising girlhood through constructions of 'fun' and 'happiness' extend into teen life (Ringrose and Renold 2016).

The focus here is on the complexities of growing up a girl, fun being a means through which expectations are constructed. This leads Cook (2011) to argue that fun is not benign. Rather it is argued to be a commercial construction in which "the fun of tween girls serves the needs of a contemporary neoliberal marketplace" (Coulter 2021: 488), which necessarily hides the injustices of the fashion industry, which is exploitative (often of young girls) and environmentally damaging (ibid). But 'fun' can also be patronising, dismissive as frivolous, insubstantial, and inconsequential rather than culturally relevant regarding their subjectivities and influence on popular culture (McRobbie 1989). Girls' roles in fashion are invaluable both as influence and production, yet interwoven with this is exploitation. Cook refers to the constructs of the young female consumer as "a figment of the commercial imagination" (2004: 7). On the one hand, there is the commercial construction of girls as fun and passive. On the other, McRobbie (2008) argues for more critical thinking about the reproduction of heteronormative femininity, in which Coulter argues "fun operates as a political means of distraction from other issues" (2021: 494) such as exploitation, reduction of collective spirit in favour of neoliberal competitive spirit (McRobbie 2008). Yet we know historically that girls and young people more broadly negotiate these messages with their own subversions and takeaways (Frazer 1987; Willis 1990) – the question, therefore, needs to be in this negotiation – the processes and practices through which these occur, the forms they take and under what conditions. Girls manage to navigate the multitudes of pressures while not being recognised for the influential and competent social actors they are. This section outlines some of the pressures and challenges facing girls concerning the neoliberal consumer culture to which they are relegated.

'Pretty' girls

This focus on fun is also linked to personal appearance in which Coulter argues of a t-shirt which reads 'happy girls are the prettiest' "The warning here is clear: to upset happiness is to no longer be pretty. In such rhetoric, the implications of not being pretty, as girls are

constantly told in consumer culture, are to not have value and to be invisible" (2021: 496). Thus, the implied 'gold standard' for girls is not just to be fun or happy but pretty. Part of the concern of constructing the 'girl' is the focus on heteronormative femininity, which becomes embodied in physical appearance. This can be linked to the consumption of clothing and makeup. Furthermore McRobbie (2015) has argued that body weight has become a tradeable capital in which personal appearance is subject to calculation. I would argue this aligns with the work of Finkelstein (1991) in terms of physiognomic assumptions and moral readings of the body – the impetus being on pretty as a means of conveying conformity.

In 'notes on the perfect', McRobbie (2015) discusses media reports of young female suicide in relation to having been called ugly or having broken some female teenage etiquette in being a 'slag'. She argues that suffering becomes part of the apparatus of the perfect. There is an impossible standard to which girls are held, which often tow binaries of pretty/ugly, slag/frigid, of which the consequences are detrimental. Moreover, Ringrose and Renold (2016) define the positions between virgin/whore, feminist/slut. The authors use the concept of affect to explore how the girls manage and negotiate these contradictions, as well as the emotional toll the affective processes have. Affect is a way to explore "the messiness of the experiential, the unfolding of bodies into worlds" (Ahmed 2010: 30) in how objects and things become associated with negative or positive affects. In this, Ringrose and Renold (2016) argue that there are messy affects of feminism in schools, exploring what that means for various reputations and how these impale girls to particular positions. In this, girls' reputations continue to be framed through sexual (in)activity (Lamb 2010) in which the girls have an acute awareness of the sexual reading of their bodies (Ringrose and Renold 2016). Elsewhere this can be linked to possibilities for education trajectories (Archer et al. 2007; Elley 2011). It is further complicated by how the girls come to understand power in relation to their bodies and with regards to sex. In some instances, it is about embracing it. In others, 'knowing' feminism is a means of mediating this. However, 'feminist' is felt as a constructed binary in which girls have to perform being 'political' and feminist in ways which felt inflexible and incompatible with other aspects of their social lives. The authors draw attention to how girls both invest and disinvest in being 'non-slutty' through the dress of 'short' skirts and shorts, which also demonstrates their awareness of the erotic capital of 'slut' (Hakim 2010). A

'non slutty' positioning is described as being respected and is framed in ways which relate to heterosexual desirability.

One way girls can 'overcome' the challenges they face is by presenting themselves as confident. As Favaro argues, it has long been seen in magazines that confidence is a "primary imperative for the production of successful femininity" in white middle-class metropolitan circles (2017: 283). There has been a long-standing relationship in which media advice for young women is to be assertive and confident (McRobbie 1997b), whilst equally discussing the female form and body dissatisfaction. Self-esteem has also been tied to forms of media in which McRobbie argued magazines became a means of "hooking them [girls] into consumer culture on the premise that they could buy their way out of bodily satisfactions and low self-esteem" (1997b: 190) in which there was a shift towards individuals and their seeking of improvement.

Messy realities

The previous sections have sought to highlight the complications between girls' subjectification and subjectivities in relation to gender. These external pressures can be argued as part of the assemblages of what it means to be a girl. In particular, Favaro discusses 'confidence chic' as

> "an assemblage of diverse – often contradictory – lines of thought and will, acts and counter-acts, interventions and developments ranging from marketing strategies in the fashion-beauty-complex to a call-out culture in the digital mediascape."… "it is deeply aligned with the postfeminist sensibility (Gill, 2009), evident, for instance, in the emphasis upon individual empowerment and choice, (hetero)sexiness as power, and a reasserted gender essentialism." (2017: 291)

The point of this is to demonstrate that these forms of 'consumer culture' constrain and influence contemporary ideas of what it means to be a 'girl' and undoubtedly inform experiences. Social media may conflate this further. Building on the work of Wissinger (2007a), Carah and Shaul (2016) view Instagram as an 'image machine'. They argue that

branding is appropriating cultural spaces, affecting the flows of everyday life, as well as reproducing gendered scripts of 'acceptable' bodies. Similarly, girls' magazines have also been viewed as constructing a certain ideological notion of teenage femininity (McRobbie 2000). Instagram and other social media sites undoubtedly work to reproduce similar constructions of femininity. This is no longer contained to a weekly issue, but (re)produced in everyday life. This extends debates over the distinction between consumption and production, in relation to aesthetic, symbolic and immaterial labour (Entwistle and Wissinger 2006; Pettinger 2004; Willis 1990; Arvidsson 2006). All of which represent mediums of consumption through which girls construct knowledge and negotiate identities.

Feminism was argued to exist as a "productive tension" within the magazines (McRobbie 1997b), in part driven by demand for, or a performative aspect of the need to point to contemporary feminist debates. While wider political and journalistic reports viewed these 'feminine interests' as worthy of moral concern, internally "the assumption is that readers know and recognise the quality of pastiche" (McRobbie 1997b: 198). As we know, how girls read, negotiate, and challenge their readings of culture varies from how they are potentially intended (Frazer 1987) or how academics do. There is a feeling that these spaces exist for women to engage with pleasure and irony in female ways, which the outside world may not accept; they become 'girls' worlds'. As argued by Favaro (2017), the 'love your body' campaigns which on the one hand can be argued as an 'enterprising subjectivity labour of confidence' also creates spaces for women to feel heard and seen in a world which continually dismissed or disregards their experiences. In that sense, "can we really account for the enjoyment of so many young people in such dismissive terms?" (McRobbie 1997b: 201). Although this point is undoubtedly salient and important for its time, McRobbie (2004) has since critiqued her work on magazines in the 90s as 'naïve', inattentive to the broader issues of white heteronormativity of successful girlhood within these feminised social and cultural landscapes. She questions what could be gained from critically rethinking the position of popular culture. Suppose we are to think about this as a productive tension. In that case, it provides the scope to explore fashion and consumption not solely in dogmatic cultural terms but not also as pragmatic individualised readings of consumption. One which can account for "girls' desire is to find ways of communicating the complex and messy realities of their lives as girls" (Ringrose and Renold 2016: 115), which can embody

oppositional, contradictory, and ambivalent identities. There is the possibility to make room for experience within critical thinking; to explore how cultural productions of gender and the pressures of these are experienced, negotiated and reproduced. What I hope is left is room to think beyond dichotomy of either feminist/feminine – but where forms of pleasure and identity formation should also be critically assessed as they relate to inequality.

This too, has consequences for girls' everyday experiences in spaces where they encounter various relational and power dynamics, such as schools. Power dynamics within schools can be explored by looking at the uses and enforcements of school uniforms. In a document analysis of Scottish secondary school uniform and dress code policies, Friedrich and Shanks (2021) explored uniform policies through a Foucauldian lens of governmentality. They argued that schemas regulated on account of binary gendered positions and hierarchised age groups in ways which left little room for deviation from these rigidly assigned positionings. This is despite research which suggests growing variations in cultures of gender amongst young people (Bragg et al. 2018). Bragg et al. (2018) argue that young people are increasingly exposed to wider discourses of gender diversity in which they have opportunities to learn new ways of doing gender. However, their more local positionings in schools maintain heteronormative gendered constructs not only in uniform policies but spatial divisions such as toilets and sports cultures which in turn can influence friendship formations (ibid). Uniforms are argued to instil students with a 'responsibility' to meet standards of appropriateness and tidiness, reinforcing the idea of the 'self as enterprise' (McNay 2009; Friedrich and Shanks 2021). Friedrich and Shanks (2021) further argued that while girls, on the one hand, may have more flexibility in uniforms by way of options (trousers, skirts), girls were subject to more detailed regulations of uniforms, such as specified skirt lengths. In agreement with other research which indicates that regulatory dress codes place particular attention on girls and their bodies (Pomerantz 2007; Raby 2010), the authors argue the additional disciplining of girls' bodies is pervasive throughout secondary schools. They also consider how uniform policies produce heteronormative constructions of the body and do not consider differences on account of race, class and disability (Edwards & Marshall 2020; Happel 2013; Friedrichs and Shank 2021). However, this piece of research looks at uniform policy as implemented by schools, and as Friedrich and Shank (2021) make clear, cannot account for ways in which these regulations are read, negotiated and even resisted. This is

important particularly in a Foucauldian analysis as forms of power should always be assessed with "an insatiable concern for the resistance, subversion, penetration, failures and conflicts of operationalised policy" (Doherty 2007: 201). I will offer more empirical reflection on this in chapter 4. The next section focuses on the everyday dynamics of girls' social relationships while understanding that these are negotiated alongside the wider subjectivities outlined in this section.

Social networks and style

In attempting to explore girls' social lives through fashion in nuanced ways, the everyday governmentality of girlhood should also be considered alongside interpersonal relationships. Fashion and dress can be used to negotiate relationships and social positions (Croghan et al. 2006). Utilising Willis' work, it is possible to argue that clothing is more than just a means of negotiating subjectivities, "clothes are absolutely central to courtship rituals amongst young people. They are used not only to attract the opposite sex, but also to gain friends, win peer-group acceptance, and to appear different or interesting" (1990: 89). Through the work of Chin (2001), it is apparent that social and kinship networks are participated in through consumption activities whether that be eating, making purchases, asking for items such as clothes or toys. Moreover, as is evident in material culture studies, familial and friendship networks can alleviate anxiety in choosing what to wear (Miller and Clarke 2002). Consumption can be important for young people to establish legitimacy within a social group (Croghan et al. 2006). Style and access to material resources are means through which to avoid social exclusion or establish social legitimacy, with an inability to participate 'correctly' continually inferred as personal rather than social failures (Croghan et al. 2006; Francombe-Webb and Silk 2016). This section will explore the everyday influences of girls' style in the context of their social relationships.

Fitting in and standing out: moral boundaries

Studies of girls' friendships offer various positions, which can be understood as complex dynamics that can provide both securities from extended perceptions of scrutiny and a site where a subject plays for power. These are often contradictory representations which shift between intimate bonds and hierarchical battlegrounds for inclusion, which necessarily

requires exclusion (Frith 2004). These dynamics are worth illustrating as they go beyond the conception of the 'nice' or 'pretty' girl. Moreover, why should accounts of girls' friendships be any different from how the rest of their social lives are represented through intimate power dynamics constantly shifting and ever renegotiated? Girls' friendships are invested in and deeply intimate and often involve intense emotional attachments (McRobbie and Garber 1976). In her ethnographic account of teenage girls' friendships in schools, Hey (1997) outlines the homophilous nature through which girls constructed their friendship groups, often under or over-sexualised depending on their academic aspirations. For example, she outlines the relationship of 3 middle-class 'gifted' students who prefer educational attainment over interacting with boys. The study further informs a larger body of work that argues that a sexualised body is considered counter-productive to education (Walkerdine et al. 2001; Archer et al. 2007; Elley 2011) and that girls from wealthier backgrounds spend little time discussing relationships and sex (Pichler 2009). Hey's analysis of girls' friendship groups outlines the power dynamics involved in friendships and keeping friendships in which girls are expected to conform to the group to stay in the group. These dynamics are fragile and subject to change if one is to act out of the symbolic lines of acceptability, where even the popular can fall. Through this, Hey argued that girls have a 'particular expertise in manipulating the local private economics of prestige because most of them are generally exquisitely attuned to how they function' (1997: 123).

Studies into girls' friendships often find group dynamics dominated by one girl in particular, and the political dynamics of the group are often fragile as girls work out their places in their friendship groups around this (Hey 1997; Ali 2002). These friendships are often not radical, reproducing similar (hetero) sexualised normative ideas of femininity (Hey 1997; Ringrose 2008). Knowledge of popular culture can also be a means of negotiating social position (Ali 2002). However, discussions of boundary formations and power dynamics are not to portray girls' friendship groups are vicious and unsupportive. Quite the opposite, these friendships also offer a retreat from the complicated worlds of family and schooling and provide support and solidarity (Ringrose and Renold 2016). These are important in 'adult' spaces such as schools where power dynamics are reflected as regulatory processes, constraining them on account of sexuality, gender and class (Bragg et al. 2018). The point here is not to add to representations of girls as 'mean' or 'nice' but rather to show how their friendships provide

useful context for the micro-formations of power, which can also contribute to our understanding of cultural reproductions on account of moral and social ordering. As teenage friendships offer possibilities for understanding the social skills teens learn and act as a foregrounding for their future lives (Frith 2004).

Style can affect these social boundaries and act as a social code for personal responsibility and self-reliance. Croghan et al. (2006) discuss school peer relationships between popularity and style success in which popularity is a measure of social acceptance. The authors discuss style as a means of identity-making but that it is not simply a measure of identity but also a way of feeling or being accepted amongst peers. Being popular is seen to involve having a heavier investment in style and being ruthless in maintaining boundaries between those who are popular and those who are not. They also drew relationships between style and class, in which working-class students wanted to spend more money on their style to show they could—further creating pressure to conform. Not having the resources to access the flow of styles was ascribed with 'tramp' – acting as a form of poverty shaming. Moreover, fashionable identities have been considered antithetical to educational attainment among school-aged working-class young people (Archer et al. 2007). Amongst the students, Croghan et al. (2006) found a lack of economic resources as a mediating factor in being a style failure but was instead seen as a lack of care in appearance. There is an issue in which moral worth is confounded with economic worth. There were differences between year 8s' and year 12s' in their investment in style and conforming to trends which became less singularly important over time as interests began to vary more to include driving lessons and future planning amongst the older students. Nonetheless, getting style 'right' remained important for social acceptance (ibid). This thesis aims to offer a counter-narrative to the experiences of poverty shaming, in which stylistic boundaries are drawn according to performing an authentic self rather than 'spending lots of money' amongst middle-class girls. There are layers of boundary formation along the lines of class; as Skeggs (1997) would argue, this contributes to the unequal process of what it means to 'get it right' in style.

Constructions of cool

Through girls' close social networks, it is possible to understand how perceptions of gender and class are reproduced and how girls navigate these perceptions in their understandings of

self. Pichler (2009) used discourse analysis of 4 London private school girls, using self-recorded material to explore girls positioning in their friendship groups, with a specific focus on practices, discourses and types of knowledge. Pichler's analysis considers the micro context of friendship groups and the macro categories of gender and class. Although there is much evidence of the girls' privilege within their discussions, Pichler draws attention to how the girls distance themselves from what they perceive to be their more privileged, more 'sheltered' – and by that socially unaware - school peers. Instead aligning themselves with what they call 'real people'. This aligns with the work of Kehily and Pattman (2006) whose study amongst sixth-form-aged students revealed cannabis use was used to signal a level of rebellion which presents a nonchalance and 'liberal tolerance' amongst students and can help to construct a 'streetwise', knowledgeable position. Pichler (2009) argues that the girls utilise non-mainstream knowledge, depicted in discussions of drugs and music, to position themselves as non-conformist and thus cool. In that sense, it can also work to extend Sarah Thornton's (1995) work on subcultural capital which demonstrated how 'hip' music scenes were associated against the 'mainstream'. Coolness is then understood as a low-level performance of rebellion still conductive on understanding the rules of the 'game', which Pichler refers to as 'tame non-conformity' amongst teenage private school educated girls— the rejection of class position *within reason*. The 'within reason' being neither socially unaware or sheltered, while remaining distinct from 'roughness'. Reinforced by the work of Francombe-Webb and Silk (2016), middle-class girls' constructions of self-pathologised 'roughness' are antithetical to self-improving neoliberal narratives, which too could incorporate a 'socially aware' position. Implicit in this is an authentic display of nonchalance, as trying to be cool would be decidedly uncool (Kehily and Pattman 2006). Thus, constructions of cool, as mediated amongst middle-class girls, rely on being 'socially aware' compared to more sheltered or overtly privileged counterparts.

Mother knows best?

Constructions of outfits and styles can also be seen through mother-daughter relationships. Katherine Appleford (2014) relates the habitus and disposition of the family to extend girls' relationships and knowledges of fashion. Mums, too, can be relied on to give fashion advice because they 'know' their daughters and what suits them (Appleford 2015). Appleford (2014)

also suggests that the habitus combining them through the family as a 'sense of place' (Bourdieu 1984) creates a common understanding of style and dress. This sense of place could be extended to think about body shapes and social conceptions of 'looking good' in line with debates on respectability (Skeggs 1997). Sometimes, these common familial codes can make them more reliable than friends. At the same time, mothers can also be relied upon to give more 'honest' opinions than friends, whose infallible solidarity may lead to them saying they look great, regardless of what they're wearing (Appleford 2014). This is not to paint a rose-tinted picture of mother-daughter relationships, as in some instances, style may too be constructed in resistance to parental opinions or 'ideas of what is suitable' (Abbott and Sapsford 2001: 36). It is possible to speculate that this may be particularly common amongst middle-class girls, whose mothers were more likely to gatekeep styles according to classed ideas of respectability (Appleford 2014) which, given middle-classed girls desexualised positions, could surely be extended to sexuality. There are plays for power between mothers and daughters, enacted through the body and style. But more, too, may inform wider cultural reproductions of 'good' style, which favour 'successful' or 'respectable' femininity. As Appleford concludes, "motherhood can have an important influence on women's perceptions of social audiences and social spaces, and can subsequently impact on women's sense of obligation to dress up and perform for others" (2014: 156). Yet, this influence could be counterintuitive; mothers may 'fail' to ensure their daughters invest in the same positions as them. Hey and George (2013) also apply political and cultural positionalities to this. Daughters, too, may critically rework or reassess what they are 'told to know'.

Social media

Social media is a site where teenage girls access information and engage in the social world, in which they also negotiate their sense of self alongside normative constructions of bodies. Instagram, according to Carah and Shaul (2016), represents a digital 'image machine' (Wissinger 2007a) and, in that sense, can be related to social pressures for acceptable bodily aesthetics. It is thus important to consider the role of social media in the everyday lives of teenage girls as a site for peer interaction, style influences, (re)productions and negotiations of normative conceptions of bodies and styles, and too as a site for political and social information. Although others have argued it is influential in making groups (Boy and

Uitermark 2020), I would argue Instagram remains more individualised, as group dynamics are mediated through friendships; Instagram is an extension of in-person friendships (Davis 2010), which are often homophilous (Skeggs and Yuill 2016) and have their own complicated dynamics (Hey 1997). Instagram has become a site for performing the self (Pitcan et al. 2018) but has many other uses (Caliandro and Graham 2020).

As has been discussed, concerns within consumption studies regarding girlhood and class have involved a shift towards more individualised approaches to selfhood which leave little room for collective solidarity. This has also formed part of the argument that dimensions of social classes have fragmented, no longer neatly associated with personal forms of identity. I would also argue that social media offers an opportunity for girls to re-engage with social and political issues, which can be shared and dissected through peer groups. 'Image machine' social media, of which Instagram and TikTok seem to be most popular amongst young people (Pew 2022), offers so much along the same tensions of practice and power. They are used by upwards of 60% of teenagers (Pew 2022), so they are a part of everyday life, in which the bombardment of images can have negative impacts on teenagers' well-being (Faelens et al. 2021). Wellbeing becomes parts of debates on images of 'perfect' (McRobbie 2015), and 'normal' bodies. But at the same time, it is an opportunity for young people to see a broader spectrum of pretty much everything than they may see in their relatively homophilous social circles. With power, there is resistance. Young people are also increasingly turning to Instagram, TikTok and YouTube for news information (Ofcom 2022). In which they can find news stories and information about global politics (Caliandro and Graham 2020), in short 'bitesize' images. Nonetheless, this is conflictual as social media can have such a siloing impact on political opinions and has been a platform for right-wing extremism. But I would also argue it offers new opportunities for collective (female) solidarity – with young people on TikTok regularly calling out and challenging discriminatory behaviour. I do not wish to approach this as somehow rose-tinted. When we reflect on Favaro's (2017) criticisms of the 'love your body' movements, they are shown to be, on the one hand resisting normative body images and, on the other, as a neoliberal self-improvement tool. These movements, then, we can similarly argue, have moral conditioning and self-improvement narratives at play. But for the purposes of this thesis, I want to introduce Instagram and TikTok as sites

through which political information circulates amongst teenagers, which has the capacity to influence their everyday practices.

Chapter comments

As has been discussed, the social worlds of girls are complex and fragmented between structure and agency – as neoliberal consumer subjects who also seem to hold the future of feminism in their hands while navigating spaces which expect complicity, happiness, and self-reliance. Despite the very real problems that feminine forms of consumption can hold, fashion can also act as a means of mediating and understanding this. In this chapter, I have endeavoured to present the complex dynamics that inform dress, style, and identity, which consider issues of relational and social forms of pressure and challenges as a backdrop against which girls negotiate their performances of self. I have attempted to illustrate constructions of middle-class femininity as desexualised, feminine, vying for socially aware 'ordinary' status, yet this remains distinct from 'roughness'. Furthermore, this is enacted through a focus on educated positionings, which could be analysed as the 'productive' girl (Walkerdine et al. 2001; Pichler 2009). As I have outlined, girls' worlds are complicated and pose everyday challenges. Critical discourses of 'consumer culture' have been presented to consider wider concerns for feminism and equality across categories of gender, class, and race. Meanwhile it is also important to think about how these modes of governmentality seek to depoliticise girlhood and define girls as model neoliberal subjects through consumption. These also act as power dynamics which girls have to read, experience, and negotiate in their everyday lives. We can therefore think about these issues of 'consumer culture' as productive tensions in which I have presented these constructions as 'messy realities' for girls. The messiness requires close attention to unpack nuances, ambiguities and contradictions in ways which leave room to explore both powers and pleasures. As has already been outlined, leaving scope for ambivalences and contradictions is important for studying consumption. As girls have been aligned so strongly with critiques of consumer culture and governmentality, this presents a clear case for exploring both together to understand consumption concerning both practice and power in everyday interactions.

3. Methods

This project is a story, a story as told by the girls in which fashion is a medium through which they navigate their social lives (Marion and Nairn 2011; Ricoeur 1992). As I will come on to shortly, the initial intentions were to conduct this project ethnographically, which was precluded by the pandemic. I, therefore, approach this as a story in the sense that I consider the performances and narratives of the girls through discussion groups amongst friends and follow individual interviews while trying to keep as much of the ethnographical intentions alive as my methods will allow.

The research was conducted qualitatively through 8 discussion groups amongst 2-4 friends and 11 follow individual interviews, all of which occurred synchronously on zoom between March-September 2020 amidst lockdown restrictions and in order to keep both my participants and myself safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. This project involves the narrative forms of the girls' discussions, in which I focus on how they use clothing to mediate social relationships and negotiate their sense of self. But it is also a story I am telling, a story which explores my academic interests, and thus there is always an ethical conundrum. Conducting research involves a negotiation with ethics, negotiating what one is willing to take from participants, thinking through what is fair to say and what is not, and ensuring free will to take part. These ethical considerations are particularly complicated when dealing with people who span the boundary between adult and child, and indeed in terms of how we think of children or young people and their capacity to participate in social research (see Punch 2002). Ensuring their safety is very important, and it is up to the researcher to have strong ethical standards in how research is conducted and in how data is used and analysed. I, therefore, think of this as almost entirely a note on ethics in how I considered these challenges and conducted my research with the girls in mind.

The story is messy and complex, filled with ambiguity and contradictions, viewing fashion as a creative process but one that is relational and constrained, imbued with power relationships. In thinking this through methodologically as storyworlding, I can address how the girls' relationships are multifaceted, complicated, enjoyable, and also classed, without reducing fashion – or girlhood – to one 'thing'.

> "Storyworlding directly explores and invokes these tensions between the empowering and agentic potential on the one hand and the social impositional forces presumed to constrain one's agency" (Dennis and Zhao 2022: 1037).

In thinking it through in this way, I hope to give due credit to the complexities and challenges and acknowledge the various power dynamics at play. It also orientates the project as epistemologically feminist, documenting girls' voices which are largely marginalised and left out of conversations (Dennis and Zhao 2022). The qualitative nature of this research also follows other feminist works which aim to account for girls' own voices (McRobbie and Garber 1976; Ringrose and Renold 2016; Blanchard-Emmerson 2022a) in recognising them as competent social actors. Qualitative research is also an important tool for an in-depth understanding of fashion consumption, including practices, experiences and forms of meaning-making (Woodward 2007; Blanchard-Emmerson 2022a). It is also an opportunity for me to explain not only what I did and how but my experiences in doing this, made all the more complicated by the pandemic.

So, this chapter is also a story of the process, how I got to my methods of data collection, and what has been important for me to consider throughout the research and write up process. It is also necessarily a story of the girls, how I met them, how they introduced themselves to me, and my perceptions of them. Within this, I hope to provide useful context for the rest of the thesis. I will begin by mapping out my journey to data collection, from ethnography in shopping centres and the challenges I faced, to online methods born out of necessity during the first 2020 lockdown. In a strange way, my research benefitted from the pandemic, as I will discuss girls are not an easy group to research. I will move on to outlining my approach to sampling and interviews, which involved both group and individual interviews. I will then outline the procedural and ethical considerations within data analysis and briefly introduce the girls who participated in this research.

On coming to my methods

In this first section, I want to provide some background to the story of how my research came about. I was unfortunately – or fortunately, depending on how you look at it – in my

fieldwork year in 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic forced us all into lockdown. Lockdown had a significant impact on my data collection methods, and as such, I will focus mostly on the pandemic friendly methods used. But I think this part of my research process is important to document well, partly because of the ways it was failing even before the pandemic caused a directional shift. I was, to some extent, naïve about the methods I would use and how challenging these would be. But I was also naïve about my subject group; teenagers are not all that easy to approach and converse with. Although this had been well documented, as a relatively personable person, I was naïve about how hard I would find it. Teenage voices are temporal, representing a specific biographical stage of an intense emotional relationship, reflexive discussion on their processes of becoming an adult. Girls' voices are important and illuminating of not only their micrological levels but their wider understanding of social structures as well. Yet they are not always given proper academic attention. I want to add my voice to these debates by discussing some of the challenges posed in adding these voices to the conversation.

Girls as difficult to study

This section outlines some of the complications of studying with girls, reflecting on ethical issues around age and potential power imbalances between myself as a researcher and the girls as participants in my study. It also discusses more generally the challenges of access. As I discussed in the previous chapter, girls' friendships have been shown to be intimate and often intense, with various power dynamics and moral boundaries, making them difficult to access. In her work on youth culture and feminism, McRobbie (2000) discusses the exasperation of youth leaders for the girls in the youth club in her study for the fact they didn't want to participate in the way that the leaders wanted, or indeed as the boys did. Girls should not be thought to be passive or unengaged, but rather they have their own specific cultural practices and are perhaps more discerningly cautious about who can enter their worlds.

One difficulty in studying girls is inherently underpinned in McRobbie and Garber's (1976) early work on girls, which pointed to not only the more discerning nature of girls' friendship circles which make them difficult to access, but the private spaces in which much of their friendships take place, their 'bedroom culture'. Traditional analyses into specific youth

practices through which we come to understand youth culture and relative subcultures. However, giving much credence to our understanding of practices and the role of consumption within this were largely male-centred, leaving some like McRobbie and Garber (1976) to ask, *but what about girls?* Whilst girls were often seen as absent from debates of youth culture, they argued this was due to the different contexts in which girls are socialised, which is often to not engage in deviance and often within the home. The context of the specific difficulties in researching girls are owed to what is often dubbed 'bedroom culture', in which much cultural production (both ephemeral and material) takes place in the domestic sphere. This, McRobbie & Garber (ibid) contend, does not mean that girls are absent from youth culture, but that traditional youth culture has not accounted for the differing, more private spaces in which girl culture occurs. Since then, the landscape of how we understand girls in relation to youth culture has changed significantly, in which much attention has been paid to practices of consumption and the uses of material goods (Best and Lynn 2015). It is possible that their relationship with the private sphere means girls spend more time in a 'collective fantasy' (McRobbie 2000); relationships with clothing and much socialisation happen within the home and is where friendships are formulated. While bedroom culture has been criticised for focusing more on teens when perhaps more relevant to tweens (Kearney 2007), their circles remain private.

My own positionality was also crucial to this access. Being a relatively young white female myself from a similar social background, I was able to access these friendship groups with less scepticism. Part of this may have been in the ambiguous age bracket of my (late-stage) 20s. I was not so far from my teens as to presumably be unable to understand the specificities of teenage girl cultures. Although I was obviously older, it was hard to tell by how much and thus, I could semi-fit into their social worlds. Although I did not hide it, I did not disclose my age unless asked and introduced myself as a university student as this was what felt more relevant information to them. It was only when I told Jessica my age (28 at the time) she said 'oh' and looked somewhat disgusted that it occurred to me that I was further away from her own life stage than she had thought. Reflecting on the fact that they knew I was at university but didn't necessarily know the facets of degree stages, it would've been a reasonable assumption that I was in my early 20s, similar to or slightly older than some of their older siblings. From a research perspective, this ambiguous life stage, and particularly my gender

and accent, probably made me appear less 'alien adult' and more like some kind of older ally. I think there was too an element in which they were pleased to welcome me into their social worlds, to have their voices heard, and in some ways, have their own sense of self and fashionable personas validated by someone studying fashion being interested in talking to them. My relative 'closeness' to them in regard to age, gender, class, and often race will have likely influenced the nature of our conversations. We shared similar accents and experiences or overlap of interest, and this helped develop rapport. This entailed me being careful about my positionality as a researcher, the sense of it being a 'closed' or likeminded space meant I needed to remind the girls of the purpose of my study and that what they said would be used in my research. As a teenager, I had gone to a middle-class school and been uncomfortable about class-based judgements and hierarchies (yet at that time without the sociological language to analyse this). It was important that I did not project those feelings about my teenage peers onto the girls. This required reflection on how I analysed the data, I utilised the process of reflexive thematic analysis, (re)listening to my data multiple times, in order to try and ensure I was hearing what they were telling me, as opposed to any presumptions I had as a result of our shared positionalities. This will also be discussed in the data analysis section later in this chapter.

In terms of the 'ethics' of studying with teenage girls who span a position of not quite child, not quite adult at ages 15-17, and as I was not ever aiming to address 'sensitive' topic areas, I took a general Gillick competency approach in which I viewed the girls as competent social actors and would not have used data if I had for whatever reason felt the girls were not. I went through several rounds of ethical approval with the LSE ethics committee, some of whom also work with young people. Sign-off indicated I had thought through many elements and felt prepared. And throughout my early adult life had been part of different fields of work with young people – volunteering, coaching, and teaching. The most important element for me was ensuring that the girls were well informed of what the research was about, and so could give as full consent as anyone can in participating in research. I emailed the girls before any discussions with an outline of the research and discussion points, reiterated this at the beginning of zoom calls, introduced myself, gained verbal consent and offered the opportunity to leave or ask questions at the start. I then followed up with thanks and consent forms after any discussion. These also had the added benefit of a small questionnaire asking

how they identified in terms of their gender and race, their ages, and what kind of school they attended (private, state, grammar). Consent from the girls felt very important. Although I did not ask for parental consent, the presence of parents was there in the research. Sometimes, it was clear parents were in the room – off camera – listening in, or they would come in to ask something entirely separate while we were chatting. I always encouraged open communication about this research between the girls and their parents. Still, I did not explicitly ask for parental consent, as it would have felt like I was going over their heads. I asked them what their parents thought and suggested they talk it through with them, but aside from that, I focused on the perspectives of the girls and their consent to take part.

It is worth discussing the general power imbalances in the girls' lives, in the presence of their parents, and of course, the power imbalance between me as a researcher and an older person. Unexpectedly, it was a lot to navigate. I communicated mostly via email and Instagram with the girls outside of interview situations on zoom. As with many of the girls I spoke to, kisses (x or xx) at the end of messages posed a weird situation for me. Norms dictate if someone sends you an x and you don't send one back; it snubs the gesture. But I am also over ten years their senior, haven't actually met them in person and exist in a weird power dynamic in which I have the upper hand and would not want anything to appear predatory. So, I did not return these little gestures of love but always made sure to double tap (like) their messages on Instagram and tell them I was looking forward to chatting. To encourage the friendly nature of the conversation but avoid crossing any strange lines between an adult and a minor.

Another 'ethical' issue which I have already alluded to in my discussions is that of how to define class. I was sociologically interested in this but aware of the difficulties in approaching or asking people how they identify with this (Savage et al. 2001; Reay 2005). I, therefore, chose to show vignettes with class-based messaging to elicit discussion, TikToks which referred to 'Chavs', and news articles about schools banning branded coats in an attempt to address poverty shaming to get the girls' views on them, but otherwise left this as something to occur naturally rather than pushing my own interests.

A fun project?

As I have outlined in the beginning chapter of this thesis, (female) scholars have long since highlighted the relevance of fashion in economic, cultural, and political terms (see for example Angela McRobbie, Joanne Entwistle, Katherine Appleford; Irmak Karademir Hazır). This deep-rooted imperative connection has, however, not seemed to have reached many members of the academic community, and the ignorance of this has been something I have had to contend with more broadly throughout my PhD experience. Responses have ranged from a general disinterestedness of some peers who turn their noses up at the topic of girls and fashion, claiming they 'don't know anything about that' or indeed senior (male) academics who refer to the presentation of my project as 'fun'. As I have highlighted in my first chapter, the term 'fun' has been co-opted precisely to depoliticize girlhood (Coulter 2021), implying a general girlishness and, consequently, not serious.

As it happens, talking with girls about what matters to them is fun precisely because they engage in meaningful ways making conversations flow and enjoyable. But this does not make them inconsequential. Consumption as a task will be shown to be taken very seriously, as one of the primary opportunities afforded to girls to express themselves in ways more than simply identity but also political and environmental concerns. As I will also show, there are more 'serious' cultural observations to be made by observing the everyday practices of clothing choices, how such negotiations on account of class and gender are rendered in wider debates of neoliberal subjectivities, which ultimately see class as an individually defined construct with little consideration for the role of familial privilege. Additionally, drawing on material studies necessitates taking all the aspects of an individual's lifeworld seriously, regardless of academic assumptions that topics such as consumption or fashion are trivial or in their pleasure make one complicit to the inequalities and fetishism they provoke. Moreover, it speaks to a more problematic attitude generally towards girls (and, by consequence, women?) through which we do not see them as worthy actors who participate in the day-to-day functioning of markets and the production of social and cultural norms. This remains contrary to what those who do study girls have found. It has therefore been important to me to tell this story with respect for an often-trivialised social group and academic topic. The next sections will discuss the initial difficulties I had in fieldwork.

Shopping centres as complex sites for access

This project was born first and foremost out of sociological interests in fashion, consumption and social class. My interest in these interactive processes led me to begin fieldwork ethnographically. I spent a lot of time in shopping centres in London, observing shop layouts, speaking with retail assistants, and, most importantly, attempting to speak to teenage girls. There were multiple initial benefits in terms of thinking through fashion consumption as the assemblage that it is, but in terms of recruitment, I wanted to avoid the girls feeling like they had to speak with me. By chatting with girls in a public space, I wanted to reduce the possibility of them feeling obliged to talk to me, reiterating many times they were more than welcome to stop the conversation or not talk to me. The shopping mall moves fast; groups of people and individuals meandering between each other between different shops; the rush of teenagers using the public space to play games or mess around; smaller children in specific play areas running and playing while parents follow around or watch from the outside. There are regular changes of layout and clothes available in stores as fashion trends move as new lines come out; people in a rush skirting around those simply window shopping; retail assistants in booths situated in the middle of the wide floors which hold shops on either side asking if you care for samples; queues of people for the booths that sell food waiting for anything from sushi to cookies. Shopping malls are more than just places to shop. They are spaces to socialise, browse, sit and watch the world go by, and stay out of cold or wet weather outside of the home (Katz 1998; Underhill 2004; Stillerman and Salcedo 2012).

With all the possibilities of the shopping centres, they also made for a far more complicated case study site than I anticipated. It felt challenging in ways unrelated to my project to attempt to define the space in the necessary ways. What I had not appreciated was the mental strength (and consequent exhaustion) it would take to go up to young people, nor the extremely fast-paced environment in which I would be doing this. Young people in shopping centres are most often on the move, as they dip in and out of shops looking to buy, or to browse, switching back to get something they'd seen earlier, all the while laughing and joking and chatting with their friends. While they might sit briefly in the food court with a McDonald's or stand in line waiting for a sushi roll, catching young people's attention while trying to eat or waiting to eat didn't seem like it would yield rich or insightful data. *I* barely

like a waiter asking how my meal is in a restaurant, let alone any further interaction. Equally, when young people are just about to go into a shop, where they are perhaps in a headspace to find something specific, or indeed in a shop browsing clothing rails also did not feel like the time to chat—the best time seemed to be as young people were leaving a shop. This left me with a split second as young people walked past the aisles of the centre to decide if I was going to chat with them and then get their attention. Now any form of cold calling can take a minute to build yourself up and brace yourself for the interaction, and this approach did not allow for that. I can recount times I have walked straight up to groups of young people and chickened out at the final moment, skirting around them and walking on, heart racing. And so, in order to give me some space to brace myself and prepare, often I would see a couple of teenagers and note what they were wearing and where they were going, and then think to myself, if I see them again, I will chat to them. Or I might watch them go into a shop and wait surreptitiously until they came back out again. I was left with uncomfortable stalker-like feelings. I did, however, make a couple of connections which helped inform the direction of my project.

I want to briefly introduce how I came to meet some of my participants through my preliminary ethnographic fieldwork. Sarah and Tabby are relevant not only because they ended up being gatekeepers for other participants whom I could connect with through them but also because they exemplify the difficulties I faced in maintaining sustained contact with teenagers, which was perversely made easier during the lockdown in 2020. I met Tabby and Sarah in a popular West London shopping centre on a Saturday afternoon in October 2019. After a failed attempt to approach them as they waited in line for a Sushi Dog, I finally summoned the courage to speak to them as they came out of Primark. Sarah wore a black cropped top with white joggers, trainers, and oversized glasses. Tabby wore grey joggers with a black cropped top and a black hoodie, with a Supreme bum-bag strapped across her body. I had noticed, in particular, the Supreme bum-bag, as Supreme was well known as an on trend (yet expensive) brand. They were both from the same school in year 10. So far, they had been to Urban Outfitters and Primark and were on their way to New Look. I asked if I could join, and they agreed. I spent about half an hour with them in which we browsed New Look before going back to Urban Outfitters, where both had found items they wanted to purchase. We discussed their hobbies and interests, they mentioned parties and boys, and they also

showed an interest in what I was doing. I told them I was interested in young people and what they wear, and why it's important to them. Sarah felt it was an important topic and mentioned how she had found that some kids would ask how much their outfit cost on own-clothes days in school. I came away from the encounter hopeful, our conversation was insightful and useful, and I was hopeful I would be able to see them again, form some rapport and hopefully meet more potential participants through them. What I had not appreciated was that even if I was able to get those first meetings in shopping centres, follow-ups were even tougher to orchestrate. Teenagers are busy and hard to pin down, and their time is not fully their own. They "have so much homework [they're] literally drowning in it", they have to "check with [their] parents", they have family birthdays, they're "going to [their] friend's house", they have "band and singing" when you suggest meeting up, or they never read the messages. My plan was then to go into schools to explore these relationships in more detail. The next section will introduce the impact of the lockdown on my research and how I adapted by conducting discussion groups and interviews on zoom.

Considering access through schools

I had in my first year made the mistake of thinking that I should avoid schools and focus on the everyday without appreciating how much school is a part of the everyday for teenagers, a natural part of the conversation. What I had not appreciated is that school is every bit as much a part of everyday life for young people as anything else, embedded in our conversations in shopping centres as well. Sarah and Tabby highlighted some of these school processes and pressures, which are considered in outfit choices and related to their friendship groups. I also reflected on work by scholars such as Hey (1997) and Ali (2002), which illustrate the complex dynamics of these relationships and their influences on popular culture. From everything I had learned from teenagers so far, my sense grew stronger that the questions I had based on these conversations, interactions and observations could be asked in focus groups amongst friends and interviews in schools. I knew already that fashion, dress, and brands posed problems in schools. A school in North England banned branded coats because of the bullying that followed young people unable to buy coats that cost between £1,000-4,000 (BBC 2018). My perspective was further peppered by friends of mine who are secondary school teachers who told me they had banned own clothes days because

the rate of non-attendance went up on those days, or of young people who would 'forget' their PE kits and risk detention rather than not be able to bring 'right' Nike trainers.

Furthermore, research in schools would enable a new kind of openness for the project; young people interviewed would no longer be being approached by and talking to a stranger. Their parents would know about the research and have given it the ok, teachers would have checked to ensure I am safe to talk to, and some of their friends may have already spoken to me. And in that sense, some of the rapport work is already done for me. It's then my job to focus on making the discussions fun, steering direction but sitting back and listening to what they have to say, rather than reassuring them I know it must seem weird that I'm approaching them while they shop. And so in January 2020, I began researching and contacting lower and higher-income schools in West London through which to conduct my research. I had made some contacts and lined up a few schools to go into, but right when we were about to set dates, the pandemic began to pose a threat to the UK, and teachers became preoccupied with making arrangements for if the worst happened – national lockdown. I found myself in March 2020 without any leads on fieldwork, living with my partner, who had also lost his job because of the pandemic, in a one-bed flat in London, feeling somewhat desolate at where this project would go. The next section introduces what ended up being my main modes of data collection; discussion groups and interviews on zoom.

A pandemic approach: research with girls online

It took me about a month to feel able to go back to this project after the lockdown was announced. I was conscious of the fact that the pandemic was unlikely to go anywhere fast, so not only did I need to change my research from a practical point of view, but also that it would provide a good opportunity to explore processes as they related to our 'new' everyday lives. I decided to stay with the discussion group starting point I had planned for schools, adapting the topic guide I had created for online purposes, again with girls between 15-17. Although we were amid the COVID-19 pandemic, it did not dominate conversations as I had expected. In fact, it was rarely mentioned, and the preference was to discuss events from just a few months before the lockdown had happened, and imagined futures of post lockdown. At this point I think we were all still quite naïve to how long it would last. The sense being this

was more of a blip in time rather than a long-scale societal change. As we know, consumption also relates to aspiration (Chin 2001; Willis 1990); many of the girls were buying and dreaming of what outfits they would wear once the lockdown was over. Fashion instead felt like a constant in this time of turmoil, change and uncertainty. I say 'fashion' because trends were still coming and going, spreading through social media, mostly via TikTok, or adapting with the pandemic (tight fitted clothing was well and truly on the out for them, baggy and comfortable was in).

Finding participants

The bigger challenge posed was recruitment. As avenues of schools and public spaces had all but vanished, I was forced to rely on my own networks more than I had initially planned. I will explain my connections to the girls more thoroughly and introduce them throughout this chapter. First, I want to outline some of the key elements of the 'methods' in terms of sampling and what my research can reasonably claim in respect of the methods used. Despite having wanted to forge 'organic' connections with participants, in using more of my own networks, there was the benefit of a sense of connection for the girls; they were, for the most part talking to 'a friend of a friend', as opposed to a total stranger. There are advantages to this approach when talking with social groups who are discerning about who they let in (McRobbie and Garber 1976), and regarding the intimacies of the discussions I was privy to.

I began by messaging connections on Instagram that I had made in shopping centres at the very start of my fieldwork. The messages were only fruitful in one case, the case of Tabby and Sarah, as they were the only ones to respond and then commit to a discussion group, and in the end, only Tabby of the two showed up on the day. However, I got introduced to Lizzie, Beth and Kate through Tabby, and Lizzie later introduced me to Jessica and Zoe. Outside of this, I drew on my own networks, connecting with the younger sisters, cousins, neighbours, and children of close personal connections. These girls acted as gatekeepers to their friends, whom I was introduced to in discussion group settings, and I could 'snowball' respondents from there. Moreover, snowballing was particularly useful for gaining insight into friendship dynamics as I was specifically introduced to friends and offered information on them in follow-up interviews. As a result, my respondents were predominantly middle-class, and

about 2/3s of them identified as white. I had initially hoped that I would be able to speak to girls across social classes. I had tried to connect with girls who could offer insights from different social backgrounds but, unfortunately, did not succeed. However, given the nature of my inquiry, in which postfeminist concerns for the co-option of girlhood as the 'ideal neoliberal subject' and the unattainable notes of perfect that appear as the 'disease of the middle class' (McRobbie 2015), moreover the issues of middle-brow consumption as where class reproductions are likely occurring yet not always given full attention, I decided to focus the project further by specifying the middle-classness of my participants. Much like Browne (2005), who utilised snowball sampling to access women who did not fit the hegemonic sexual norm and were otherwise 'hidden', middle-class girls are hidden in a sense through the aforementioned time spent in the home (McRobbie and Garber 1976). I cannot ignore the biased nature of my sample (Biernacki & Waldorf 1981; Baxter & Eyles 1997), but I think the benefits of having that level of connection given the nature of the sample itself are important in terms of the quality and depth of data. I, therefore, focus on the ways social knowledge is generated through networks in ways that are emergent, political, and interactional (Noy 2008).

Sitting on-screen limited my capacity for elements of observation I had wanted to make – such as in outfits worn or clothes chosen in stores, limiting my opportunities to observe their interactions with material items. Additionally, I think the girls would likely have chosen something 'comfortable' for zoom rather than their favourite outfit. Indeed Izzy didn't even realise she would be on video but rather thought it would be an audio chat only. In that sense, there is more focus on narrative than initially intended, but this has influenced the storyworlding approach to the analysis, which in turn allowed for analysis of how the girls described their uses or constructions of clothing and styles in mediation of their surroundings. Lockdown provided me with an opportunity to access social networks and difficult-to-reach participants. This chapter necessarily provides some background for the characters of this study and their individual friendship dynamics, which vary in levels of support and levels of support needed. These are, to some extent, fragmented glimpses into the friendship dynamics of the girls in question. However, they still illuminate how these dynamics shape fashion choices and how fashion choices shape friendships.

Discussion groups

Discussion groups and follow-up interviews occurred synchronously using zoom, and I used Instagram and emails to communicate beforehand. I requested the email addresses of all the willing participants through my initial connection or gatekeeper friend. I emailed information about the research and confidentiality assurances before discussion groups began and the zoom link to participate. The girls always dictated the time of these, and I worked around their schedules. At first, these were 'after (online) school' times or weekends, but as lockdown rules relaxed, it was whatever fit around their social lives. Subsequent to gaining consent, Instagram also acted as a means of keeping in contact after meeting participants (Pink et al. 2015; boyd 2015).

As a core part of this research is understanding how practices and power relations are 'made and unmade' through interactions, it was very important to explore this as a collective process, for which "focus groups" are a useful method (Munday 2006). I here, however, use the term 'discussion group' to describe the group interviews, as in my experience 'focus group' has a somewhat cold and stuffy connotation – of a bunch of strangers joined only by a shared or relevant interest for the researcher, sitting in a circle being asked a series of questions. Instead, these were friendship discussions in which the conversations flowed easily, and the familiarity between participants helped to create a comfortable environment (Renold 2005; Francombe-Webb and Silk 2016; Blanchard-Emmerson 2022a). The intention was that the group of friends would help ease interviewer/ee power imbalances as they outnumbered me and thus would be less likely to simply tell me what they thought I wanted to hear (Punch 2002).

The friendship group dynamic allowed me to sit back and extend my understanding slightly beyond just 'talk' by exploring the friendship dynamics and the ways the girls responded to, and in some cases regulated, each other. In some small way, these observations alleviate the argument that 'talk is cheap', that what is said cannot be a substitute for actions (Jerolmack and Khan 2014). But in many ways, even talk can be contradictory, as is illustrated in the girls' discussions of fast fashion; understanding it is wrong and, in some cases, feeling very passionate about the environmental and exploitative implications, yet still consuming fast fashion pieces, what actually happens is simply a need to justify it. But why shouldn't we take

these girls at face value? Who am I to interpret their own statements and practices on their behalf? Girls, after all, although often the purveyors, champions and vanguards of popular culture, are seldom taken seriously by culture industries and more widely.

At the beginning of the calls, I would introduce myself, including what I studied and was interested in. I reassured them of anonymity and confidentiality unless I felt their immediate safety was in danger. I also told them I would sometimes repeat things back to them to check if I had understood correctly – and they should feel free to tell me I'm wrong if I am, in a further attempt to bridge any unequal power dynamics as best I could.

First, I asked for their general introductions – how they all knew each other and how things were going (mostly centred around lockdown rules, regulations, and schooling). I then asked them to show, draw or describe a picture of them in an outfit representing their style. I had a wider desire to follow the work of Francombe-Webb and Silk (2016) in employing 'methods that move' but that could be adapted for online calls. I attempted to use interactive elements throughout discussion groups, such as finding images of their favourite outfits, showing them TikTok videos and articles, and descriptive tasks to describe perceptions of good and bad style. The task of finding a photo which sums up their style enlisted a range of emotions for the girls, with many feeling they don't take enough photos of themselves, which they found to be an issue. It would often take a while of silence while they scrolled through their phone looking for something suitable for others, even more anxiety inducing which was verbalised with their friends. At times friends would also contribute with suggestions or photos that they perceived to demonstrate their friends' style. Choices were often found to relate to how confident they felt (or bored…!), varying from day to day.

After discussion of their outfits, their descriptions of their style and where they liked to shop. We moved on to being asked to write down two words to describe good style and two words to describe bad style. These discussions significantly influenced the conversations used in the empirical chapters. But broadly speaking, there were levels of consistency in good style as being authentic – reflecting the individual person and bad style often associated with clashing or tacky-ness. There were also levels of regulation within the friendship groups; for example, Jessica chastised Zoe for using the word 'chavvy' for bad style, as that was a 'bad' word. Not only did this give indications of the moral regulations at play, but it also might have

constrained what the girls said in group situations. As Kehily (2004) notes, the desire to be a part of the group is sometimes at odds with personal feelings. In her work on tween-age girls' friendships which utilised diary studies, Kehily found forms of appeasement existed within friendships, as well as subtle modes of regulation; "Unlike many of the girls in Hey's (1997) study, the diary group girls appeared keen to avoid tension and open conflict. They supported and regulated each other in strong displays of approval/disapproval, expressed through chorused voices, nods of agreement and, occasionally, an open vote" (Kehily 2004: 367). I, too, found these conversations imbued with reinforcements and encouragements, but as exampled through Jessica and Zoe, a site through which the girls regulated each other and instilled moral boundaries.

We also watched a TikTok video of a girl 'dressing up' like a 'Chav'. The girl in question layered her face up with makeup, put her hair in a high bun on top of her head, and had derogatory comments on screen such as 'chavs don't wash'. Although I would say this did not garner any in-depth conversations, I kept this in to keep some consistency and because it allowed me to explore relationships and associations between TikTok and 'subcultural' groups – of which there were not many. The most commonly cited 'groups' of styles were 'Chavs' and 'West London Girls', which will get the most attention in this thesis, as will certain stylistic descriptions of 'basic' and 'alternative'. A few mentioned groups, such as 'emo' or 'punk', but I could not draw much analytically from these discussions. The final vignette was a news article reporting on a school that had banned certain branded coats (Appendix B). I was surprised by the level of 'personal responsibility' approaches amongst the girls in which there was little room for collective solidarity or reflection on income inequalities or peer pressures, but simply that people should not buy things they cannot afford, and people who can, should not be prohibited, as long as they do not show off about it.

The use of discussion groups provided useful insight into their wider friendship dynamics and how ideas and styles were formulated and reformulated through each other. They also offered a useful and 'safe' way for me to create rapport with them, as they outnumbered me and could lean on each other for support. These were valuable in terms of how the girls navigated their friendships in discussions of style, preferences and social issues. The specifics will be discussed in the 'empirical reflections', but for the purposes of this section, I argue

that the discussion groups provided insight into how these issues were formulated and regulated in group situations. Using discussion groups in conjunction with individual interviews allowed for ethnographic reflections, as I could sit back and observe interactions as they occurred and get a sense of how the friendship groups functioned. Indeed, as the next chapter will discuss, girls' friendships provide a multitude of ways to survive teenagehood – and the pandemic. As I started speaking with friendship groups during the lockdown and over the summer as restrictions eased, the sense of frustration and longing when kept apart and the relief they felt when they could finally see each other again was evident. Seeing each other represented a sense that things were getting back to 'normal' and providing some well needed respite from parents and siblings. Girls provide support on outfit choices; they are fun to shop with and hang out with, support each other during difficult times and provide shelter from the challenges they face as young women. This then also gave me a better insight into the functioning of their social worlds to take forward into interviews. I saw the discussion groups as important in their own right, but also a way for me to build rapport with girls while they were in their friendship groups and, hopefully, feel more comfortable. I was then able to explore themes further in follow-up interviews. I will now consider the use of online methods before moving on to discussing my use of in-depth interviews.

Justifying online methods

Online interviewing provides flexibility in terms of accessing participants (Are 2019), particularly in the current climate of the global pandemic. However, it also faces challenges regarding accessibility in who has access to the digital sphere and must be recognised as exclusive from this perspective. The digital approach worked well for me, perhaps partly owing to the age group I was working with, whose uses of video calls and mobiles imply they are well versed in the digital world. Online interviewing is also critiqued for not providing the same level of comfort and rapport between interviewer and participant as in person (Are 2019). However, a study by Archibald et al. (2019) found interviewees generally rated their experiences on Zoom highly, noting the ease of use and cost-effective measures. Moreover, Zoom offers the easy ability to manage data and security safely (ibid). Since 2020 this can surely be extended to think about the benefits of keeping research alive during a pandemic

and accessing hard-to-reach groups. Although not a generalisable claim amongst all my participants, for the most I was able to create rapport and a comfortable environment with my participants at a similar rate as I would expect in person. Many girls in the interview mentioned they had discussed the discussion groups with their friends afterwards and had all enjoyed them. I do not pretend to consider that there is an element of wanting to please the interviewer, nor that these are 'polite' middle-class girls who are not necessarily encouraged to express discomfort in any forms of their life. Still, given the general depths of discussion, there was no reason for me not to believe them.

I strongly feel that my approach was resourceful and reflective of the time. It provided me with a unique and short-lived opportunity to capture teenage girls' social worlds, which are otherwise very difficult to access. This is not because of a lack of interest in the topic, but because their social lives are so full, they become almost impossible to connect with in any meaningful way. In reflecting on how this relates to the bedroom culture often associated with girls, I draw on Pichler (2009), who mediated this by requesting that some of the girls she observed in school record their conversations while hanging out at home. I was able to take advantage of the unique opportunities available to me during the lockdown and access a digital form of bedroom culture. The girls were each in their own room but outnumbered me on our first meet and were likely participating from spaces they generally feel safe. What I have is a snapshot of the lives of middle-class teenage girls as they, too, have been navigating this uneven and unexpected social world. I have a sense of the normality many tried to maintain in the face of so much upheaval and how fashion represented some of this normality, to some extent, a distraction, and still held a lot of salience in their everyday lives. Moreover, this is likely to represent an important moment in our modern history, and I am grateful that I was able to capture it in some small way. I was also allowed insight into their responses to the Black Lives Matter movement, which took international hold in June 2020 and requires further reflection. It was not the year anyone expected, but it has been important in so many ways.

Follow up interviews

Following other research on girls and fashion, interviews offer possibilities for understanding experiences and personal narratives (Marion and Nairn 2011; Thompson and Haytko 1997).

At the end of the discussion groups, I told the girls I would contact them with consent forms for the discussion groups and would ask them if they would like a further interview. If they agreed, I would follow up with them about when would work. There was often a bit of chasing on my part, and it felt like a constant balancing act between not being forgotten and not being pushy. I averaged about a 50% follow-up rate in my initial groups, but as lockdown restrictions eased and schools restarted, this got more difficult. In the end, I had 11 follow-up interviews, and only in the final group of private boarding schoolers did I not get any take up for interviews. However, since my discussion group with them happened in early September, as those boarding had just got back to the UK (after months back home owing to the pandemic) and school was about to start, this is not surprising.

As with all research, the discussion groups were imperfect, and there was not always time to follow up on everything. At the same time, some elements occurred to me after the fact. Some topics like money seemed uncomfortable in group settings, so I wanted to pursue whether this varied in individual interviews. As I will show, money was always a contentious topic, better discussed in the abstract than personally to the respondent. In some cases, I wish I had followed up on this further, as literature on young people and 'getting money' seems limited at best. Still, I could also tell when the girls were uncomfortable. As my primary goal within interview settings was to create relaxed and open environments, I did not want to push too hard on anything that felt like it was for my academic benefit at the expense of anyone else's comfort.

I had already met the girls participating in group sessions alongside their friends, and there was a more immediate sense of ease or familiarity, which enabled a fairly quick transition into discussions. At the start of conversations, I would reiterate the same assurances about the purposes of the research and confidentiality and start very open – tell me about yourself. If this felt hard to answer, I would ask if they had always lived in their house, what they were studying, things they liked to do. I would then ask them if anything about our previous conversation had stuck out for them. This worked to varying degrees of success; my sense with some girls like Lizzie was that they saw this as a test in which they needed to say something impressive or recount large parts of the conversation; some seemed to panic and not remember anything, and some more confidently asserted positions or wanted to

reinforce previously made points. I reminded them all that I had been working on transcribing their conversations, so while I could remember lots, I did not expect them to. I had a few themes that I kept in mind for the conversations, largely based on further insight into their friendship groups, ways of shopping, outfit choices and construction, and differing styles amongst teenagers, as observed by them. At the same time, I was leaving plenty of scope for open discussion based on what was said and trying to leave as much room for the girls to lead the conversation as possible. The follow up interviews also allowed me to check my own perceptions and mediate differences between group and individual dynamics. In having one-to-ones, I got more personal insights from those who took part and was able to further explore variations of performances in group and one-to-one settings (O'Reilly 2005). These instances are documented throughout the thesis, whether it be about Beth, who I initially mistook quietness for being bored in our group discussion, only to learn she has disagreed with her friends. Or Izzy and Pippa, whose friendship group had seemed strong until they both told me a separate group participant - Emily – had been copying their clothes and messaging Pippa's boyfriend, so the group was in the process of distancing themselves from her. In terms of the 'end' of methodology, 'leaving' a field is difficult and difficult to define, made more so by the unfinishedness of online. I really took my participants lead on this. Fieldwork came to a somewhat 'natural' end as schools resumed in September 2020, I found the girls had less time and responded less to messages. In their lessening interest and communication, I felt I had taken as much as they had to give and did not want to push further. Truth be told I was also both exhausted of fieldwork and excited to start processing and analysing my data. The next section will follow up on these sorts of reflections in further detail – introducing the participants by friendship groups (rather than order of interviews). In these introductions, I offer some personal reflections on the research process.

Empirical reflections

This section provides a little useful context about the girls and how they came to be a part of this research project and reflects on some limitations. The girls come from a variety of cities in the west, south and midlands of England. In order to protect their anonymity, I have decided not to disclose the locations of the girls or exactly with who I had built connections through. Some distinctions between those inside and outside of London may become

apparent where relevant in analysis, but outside of this, the geographical positioning of the girls has not been necessary and owing to the disparity in locations, it did not feel possible to draw many conclusions of account of region. Moreover, going into this would be further complicated by a few boarding school attendees whose families live outside the UK. I would not have the data from my methodology to say anything conclusive. Although this can be regarded as a limitation of the research, it was also outside of the project's main focus. What is more generalisable across the participants is their age, gender, and relatively stable and comfortable economic and social positions. There were variances between the girls in terms of sizes of bedrooms and their education between state, private, and boarding schools, but conversations commonly indicated stable home environments. By this, I mean although there are variations in the girls' affluence and 'middle-classness' generally, the girls should all be understood as part of stable middle-class families. This has been relevant to my core sociological concerns on their relationships with and uses of fashion and how these relate to everyday relationships of power.

My first discussion group utilised personal connections through my partner's mum, resulting in a group of 4 girls aged 17 in their first year of A-levels. Adele attended a private school in the area. In contrast, Amy, Lydia and Imogen attended the same local girls' school and made-up part of a bigger group of friends - and I was later introduced to Charlotte, Nancy and Georgia through them. Amy and Lydia had met Adele initially through cadets[2], and all four had met recently at a new year's eve party at Lydia's house. Not the most 'popular' of groups, this group of girls is fairly large. I don't know all the members and all the dynamics, but what is clear is that fractions exist within the group where some are closer to some more than others. Still, on the whole, the group is supportive, unassuming, and there is a freedom to be 'weird' and reject norms of popularity within the group. They seem hard-working, and school focused. I spoke with all of them in some way about their future trajectories; some about degrees or another about career aspirations, others about UCAS applications and university open days. They have quite a focused sense of where they want their lives to go in the next few years while also battling the pressure of being 17 and supposedly needing their lives figured out – what they want to study and what they want to do with that, but not all of

[2] The army cadets is a voluntary youth organisation in the UK where young people can learn basic survival skills, go on expeditions and engage in social events.

them are so sure. Nancy, for example, grapples between science and art, marine biology or animation. She thinks she might do an art foundation year to help her decide. Lydia also loves art and creative hobbies such as stencilling and making (or refashioning) her own clothes. On the other hand, she knows exactly what she wants to be: a paramedic. The complex and contradictory feelings that come with being 17 are apparent, as is the aspirational individualised model of a woman; career thinking, individual, confident in their capacity to succeed. But they're also 17-year-old girls dealing with all the things that 17-year-old girls have to contend with and the insecurities that go with this. As Lydia, Amy, Adele and Imogen made up my first discussion group, I was surprised at how in depth it was. As I suppose always is the case, I wasn't entirely sure how it would go and whether the conversation would flow. It became apparent that friendship groups worked well for discussion, although some naturally dominated conversation more than others. I could manage this, and it also gave me insight into dynamics. Lydia presented herself as very confident, with a penchant for wild and wacky clothing and hairstyles which aimed to provoke. Amy, on the other hand, criticised 'individuality for individuality's sake' in a way which appeared to be a certain kind of provocation to Lydia. In fact, Amy regularly seemed to police Lydia's behaviour in a competitive way; there was clearly some tension between them that I would presume was some sort of intellectual battle, as they were both very articulate and put a lot of stake in their intelligence. Adele meanwhile professed her love of clothing which was 'fun' and weird, presenting an 'I don't care' attitude. Yet, follow up conversations with her seemed to reveal less confidence and more presentation of it, in line with Lydia. Lydia and Adele took me up on my request for a follow-up interview. Lydia was also mentioned for her bold style amongst other friends I spoke to a month or so later – Nancy, Charlotte, and Georgia. Perhaps slightly more openly concerned with what others thought, they struck me as both conscientious and self-conscious. I was able to have follow-up conversations with both Nancy and Charlotte. Charlotte, in particular, felt she wanted to say the 'right' thing, apologising if she didn't know how to answer a question, saying she should have prepared more in advance. I reassured her that this was just a conversation and there was no right answer, but while I had done my best to frame this as a relaxed and open conversation, I hadn't appreciated that some might see this as some sort of test.

The second discussion group I held was with contacts from the shopping centres via Tabby and Sarah. Sarah did not join the call on the day, and when I contacted her to check she was ok and suggest another discussion group, she said she would ask her dad and then didn't get back in touch. I took this as code for either she did not want to take part or was not allowed and so did not push it. The discussion group consisted of Tabby, Kate, Beth and Lizzie – all of whom were aged 15. I would suppose the most interlocking person in this group of friends is Lizzie, as she knows everyone I spoke to the best. This a reflection of something that probably sums Lizzie up quite well as she seems very personable and somewhat of a people pleaser. It was Lizzie and Kate who spoke the most in the discussion group, which may have also been because they shared the most similar views, and it was Lizzie who introduced me to Jessica and Zoe (as well as the reason they met). Zoe attends a nearby private school but has known Lizzie since they were much younger. Lizzie lives in a house very central to the other girls in her group and also has an attic bedroom which feels separate from her parents; for these reasons, her house is often a central meeting point. Although Jessica and Lizzie go to the same school, they keep their friendship somewhat separate, Jessica likening it to a sisterly relationship both acting as advisers and confidants. Beth, Tabby, Kate and Lizzie had recently become good friends at school, disbanding other friendship groups to join forces after Tabby and Kate met in history class. They had made good friends throughout the academic year and had spent New Year's Eve together as well. I spoke with all but Tabby individually, who had declined a follow-up interview because of her social anxiety. I offered means of addressing this if she did want to take part (a very short initial chat to see how she felt, check ins on the day etc.), but ultimately Tabby declined any further involvement. The discussion group with Zoe and Jessica was supposed to have a third member who could not attend owing to a family event, again highlighting one of the challenges for access to teen's time, which is not always their own but dictated by wider family structures. The additional participant wasn't really missed, as Zoe and Jessica had enough conversation between the two of them. Lively and energetic, they were perhaps my favourite interviewees, although I have tried to manage these biases in my analysis. They both struck me as popular and very on top of fashion trends – Zoe even introduced me to the second-hand app Vinted, which I have since bought most of my clothes from. They interested me because – I think – the conversation felt that energy and engagement. I did not feel much like they were trying to impress me but were more interested in showing off to each other, which of course, from the perspective of participant

observation, was great. The extent to which the girls felt comfortable was partly indicative of personality and confidence and inevitably varied from participant to participant.

I also spoke with Izzy, Jade, Pippa and Emily through personal connections. The four made up about half of a larger friendship group of 15-year-olds. Although technically living in a city, these girls are slightly more 'small town'; many of them have been friends since they were little, and many live close by and can easily walk between homes. There is also a sense of much closer mothering amongst these girls, who relate to their parents (particularly mums) more than most of the other groups, which could be something to do with the possibility for freedoms that accompanies city life, or that there is less resistance towards parents for these girls in favour of autonomy. But much like the other girls I've spoken to, they are always figuring out how to negotiate better clothes for less cost. Part of this in relation to clothing is undeniably because being dependent on mum and dad means access to the bank of mum of dad. For Izzy, she knows full well she's more likely to get bought new items if she's out shopping with her mum than if she goes with friends. This speaks to the enterprising spirit in many of the girls I spoke with, where how to attain or maintain as much money as possible is at the forefront of decision making. Comfortable is a way of describing these girls in terms of style, lifestyle and relationships. Clothing and fashion do not necessarily bond them, and they describe being more likely they spend their time together in their scruffy pj's without makeup or paintballing than dressed up for parties. Generally speaking, they see their group as varied in terms of style but outdoorsy and enjoy trying new things. Pippa describes Jade as having very cool clothes, the one who seems to follow fashion the closest, while she sees herself as having a summery, beachy style, enjoying dresses and shorts. Much to the aghast of the other girls, Pippa doesn't like high-waisted jeans and opts instead for the much less fashionable ones, which she feels suit her best—again, implying here that comfort and self-confidence are more important here than 'trends'. Izzy is described as having a neat, cute style, consisting largely of cropped tops and either jeans or joggers. What was surprising on further discussion with both Pippa and Izzy (as not apparent in the discussion group) was that Emily was seen less as having her own style, which she herself described as vintage '90s', because she appeared to copy what everyone else wore. Copying has made her somewhat unpopular in the group, with many such as Pippa and Jade trying to remove themselves from that friendship tie in a sort of uncomfortable, unspoken way. Whether Emily was aware of

this is unbeknownst to me as she declined (or rather never responded to) an interview. Izzy told me about this as if Emily was unaware of the situation. Still, if she were, this may explain the rather energetic and people pleasing way she conducted herself in the discussion group. A key focus of her concern was Pippa, who Izzy described as the 'queen b' of the group, whom most people felt closest to and who, as an only child, was used to getting her own way. I was surprised by this, as Pippa had struck me as shy and lacking confidence in our conversations. It may be that she prefers the company of people she knows, and it is also indicative of a limitation in online interviewing. Without the capacity to build any longer term relationships with the participants, it altered what I could reasonably collect with the data. Nonetheless, conversations like the ones about Emily counterbalanced this to some extent.

At the end of the summer holidays, I spoke with another group of 17-year-old sixth formers who all attended a local girls' school. I had gained access to them via personal connections. Their first year of A-Levels was marked by no more uniforms, something we discussed in both groups. Of the 12 in their friendship group, I spoke to around half in 2 groups of 3 participants. The first was Claire, Frankie and Zara, and Tamara, Lilli and Safia the following day. A politically and socially conscious group, those I have on Instagram post regularly about social issues globally – like Black Lives Matter and the ongoing turmoil in Palestine, as well as more locally, such as experiences of racism and racial difference in their own school. They are conscious of the social pressures that face women and people of colour and make choices in response to this. They themselves are a diverse group, and of the 6 I spoke with, only two were white, which differed from many of the other groups, where being a 'minority' was in the minority. Much of what they wear reflects this social consciousness, with a need and a desire to express not only individuality but an awareness of the social issues surrounding the fast fashion industry and the complexity of their character through not wearing basic clothing. There were, however, differences between the two groups I spoke with. The first group had gone very well. We'd have an engaged and what felt like a frank conversation where the girls said they felt at ease and there had been a good energy to the conversation throughout. I'm not sure if it was because of this and the anticipation for the second group on hearing about our chat, but the following day had felt a little more forced, and the conversation a little harder to keep going. Going back to school was going to be different. Year 12s would have access to the common room, which felt annoying because the common

room is more of a ‘year 13 thing’, but instead, they would have the library – which would have its uses in the run up to their A-Levels. A focused group with various career aspirations, some are applying for medical degrees while some are taking more creative and arts routes like fashion and drama. They described themselves as close – mostly hanging out all together, but occasionally they do smaller things. A key hangout spot for them is a hill in a park close to their school, where they can all be together and sometimes with other friends or groups of boys. Before the lockdown, they would also go out for dinner, parties, and people's houses. The hill was somewhere they had been going before but felt extra special in the move out of lockdown. They speak less in their group chat than they did at school. Claire and Frankie have seen each other quite a lot because they live close, but other than that, they haven’t seen each other as much. It had felt quite nice to have a bit of space from one another, claiming the little things bothered them less – quality, not quantity. I caught Frankie for an interview while she was quarantining after her holiday in France. She only had two more days until she could return to school, which she was excited about. Due to quarantining, she had a lot of free time, and this interview ended up being the longest of those I conducted. Bright and bubbly, Frankie is easy to talk to, and I think she seems quite eager to please with a naïve charm and perhaps a lack of filter. Her trust in me and confidence in herself to say whatever she wanted were charming. She told me about the others in the friendship group, from those I spoke to and those I didn’t, qualifying them in terms of how hard they studied and what they wanted to do career wise. I was also told about boyfriends and break-ups from her perspective. They have a mirroring boys friendship group who they do certain things with and have recently had to navigate these relationships when some of them had dated and subsequently broken up. In terms of considering who is ‘missing’ from my research, disability was not something widely mentioned. Frankie told me about one of her friends with Crohn’s disease who had recently been fitted with a stoma bag. The girl in question had missed a lot of school but had still done well at GCSE and was making up for lost parties now that she was more able. As someone who also had a life-altering surgery at a similar age, I would have loved to have been able to explore further post-operative relationships between the body and fashion, but this remains an area for future exploration.

The final group of friends I spoke to – although utilising my own networks – attended an international boarding school. Emma and Rachel board full time while Jennifer attends during

the day but lives close enough by with her family to commute. At the start of the call, Jennifer was at her home while Emma and Rachel were in a room together, and there was an additional girl in the room with them who had just joined the school and was Emma's new roommate. As an unofficial member of the discussion group who disappeared halfway through, I cannot say any more about her, but it points to the relaxed nature through which the girls treated this conversation. Emma and Rachel would often start quiet conversations and then bring Jennifer and me into their discussion afterwards. A teacher also came into the room at some point as Emma was supposed to be volunteering in some sort of open day tour, to which Emma said she would be running late as she was taking part in this research. The teacher then chastised them both as Rachel was supposed to be quarantined alone in her room in line with government legislation, having only recently arrived back in the UK. The girls didn't seem to take it too seriously, giggling and then carrying on our conversation, clearly keen to be back in each other's company after so long. As this was still at the height of the pandemic, it is curious to wonder exactly how much regulations were being followed – or how indeed it was possible to implement them – in closed spaces like boarding schools, but this is all I would have to contribute to such conversations, and it is anecdotal at best. Rachel had been back in Thailand with her family, while Emma had been with her family in Brunei, which was their current base. Brunei had not had any lockdown, Thailand had, but the swimming pool at home had made it more bearable, while Jennifer had been at home with her family observing UK guidelines. Fashion-wise, they all varied. Rachel was very interested in styles, street fashion and Asian fashion in particular. Emma and Jennifer classified their styles more as 'jeans and jumpers'. The friendship dynamic is complicated by the board/home element. Emma and Rachel spend most of their time together, while Jennifer might hang out with them after school, but never on weekends. Jennifer felt bad for saying it but hadn't liked Emma when they first met. It was only when they all did the Duke of Edinburgh awards together that they became friends. It was the only group I was not able to get any follow-up interviews with, which I would imagine was because the term had just started. However, their insight into very privileged spaces and the similarities they shared with other girls I spoke with in terms of relationships to fashion and how it is valued if anything, strengthens this more blended approach to class I have taken, which focuses more on financially comfortable than needing to denote layers of social class further.

In all the groups, I changed all their names from the beginning of transcribing and notetaking, in order to protect their assured anonymity. In some respects, I don't know how it is possible to be grateful enough to the girls for their time and insight, but in thinking about the reciprocity with the participants, or ways in which to 'give back', I have largely seen this in the way I have handled the data and reflected upon the girls. In which I aim to be sensitive to their complicated positionalities, reflect their world views, and position them as the competent and valuable social actors that they are. I also plan for any future writing on this topic to be written in ways which are both accessible and digestible, so that they are available to the girls should they ever want to read about how their stories and insights have been taken up in sociological work.

Data analysis: a reflexive approach

I recorded all conversations after reminding and requesting consent from the girls at the start of each conversation. I recorded the conversations via zoom for the audio and also used my phone to record on otter – an auto-transcribing software. All recordings and transcriptions were immediately uploaded to my LSE OneDrive for data protection. I went through the auto-transcribed document alongside the recording to make edits and check accuracy within a week after each interview.

In keeping with the aims of this thesis to maintain an ethnographic, storyworlding approach, data analysis involved reflexive engagement with my data over a prolonged period to draw out themes as I felt they occurred rather than through a form of coding that would be based on the amount of times a specific topic was discussed. This was with the intention of more accurately depicting the social lives of teenage girls. But as I have already stated, I am sceptical about overstating ethnography as naturalised and 'talk as cheap' (Jerolmack and Khan 2014). All research is conducted in the interests of the researcher. I, therefore, utilised the reflexive thematic analysis approach as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021) as a means of justifying these tensions while leaving room for flexibility in data analysis that is not reliant on rigid coding structures that could have removed some of the subtleties of my approach in reflecting on the intersections of power and practice. The reflexive thematic analysis considers that themes do not 'emerge' from data but are generated as part of a creative and critical process in which "meaning and knowledge are understood as situated and contextual,

and researcher subjectivity is conceptualised as a *resource* for knowledge production, which inevitably sculpts the knowledge produced, rather than a must-be-contained threat to credibility" (ibid: 334-5). That is to say, analysis is not generated in a vacuum. All researchers come with preconceived ideas and preformulated knowledge that should be reflected on as part of the reflexive thematic analysis.

The reflexive thematic analysis involves co-construction with practices outlined in the article but is also subject to development by the researcher. I constructed themes from my data as part of a reflexive interpretive process that incorporated elements of the six-phase process outlined by Braun and Clarke.

> "1) data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes; 2) systematic data coding; 3) generating initial themes from coded and collated data; 4) developing and reviewing themes; 5) refining, defining and naming themes; and 6) writing the report." (2021: 331)

My take on this was to forego systematic data coding in the earlier stages of analysis in favour of maintaining more reflexive practices in listening and relistening to interviews, noting themes and seeing how they sustained or developed under further review. In that sense, I would say systematic data coding happened between stages 4-5. I went through all transcripts and highlighted four key themes which at that time of review centred around: knowledge, identity, collaboration and cost. Reviewing my themes and data, I felt I had more adequately heard the varying stories and their significance. For example, much of what makes up the following chapter regarding understanding the girls' social landscapes and how they position themselves within this came from relistening through my data. In the first instance, the topic of 'chavs' stuck out owing to its sensationalised nature and my own academic interests in class, but how these are constructed as parts of the girls' social lives and how they tell their stories of the challenges they face in familial and school settings on account of 'being a girl' required further reflection. In coding in this way, it is still possible I have less reflection on relationships to bodies and bodily pressures. For instance, I touch on issues of diet culture in chapter 7, but I haven't been able to unpack this further. Equally, it has felt outside the scope of this research to fully reflect on youth cultures and subcultures – although I found it difficult to see how they fit into what appeared to be a wider alignment

with forms of individualised identities, where the girls did not want to be ‘put in a box’. In future work on this topic, I would like to more closely consider how explored constructions of ‘basic’ and ‘creative’ style relate to grounded aesthetics, as Willis (1990) would put it. That being said, my interest in exploring relationships of inequality through fashion has yielded rich empirical insight. What initially started as themes of social relations, individuality and knowledges concerning fashion developed into the more specific chapters in this thesis in which girls mediate their dress on account of their social landscapes, individuation, understanding of themselves and their financial positions, and in line with their political and environmental concerns. It has been a constant reflexive practice in which I have tried to interrogate my themes and direction to do the data justice as best I can.

As I mentioned at the start of the chapter, storyworlding offers the possibility to explore both individuals' own senses of self-alongside wider sociological understandings of power relationships. There are limits to the co-construction of this storyworlding in my project, ultimately I am the one who has directed conversations and data analysis, My accounts of their class positioning and relationship to privilege may not be entirely in line with their own analysis of themselves, and in my interests in these. Therefore it is possible I missed other aspects of their social lives that they felt had more salience. I did what I could to mediate this. However, social class is an important part of my interests and analysis. I have been exceedingly careful not to make this their sole narrative, in part because of the complex nature of class and self-identification (see Savage et al. 2001) and because that would not give credit to the girls' stories, nor indeed the multifaceted ways in which fashion is woven into their everyday lives.

Chapter comments

This chapter has sought to outline the practicalities of this research project; in explaining the modes through which discussion groups and interviews took place. As I have outlined, there were specific practical responses to the pandemic in moving the research online. However, this had the perverse benefit of engaging a group of girls who were otherwise quite difficult to reach owing to busy schedules. Although it did involve a huge shift in my intentions to develop this research ethnographically, I maintained opportunities for observations in discussion groups amongst friends and in my approach to my data in which I utilised Braun

and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis approach, dedicating a lot of time to listening and note taking on what was said and how. I have also introduced the groups of girls in my empirical reflections, which provide some information on the girls and their friendship groups, which I believe will be useful for the following empirical chapters. These reflections also served as a space for me to highlight some of the ethical and methodological considerations as they occurred throughout fieldwork in which I have reflected on my position as a researcher and the effect of this on the girls, my own biases and the need for the follow-up interviews which sometimes revealed deeper insight into dynamics in friendships. The next section begins the first of 4 empirical chapters. I will draw on empirical analysis to provide a broader picture of the girls' social worlds and how they navigate their relationships which involve various power dynamics, be it institutional or localised within friendships and peer groups.

4. Navigating relationships

This chapter highlights the different social relationships and hierarchies that girls negotiate in everyday interactions and reveals how the girls in this study use clothing to mediate judgements and social pressures. What felt striking was the ways they articulated what it means to be a girl, both in how they feel their bodies are regulated in hierarchical or institutional spaces but also in the felt solidarity of this amongst friends. The body is a site of discipline subject to much "management, maintenance and work" (Coffey and Watson 2015: 193). This chapter provides insight into girls' lived experiences in their everyday social environments and foregrounds subsequent investigation of the ways in which this is embodied in their wider social practices, where I will also consider relationships to privilege and political knowledges that underpin practices. Reflecting on the different social environments of school, family, friends, and peers, I demonstrate the affective means through which girls calculate their appearances which recognises their relationships to gender and class, and how dress is used to mediate various social environments, from institutional regulations to peer relations. The girls provide instances where they are both instigators and reciprocators of regulatory practices, thus, highlighting the interrelationship of practice and power in how girls negotiate relationships. These are shown to be subtle negotiations of spaces requiring the girls to adequately assess their social environments while engaging with normative expectations of acceptable gendered and class performances. There is an importance to studying girls and fashion in ways which cannot be accounted for by utilising a purely cultural analysis which preferences forms of 'taste' over experience.

The first section will necessarily introduce wider everyday social environments, which enables subsequent reflection on how different spaces require different modes of performances and mediation. I begin by outlining how they define their relationships to dress in 'adult' and institutional landscapes, in other words, the everyday social environments in which the girls revealed a sense of powerlessness. As I highlight in the methods chapter, at the conception of this project, I had not anticipated how much school and uniforms would feature in my conversations with the girls, particularly as they did not take place in institutional spaces. Schools are here viewed as regulatory institutions hosting a range of differential power dynamics, both with teachers and staff and between friendship groups (Friedrichs and Shanks

2021; Frith 2004; George 2007; Hey 1997; Pomerantz 2007; Raby 2010). The first section highlights how the girls locate their relationships with their gender through interactions in schools. Specifically, how they feel their forms of dress leave them vulnerable to scrutiny, in which specific uniform rules work to regulate their bodies. There is a particular inequality in that these regulations are not only formal through the institution of school but, at times, border on predatory. I will then move on to how bodily regulations occur in the family and how mums can provide honest and reliable opinions on outfits in ways which understand tensions between heteronormative expectations of adult spaces and girls' own senses of self (Appleford 2014; Abbott and Sapsford 2001). The girls are shown to negotiate familial and schooling structures in their uses of clothing; through either adopting certain 'looks' to avoid scrutiny or in resistance to what they perceive to be expected of them.

I will then move on to explorations of the tensions of fitting in and standing out, as discussed by the girls depending on peer relationships. I examine the magic of a good group of girlfriends and how they become a support system in times of trouble and anxiety. Yet these are also complicated and complex. The dynamics of girls and friendship groups reveal intimate power dynamics that are constantly shifting and ever re-negotiated, offering both networks of support and judgement. Girls' relationships are often deeply intimate, involving intense emotional attachments as well as battlegrounds premised on facilitating their inclusion, which necessarily requires exclusion (Frith 2004; McRobbie and Garber 1976). Thus, I highlight the construction of the 'other' through which girls invest in their social relationships and their place within these (Marion and Nairn 2011). I illustrate the subtle hierarchies within the girls' perceptions of their friendship groups, in which the 'other' is most notable in the discussion of the 'Chav'. Chav can be understood as an affective figure that embodies historical and present class anxieties and is associated with disgust reactions (Tyler 2008). Still, here it is argued to also relate to personal relationships. The final section of this chapter provides an exploration of the intimacies of girls' relationships with each other in which dress becomes a means of impressing their peers and fitting in. Overall, this chapter aims to illustrate the challenges the girls face as girls and the ways they use clothing to mediate this and how they locate their relationships to gender and class within this.

Dress as a form of social mediation

Negotiating regulation: schools as spaces of scrutiny

I should start by acknowledging that many conversations about school were that of reflection, as my first few discussion groups took place during the height of the first lockdown. Neither the girls involved nor I had seen anyone outside their household in over a month, and communication practices had changed. For some, there was a lot of video calling or WhatsApp conversations. For others, occasional memes were sent and subsequent 'hey how's it going's'. There was a general feeling of resignation for the situation – with some enjoying the solitude more than others – but as for most of us, they seemed to have adapted to the problem at hand. With their own bedrooms in houses with gardens, the solitude was slightly easier to bear, chilling in paddling pools in the garden during the hot weather or hiding out in their rooms to limit communication with their immediate families. Certain pastimes such as shopping, and education, had moved online. Lockdown lessons felt like a hardship, as there was often more ability to mess about in classroom settings and avoid work. Some felt teachers took advantage of this more solitary approach to learning by giving them more work than they would typically be expected to complete in class.

Adele did not attend the same school as the others on the call, but a nearby private school, and had met Lydia and Amy through cadets and Imogen through them. Self-professed nerd Adele was amused by the others' educational situation and their more formal relationships with their teachers. Instead, she was 'having a great time' discussing a variety of her own personal interests, such as Ligers (a lion-tiger crossbreed) with her teacher. This difference was subject to some mocking, where the others asked Adele whether she was still paying the same amount for her education despite not being in, having clearly previously worked out that her parents were spending £8 for each lesson Adele had. This cost had remained the same during the lockdown; all that had changed was the removal of school dinner charges. Rules of engagement with teachers varied from school to school, Lydia, Amy and Imogen, who went to a local (well-to-do) state school, weren't allowed to speak to their teachers from their bedrooms, and had to inform their families when they were in any online sessions – to supposedly avoid embarrassing walk-ins. There was a strong implementation from the school to distinguish between public and private spaces within the house, with bedrooms

considered inappropriate spaces for conversing with teachers. The discussion of where the girls could speak to their teachers for Lydia, Amy and Imogen's school, and by extension for their school friends Nancy, Charlotte and Georgia, whom I was later introduced to, appears symptomatic of a wider theme apparent in schools in which 'protecting students' comes at a specific cost to the girls' freedoms. They indicate a wider subtle reading of girls and their bodies as sexual, in this case, highlighted through recognition of their bedrooms as intimate, private spaces. Thus, despite the changes in environment during the height of the pandemic, similar practices remained.

The physical gaze: dress codes of conduct

I was very struck by our conversations about what it meant to be a girl. Much like McRobbie (1982) found in her work on girls and youth culture, social class was rarely explicitly mentioned by the girls but being a girl 'determined their every moment'. McRobbie discussed girls' experiences in youth clubs, and I here extend this to think of how it applies within school settings. It was particularly evident in their experiences with school authority. Much frustration was expressed around uniform regulations, which were felt to penalise girls unfairly. Tabby, Lizzie, Kate and Beth attend their local catholic state school.

> Lizzie: on the last day of term, they [senior leadership team] come or near the end of term they come, and they take all the girls outside, look at how their skirts are, still on their knees. And then if not, they send a letter home saying you need to get a new one over the holidays. And they check that you have the school bag, and the correct shoes. And when they come in everyone unrolls their skirts
>
> Kate: everyone unrolls their skirts
>
> Lizzie: and takes their earrings out
>
> Gaby: is this just the girls or the boys as well?
>
> Beth: I mean. Boys have, its less strict because they don't have to check skirt lengths
>
> Kate: Yeah

Beth: so, the boys they Just tell them to hold up their bag, and check that they have their blazer and their tie and stuff but it's easier to do it in class, so they just do it in class

Lizzie: it's also like quite unfair for us because if you get caught with your skirt rolled up or above your knee, you get a straight detention.

Kate: Yeah

Lizzie: like supposedly they're supposed to give you a straight detention it kind of depends on the teacher, but like, it was a boy he has yeah, a boy has their shirt untucked, which is kind of like the equivalent in like teachers eyes. They like just to get told to tuck it back in.

Far from any sort of 'imagined gaze' which can dictate forms of dress (Woodward 2005), the girls describe the literal gaze of senior teachers in which their bodies are variably subject to scrutiny. In this case, the critical examination of their uniforms. The feeling of scrutiny on their uniforms and, by consequence, bodies was felt across many groups whose dress codes had additional elements to that of boys. Girls are quite literally removed from the classroom settings, and senior members of staff examine their lower halves. It was articulated as unfair given that girls were subject to harsher punishments for breaking uniform codes by having skirts that were 'too short' compared to boys with untucked shirts. The additional scrutiny for girls' uniforms relates to how much of their bodies are on show, in this case through assessment of skirt lengths. Yet the girls indicate in their rolled skirts that they navigate their dress codes in ways that allow mediation between their localised styles and that of wider regulation. Thus, the rolled-up skirt functions as a mediation point between girls' senses of self and style, viewed collectively in how 'everyone' does it, and a form of recognition for coded acceptability within the school space. Fashion is a *situated bodily practice* (Entwistle 2015). The rolled-up skirt allows for playing with boundaries of institutional rules, forms of trends, and how they articulate their bodies performing style and tame non-conformity.

For sixth formers able to wear their own clothes and school-aged girls on own-clothes days, similar principles applied in terms of lengths of skirts or shorts and were extended to banning

ripped jeans, and certain tops that had either thin or no straps were also off limits. In a discussion of a school that banned certain branded coats to reduce poverty shaming, Nancy took more issue with the limitations of uniforms in their all-girls school.

> Nancy: I think at least our schools banned a lot more ridiculous things as well, like spaghetti straps and short shorts. I don't know. Like, especially in the heat, in the middle of summer. Everyone's gonna wear them anyway. It feels really dodgy. Like a lot of the time, they don't justify it, but when they do, it's usually something to do with the male teachers. And trying not to encourage them, which if they're feeling anything like that, then they really shouldn't be teachers or around children. Or it will be like, because it's less professional or whatever and looking at the fact that we're children, we have to be professional, and no workplace will let you go in, in a strappy top, which is very untrue in today's workplaces.
>
> Gaby: How do you feel about that?
>
> Nancy: I just think is quite ridiculous. Like it would have made sense when, like work was just in an office and you have to wear a suit and all of that, but even then, we're not in the offices yet, we're children. And we should be able to wear what we like. And nowadays there's so many. There's like a huge spectrum of jobs which require different things. And. I don't know it just feels a bit ridiculous.

While most teenagers, it would seem, would like to distance themselves from the image of a 'child' in favour of independence, Nancy expresses her vulnerability through the description of herself and her friends as children. This provides real life example of the experience of what Friedrich and Shanks' (2021) analysis of school uniform rules describe as an institutional focus on the 'self as enterprise' – encouraging 'children' to look professional (McNay 2009). There is a 'creative economy', as McRobbie (2016) discusses, in which young people presume they will be less bound to institutional codes of professionalism. As children, Nancy feels they should not be subject to the rules applied in the workplace. More strikingly, this vulnerability occurs at the level of the school, in which the girls – and they are still girls – are not allowed to have too much skin on show for fear this would distract the male teachers. The wider research, which indicates that school dress codes pay particular attention to girls' bodies

(Pomerantz 2007; Raby 2010), is felt by the girls themselves. In a different all-girls school sixth form, Frankie recounted a story of a girl who had been reprimanded for coming to school wearing a jumper that said, 'what are you looking at' across the front. For the girl, this was a comical statement about why someone was looking at them. Still, she was warned by a female member of the senior leadership team that she should consider a different outfit so as not to make the male teachers uncomfortable. The girl in question hadn't considered that this jumper could have sexual connotations, and the insinuation of this from those in positions of power was surprising and unnerving for Frankie. Frankie's friend thought she knew what she was expressing and, in getting it wrong, disrupted who they felt they were within the school space, leaving Frankie with a visceral sense of shock. The disruption of how the space is perceived demonstrates acutely how schools contribute to the girls' perceptions of self in institutional spaces, wherein they are told to cover up or avoid the provocation of males.

Moreover, the regulation of clothing in schools is perceived to limit their ability to express themselves, either in creative terms or because the potential sexual consequences of this were alluded to. Lydia describes herself as punky, individual, and 'weird'. When we spoke, she had a shaved head except for a blue stripe of slightly longer hair down the middle from front to back. She goes to the same school as Nancy and similarly expressed this frustration about the limitations of uniforms.

> Lydia: Because they try and control people with uniform so much. And, like, I don't like uniform, like I'm going into a career that has one, but that's because I want to be a paramedic and there's a lot of vomiting involved in that. But yeah, so like the school is always like, okay, you have to wear it like this. You can't tuck in your jumper to your skirt. Why not? It actually looks neater to tuck your jumper into your skirt, but you weren't allowed to do that. You had to wear over the top of the skirts, and you weren't allowed to wear white socks, you had to wear black ones. If you wore a hijab, you were only allowed to wear a purple or black one.

Aesthetic and political knowledges are contained within modes of dress that will be explored more throughout the following chapters. Still, here I will focus on the resistance to control that Lydia expresses. As she goes on to illustrate, she embodies her resistance in her

aesthetic presentation of self. Lydia takes up deference issues to teachers in which she questions the rules, utilising her aesthetic knowledge to challenge the logic of imposed uniformity. Lydia furthers her point in her example of hijab regulations which restrict the colours permitted.

> Like, they tried to control every aspect of the clothing, and I remember getting told off a lot for my haircuts. And like, now they can't really do it because we're in sixth form, we're allowed to have our hair…but they wouldn't like, they won't like the stripe when I go back. They will hate that. And I had purple hair. I had purple hair and this bit [points to longer portion of hair], I had long, so it came down to about here, and then the sides were shaved, and they deemed that as too extreme, and like it was the wrong colour and it was too extreme and eventually I just ignored it for about two years. And then when they came to me and they were like, your hair is wrong, I'd go, I've had it for two years, you actually can't touch me now.

In discussing her hairstyle, Lydia points to various facets of dress codes and forms of acceptability. Lydia likes to be 'smart' – she feels able to challenge teachers and bolsters her confidence in these challenges against what she sees as conformity. The persona being, I don't care what you think of me. Inspired by punky parents and the punk movement, her style is about turning heads and wearing something people can talk about, clashing colours, patterns, capes and refashioned items. In her interview, she discussed how she resisted the restrictions of her school by arguing back with teachers. She had started to feel limited by school restrictions and professed to have bolstered her confidence more by actively resisting these through reinforcing exaggerated responses and being louder and wackier. She constructed false narratives about herself, messing with teachers' ideas of her by making up stories about herself, from only sleeping 4 hours a night to being a part-time stripper to convolute whatever expectations she felt to have been placed upon her. Her hair, as one of the fewer adornments she can control in lieu of being able to wear her own clothes – becomes a symbol of her stylistic preferences and mode through which she rejects 'uniform' in favour of an 'extreme'. Lydia questions the motivations behind uniform regulations, and the next section illustrates how these issues relate to gendered expectations.

> But yeah, I think that cuz I remember one time, a teacher coming to me and saying, your haircut is too extreme. And I responded with why is that extreme and they were like well, because it's too extreme. It's shaved at the sides, that's too extreme. And I pointed out that over the other side of the park, there was a girl sat there with hair long enough to reach her knees, and she had to sit on her hair, even when it's platted. And I said, how is my hairstyle extreme when that is also extreme, but my hairstyle is extreme in a non-feminine way and that's why you don't like it, and I won. But yeah, I think that the school is to blame. Oh, 'your hairstyles too extreme'. Put some boundaries in like, I can respect [local boys' school] more when they say extreme hair cut because they say you can't have hair longer than your shoulders, and you can't have hair shorter than number two. And if you're gonna say extreme hairstyles, you have to put restrictions on it you can't just say 'you can't be extreme' because that's too like, flexible.

For Lydia, there is not only a sense that she cannot express herself as she wants and that the reasons for these seemed to ultimately come down to what were considered acceptable performances of gender. For Lydia, being loud and different is key to her identity. This discussion of her hair offers insight into how the mediation of aesthetic look is a form of practically managing social relationships and expectations. Responses to uniform rules varied, with shifts between active resistance and internalised struggles in response to perceived acceptability. Lydia's confidence was well acknowledged within the friendship groups, in adoration, competition and sometimes indifference. Thus, making her well-placed to actively resist felt regulatory practices from schools. Amy, who also likes to debate and places much emphasis on her intellect in doing so, questions the idea of individuality in which when people begin to do things to be authentic, does it then lose its authenticity? I sensed that she found Lydia overly performative and resisted this. I, too, must admit I found much of what Lydia said to be accompanied by silences that seemed to demand a reaction to her 'weirdness'. Describing her group of friends as 'niche', she seemed to feel that her weirdness put her in the firing line for judgement and recalled being shouted at by boys for wearing a mix of patterned clothes while cycling to visit her grandmother. But unlike the others in the group who shied away from this, Lydia liked being different. Being looked at for her was a good thing. Here, she was positioned in her friendship group as the confident, loud, and

different one. Most of her other friends mention her style, like Charlotte, who thinks Lydia is cool but wouldn't wear such punky clothes.

For Nancy and Charlotte, there was a lot more internalised consciousness of what was perceived acceptable in schools, as dictated through 'showing skin' in skirt lengths and top straps. They had a sense of concern at having too much skin on display, expressed through discussions of outfits in which it would be a source of discomfort to be the one wearing the 'least' amount of clothing. It was further exacerbated for Charlotte in her experiences of how others talked about a friend of hers who chose to wear short and tight clothing. The 'others' in question appeared to be boys in our first conversation, but by the second, she had noticed her female friends discussing this one friend's 'lack of' clothing, and even the friend's mum had made comments to her about this. Charlotte was left feeling uncomfortable on behalf of her friend, who she was unsure of how aware she was of this but equally influenced how she chose her outfits to avoid the same comments at her expense.

The imagined gaze: popularity and style

Thus, it is not just amongst teachers that girls expressed experiencing scrutiny. There are variations on this; Zoe and Jessica, who are still at 'school', not sixth form, were more concerned about what was considered acceptable in a given space. As they happily go to parties with friends in lingerie-based outfits – sometimes literally lingerie found in charity shop bargain buckets and sometimes clothes which mimic that of such as corsets and laced camisoles – they regulate their outfits depending on where they are going, as this is not felt to be appropriate for the school space. What then becomes apparent is how the girls mediate their dress in schools in ways which conform to or resist teacher regulations. However, a desire to impress their peers further complicates this in school settings.

> Zoe: For me it's also the fact that we're with teachers for mufti day. So, you want to look good, but you cannot dress.. that's the one day, it's just disrespectful. Well, in my opinion to dress really kind of like lingerie. And obviously not many… Like no one really does. But to wear like really sort of like I don't know it's that boundary of being at school

Jessica: also, yeah, its sounds really weird, because there's only, I don't know from my experience like one mufti day like per year or whatever. So, it's like you've got one shot to have like a nice outfit

Zoe: exactly

Jessica: do you know what I mean because like if youre going out with friends, when you're going out with friends like you wear this on this day like this on this day and get like a little mesh of like, you know, clothes in general like your style but you've got like one shot to like to represent yourself.

Zoe: yeah Exactly. Like I said before, it's like, it's just the lack of confidence, the more the less, the less confidence you have, the more you're willing to like I don't know... subside to someone else's sort of opinion of you and everything. So let's say you've got two people standing next to each other theyre both been told your outfit like sucks your outfits like so gross like what is this? the person who is more comfortable in their own skin and just more confident will be fine probably might hurt a little bit, the other person might literally change their complete wardrobe, just because of that.. just more how sensitive you are as well, like I'm quite sensitive so little comments hurt more than for other people. Some people just don't care as much but I care.

Jessica: Like, people feel like, um like there's a lot of validation with social media. And like it's, almost as if people with like more followers and like, more people on soc- more of a social media like I don't know like uh whats the word

Zoe: presence

Jessica: presence, they have more of a right to judge people.

There is an imagined gaze through which Jessica and Zoe mediate between 'acceptability' in the institution of the school and style success with peers. Zoe imagines a situation of critical examination of her outfit and that she would not be able to handle such criticism. In this sense, the institutional space requires specific dress codes, even on 'own clothes' or 'mufti'

days. Zoe goes to private school while Jessica attends her local state school. They come across as confident and chatty, likely popular within their year groups. Here, certain boundaries they feel are in place at schools regarding what can be worn are outlined. While confidence and judgements will be addressed at various other points of this thesis, I want to focus here on the specific school setting of own clothes days. For many, regular uniformed school days are not situations where people need to 'look their best'. They mediate that alongside a maximum amount of sleep and general day-to-day attire. Times when they do make more effort become more of an 'event'. In the context of the school, this is often in events that require a level of 'dressing up' such as prom and own clothes (mufti) days. Clothing becomes a marker of personality, and such events are categorised as an opportunity to represent oneself in the best possible way amongst peers they do not regularly see outside of school. School becomes a site for pressure to represent oneself well, with the fear of being judged wrongly at stake. These dynamics are not just informed by faculty but by 'other' groups, namely popular people. For Zoe and Jessica, the desire to avoid judgement is linked to value and status; it would be hurtful to get negative comments on their appearance and representing oneself well seems indirectly linked to wanting to impress 'popular' people. The number of followers individuals have on social media was a common indicator of status for many of the girls I spoke with. Those who are popular are given the right to judge, and while none of the girls aligned themselves with this explicitly, the perceived judgements of others were felt in multiple contexts. In the following excerpt, Izzy, Pippa and Emily explain why they dislike wearing their own clothes to school.

> Izzy: I don't know like if you wear super kind of trendy clothes then people are like 'Oh wow they get all these nice clothes' but if you wear just your comfy [inaudible] they're like 'oh well they haven't put much effort into it'. I think there's just so much, I think obviously your style can represent who you are to an extent so people kind of look at that as like a way of... oh what are they wearing. I think just teenage girls especially are kind of judgey of each other. So, it's kind of normally youre all in the same boat wearing the exact same thing and then it's more kind of your own person, and your choice I think that's kind of where it comes from

Pippa: yeah, and it's like that one day where everyone actually gets to see what you're like, outside of school, in a way. So, youre used to everyone looking the same. And then, suddenly, it's like, 'oh' different

Emily: I don't know how boys think obviously, but I think for boys... they all kind of wear the same sort of stuff, like branded joggers. As long as you're wearing something branded, I don't feel like they would judge too much whereas girls. It's just you've got to put it all together.

[inaudible]

Emily: Yeah, girls, have... boys I don't really care they don't really give their opinion whereas girls like even if they don't say anything, like they give their opinion you know

Izzy: hell yeah

In the everyday uniformity of school, days in which self-expression through clothing is permitted are viewed as opportunities for 'self-presentation' to those in other friendship groups. This assessment of brands and joggers will be explored more in the following chapters. Amongst peers is this more 'imagined gaze' than the physical gaze of teachers, in which teenage girls articulate anxieties of not being 'on trend' and how that can lead to more canonical forms of judgement of style against trends. Own clothes days then leave a lot of anxieties for the girls in the sense that there is the desire for approval from peers, but also presenting oneself both as an individual and fashionable, highlighting the tension between fitting in and standing out. There is, therefore, a situation where everyone feels offered up for judgements on their ability to balance this. Again, this was articulated as 'popular' girls subjecting judgement onto others. Girls *give* their opinion without needing to say a word, and this was felt to matter more because they know how girls think. Girls have a complex dynamic within which they can act as a support network, as will be discussed later in this chapter, but they can also create anxiety for others. What will be discussed further in the following chapter is the distinction often drawn by the girls in which creative and individual dress is a female engagement, contrasted against the considered lack of creativity of other groups, in this case, their male counterparts. In that sense, dress as a form of social

mediation feels like a specific female concern. The next section extends this to identify continuity and difference in more intimate spaces of family.

Performing femininity, protecting autonomy

What has been discussed so far is the power and age dynamics between the girls in this study and their teachers which creates a regulatory force on clothing choices. Following on from the dynamics within the school, outfit considerations were also keenly felt when amongst family. Generally, the nuclear families in which most resided felt like places where the girls could be themselves and wear what they wanted, but the term 'appropriate' was often used when seeing wider family members. In the following excerpt, I follow up on their use of 'appropriate' in a family setting– for context, Beth's extended family mostly live in Canada.

> Gaby: What does a 'family appropriate' outfit look like?
>
> Tabby: probably like jeans and a... normal top
>
> Lizzie: Yeah, something simple, but if it's like a party then just like a dress but like not like a dress that you'd like to wear to a party more like a dress with like flowers on it or something
>
> Kate: yeah
>
> Lizzie: quite like floral and colourful.
>
> Beth: I mean, I only see my family in the summer. So, my outfit is like shorts and a t shirt… But yeah, for parties, I have one blue flowery dress.
>
> Lizzie: Yeah, I'd say I have one dress that I'd only really ever wear to see family and I'd like [inaudible] for another reason
>
> Kate: oh same. I have a black dress that I only ever wear to see my family. That's it. 'Cos, it makes me look really young and innocent as well.
>
> Gaby: is that preferable when you're with your family?

Kate: Yeah.

Group: yeah

Gaby: Why do you think that is?

Beth: you have to hide who you are. You have to hide like one side of you from your family

Lizzie: Yeah.

Kate: also. My cousins, because I don't have a brother my cousins are like really protective, like, three of my cousins are really protective. So, I just try to make myself look like as young as possible and they won't ask me questions.

Lizzie: Yeah, my uncle that normally hosts stuff is a vicar and all his sons are quite like that. They're very nice, but like, Kate said quite protective. So just to make yourself look young. And they don't ask you questions like Kate said.

Gaby: Tabby, is it the same for you too?

Tabby: oh um Yeah, I think so because my… I'm not really close with my dad's side of the family. And they're kind of old fashioned but not strict, so I just wear like jeans and stuff. And that's basically it

Gaby: So, when do you get to be yourself then if you, if you're with your family and you've got a hide part of yourself to use Beth's words when do you get to be yourself?

Kate: with friends

Lizzie: with friends. Yeah.

Beth: definitely

The girls perceive they have reached an age in which their sexuality will be called into question. The flowery dress represents a specific knowledge of normative codes of femininity

and youth. It is used to reposition themselves as 'innocent' and thus create a boundary on how much they allow family members access to their social lives. The girls, therefore, faced a complex mediation of hierarchies of both age and gender in which they manipulated codes of femininity to impose this boundary and evade scrutiny by conforming to what they understand to be normative constructions of 'innocence' through girlishness. This strategic performance evades unwanted attention and can be linked with McRobbie's work on girls and girl culture in that the girls are discerning about their social lives and who is permitted to know what they are doing. Coulter (2021) drew attention to how not being 'fun and pretty' can render girls invisible, while here, the girls suggest their own appropriation of these constructs of 'fun and pretty' to manage their own visibility in different spaces. Although all did not share Beth's more extreme analogy of hiding part of herself, the idea of being 'modest' around family was prevalent for many of the girls across the groups, mostly in relation to extended family. There are ways in which school dress codes are mirrored but are complicated by family intimacies in which relationships between adults are children are not so formalised. Kate also discussed that she couldn't wear cropped tops around her grandmother, who would poke her stomach. While she found it amusing and is most likely a harmless joke, it speaks to the same regulations about the skin on show the girls experience at school. Moreover, the example offers a potential boundary in the family with regards to female bodies, in which Kate has transgressed expectations of her grandmother which may signify intergenerational discrepancies in 'acceptability' but more broadly points to the implication of wearing outfits considered to expose their bodies are signalled out and called into question. In this case, Kate's personal space is invaded quite literally in the form of touch and, more insipidly, in which her body is subject to physical 'comment' for being on show. Therefore, they learn when to 'hide' themselves physically and metaphorically and when they can be themselves. Particularly evident in the discussion of 'modesty', which has connotations for women covering their bodies.

The girls express being able to 'be themselves' in their style and experiment with clothing amongst friends, exemplified by feeling more grown up and providing a space to explore their independence. The one exception to this is that of another female relationship, the one they have with their mothers. While - as will be discussed - there is almost an expectation that friends will be supportive no matter what, mums can be trusted to give their honest

opinion on outfits. Mums here offered a mediation point between understanding adult scrutiny and their own senses of self. As mothers did not get mentioned by all the girls, their absences could highlight varied and complex relationships and different levels of reliance on mums depending on aspirations for 'coolness' and individuation, which will be addressed more in later chapters. But for this section, where mothers were discussed, it was generally for validation of their outfits in ways that felt were honest.

> Izzy: no offence to you guys, but I don't really trust what my friends say because they just kind of, they'll just be nice when they're not-
>
> Emily: -yeah, they definitely 'up you up' you know, like sometimes you need to know if it actually looks good or not
>
> Izzy: yeah cos if you go oh I'm not feeling good they'll be like 'oh no you look so de de dee de de' and it's like shut up [laughs] I think my mum is definitely where I go it just cos shes quite reasonable about it like she probably wouldn't go like 'oh youre just this beautiful person youre the best looking person in the world with like cringy stuff she just kind of puts it more reasonable like you're young, you.. I don't know just makes me kind of... it puts it in perspective, a bit more. I think that there's people in a lot less like fortunate situations and stuff and just makes you realise that you are just a normal person to be honest, no one really is going to care that much at the end of the day, like, obviously your friends might think... like people that are close to you might pick up on things more but if someone doesn't like you, they don't like you, you can't really change things like that or if they don't like your fashion type, they don't like it, and I think it's just realising that everyone's in the same boat. Really but yeah probably go to my mum, for most things.
>
> Pippa: Yeah, same. my mum seems to know what looks good as well
>
> Emily: is there a stereotype like mums are meant to lie to you and tell you how pretty you look. I feel like sometimes that's not true and they just give it to you like honestly and that's kind of good.

The messy realities of girls' lives are such that they are not looking to live up to ideas of perfection but just have their 'look' validated through the lens of acceptability and normality. What this offers is another layer to conceptions of ordinary discussed in chapter one, in which girls attempt to navigate the apparatus of perfection by being 'a normal girl' with normal everyday experiences and struggles. Mums can offer support against the scrutiny of public and institutional spaces the girls express as present in their everyday lives. At the same time, this is not intended to imply that there are not conflictual discussions which also occur between mothers and daughters, particularly middle-class mothers who may regulate their daughter's 'respectability', and that mothers can be a part of this conflictual regulation of gender and sexuality (Appleford 2014). What this does point to is that mothers occupy a position between knowing their daughter and their 'style' as well as more formal expectations of them in the hierarchical spaces the girls occupy, thus can act as a mediation point between the two. This sense of honesty would equally imply that the girls experienced times when mums then expressed negative opinions on an outfit, so they knew they could trust when the approval was real. Girls can therefore negotiate wider spaces with some sort of validated acceptability. Beth, too, would often sense check her outfit with her mum. It didn't have to be a lot or even a spoken event; her mum may even be on the phone and just signal a thumbs up if she approved. There is a sense that mums (and household family more generally) see you at your worst – first thing in the morning or when not feeling your best - and love you regardless. While both parents can be a source of monthly allowances, mums or friends are often the ones to go shopping with, mums having the distinct benefit of not only providing honest opinions but can also treat their daughters more readily to new clothes, something Izzy seemed to take great advantage of. There can be a practical and beneficial relationship between mothers, daughters, and their clothing. But still, there remains that discrepancy in which girls rely on their mums for money and, in some cases, will also be told they are not allowed to wear certain clothes. The next section will further explore girls' friendships, a space which offers support and freedom concerning clothing.

Fitting in and standing out: girls' social networks

What has so far been discussed is the 'adult' spaces girls articulated in their everyday lives, which required mediation of clothing through and in response to a regulation, and as a

means of protecting themselves from scrutiny. Fashion and dress act as forms of mediation – from floral dresses to perform innocence to rolling up or down skirts to situate themselves between regulatory practices and localised trends. As I have alluded to, these localised trends often involve more intimate expressions of their bodies. A crop top is a key example of this and is viewed as transgressing lines of 'acceptability' – in own clothes days at schools or with older family members. These codes of dress are conversely more necessary or expected amongst peers. This section will illustrate how negotiations of clothing differ between close friends and wider peer groups in which girls mediate between spaces of friendship and the wider imagined gaze of peer groups in which I demonstrate they both affect and are affected by forms of judgement.

Friendships as a site for expression and individuation

Friendships are massively important parts of girls' social lives, involving complex negotiations of power, moral boundaries and desires to fit in (Frith 2004). As from early works on girl cultures, girls' friendship groups are often discerning and difficult for 'adults' to access (McRobbie 1991). I was permitted *some* access which I would attribute to my accessibility as a middle-class white woman of an ambiguous age 'in my 20s'. For that reason, I think we had enough overlap in life experiences for me to be allowed in (to an extent). I often also had a gatekeeper through some sort of loose connection with someone else they knew, which also helped garner an initial level of trust. There are multiple reasons why the girls' groups were closed spaces. Previous negative experiences often dictate who is trusted and who is leaned on. For many, girlfriends are an important part of surviving teenage life. Kate illustrates this well.

> I think girls just tend to be... because there are some girls who just really like to bring other girls down and that's really sad, but most girls know what it's like to be judged because girls generally just get judged for like everything and anything. So, it's just like we know what it's like. And we don't want to add to the problem for girls because girls literally anything and everything girls just get criticised so it's just like, why would I want to contribute to another girl feeling like that because I know what it's like to feel like that. And I feel like most boys tend to not- like it doesn't happen to them as

> much. So, it's like they don't know what it's like. So, girls tend to just support girls more because we know what it's like to be a girl, we know how horrible it is

Kate points to the intimacies and importance which underpin girlfriends; girls are the best kinds of friends because they understand exactly how hard it is to be a girl. I will explore the raised issues of judgement and social pressures defining girls' relationships, but I will first focus on their articulated importance. Kate lives with her mum and dad in London, and previously her older sister, who is now away at University for most of the year. I met Kate through Tabby, who I had met in a shopping centre in London when attempting to develop this research ethnographically. As it turned out, however, I would say Tabby made more of a useful contact as opposed to a key member of the study. She participated in the discussion group, although she was one of the quieter members and shared with me that she had social anxiety and did not want to participate in an interview. I reached out to Tabby about a discussion group and was introduced to her school friends Beth, Lizzie, and Kate. Lizzie and Kate spoke the most in their discussion group, which may have also been because they shared the most similar views. They laughed a lot at how they talked over each other and echoed what each other said. The 4 of them depicted their friendship as quite a new development, only about six months old when we first spoke. Beth and Lizzie had previously belonged to a different friendship group (although they did not appear particularly close), and Tabby and Kate had left different friendships to join forces. A happy development for all involved. As for Kate, her old group had been too cliquey for her liking, and she felt much more supported by these new-er friends. There is nothing better than a good group of girlfriends.

It is with friends that fashion can be both collaborative and free. Girlfriends can act as a sounding board, but also provide a space for girls to explore their adolescence. As the previous section illustrated, Beth, in particular, felt that she had to hide part of herself around her family. Kate, for example, had learned not to wear cropped tops or cover her stomach by tying her hoodie around her waist when around her grandmother. Likewise, Kate and others, such as Lizzie and Zoe, had worked out which dresses they could wear around the family to invite the least amount of questioning. Thus, calculating outfits to appeal to the situation allows the girls to mediate their freedom and family's response. In contrast, the concerns some might have over showing too much skin, or regulations faced at schools or in families are lessened amongst

friends. For many of the girls, outfits varied from more casual in the day to more “dressy” in the evening, defined by a “nice top” (often cropped) and a skirt. The desire for cropped tops and sometimes short skirts comes with the feeling of being grown up and sexy. This feeling is an area for exploration amongst friends at gatherings and parties. Following on from the earlier conversation about what they felt was ‘family appropriate’ attire, I asked the girls how outfits differed for parties with friends.

> Gaby: So, what does an outfit, a party with friends look like?
>
> Lizzie: ummm probably, like a skirt
>
> Kate: and a crop top
>
> Lizzie: Yeah, like a quite nice top
>
> Kate: like hoop earrings. I love hoop earrings.
>
> Lizzie: It also kind of makes a difference if it's like the daytime or like the evening, I guess so
>
> Kate: definitely
>
> Gaby: what's different?
>
> Lizzie: Um, I feel like in the daytime. I'm more likely to be a bit more casual and just wear like jeans and a nice top or something. And then in the evening I might wear like a skirt and a nice top just because it feels like fancier ha um like more grown up, if you’re like going out to dinner or something.

Lizzie illustrates differing senses of appropriate or comfortable dress depending on the time of day or space they are in. Here, friendships are felt to be a site for individuation. Being with friends offers opportunities to feel more grown-up, in direct contrast with their positions with their families. In contrast to the ‘floral dress’, the girls discuss cropped tops and short skirts. Dress offers opportunities for girls to play with their image and different codes of femininity. Dressing ‘up’ to experiment with modes of expression, such as ones that make them feel more

adult and less controlled than they feel in adult spaces. They can also wear clothes which expose parts of their body which are subject to comment in other spaces. There is room for playing with performances on account of sexuality or simply different styles.

What should probably be qualified in this discussion of friends is that we are talking about 'good' friends. As I mentioned in the previous section, Kate had felt herself upgrading in starting to hang around with Tabby, Lizzie and Beth, as these represented 'good' supportive friends who provided her with the freedom to wear what she liked, as opposed to her previous group with whom she would have regulated her style in fear of judgement. She had seen recent TikTok videos of people saying that they feel like they would dress differently if they had a different group of friends, and it resonated with her; there is a need to be comfortable within the friendship space to explore their identity better and experiment with fashion, amongst those going through the same thing as them. Kate is feeling freer to experiment and tries new things in her new friendship group, including skirts and more designedly feminine items, as this is what Lizzie wears more of. In that sense, it is also important to reflect on the influence of friends. While somewhat open and relaxed, tensions around fitting in remain and the ability to try new things individually if it aligns with others collectively. Lizzie, too thinks she dresses differently when meeting up with her private school friend (who I can only assume is Zoe). The next section will explore these social relationships and forms of mediation.

The imagined gaze of others and the othering gaze

The relationship between girlfriends and the possibility of being oneself has been discussed so far. However, with more freedom comes more potential sources of anxiety. In this next section, I will explore how the girls articulated perceptions of judgement from peers. I will show this to be Janus-faced, in the sense that girls are both supporters and critics when it comes to dress. In discussions of judgement, there is an implication of culture – they are not individual actions but a wider secerning of acceptability along the lines of style and popularity. That is to say; it is performative. Therefore, I also consider ways in which the girls themselves are implicated in judgements, highlighting a more authoritative class positioning.

Perceived judgements: 'teenage girls are a different breed'

Both Zoe and Jessica struggle to choose what to wear for evening events. Zoe claimed her friends refuse to get ready with her anymore because she cries and takes so long to decide. Jessica says she's the same. They both strike me as fairly confident and popular, so this statement is more to emphasise the challenges they face in choosing the 'right' outfit for the occasion than anything else and the potential pressure to maintain a certain image. Although Zoe will acknowledge that once she returns from a party, she doesn't really remember what anyone was wearing, her outfit planning before the event remains strenuous. In essence, the fear of 'getting it wrong' is heavy when choosing an outfit, and it takes a lot of work and thought to balance all the factors that need thinking through. It would ruin Zoe's night if she got it wrong. Jessica illustrates the point by talking me through the process a little. For Jessica, she claims she makes a mess of her room while scouring her wardrobe, conjuring images of someone throwing everything out of their wardrobe in search of the 'right' items of clothing. The concern is to choose outfits for the right vibe. It's not just what they want to wear but what others wear. The questions they contend with are; will I feel uncomfortable; will I be sitting on grass/ indoors; will it match my shoes; will it match the energy; what people will think; will it look weird if I take my shoes off inside; not too much skin; not too little. They consider who they will be hanging out with as this may help determine choices, to avoid being over or underdressed. Part of the anxiety around choosing what to wear is, as I was informed by Zoe, that teenagers could be very judgemental.

> Zoe: Teenage girls are a different breed, when we get to 18 no-one will care but right now its scrutinising.

There is a reflexive approach to teenage years and senses of self that will be developed more in the following chapter. Zoe points to the same sorts of reflexive relationships to age that Kate, Lizzie and Beth showed in relation to their uses of flowery dresses; the girls reflect on their biographical stage in which they draw on aspects of the past or visions for the future to help mediate their current experiences. Zoe highlights the stage of teenage girlhood, where scrutiny and judgement feel like a particularly prevalent presence in their social worlds, and expects this will decrease as they reach the age of adulthood. There are specific tensions of fitting in

and standing out in this stage of life, in which Zoe imagines there will be more scope to 'stand out' without scrutiny as she ages.

Judgement comes from outside; both boys and girls are implicated in this. Jessica tells me how her shoes 'get violated' by boys who tell her she looks chavvy – a commonly used insult or description that I will address in the next section. She has also previously heard male friends say they didn't like a certain girl because she was wearing cargo trousers. Such labels of 'sketty' or 'chavvy' represent both gendered and classed assessments of style and image and are what is at stake in 'getting it wrong' when it comes to outfit choices, in being disliked or not fitting in. Thus, clothing is critical in perceptions and popularity. This desire for individuality in style will be explored in various ways throughout this thesis as it relates to how the girls understand themselves within their social landscapes, in which I will take up issues of class more explicitly. The perception of judgement is often discussed abstractly in relation to 'others'. Although they feel that they shouldn't want validation from others, such comments affect how they feel, and in turn, they work to avoid them. Both agree that not feeling good in their outfit makes them uncomfortable all night. Although they resent the feelings, they remain.

> Zoe: it angers me that I care
>
> Jessica: yeah
>
> Zoe: like it upsets me that I even like am thinking like what will they think of my outfit because it should be for myself but realistically it's just not
>
> Jessica: yeah
>
> Zoe: it's a bit [inaudible]
>
> Zoe: [its] not even comments just like what people think in their heads bothers me more
>
> Jessica: and also, you've got to factor in like when youre like, back to what we were saying, when you're like dressing for something you've got to think about who youre

hanging out with because you never want to be like that person who's like the most overdressed

Zoe: mmhmm

Jessica: if it's like a chill thing

Zoe: exactly

Jessica: like full out. Or if it's like a, like everyone's gone full out and youre just there in like really underdressed

Zoe: yeah, you just want to match everyone else

Jessica: You want to like find out what other people wearing as well

Zoe: yeah [laughs] the amount of messages-

Jessica: -but you're not wearing the exact same outfit-

Zoe: -oh my god send me your outfit [laughs]

Jessica: mmm

Zoe: and I love that I love that so much like the kind of... I think it's like a little community when all the girls are like talking about what theyre going to wear

This discussion corroborates Woodward's (2005) work on women's practices of getting dressed, in which the imagined critical gaze of others causes anxiety. It illustrates the everyday tensions between fitting in and standing out in outfit choices. Sometimes, it is simply the concern of what people might be thinking that causes anxiety. There is a desire to fit in with others within the social setting and not draw any unwanted attention. Zoe and Jessica illustrate the care and concern they take in the fashion processes, taking inspiration from what they know about the vibe of where they're going and checking in with friends to gauge what others are wearing to coordinate. In coordinating, they cover themselves in terms of fitting into their social environments. As Zoe illustrates, this is felt to be a little community, a network of support

which enables mediation against the wider perceptions of judgement. Jessica then goes on to say her friends aren't doing that as much anymore, leaving her to get ready unaided. As a result, Jessica recounts a recent experience in which she ended up wearing the exact same thing as the only other two girls at a gathering she went to recently. She described the outfits as "I guess we're basic – baggy jeans and small tops". As will be explored in more detail in the following chapters, 'basic' style can also constitute safety; baggy bottoms (often joggers) with a small top represent a way to be stylish when you're panicking about what else to wear or just generally want to be stylish yet comfortable. Basic style is defined by the high-street stores shopped in and particular items. In this case, this could represent an accidental matching – unfortunate and potentially embarrassing for many girls who prioritise their individuality. This concept will be explored further in the following chapter. However, this is also a neutral dress ensemble, a combination both common and 'on trend' enough that when fears around what to wear strike, it can be a reliable fall back. This aligns with other discussions around dress, for example, in Miller and Woodward's (2012) study, denim jeans are argued to be a universally acknowledged neutral item, able to be smart or casual. In this instance, baggy bottoms (often joggers) and small tops are a popular combination amongst most of the girls in this group to be in style while mediating perceived judgements. I will later demonstrate how such styles also relate to 'ordinariness'.

However, not all examples are quite so imagined. Claire recounts an experience when another girl was subjected to judgement in which one girl asked another, 'ugh why are your legs so hairy' that then triggered a mean response from another, saying, 'why have you got this on your legs'. Claire described this as a horrible situation and wished she'd said something or stood up for the girl. She recounts being taken aback by the explicit nature of the situation and described it as 'not girls supporting girls at all'. The forms of regulation on their femininity and their bodies demand adherence to the standards of the 'perfect' that also occur within girls' spaces and friendships. It implicates the various constructions through which when girls' bodies are perceived to be on show, they require work and maintenance, not just in the social sense that Coffey and Watson (2014) discuss but physical maintenance wherein body hair is antithetic to femininity. But Claire's description of this also demonstrates a sense of female solidarity in 'girls supporting girls'; judging other girls is antithetical to a wider sense of female solidarity. Being a girl has its own wider challenges. Thus, girls are held to a different standard

in conversations where they should be supportive. Not being so may also come with its own forms of judgement and regulations. Girls can create 'little communities' to soundboard outfit ideas which will both represent themselves yet fit the general vibe of the event. While girls can create these little communities, they can also be judgemental, and outfit choices in wider peer settings are made with consideration of perceived judgements of others. The remainder of this chapter will explore the ways in which the girls themselves subject others to judgement, most notably in the construction of the Chav as 'other'. I will then discuss further the importance of first impressions as a means to avoid judgement.

Judgements as a construction of the other: the case of the 'chav'

What I have endeavoured to illustrate thus far are the different hierarchical social relationships in which girls articulate both imagined and actual gazes of others, which invariably requires different forms of mediating dress to manage these social environments. Although close female friendships can offer a space for more freedom to experiment with styles in a 'judge-free' way, even these relationships are complicated, and girls of their age are also 'a different breed'; judgemental and hard to please. As teenage girls, they are affective within this, and they themselves are judgemental. This judgement means moral formations and boundary-making between themselves and other girls (Frith 2004), for it is teenage girls who are this 'different breed' in which they are both subject and subjecting to judgements.

As Marion and Nairn (2011) discuss in their work on teenage girls uses of fashion, dress is often constructed concerning how one sees themselves and how they compare against the 'other'. These moral boundaries were most clearly defined in relation to what the girls described as a 'Chav'. Other research in which middle-class girls construct their style in opposition to 'Chav' aligns with this (Francombe-Webb and Silk 2016). Descriptions of the term and what it stands for vary, but generally speaking, a 'Chav' is pathologised as excessive, evoking affective reactions of disgust, aligned with a roughness that is antithetic to successful femininity (Francombe-Webb and Silk 2016; Pichler 2009; Lawler 2005; Tyler 2008). Taking from Tyler, "the word "chav," alongside its various synonyms and regional variations, has become a ubiquitous term of abuse for white working-class subjects" (2008: 17). At the time of this research, it is more widely recognised as a discriminatory term, schools often recognise this as a protected characteristic and condone it's use amongst students. I here reflect on how 'Chav'

is taken up in everyday ways and what it is articulated to mean. This is not at the expense of recognising the wider implications of class-based discrimination but in order to better understand how it is used in 'closed' spaces. These judgements are activated in style choices which will be outlined here in terms of the narrative of 'Chav'; that is, excess of style taken up as discourse of personal responsibility. In that sense, moral boundaries and physiognomic assertions are being formed. However, building on Francombe-Webb and Silk's (2016) findings of how girls embody middle-class femininity in opposition to the pathologised workless other, there is also a repertoire between them in which 'Chavs' has a much more personal affective relationship between them and the girls present this as judgement and bullying. In that sense, there is a specific narrative which deviates from 'nice girl', in which the girls take up issues of good femininity. While it does implicate social class positioning, this is argued to be a subconscious relationship. 'Chav' was used to depict both a style that was undesirable and a popular group that imposed judgements on others. In stylistic terms, this was often muted as not 'rude' but a descriptive factor based on clothing (often associated with puffer jackets, ripped jeans and tight dresses) or a generalised term to describe the popular group at school. It was also justified as a term because some of the girls had felt wronged by 'Chavs' in the past, leaving them free to discriminate on these grounds. When discussing different styles, Beth stated she was 'not a fan of Chav' and relayed how she and Tabby had a friendship that ended badly. Likewise, in discussing what 'Chav' means, Lydia conveys multiple meanings.

> Lydia: well Chav actually stands for council housed and violent.
>
> Amy: We live in quite a nice [inaudible] I don't think there are actual.. I think there are people we label chavs like in a mean-spirited way like, I don't know. I just think like they're just kind of chav slash [sic] British girls. and it's just people putting on lots of makeup.
>
> Lydia: Yeah. It's sort of I don't think we have many chav chavs like, because the typical thing is they're really violent, they're very scuzzy and things, but there's also sort of the 'chav' look, which is all come about. So, like the group of people that that were already like sort of bullying to everyone else in the school. And then they also have adopted this look, which is why everyone called them chavs because we didn't really feel guilty about singling them out because they were all arseholes.

There is an ‘intensely affective’ (Tyler 2008) relationship between style and personality, in which morality becomes coded in dress. To be a Chav is associated with wearing certain clothes, as mentioned, and rude or aggressive behaviour towards others. What it specifically means to be a Chav seems difficult to define – Amy says its more that they label people Chav as an insult, as their area is nice there aren’t the kinds of ‘violent scuzzy’ people who would apparently qualify for the term, indicative of a roughness that they situated themselves against (Pichler 2009; Kehily and Pattman 2006). It is also a form of personal responsibility, in which ‘Chavs’ had earned the ‘mean-spirited’ title through their own behaviours.

‘Chav’ is also coded through consumption and cost. The following chapter will explore some of the relationships between style and cost. Still, the emphasis here is on symbolic and layered codes of describing someone as a ‘Chav’, which vary between stylistic description and more negative implications of personhood. But there are also implications that relate to privilege and dress, in which certain styles connote certain class positions. Amongst the girls in this study, most of whom come from middle-class or upwardly mobile families, style that tries too hard or costs too much is associated with ‘Chavs’ or poverty and should be avoided.

> Lizzie: I think it's very interesting. I thought about this before, because I think Chav is often associated with having less money but it's interesting because a lot of the time they're wearing like branded clothes like Adidas. So it's interesting how people like associate that, and I don't personally think this but I've heard people who have been like ‘oh chavs parents put all their money into their clothes, and like getting their kids branded things’. And then, I guess with the West London girls it's almost like the same idea but the opposite response. So they’re sort of also wearing quite, I think, I don't really understand the West London girl thing at all because I think the clothes they're buying are expensive, but I think the way they style it is more like baggy, and like out there, so it's maybe associated with less money but it's almost the same thing either way, like you can't really win.

The above description aligns with other discourses of 'excess' concerning Chav - denoting a lack of personal responsibility in consumption, overspending, and excess in style (Lawler 2005; Tyler 2008). However, it is a counter-narrative to the experiences of managing poverty shaming through buying branded clothing, as exemplified in chapters one and two (see Elliott and

Leonard 2004; O'Cass and Frost 2002; Croghan et al. 2006). Providing an example of what Bourdieu (1989) would call 'misrecognition', in that despite buying branded clothing to mediate the stigmas of poverty, this is still subject to judgement in more privileged spaces. There are also local codes implicit in which West London girls is a term for those of that area, associated with being relatively well-off yet wearing baggy clothes which downplay their class position. West London girls were introduced in the case of B Gove in the introduction to this thesis as a typology of a rich girl who dresses 'poor'. For Lizzie, there is no hierarchical element here, as a middle-class girl she feels equally attacked for her style choices. The sentiment is that no matter what influences your style, there are critiques associated with this which is true to some extent, particularly for teenage girls, who are often dismissed and disregarded. Furthermore, there is a 'damned if they do, damned if they don't' attitude amongst the girls in which their status as relatively privileged is also felt to come under attack. But it would be wrong to omit the hierarchical nature of these interactions and judgements, as much as we understand how they might go on to create cultural inequalities in the workplace and beyond (see Friedman and Laurison 2019). This tension between their experiences as women and their ambiguous relationship to privilege is a key theme for further development throughout this thesis. Moreover, such discussions point to the role of cost, or perceived cost, in how style is constructed amongst the girls, and to where symbolic value lies.

As has been discussed, 'Chav' can have a multitude of meanings but can be described as a 'look'. In this sense, it can be performative as much as personal. Some girls used the term reluctantly, understanding its uses in class-based discrimination. Others rejected it entirely. In our conversation about what constituted good and bad style, Zoe had asked if she could be rude (by all means, Zoe) and described the bad style as 'Chavvy'. Although she could not pinpoint exactly what that meant, the terms tacky and overly branded clothing were used, also reflected in other groups' descriptions. Jessica didn't agree with this and, later in the conversation, chastised Zoe for using such labels. Although the term chav has been around for well over a decade, it has recently been circulating through the social media site TikTok. In this, girls participated in making video performances and impersonations of the stereotype of a 'chav' through excessive makeup and implications of teen mothers with unknown baby daddies, which are designed to invoke the kinds of affective disgust that Tyler (2008) makes clear in her discussions of 'chav mum, chav scum'. Jessica argued that they, too, could be

made fun of for their style being associated with being posh as West London girls, resisting the idea that anyone should be put into a box or labelled. For Jessica, there were so many restrictions placed on them because of their style; they couldn't be different because then you're an 'alt girl', can't be 'basic', can't be a 'Chav' because everyone makes fun of them. She asked Zoe whether she knew what Chav stood for, claiming it was a bad word that shouldn't be used in ways which demonstrated a kind of liberal tolerance and moral licensing. Zoe then said she took back what she had previously said about Chavs and bad style. Likewise, Kate understood the negative associations of 'Chav.'

> Kate: Yeah, I just think people should just stop basing people because of it. Because, people tend to just be like, 'Oh if they have a fake tan and they have a bun, like a hair bun you know the ones that go like that [signals on top of head] and fake lashes and are wearing like a body con dress, ripped jeans theyre a chav and you should like stay away from them'. But there are actually lovely people like theyre really nice, most of them. And it's just the same just as you can get like really really lovely chavs you can get really horrible like west London girls, and people that dress like alternative and stuff it just depends on the person, rather than what they wear. So, I think just the stereotypes just like needs to go. Yeah, because they are generally lovely people. Most of them.

While both Jessica and Kate reject the stereotypes they see associated with such terminology, the underlying assumption appears that chavs are bad and rich girls are good until proven otherwise. And as will be discussed in later chapters, they, too, dismiss the stylistic elements such as overly branded clothing associated with 'Chav' in favour of what they view as a more individual style. In this sense, the same cultural hierarchies are reproduced, which legitimises certain styles while denigrating others. 'Chav' remained both practically and symbolically a constructed 'other' style which was not desirable and not to be positioned with. Much like Hey (1997) discusses in her discussion of how the girls in her study were not radical but reproduced hegemonic ideas of femininity, I too could argue that despite knowledge of inequalities around social class, discussions continue to reproduce hierarchical and physiognomic assumptions based on 'class' aesthetics. There are differential starting points between who is considered 'good' and 'bad' in these interactions, which

pertain to moralistic and physiognomic judgements of style and substance that are embodied in the term 'Chav'. This points to how cultures of class are (re)produced and offers insight into the implications with regard to cultural and social inequalities.

Girls impressing girls

In the context of discussions so far, there are very specific gendered scripts that the girls follow regarding their bodies and issues of the appropriateness of dress in 'adult spaces', which they can feel subject to scrutiny and thus mediate their dress according to their environment. Meanwhile, amongst peers, there are variations between close friends who are perceived to offer freedom to express themselves and experiment with their age and sexuality in dress and wider peer networks, which require complex negotiations of dress to manage anxieties of the imagined gaze. This section draws further on what Emily pointed to in a discussion of own clothes days, that girls opinions matter because girls understand their social worlds. Although I will briefly take up issues of sexuality, generally speaking, it was girls whose impressions girls sought. As friends and mums have been shown to see them at their worst, I will illustrate the pressure for 'getting it right' when encountering acquaintances, when the stakes feel higher for avoiding style failure.

Due to the nature of this project in terms of how discussions took place amongst girls, and my position as an older - yet somewhat ambiguously so - female, many conversations were about dressing up for themselves or impressing other girls. As I have already shown, the girls are pretty discerning about who they are themselves with so it is possible I was not always privy to conversations about sexual partnerships per se. There were some indications of this. Zoe mentioned she could be dressing to impress a boy. In Charlotte's case as a bisexual, she said she was 'dressing up for everyone'. There may well be elements of desexualising in favour of focusing on studies (Archer et al. 2007; Elley 2011) or not discussing this with me in detail as I am an 'adult'. But as I have outlined, girls' worlds are challenging and full of scrutiny and judgements. It would, therefore, not be surprising if the opinions that matter are the ones that come from those who understand them best, other girls. Thus, although for many of the hetero girls there is an element of dressing up for boys and a pressure to look sexy, but not too sexy, and fulfil some level of hegemonic beauty standards, what was really articulated to matter is other girls. Girls are the ones to aspire to or impress. As discussed

earlier, this may well relate to popularity or could relate to an aspired style. There is a creative element to dress, an outfit, whether formal or casual, with a sense of individuality. In this sense, this has little to do with sexuality and a lot to do with validation and who matters. They judge themselves by their own standards, and thus, criticism from a girl stings more than from a boy – who doesn't understand what it's like to be a girl anyway. Girls also own the sense of their creativity; boys are considered to lack in this area, so their opinion doesn't matter as much. Perhaps because they share similar values in relation to clothing and fashion, and as I will discuss in a later chapter, the value they place on knowing what to wear.

These desires to impress girls have ultimately different impacts on the girls' performances. Lizzie, for example, feels like she has two personalities, not just with family but with different friends. She examples this by describing girls who live near her who are very girly and bubbly. She dresses more colourful and tries harder because they have a similar style, but she feels she dresses more casually around Tabby and Kate and is less colourful. If she knows girls are going to wear floral tops and skirts, she wouldn't want to wear joggers. For her, this is not because they'd judge her but because it feels more normal to fit in. Lizzie wants to make a good impression. She does not describe this in relation to perceived judgement but that she mediates her dress on account of who she is with. Lizzie thinks about which friends are more into fashion and who's going to notice if she makes an effort. Further illustrating that for some, there is an element of practical coordination amongst friends.

Conversely, for Zara, good friends are not the ones she feels she needs to dress up around, but rather acquaintances.

> Zara: your outfit is the first hint of what you're like. If someone's not spoken to you, that's their first impression of how basic or edgy or whatever, especially nowadays, and if they don't see you regularly that one outfit is going to be defining for you even before you start a conversation. Which is why it seems to matter more when it's someone you don't know. Doesn't matter with friends if one day you look really bad because they've seen you 100 other days.

These descriptions of styles as basic or edgy (also referred to as alternative) will be taken up at various points throughout this thesis. As I have introduced, basic constitutes a comfortable

means of fitting in through wearing widely accepted popular styles. Edgy or alternative style is often positioned in opposition to this, as will be reflected more throughout the thesis. Edgy style involves a deeper sense of personal reflection in the ability to perform individuality and creativity knowingly. Zara articulates the pressure to 'get it right' in outfit choices, where the stakes are higher amongst people they know but doesn't often see. She thus corroborates Izzy, Pippa and Emily's anxieties about their own clothes days at school. Zara's friendship group comprises 12 girls, 6 of whom I spoke with. As they all go to the same sixth form, they mostly hang out all together, but occasionally some will do smaller things. The essence of their friendship group is that it is varied, leaving all the girls feeling free to dress in ways that fit their style and needs and able to do this around each other comfortably. If anything, they see themselves as quite lazy, not wearing makeup often or getting dressed up. Figuring out what to wear can be a challenge; having an item to start with and work around can eliminate some of the anxieties associated with getting ready. The decision-making is also coupled with group chats and collaborations on what to wear – not in order to match, but to fit a certain 'vibe'. This corroborates with others who similarly feared being too over/underdressed compared to others in the social situation, like Jessica and Zoe. The social situation itself also dictates how outfits are chosen. For many of the girls, the most difficult situation, which lends itself to the most time and effort spent choosing an outfit, is that with acquaintances. The logic is quite simple, on holiday or somewhere completely new, there is an opportunity to try new things, and if it doesn't work, it doesn't matter. Anyone who sees them probably won't see them again, so the impression is fleeting. Likewise, with close friends, they see each other all the time, so if they happen to look less good or less like themselves for one day, well, their friends already know them and have also seen them feeling great, so the impression is fleeting. It does not feel so with those who they only see occasionally, through mutual friends or perhaps at parties. Here, outfits reflect one's person and character, and they must get this right because the memory of the outfit and impression is felt to be more sustained. They may also not be able to get another chance to rectify the situation should their outfit not work on the day.

Likewise, when it comes to sexuality and the body, Claire felt that sometimes wearing summer clothes and a strappy top could make her feel self-conscious, exemplified by a time she was wearing a strappy top at home but put a baggy jumper on to go out to the local

shop. In this instance, Claire wouldn't have cared so much about friends but felt self-conscious in public. This may also pertain to the everyday scrutiny of their bodies which regulates when it is deemed 'acceptable' to wear strappy tops, as this is against their school dress code. Thus, in this instance, friends provide a safe place to experiment with clothing, not look their best or wear whatever they like. Claire feels lucky that her style has developed over time. Some people might feel restrained from wearing new trends if they feel they have become typecast to a particular style. Their friendship group wears a range, so it is easier to wear whatever than friends who all wear the same things. Zara feels the same; they have a range and can take inspiration from each other, but all wear clothes in different ways; some dress neater, some baggier, and so on. Zara has friends in other schools where the pressure to fit in is perceived to be greater, where everyone wears the same style. For example, a friend at a different school had to have a Michael Kors bag in year seven; otherwise, they wouldn't be cool. This is indicative of the kinds of social pressures Croghan et al. (2006) talk about in which engaging in local trends would be a style failure. Year 7 is also a notable year in the sense that for many of the girls, this time in their lives (as the youngest year at a new school) represented a time of greater style conformity (ibid), a time they look back on and laugh at their outfits. As they grow into school and teens, they feel like they start developing their style (ibid). These senses of reflexivity and growing independence in style will be explored more in the following chapter. All friends feel flexible to wear what they want as styles vary across the group; this is common amongst the groups I spoke to, but with the acknowledgement that not all friendships worked the same and that conversely, for some, there was a pressure to look the same. Thus, once again, what becomes clear is the pressure to look good for girls. A supportive group of girlfriends is considered important in being able to express one's style, which does not always feel possible in more public or new spaces. But this is convoluted by their own sense of self, as they move away from their cringeable younger selves and start to figure out who they are and how to express that, a sense of individuality is also important. The next chapter will then explore in more detail the complexities between maintaining individuality and fitting in.

Chapter comments

This chapter has sought to illustrate the pressures the girls face within their social worlds and how these are articulated and navigated through dress. The chapter engages in various experiences of judgement and scrutiny as the girls navigate both imagined and physical gazes of others. In doing so I demonstrate similar negotiations of the imagined gaze, and reliance on social networks found in Sophie Woodward's study of women's wardrobes, but extend this to forms of physical scrutiny that girls are subject to. The girls demonstrate a competent reading of different social situations, how they navigate these and what is at stake for them in navigating these successfully. I have outlined the complex terrain in which the girls operate in which they mediate a multitude of social expectations in relation to how they understand their age, gender and class. These range from spaces in which there are clear power imbalances in relation to ages and positions in which both teachers and wider family members seem to illuminate the girls presence as sexual beings, creating sources of embarrassment and discomfort. At times, girls' bodies are literally subject to discipline through uniform regulations and family comments or invaded (for example, in poking stomachs). The study of fashion allows insights into how girls understand regulatory processes of uniforms, contributing empirical material to Friedrich and Shanks' (2021) broader work on uniform regulations and how this sits within wider feminist concerns for the ways in which such governmentality and regulation of bodies reproduce normative constructions of gender and bodies (Bragg et al. 2018; McRobbie 2015). This chapter offers empirical insight into how this is experienced and negotiated. The girls work to mediate their dress in response to this.

Moreover, beyond simply understanding the 'rules' of femininity, the girls are shown to appropriate them in order to maintain their social boundaries. To do so requires a knowledge of constructions of femininity and desexualisation, which in turn allows them to navigate their social environments and protect their autonomy. This can vary from active resistance like by Lydia, to covering up to avoid feeling exposed, to wearing clothes which make them seem younger to avoid scrutiny. In this context, it is important to iterate the presence of scrutiny related to their bodies in making decisions about their everyday dress. In contrast, elsewhere, I will consider how discourses of fashion consumption consider appropriate in

terms of financial and political mediations. Choosing an outfit representing them and responding to their understanding of 'acceptability' in spaces becomes important in navigating perceived judgements. The construction of these outfits as complex and multifaceted in value will continue to be explored throughout this thesis. The framing of this chapter focuses on the messy realities of girls lives. Contrary to postfeminist concerns that consumer culture constructs the girl as 'fun' (Coulter 2021) the girls illustrate the forms of work used to mediate forms of scrutiny, regulation and anxiety. They navigate this in ways which respond to wider social environments and focus on their successful navigation of these. While this does corroborate with concerns for how female development is taken up in predominantly female spaces (McRobbie 2015), I would argue that the girls position themselves as in control of these spaces and utilise forms of dress to mediate their positions. The chapter offers rich empirical insight into how this operates in everyday ways. The girls are acutely aware of the positions they hold, and this too leads to sense of solidarity amongst themselves.

The reliance on girlfriends to help navigate these external pressures has also been discussed in which girlfriends become a safe space for experimenting with fashion and self-expression, away from the judgemental eyes of others. Amongst other teenagers, depending on what they wear, they can be subject to comments about their appearance, from being called sketty (slut) or told they dress like a boy. Once again, what is apparent is the policing of their gender, with strong boundaries on their sexuality and femininity. However, class judgements were also found, as described against the other of 'Chav'; in that respect, the girls also engage in their forms of judgemental and hierarchical cultures. The pressure that comes with mediating against these labels feels like it affects them. While Beth asserted in our discussion group that she thinks fashion depends on how much you care about what other people think; for many, they do. These judgements are both temporal and ephemeral; once they reach the age of 18, they believe they will no longer matter, but the stakes at this moment relate heavily to how they feel in a space. Their perception of self is more closely tied to girlhood, so this space matters more than the outside world of teachers and family members. Given this, it is perhaps unsurprising that scrutiny hurts most when subjected to it by their peers. Thus, mediating their dress to present themselves well to others becomes important in the construction of outfits. Girls friendships are illustrated as both important yet complex,

aligning with other research in this field (Hey 1997; Frith 2004; George 2007). Moral boundaries are formed in various ways from performances of femininity and class, yet also in expectations for solidarity amongst peers.

The example of a cropped top usefully illustrates mediations of gender and social relationships in various contexts. The cropped top, for example, is banned in schools and subject to affective regulation amongst family members. However, friendship groups offer opportunities to feel grown up and experiment with sexuality. Similar findings by Karademir Hazır (2020), in an analysis of dress performances as they relate to habitus, found women in Turkey to engage with narratives of getting it right in relation to age appropriateness and distinguished between social environments. She found dress to offer internal codes, in this case, these codes consider femininity and sexuality. Yet they also hint at class position. Aligning this with the work of Appleford (2014) it would be possible to argue that these specific codes of femininity and sexuality, also relate to the middle-class dispositions of the girls in this study. In exemplifying their uses of dress to navigate relationships, practices are shown to be both calculated and mediated performances which draw on forms of femininity, age and 'appropriate', which also reflects class presentation of 'good' girls with 'good' style. Conceptions of good style will be addressed more in chapter 6. The key focus of this chapter has been to illustrate the complexities of girls' social worlds in which they navigate precarious positions and how dress becomes a form of mediating these, ultimately shaping their practices.

5. Performing separation

The chapter offers insight into the pragmatic and aspirational elements of girls' material relationships in which the girls ringfence room for autonomy and independence. Relationships to clothing are often ambiguous and ephemeral, linked to temporalities of age (Blanchard-Emmerson 2022b; Twigg 2013) and social networks (Woodward 2005). I illustrate this in ways which touch on concepts of narrative identity and temporality in which the girls individuate their senses of self and their consumption practices. This involves reflection on forms of interpersonal autonomy in which the girls negotiate their relationships to their gender, age and constructs of individuality. I then move on to practices of fashion consumption as a means of developing autonomy. The girls provide clear examples of how their opportunities for income and consumption are regulated by their parents but how they navigate this in ways which leave room for their autonomy. This is split into two parts which consider the access to financial resources (money) and the resourcefulness in spending (practices). I draw on Zelizer's (2017) social meaning of money to illustrate the conflicting freedom and control that money offers girls and how they individuate their practices away from discourses of control.

The chapter first illustrates how the girls utilise fashion to understand themselves. Drawing on Marion and Nairn's (2011) use of the concept of narrative identity, which relies on the fluctuating relationship between sameness, selfhood, and otherness, fashion can be shown to offer such mediations. With specific attention to their gender, age and individuality, I show how they ringfence room for their own autonomy and selfhood in their discussion of themselves. As I have previously highlighted the importance of being a girl in understanding their subjective experiences, it is not surprising that part of their mediated form considers boys as 'others' – less creative and less free in forms of dress. Being a girl, or 'femininity', is also seen as a less rigid category than 'masculinity'. McRobbie highlights creativity as part of the 'good life' and at the behest of (middle-class) women to fit the neoliberal economy (2016). This chapter reflects on the specific tension between critique and experience. I will focus on experience as a means of illustrating how the girls understand themselves.

Moreover, I demonstrate the self as a means of becoming from who they were to who they hope to become. I will particularly focus on how the past versions of self are a means of articulating their relationship with age through which their narratives focus on their growth and maturity. In their individuation, I also discuss girls' friendships. Wherein authenticity is assessed alongside discussions of copying- understood as inauthentic as it relies too heavily on another's personal identity as played out through dress. I seek to highlight how the girls individuate themselves by performing their autonomy through material things and practices.

The chapter focus then shifts to the more specific pragmatics of money and consumption in understanding the girl's performances of autonomy. As I outline in the first literature chapter, I do not view cultural and economic elements of consumption as separate but rather interloping. Moreover, as I have highlighted, the relationships between style and one's ability to consume (see Croghan et al. 2006; Francombe-Webb and Silk 2016) require reflection on girls' access to money. I extend Zelizer's work on various forms of domestic monies, entitlement, payment, and gift, to think about different forms of accessing and accumulating money. Through pocket money, multiple forms of paid employment, enterprise, and savings. Although they have forged some financial freedom, they still remain somewhat dependent on their parents for money. I also build on 'enterprise culture' as McRobbie (1989) defined in her early work on second-hand dresses, in which the increasing possibilities for selling through online mediums make 'enterprise' a part of everyday life and a means of making money through what the girls have – their clothes. I demonstrate how the girls are subject to forms of regulation, not simply financial but also moral and social. Yet, their own narratives focus on how they make space for their own capacity for autonomous consumption practices. It is possible to refer back to the start of this thesis and the case study of B Gove, as I highlight that it is not just the cultural means of performing separation from parents but the specificities of money. The girls do not perform themselves as similar to their parents but through their individuation and calculations. I further develop this by thinking about consumption practices in which the girls find creative ways to make their money go as far as possible. It is a ritual and coded into their consumption. Their creative uses of money also enforce meritocratic codes of 'work' in practices which will be extended in further chapters to discuss moralistic and creative discrepancies between 'basic' and 'skilled' forms of consumption.

Developing autonomy

Girls as creative imperative

I here focus on fashion as a means of individuation, that is, developing an autonomous sense of self. The process is intersubjective, as the girls' narratives identities here fluctuate between selfhood and otherness, how they view themselves in relation to others (Marion and Nairn 2011). As has been discussed, girls' friendships and girlhood are integral to how they survive their surroundings, be it the scrutiny of family members, school regulations or the judgements of other teens. For the girls in this study, being a girl remains a large part of their identity. And how could it not? With all the ways they feel regulated on account of their gender, it is inevitably defining. Despite inequalities felt by girls as girls with regard to their bodies and dress, they still view fashion as a fun and expressive space. Conversely, boys are often described as having less flexibility and dressing in 'boring' uncreative ways.

Emma, Rachel, and Jennifer go to private school together, Emma and Rachel are borders. Emma is Dutch, but her parents live in Brunei as her dad works for Shell. Rachel is Thai, and she and her siblings are sent to the UK for schooling. Jennifer is white British and lives at home with her family close by, just coming into school during the day. They reflect on the pressures and freedoms of outfits, in which they can present themselves as less constrained to explore styles than boys.

> Jennifer: I think it [wealthy people at school] definitely has an effect on it, like branded stuff.. maybe its more in boys than it is with girls
>
> Emma: yeah the boys have more pressure than the girls do. But us girls like its just easy to have like high waisted skinny jeans...
>
> Rachel: in my opinion, there's easier things to find in fashion for girls than boys, because girls pay more attention on how they dress and on how they perceive to others before boys, and they really just rely on branded stuff. Unless you're like fashionable...I guess it's harder for them because with girls you have mom jeans, you have skinny jeans, you have boyfriend jeans and as girls you can wear skirts and shorts, its considered normal. And of course nowadays it's 2020 so there's more boys like wearing skirts and stuff but then

people, like no one in our school would come up and wear skirts. And if they do, everyone would think that they're like gay or something.

Emma: Its not really fair on them

Rachel: Its just society

Emma: because girls have more variety it's easier for us to choose, whereas for boys because I know for a fact that I know a few boys that wear the exact same thing because they have nothing else

Rachel: theyre just not interested in fashion like they don't care

Emma: like if a girl doesn't like skirts she still has shorts she still has jeans but if a boy doesn't like jeans they just practically got joggers

Jennifer: oh grey joggers though I like grey joggers

Emma and Rachel: yeah yeah me too!

Being a girl is positioned as having more freedoms in dress, and femininity a more fluid category than masculinity. Boys' style is often viewed as pitiable, while comparatively, girls can have good style with relative ease. Boys are regularly described as all wearing the same thing (namely t-shirts and joggers), having about three different outfits to choose from. The uniform nature of boys' clothing leaves them at greater risk of judgement if they steer away from this (with still simple clothing). Thus, despite various forms of judgement that the girls have discussed, they position themselves as having the upper hand with fashion compared to boys, with more freedom to experiment and express themselves. Although with this freedom may also come more anxiety (see Slater 1997). The girls also discuss the additional pressures on boys to spend more money on clothing and generally discuss boys as lacking creativity. A lack of creativity is often aligned with branded items (bought 'off the rack'), prone to higher costs. The various groups generally reflected this, from those at private schools to those at the local state school, although likely varying in terms of the cost of brands – high end clothing such as Louis Vuitton or everyday brands such as Nike and Adidas. Jennifer's love for

grey joggers simultaneously emphasises the ambivalence and contradictions that meander through everyday interactions and opinions. The alignment of brands as uncreative will be explored more in the next chapter. The emphasis on creativity may also point to the creativity dispositif that McRobbie (2016) discusses becomes inherent in personhood (particularly young middle-class women) and that can be subsequently unrolled into the labour market. Perhaps this, in part, makes sense of this specific preference for girls to 'be creative'. As will be discussed in detail later, the girls can also perform creativity with styles and clothing in ways which do not have to be costly, as often buying items second-hand or 'bargains' holds such symbolic value. Their options are perceived to be inherently more stylish, thus there are more opportunities for them to 'look good'. In that sense, fashion is viewed as a female playground with opportunities to perform separation from their less creative male counterparts.

The nod to '2020' indicates a kind of political liberalism in which 'anyone can be anything', yet heteronormative constraints remain in everyday codes of dress. If femininity is both regulated and mediated in various spaces as outlined in the previous chapter, so is masculinity, in which the girls illustrate how boys are tied to heteronormative reproductions of 'boy'. On the one hand, this may be itself because of how females are tied to the body, fashion and beauty, further fuelling an objectifying culture in which women are judged first and foremost for appearance, however, fashion *is* also fun. There is a lot of enjoyment that comes in the experiences of fashion; exploring and researching trends online, taking influence from those around them, shopping with friends, dressing up and choosing outfits for social events. Moreover, they *care* about their appearance. Drawing on the previous chapter, this may be because it allows them to negotiate their social environments, and this contributes to the impressions they make. Fashion, too, offers them forms of freedom. These material choices define selfhood, thus, the othering of boys as constrained offers a counter narrative to the wider feminist concerns for female regulation while also perhaps making the girls feel more in control of their own choices. What McRobbie (2016) might call a 'training ground' is then reflected on as a 'playground' in which girls position fashion and dress as their domain in which they have the upper hand compared to boys who dress comparatively uniform and with less creative and liberal license. This corroborates with feminist concerns for the 'beauty apparatus' in which women tend to occupy spaces that are 'feminine' and

thus self-regulate and self-blame if they fall short (McRobbie 2015). Yet the ways this is framed in everyday practices positions this kind of self-governing as part of the good life. This can also contribute to literatures on creativity as a neoliberal construct in which creativity is at the behest of 'self-reliance' and self-development, particularly for women (McRobbie 2016).

Processes of becoming

Dress can also be a means of articulating and feeling age (Blanchard-Emmerson 2022a;2022b). The girls in this study also demonstrated a great deal of reflexivity regarding their biographical stage, including affects of embarrassment for their younger selves and aspiration for their future selves. In a conversation with Tabby, Lizzie, Kate and Beth, when asked if they have any stories about a time someone embarrassed themselves with clothes, they relayed personal experiences in which they associated their younger selves with style failures.

> Tabby: I do remember this one time in year seven when I was going out with-
>
> Beth:- Oh I love this story.
>
> Lizzie: what is this story
>
> Kate: I know exactly what Tabby is gonna say. Sorry I remember this happening
>
> Beth: wait what
>
> Tabby: no I was talking about, um, I was going out to cinema with this guy. I don't know what I was thinking I was wearing like this kind of big jumper. And a skirt. And so you couldn't really see the skirt under the jumper. And I wasn't, I don't know what I was thinking, and it was horrible. It was-
>
> Lizzie: -my style in year seven was so bad. sorry. [laughs]
>
> Kate: do you know-

> Lizzie: - I used to have like leggings with pandas on. It was like the most random stuff [laughs]. And I think, up until like maybe even like the beginning of year nine. I had like, no style whatsoever I just like wore whatever clothes and now I'm like really interested in like fashion and like trying to like get nice pieces of clothing
>
> Kate: year seven and eight me was just lots of, I just wore like what every basic girl wore it was literally like jeans a top from new look and superstars. That was like a year seven me.

In our conversation, Tabby also discusses going to a birthday party in year 7 wearing a bright red top and shorts and tights - shorts and tights being a style faux pas. Narratives of getting dress wrong and continued embarrassment demonstrate constructions of knowledge as age related, 'growing' is reflected in not making the same mistakes as their younger selves. The girls articulate their style in relation to their age, in which being 'year 7' – at a new school and as the youngest there – is associated with having no style or wearing basic clothing the same as other people. A discussion of panda leggings makes this further evident, with animal print perhaps connoting childlike immaturity. Conversely, as they have matured into their schools and teen years, they consider their style to have developed. Croghan et al. (2006) equally found that young people placed more emphasis on style and fitting in at the earlier ages of teen-hood. As the girls mature into their teens, they individuate from the 'follower years', and emphasis is placed on individual style as a means of fitting in. Lizzie considers herself to have become more 'interested' in fashion in the last year or so, while Kate recounts wearing what 'every basic girl' wore. She denigrates her younger self as lacking creativity, demonstrating her biographical reflexivity and a perceived growth in style. Likewise, in a separate conversation, Nancy discusses disliking obnoxious branding and relates this dislike in part because it reminds her of what she used to wear and how her younger brother dresses now, which she thinks is perhaps why she judges it so much. Fashion articulates the girls' adolescence and personal narratives of maturing and developing their style, separate from their younger immature selves.

Establishing individuality

Girlfriends have been established as a site for individuation and expression, in which Lizzie feels 'grown up' in outfits she wears with friends. However, friendships are also sites for individuation, which requires opportunities for the girls to explore their individuality (Frith 2004; Croghan et al. 2006). Variable boundaries are therefore required between influence and 'fitting a vibe', and direct copying. As the previous chapter and section both demonstrate, dress is subject to regulation, and as such, forms of dress involve calculations based on the spaces the girls are in. Yet, these are also temporal, where the girls are 'figuring out' who they are and what is appropriate in a given space. The issue of 'copying' outfits will be explored in this section as another tension between fitting in and standing out, in which the girls carve out space for their autonomy. Although there are variations across the friendship groups I spoke with, certain values and moral codes surrounding copying were present for many.

> Jennifer: There was one own clothes day where someone called Annabel, she has really good fashion, like really good and everyone was talking about it in a good way, and then the next own clothes day, someone else comes in wearing the exact same thing
>
> Emma: what you wear is also kind of part of you, like your identity. You don't have to express like I don't express myself through clothes but still what I wear is a part of me
>
> Jennifer: your signature clothing and stuff
>
> Emma: yeah so when Dominique like another girl would wear
>
> Rachel: to impress her
>
> Emma: to impress her and then slowly she didn't have her own clothes anymore like it wasn't her style anymore
>
> Rachel: there's a difference between having a common thing and just trying to be someone
>
> …

Rachel: unless you copy them in a good way like trends, that is how trends start you basically copy what someone is doing but there needs to be difference

Emma: you add your own little thing to the trend

Here there is a clear recognition of when someone appears to be copying and how this is internalised, observed and differentiated against. Clothing is ultimately considered an expression of the self. Even Emma, who did not invest as much time in style as Rachel, felt that clothing was still 'a part of' her. Whilst they might have admired Annabel's style, Dominique had broken an unspoken rule by wearing the exact same clothes. On the one hand, Dominique was what Croghan et al. (2006) might call a 'style failure' because Dominque's dress may have been an attempt to feel or be accepted by peers. Yet her authenticity is called into question for having not created her own style but directly taken someone else's. There is a stark difference between copying and inspiration. Differently, Rachel identifies that trends are reliant on a level of repetition, the difference therefore lies in the ways in which trends are utilised in individual ways, illustrating trends as a form of assemblage – constantly fluctuating and subject to change for them to work authentically. Thus, the rules of engagement in trends require authentic performances of self, illustrating an autonomy and ownership of style.

The desire for something that was one's own and, therefore, not to be copied resonated across many of the groups. In turn, some clothing items were taken direct ownership of. Zara, for example, would be annoyed if she had a 'thing' like a jumper that was hers, and one of her friends got the same one. Conversely, Charlotte had done exactly that. Charlotte coveted an Urban Outfitters jumper which her friend had got, which she showed me during our interview. It was a chunky knit and colourful. As Charlotte had moved to a different sixth form, and this friend remained at her old school, Charlotte justified buying the same item as she could just wear it in different friendship groups so as not to overlap. She recognised the rule and her potential overstep but had negotiated her terms of use to make this acceptable. However, when a mutual friend posted a photo of them on Instagram while Charlotte was wearing the jumper, she received an immediate message and screenshot from her friend saying, 'you've got my jumper. The friend in question further told all their mutual friends that Charlotte had got the same jumper as her. In this way, it seems the friend was attempting to

claim ownership of the item, as she had got it first. The friend in question also said she didn't mind that they had the same jumper. Charlotte found this situation strange and wasn't sure if her friend was insecure about her style. Although Charlotte then professed that she knew her friend wouldn't be happy with her buying the same jumper, she did it anyway, 'which was a bit weird'. Charlotte feels she was a bit 'weird' herself for copying the jumper but that her friend's reaction felt equally weird. There is a level of regulation and ownership over style, which is recognised amongst groups and relates to the desire for individuality. Yet the recognition of good style or clothing items can lead individuals to want the same things as others, despite knowing this may cause controversy. Copying is a complicated moral boundary reliant on a sense of what is acceptable. In this respect, this exploration of fashion can account for an unspoken form of alliance and agreement in girls' friendships, which should necessarily allow for individuation.

As copying has been established as a moral boundary in friendship groups, there are social consequences for breaking this code of conduct. I met with Izzy, Pippa, Jade and Emily in June 2020. Izzy has recently become friends with the others, while Pippa and Jade have known each other since they were very young. As one half of a group of friends, they seemed like a close circle of friends who did many things together in and outside of school. However, in both my interviews with Pippa and Izzy, it transpired that there was some conflict in their group. I was told that Emily had a reputation for copying and was described as not really having her own style as a result. Not only did Emily copy outfits, but Emily had apparently been messaging Pippa's boyfriend, seemingly trying to get him to go out with her instead, and generally was known to buy whatever Pippa bought and go wherever she did. Pippa no longer felt that she could tell Emily anything she was doing or buying, for fear she would go and do the same. Both Izzy and Pippa expressed frustration about this and told me Emily had also copied some of Izzy's shoes. Izzy attributed Emily's copying habits to her parents, saying they aren't around much, and her mum gives her money to make up for not spending time with her. Emily was felt to be crossing a line regarding each of the girl's styles. The copying was considered invasive and, in some contexts, crossed clear moral boundaries, such as flirting with a friend's boyfriend. For the most part, copying clothing was felt to be invasive in a different way, encroaching on their senses of self. In this sense, the self can be a fragile concept in need of safeguarding. Individuality is an important part of fashion choices for the girls, Pippa would often buy items

on holiday or abroad to ensure what she had would not be the same as others. Izzy would also not tell any of her friends her Spotify username for a similar reason. It was her music, and her friends wouldn't appreciate it in the same way. The consequences for Emily were severe. The girls avoided direct confrontation but silently removed Emily from their circle, inviting her to fewer social events and reducing their communication.

In my conversation with a separate group, I used the example of Emily being in trouble for copying, keeping her anonymous, to ask about copying, and the feeling resonated.

> Claire: Yes. But we were all thinking the same thing. Yeah,
>
> Frankie: I think I definitely think there was a point when certain person would like, they will choose like buying everything that other people have. But now it's a lot more like, I don't think people really care as much.
>
> Claire: Yeah, yeah, I don't know, I think, I mean I agree with what you're saying but I think copying is quite annoying if it is, even if it is from like a big brand. You know, it is. It is quite annoying, but we have like, but if it's taking influence I think there's no problem. Like if it's not the if it's the same pair of jeans but different colour. Cool. If it depends how like personal items I don't know

Although they did not mention the person they were specifically talking about, they made it clear they were all thinking about the same person, who had apparently copied Frankie's jeans, Claire's shoes and Lily's coat. Although these incidences had happened over time, it had become noticeable that this individual had essentially 'stole' an entire outfit off her friends, which in turn affected the individuality of the others. These codes of conduct are implicit. They all expressed the desire to feel like an individual. For Zara, there is a want to feel like she'd put something together and feels good. In turn, it is disappointing when something becomes mainstream and puts you off, with which Claire agreed. This theme of 'mainstream' as undesirable complements preceding arguments for individuation and will be continued to be explored in later chapters. What was argued in the previous chapter is that in wider spaces, the girls are arguably encouraged to de-sexualise or feminise themselves for the benefit of others, namely men, as exemplified in discussions of male teachers and older

male relatives. Their female-based social worlds become where they can engage in explorations of self, utilising friendships to help manage their outfit anxieties and outfit choices and valuing the opinions of other females. Although these friendships can often be safer spaces for experimenting with style and identity, the girls desire to maintain their own sense of individuality. On the one hand, this analysis complements existing research on girls' friendship groups as complicated hierarchical spaces of power involving boundaries of inclusion and exclusion (Hey 1997; Frith 2004). But it also demonstrates the complicated forms of reliance and agreement, building on the previous chapter on the importance of girls' friendship groups as spaces for individuation. The example of copying thus offers insight into the dynamics of how these are maintained. Means of individuation have been illustrated in how the girls carve out spaces for autonomy. They feel their age in growing up and maturing, which is necessarily a process of developing autonomy. Copying forms of dress intrudes on their individual senses of self. The next section focuses on these tensions of autonomy through the girls' income and consumption practices.

Managing money

Senses of autonomy are still complicated by the girls' specific position as not quite children or adults. This section outlines some of the complications and ambivalences of their social positions but also demonstrates a similar autonomous 'ethic' in their means of consumption that girls use to describe their practices of dress. The topic of money was awkward, involving similar ambivalences, deflections and defensiveness that Savage et al. (2001) found in their work on class identities. Thus determining precisely 'who got what' was not always straightforward, at times, required a more general discussion of money than questions of individual practice. Money is here thought of in line with sociological analyses of Zelizer as a social process - through which the girls negotiate their independence. Akin to a 1920s housewife, the girls have no legal entitlement to their 'own' money and, as such, are heavily reliant on their parents. Acutely aware of the inequalities they face as women, it is important to consider how women learn to organise their money. Opportunities for women in employment have changed since the 1920s, but the connection lies in how creative methods must be used without an established income. Zelizer identifies three core ways domestic

money is organised: payment, entitlement, and gift. I have extended this here to think about the domestic money of children, as outlined by the girls in this study.

1. Payment: a direct exchange through domestic work in the household, but also through forms of employment
2. Entitlement: the right to share as seen through allowances
3. Gift: the voluntary bestowal when going out, or indeed for celebrations such as birthdays or Christmas

This section will focus mostly on the first two forms of payment and entitlement, although it should be noted that most or all of them discussed using birthday and Christmas money for buying clothes as well. Their access to forms of income is shown to be complex, varied and subject to others, which complicates their sense of autonomy. Few have stable or consistent ways of earning their own money, yet they are shrewd in how they manage this. Some of which, like the keeping of left-over change is similar to Zelizer' s examples of wives not disclosing left over change, or stealing from a husbands pocket while he slept.

Forms of income

Consumption plays an integral part of how one sees themselves, from aspiration (Willis 1990; Chin 2001) to idealised self (Woodward 2007) and subcultural connections (Hebdige 1979; Willis 1990). At the ages of 15-17, the world of paid employment opens up to varying degrees, while remaining elusive for some. For those who are over 16, there are more options available, from working in hairdressers, to delis, to Waitrose, to waitressing. But 'children' more generally are neither seen as agents in consumption (Cook 2004) nor given free rein in consumption, with many of their sources of money being conditional and related to their parents. I will next explore four key themes in relation to consumption: pocket money, forms of work, enterprise and savings. The sections illustrate how access to money is relational and constrained in many situations. The girls remain dependent on their parents, yet they are resourceful, able to 'work' their situations to ensure they get the most money possible, and ringfence room for independence within this.

Pocket money

Forms of pocket money vary between the girls. Some get specified monthly amounts, whereas some earn on a more ad hoc basis. There are pros and cons to this in terms of how much parents can get, how much they need to budget monthly, and how much their money is controlled. It is complicated to determine exactly what constitutes 'a lot' or a normal amount of pocket money, and this is also subject to whether parents also take their children shopping or pay for elements of consumption (like phone contracts) outside of this amount. In the conversation of what a 'normal' amount is, Tamara's friends vary between those who get 'quite a lot' and others who don't get anything. A lot is here classified as £50-70 a month. Tamara gets between £30-40, this has to cover all her school lunches, products and skincare, which doesn't leave her with much, and as such, more leisurely consumption (rather than everyday staples) has been curtailed as the pandemic has disrupted her job. Meanwhile, Zoe a little reluctantly divulged her allowance of £7 a week, which she claims is a lot. Zoe asks Jessica if she gets pocket money in a way which seems to be baiting her. Jessica awkwardly deflected, saying she didn't know as her dad put her money straight on her card and that she has to pay off her phone contract with the monthly amount, and then said that because all her money goes on her card, she feels like she spends it all on food and 'silly things like that' when shes out. Jessica further removed herself from the spotlight by pointing to a recent discussion about pocket money with friends, and one had said that they got £50 a week, another felt this was unfair as they only got £25pw. Jessica claimed to think she got about £4 a week but given she had previously declared this money paid off a phone contract as well as 'food and silly things' I'm inclined to believe she received more than she let on. Likewise, Zoe's position as a private school student and, as I discuss elsewhere, her capacity to buy lots of clothes during lockdown suggests she may, too, receive more than £7 per week.

These entitlements were complicated in multiple ways, from a relative ambiguity in terms of disclosing amounts to differences between set entitlements and ad hoc ones. Lizzie has a specified monthly allowance, the amount of which she did not disclose with me but did share that many of her friends tell her she gets a lot. Lizzie did not necessarily think this was fair, comparing her situation to those who earn money on an ad hoc basis. Lizzie argued that if every time her friends go out, they ask, 'oh mum can I have some money' they probably get

more money overall, but they spend it quicker because they don't have to budget. On the other hand, Lizzie feels she needs to budget to ensure her money lasts. Normally she puts half of her allowance in her savings account and half in her cash account. Savings were generally cited as being for nothing in particular or specific purposes, such as holidays, festivals and gap years. Although Lizzie had been saving, this changed over lockdown when she moved all her savings into her cash account and with the amount of clothing she'd recently bought, she no longer had anything saved. Fashion and dress, as commented earlier, offered a form of stability and future imagining during the uncertainty of the pandemic. Lizzie laughs as she tells me that it is too easy to transfer between accounts. For this reason, she doesn't consider herself to be good at saving money but is forced to budget and prioritise more than some of her friends, who get given money as and when they want. There is a distinction between those with clear finances and those with vague allowances.

Entitlements were also subject to parental control and regulation. Beth received forms of payment from her parents, getting £10 an hour to do chores around the house, this can be anything from un/loading the dishwasher to shredding old work files of her parents. She also receives money for food and shopping when she goes out, this itself is not regulated, and she has learned that her parents are more generous with what they give when they approve of her friends. For example, when spending time with her best friend, who her parents love, her parents will likely give her more money, even some to treat her friend. There are complex negotiations when it comes to parental control and performed independence. Beth's parents give her more freedom to do things with people they approve of, yet Beth sees this almost as an amusing anecdote in which she has worked out what situations she can get the most money from her parents. Independence is ambivalent for teenage girls, for whom it is not just 'money' that offers some freedom but their parent's approval of their friends. It also points to their own mediations of their situations in which they can 'work' the situation to get the most money, ringfencing their room for autonomy through their calculated and practical understandings of their social relationships.

The girls are also subject to sanctions in line with their spending practices. In my follow-up conversation with Jessica, I learn that she, like some of her other friends, has a go-henry card. A go-henry card allowed her dad to deposit money into and monitor spending. She found this

annoying, however, because her dad could see everything she got, and there were always limits on how much she could spend, a naturalised feature of the account. The day before we spoke, her dad had given her money for an upcoming holiday to the Isle of Wight, and she 'accidentally' spent it in TK Maxx. The accident appears to be in the impulsive yet important purchase of some Armani jeans, with Armani written in graffiti style paint. Jessica was told off for her misuse of the allotted money, and she would not be receiving any more pocket money for a while.

As Zelizer (2017) highlighted, the paradox is that money can offer both freedom and control. Jessica is given money to spend in her bank account, but this is overseen by her dad, who can limit or change her entitlements to sanction her practices, pointing to financial and moral regulation. Kate, too is subject to financial regulation by her parents. Kate gets £20 a month from her parents, on top of some money for food when she goes out. Kate felt that before she had a job, she was terrible with money because she didn't have a concept of it. She would spend her £20 immediately and have nothing left for the rest of the month, which prompted her mum to start giving her £2.50 a week and an additional £10 at the end of the month. Kate's spending was curbed, ensuring she did not spend all her money simultaneously. However, over the course of our conversation, Kate realised she needed to collect on that week's cash, illustrating this as a complicated system to keep on top of, with either Kate or her mum often forgetting. When we spoke, she had also recently been clothes shopping with her mum. This dynamic that is dependent on parental approval would too likely apply to the consumption of clothing as a means of aesthetic regulation. The girls know what their mums will buy for them in ways which fit issues of acceptability in dress and what they will need to buy for themselves. This section highlights entitlements of pocket money as a form of domestic money and how this is subject to financial regulation in ways that uncover relationships to social and moral forms of regulation. Yet, the girls frame this as a productive tension, in which they learn to read and negotiate situations for their purposes.

Forms of work

Forms of work in adolescent years are multifaceted, varying between domestic money in allowances predicated on keeping rooms clean or doing chores at home and paid employment outside of the house. These jobs were variable in terms of economic legitimacy,

from contracted employee to cash-in-hand roles. Jobs had also been disrupted during the pandemic, some like Tamara and Adele had done tutoring or exam invigilating before lockdown, while others, like Amy, who worked at McDonalds, had found themselves on the receiving end of the furlough scheme. Not all the girls were in this position. Parents such as Lydia's had offered to pay them for general cleaning and helping around the house, recognising that their children still needed to earn money and because their cleaners could not come over during lockdown.

One way in which even 'under-age' girls can earn money is through babysitting. Therefore popular with under 16s, Kate is in the process of cultivating a network for her babysitting business, largely building on what her older sister (now at university) had already created. Currently, she only babysits for a 'lovely family across the road'. As her parents currently only allow her to babysit until 11 pm, she is somewhat restricted in what she can do but hopes to do more as she gets older, which points to the limited freedom to earn money in some cases. As for many of the girls, there are multiple sites on hand to acquire money, part-time jobs and parents too. As such, Kate has also found other work in the form of helping clearing up after her drama class on Saturdays, where she and one other get paid £20 a week to turn classrooms back into their weekday set-up. However, she wants a new job when she turns 16 because her boss is mean.

But there are other ways of working, including working their parents. Izzy knows her mum is a bit of a shopaholic, so if she can't buy new clothes for herself, she'll buy things for Izzy, and if she goes out shopping with her, mum will likely buy her something. She can use this as an opportunity to get things she would not want to buy herself or more expensive items from places like Urban Outfitters. Izzy also knows if she goes shopping with her mum and her sister, her mum will spend the same amount on both of them - to make it fair, thus shopping with both of them is beneficial. Parents' money, then, could be seen as separate money. In this way, Izzy knows how to get things gifted to her. However, part of her earnings comes as an 'exchange', either in money earned by doing chores around the house, cleaning her dad's workplace, or as part of a settlement package in shopping. The latter is where mum will offer to buy *some* of the items in a larger purchase. As far as Izzy is concerned, this is fair, and

although there is an acknowledgement more broadly that more money can lead to better style owing to the relative freedoms, she seems comfortable with her situation.

Enterprising girls

As McRobbie (1989) introduced in her work on second-hand dresses, second-hand consumption practices also offer opportunities for enterprise. I would argue there is an increased ease in doing so by buying and selling on second-hand apps such as Vinted and Depop, although success in such an enterprise may still require an 'eye' for localised trends. I will discuss these issues in more detail throughout the rest of the thesis. As I mentioned in the section above, Jessica has recently been caught out for spending money her dad had given her for a holiday on a pair of Armani jeans she found in TK Maxx – in not earmarking her money as her dad had intended. This felt worth it for the purchase. Jessica perhaps feels more relaxed about being denied pocket money, as she has her own source of income, too, selling her clothes on Depop. Indeed, in recounting her weekly allowance of £4 a week, Jessica was quick to add that she makes most of her own money through selling clothes. Jessica uses Depop for clothes she bought that she thinks she will like and doesn't or that she doesn't wear any more. The Armani jeans will likely end up in the flows of fashion consumption, utilised by Jessica for a while before being sold on in favour of something new. As seen by her dad, this represents an earmarking error, but to have not bought it would have been an enterprising error for Jessica. Jessica knows when something is worth buying because she can make some money on it. This enterprising spirit has served Jessica well. She has a Dolce and Gabbana top which she loves, it was £35, which she admits would be the top end of her budget for a top, but she really liked it and felt confident she would be able to sell it on. Her bedroom business thrived during lockdown, meaning she had what she felt was lots of money during quarantine, exemplified through having sold a pair of dollymix joggers for £90, having bought them for £85. Jessica gets 'all' her money from Depop. Jessica relays how she gets 'really cheap' items of clothing which she wears for a while until then they 'go out' [of fashion] and then sells them for 'so much more' than she got them for. She, too, had capitalised on a trend of Slazenger tennis skorts. As they sold out online, she could sell them for more than store value.

> Jessica: The tennis skorts are ridiculous. Because you get you get them from sports direct for like seven pounds. And then there was a stage where they were just out of stock on sports direct so all the Depop sellers were selling them for honestly like - I have to say I'm guilty of selling mine for a lot more than I bought it - for like, 20 quid and they were bought for seven pounds and they're all Slazenger skorts

The 'craze' of trends amongst teenage girls gives rise to items' popularity and the ability for enterprise within these girl cultures. But this also points to the affective nature of girls' consumption, in the exaggeration of price points in how Jessica discusses her love for certain pieces. Jessica demonstrates an ability to be on top of trends, buying popular items while in stock and then selling for a higher price as they sell out. In doing so, she presents herself at the forefront of fashion trends, enterprising in that she is engaging in more than just consumption but in the circulation of trends and value. I will reflect on this in various ways over the coming chapters.

As with all the girls, there is a limit on what is worth spending. Jessica tells me she wouldn't spend much on a plain camisole top because she can easily get one from Primark for cheap. The exception here is with brands. The Dolce and Gabbana top was her maximum, justified because she really wanted it and knew she could sell it on for the same price or more. In that sense, her consumption feels more like she's lending money out and will get it back. Jessica is simultaneously annoyed when others buy clothes from 'cheap' stores such as Shein and Ali Express (£4) and then sell them on Depop for a lot more (£25). They're really cheaply made, but people will buy them. She feels bad making a profit off something like that because the clothing is poor quality and bad for the environment. Thus, ambiguity and moral regulations underpin some of these conversations of enterprising means of making money off of 'fast fashion' items, which will be discussed more in chapter 7.

Entitlement: emphasising self-reliance

As incomes are varied and subject to change, trying to ensure they will always have access to some money can be important so that they don't miss out on opportunities. Mostly Zoe claims to save what she earns, and for this reason claims

> "I've never actually been properly broke I always have some money, it kind of stretches like it doesn't really go past the £20 mark ever".

Zoe also has ways of making her money go further. She exemplifies how she will take a packed lunch when she goes out with her friends rather than buy lunches, and as will be discussed elsewhere, she looks for bargains when it comes to shopping. This excerpt is worth remembering for the next chapter, in which I also highlight how 'broke' can be co-opted as a form of aesthetic. Savings, too, are subject to ebbs and flows as things are saved for and paid for. The same applies to how gifted money, such as birthdays and Christmas, is received and spent. Relevant to the study's time was the pandemic's impact on savings. For some, like Frankie, this was a result of lost income. For others like Lizzie, this was in part due to boredom. For others, there is more reliance on forms of paid work. Frankie had been working as a swimming teacher earning £7 an hour before the pandemic. She sees herself as a saver, which has helped her through the loss of income.

> 'I'm a saver, so I haven't really had any issue with not having any money. I've saved for the summer, because we had so many plans. Like I was going to buy festival tickets but I didn't have to but I didn't really want to buy the tickets, like I wanted to go but it was almost a blessing in disguise that it got cancelled [laughs]'

As a practice, Frankie earmarks money for social events. Frankie is conscious of what she is saving and spending- this is evident in young people's consumption. Frankie is conscious of spending within her limits (Chin 2001) and maintains some level of savings and security rather than spending all of her money. Although she has some part-time work, she also receives some of her money from her parents. It is not a set amount, and she didn't think her parents would agree to this, but Frankie reckons you can get more money out of your parents without them knowing when it's just given as and when. One way in which she can save is that she is given £10 for food each time she needs it, but then tries to spend less than the whole amount. Like the housewives, Zelizer (2017) discusses who would pocket any leftover money allotted to them for the household budget. She doesn't like spending that much and would rather keep some back. She could also get an extra £5 a week to tidy her room but rarely bothers with this.

Within any friendship group, there is a range of mediums for earning money. Frankie gave me a deep dive into her and Tamara's friendship group and their relative positions and work ethics.

> But I think most people is not an allowance most people just get topped up on their cards when they ask their parents if they don't earn... Safia earns and I think everyone gets money from their parents for food. Um I'm not sure about Fantasia just because of how much she earns [working at Waitrose], I'm not sure she'd bother asking.. and also Antonia and Ellie they both work at the club [waitressing] they earn a lot. Lilli gets money from her parents who are well off. I don't know what her parents do but. She's like, she's a big spender but I don't see her as being irresponsible in my head

As a group, Frankie doesn't think her friends spend too much, but they are thinking of booking an Airbnb together after A-level mocks which she estimates would cost about £30 each. Everyone's got enough money one way or another. I use this example to highlight that income is viewed rather subjectively in relation to each of their own positions. Through this, I learned that Fantasia lives in a small two-bedroom flat where she shares a room with her two siblings. She works relatively more hours than the others, balancing this with her A-Level studies, yet she is seen as having almost too much to ask her parents for money. Conversely, Lilli gets relatively a lot from her parents, enough to buy most of her wardrobe from Urban Outfitters, commonly denoted as one of the more desirable but expensive shops, and for food and trips. Yet, in Frankie's description, she situates those who earn their own money similarly to those who receive it from their parents. Despite what could be considered obvious inequities in forms of income, these are seen as two sides of the same coin, so to speak. This relationship between spending and personal responsibility will also be explored more throughout the rest of the thesis.

What has been discussed so far is the various ways in which the girls in this study can participate in consumption. By understanding money as a social process, we can look at how the girls understand money, and work situations to give them the most room for freedom in their consumption. They can also help each other with this. Bartering and sharing are

relevant for some of the girls like Jessica, where if someone has £50 on their card and the other £5, that one will buy the other lunch. They don't work based on quid pro quo but on the assumption that something is shared and equalised over time. Similarly, Chin's (2001) study predominantly focused on the consumption of 3 girls from low-income households whose bartering and sharing were ways of managing spending and mediating friendships. It is also related to more conscious consumption, consuming within a certain budget and prioritising. As has been discussed, there are multiple ways for girls to acquire and accumulate capital. In many ways, the girls' income, spending observed through parentally controlled debit cards, the money given dependent on who they hang out with, or even their ability to earn are dependent on their parents. Yet the girls ringfence room for freedom, from those such as Jessica who do not see themselves as savers, they can become invested in fashion economies, selling clothes to buy new ones, even turning small profits. For some of the girls, they know how to 'work' their parents to get the most from them. Kate, for example, will go shopping with her mum, knowing that she'll pay; Frankie takes more money for lunches than she needs, and Beth can receive more by going out with certain friends. What is also apparent here is these examples are also indicative of a relatively more economically stable family life than the girls Chin (2001) studied. There is little concern for being fed and well provided for, but the girls calculate various situations to ensure they ringfence monies they can call theirs or get the *most* out of what is available to them. Thus, there are some initial indicators of their relationships to class (and entitlement). I will develop this further in the upcoming chapter on how girls mediate their privilege by emphasising their own knowledge and skill in fashion consumption, suggesting it allows a relative disinvestment from entitlement. The next section focuses on the wider contextualisation of how the girls consider their purchase of autonomy.

Forms of consumption

The varied and complex ways the girls are entitled to or can earn money means that money is not guaranteed and is often subject to ebbs and flows. As such, finding the best clothes for the best price is an important factor in consumption. This section provides insight into qualifications and calculations made in the consumption of clothing, in which I will contextualise what is considered an 'acceptable' amount to spend on various items. In the

words of Entwistle, “qualification describes the process by which things are defined, examined, shaped, acted upon by actors in order to make sense of and render them calculable” (2009: 67). Qualification is an important tool in order not to lose sight of individual engagement in consumption as it is a site of constant negotiation and valuation. I will demonstrate various means of qualification and calculation in girls' consumption practices. I will contextualise what is considered ‘acceptable’ spending before introducing how the girls negotiate this acceptability in their discussions. A focus on affordability allows for the girls to perform autonomy in their consumption, which aligns with forms of personal responsibility.

The pandemic did lead to a shift to online consumption, but as far as the girls were concerned had not altered the symbolic value of clothing in much significant way. Trends were still coming in and going out, and how these took place just took on a more digital element. The girls sought new spaces for expressing style and navigating the uncertainty of the pandemic. Yet, these practices were also subject to regulation by parents. In her words, Jessica had been buying a lot during lockdown, receiving a parcel every day and selling many of her older clothes, so she was still earning more money than she had spent. Jessica would also take the opportunity to dress up to post her Depop sales. Similarly, Zoe felt that online shopping had got her through quarantine. Her mum asked why she was online shopping so much. Zoe’s theory is that because of the uncertainty of lockdown, the one thing they could look forward to was online shopping. Knowing there were parcels on the way gave them some excitement. The opportunity to go out to the post office also helped. Jessica would wear the best outfits to the post office. Her outfit would include a matching bag, matching shoes and a full face of makeup. Other groups, too, had been engaging similarly. Tamara had a birthday recently before we spoke, so she had spent birthday money on new things and even got in trouble with her mum for having so many packages being delivered. Tamara, Lilli and Safia had observed many discounted items and sales, and many on-trend items were sold out.

In-store shopping, Nancy will always start at the cheapest shops, like Primark, before moving on to H&M and then more expensive stores, like Urban Outfitters, to ensure she has checked for the cheapest or best deal before paying more than she might have needed to. Tamara

sets a price limit of £20 on online store ASOS and then sees what items are available within that price range. Price is a big factor in how she chooses clothes. Still, recently she has been doing a textiles project on the ocean, reading more about sustainability, and thinking more about fast fashion, which has influenced her choices. ASOS offers the possibility of filtering only to show sustainably made clothing, but this tends to cost more. For many of the girls, sustainably made clothing is outside their price range. Although the considered value of the object relates more to consumption, it is worth noting that amongst those I asked, the general consensus is that a top should cost around £8, less for something really basic, more if it's fancier or branded. Pippa had recently bought a top for her boyfriend and was annoyed to discover that Hollister charged less for men's t-shirts – around £9 instead of £15-20. For Kate, £15 would be her upper maximum for a t-shirt, and jeans should cost around £30. She notes that 'affordable' will look different for everyone. In part, it depends on parents and how much individuals get from them. Jeans, too, might change in price depending on the brand and much like previous work on jeans, particular brands will be chosen depending on fit (Miller and Woodward 2012), which can alter the price. However, a recent shift to the trend of baggy jeans means that fit can take less importance, paving the way for cheaper jeans, including for Jessica, who I introduced earlier as having bought some Armani jeans at TK Maxx. These jeans were too big for her, but as the aesthetic is baggy, this was not as important as finding branded jeans for cheap. Fit could be reinforced with the new trend of using a shoelace as a belt, highlighting a 'budget' aesthetic at the time of writing- which will also be explored more throughout this thesis. The important balance being not spending outside of their means, and in doing so, they can focus on how their 'worked incomes' maintain their own autonomous practices of fashion and dress.

Although there are the usual avenues of consumption via high-street websites, second-hand apps allow for both buying and selling. According to Jessica, the best place to sell clothes is Depop, but it involves more work, as to ensure sales, there needs to be lots of photos with good lighting, preferably some modelled as well. Depop is the most well-known and commonly mentioned, but Zoe is obsessed with the second-hand selling app Vinted but doesn't want to tell anyone about it. She shows us a bundle she got recently consisting of baggy jeans, a floral dress, two lace tops and a beanie for £5. She loves it so much and

doesn’t understand why anyone would buy new, having figured out lots of ‘hacks’ on the filters to ensure she's finding the best clothes at the best prices.

Similarly, Jessica professes to be obsessed with eBay, from where she has been cultivating a bag collection during lockdown. Her bag collection consists of lots of branded bags, she collected lots of different ones to match her outfits. Zoe tells her she is obsessed with the Playboy one of Jessica’s, but unlike Jessica, Zoe has just the one from Primark, which cost her £4, but she always gets lots of compliments on it, so it's ok. Likewise, Jessica got hers all for cheap because they were from eBay. In the world of buying and budgeting, finding cheap items is key. Knowing how and where to do this holds a lot of value. It is not that it has to be second-hand, as Zoe demonstrates with her Primark bag, but still the ‘eye’ of finding something that doesn’t necessarily look like it's from Primark, which receives compliments or represents an expensive item but bought for a lower cost.

The ways in which costs are debated are further highlighted below in the discussion of whether schools should ban branded coats

> Lydia: that’s so wild imagine spending 1000 pounds on a jacket.
>
> Amy: a nice jacket
>
> Lydia: it’s a 1000 pounds. be a nice laptop
>
> Amy: yeah but if you’ve got that money why not
>
> Adele: yeah people spend ridiculous amounts of money on coats who cares
>
> Gaby: but what about if you don't have that money?
>
> Lydia: then you wouldn’t buy it
>
> Amy: we’ve had lots of these like um, we do lots of these like debates in school about whether we should ban school uniform. And this like poverty issue always comes up. obviously I don't know the... I live in quite nice area so I couldn't possibly make comment on that but I just feel like it doesn't really happen like that in schools, I'm

> not sure if it.. maybe like subconsciously but no one's actually like uh I can't hang out with you because you don't have this coat. I'm not sure...

What becomes clear here is the way consumption and value become topics of debate for girls. The girls make calculations about their senses of appropriate amounts to spend on material items and who indeed should or could consume them. Amy is most reflective of differing motivations behind consumption. Lydia and Adele – who mostly engage in second-hand and bargain consumption – could not imagine spending £1000 on a coat and functionally discussing other uses for such an amount of money. Even in saying 'who cares', Adele also highlights £1000 price tags as being 'ridiculous' and, in so, makes a value judgement on what is acceptable spend. Moreover, the girls demonstrate modes of personal responsibility in which those costs are simply for those who can afford it. I make this point to illustrate the discussions of consumption as autonomous, in which there is little reflection on wider social constraints. The issue of whether schools should ban expensive coats to stop poverty shaming is complex, and amongst all the girls, I was surprised that most seemed to view consumption as a personal choice not to be interfered with. Those who cannot afford it, they simply shouldn't buy it. There is evidence of the means through which girls also engage in regulatory practices in line with these modes of responsibility. As previous sections have shown, the girls make calculations on how to make their own spaces for autonomous consumption and dress and work on how to perform their own autonomy. Perhaps concerning is how it becomes evident that the 'poverty issue' is a subject for debate amongst the privileged. Meanwhile, brands and their costs are shown to have little sway amongst many of the girls, who prefer to find bargains, often using creative means, to show individuality in their style. The main argument here is that these consumption practices are reliant on independent assessments, in which the girls assert their positions as autonomous actors, using their money for clothes which reflect components of their individuality and age through creative means.

Chapter comments

Fashion tells the story of self, embodying experiences and aspirations and responding to their wider social structures (Marion and Nairn 2011). This chapter demonstrates relationships of power and practice in which girls make sense of their own positions in various contexts and

negotiate their autonomy within these. The chapter offers multiple and varied examples of the pragmatic narratives the girls use in their understanding of themselves in autonomous 'self-reliant' ways. Despite the gendered implications of fashion as an objectified form, the girls do not view fashion in these ways but instead focus on the ways in which it is both fun and creative and see themselves as having more freedom than boys to express themselves within this medium. The girls express this in stylistic terms, in how individuality is an important part of their construction of the self. In that sense, the girls perform separation in aspirational ways, constructing their narratives in relation to the 'other' of children, boys and as individuals, illustrated through discussions of copying. Discussions offer insight into the messy period of figuring themselves out and learning independence.

Much like the work of Zelizer, whose exploration of 1920s housewives showed how women worked their situations and their husbands to get as much flexibility as possible for their consumption practices, similar measures can be found among teenage girls. They illustrate the challenges they face in earning money, with rigid structures of pocket money and allowances which require budgeting, and the ways in which more 'essential' forms of consumption, such as health and skincare, limit possibilities of engaging in fashion consumption. Moreover, forms of paid work can also be prohibited by parents, with strict bedtimes curbing their ability to babysit or the transport requirement to get to jobs. However, the girls are creative with how they approach this and ringfence room for freedom through a series of mediums, such as knowing how to get the most out of their parents, saving change from lunch money, and selling on clothes to buy more. This chapter thus uncovers more about *how* girls buy things – the varied sources through which they can 'earn' money and the ways in which these are still dependent on their parents, conflicting with their desires to individuate selves. I draw on arguments that money is a social process in which relationships are navigated and negotiated (Zelizer 2017). These become the means through which the girls perform separation. Their narrative constructs focus on their empowerment in which they perform autonomy and creativity. It is also possible to draw on McRobbie's (1989) work on second-hand dress as an enterprise culture. For certain girls like Jessica, they are able to use their interests in fashion to create their own incomes which help mediate parental control. I also demonstrate that in these spaces, the girls see themselves as singular rather than to be beholden to their parents in ways which resonate with entitlement (Zelizer

2017). The introductory case of B Gove also contributes to this, as well as the following chapter on mediating privilege. It also demonstrates the messy nature of these narratives and performances. The final section then illustrates how this is transferable into their consumption practices and strategies for finding bargains. All of these demonstrate resourcefulness and focus on their narratives of autonomy.

As a final note, I just want to draw on the case of Jessica's Armani jeans to illustrate the various modes of performing separation discussed in this chapter through material relationships. Jessica had purchased her Armani jeans in TK Maxx, which I would argue offers a form of consumption that subverts the 'standard' high street in providing more unique or old season stock at cheaper than initially priced. They would hypothetically be harder to copy. These jeans were also too big for Jessica, and the specific gender of them unknown, thus emphasising the more 'fluid' gendered performances available to girls rather than boys. They also had 'Armani' written in graffiti across the back in ways that elicit the same graffiti images conjured by B Gove's bedroom. All of this highlights the item's aesthetics and its uses in individuation, which could mediate issues of copying and desires for creative and authentic style. But moreover, power dynamics between girls and their consumption, as Jessica had used the money her dad had given her for a holiday to buy them which had resulted in forms of financial regulation in which her pocket money would be stopped for a few weeks. However, the ways in which this was framed emphasised her narratives of autonomy and her use of enterprise in her everyday life in which the jeans were a worthy purchase not simply because they met various aesthetic desires but also because they offered possibilities to make back her money or potentially even a profit. Thus, Jessica focuses on how she can ringfence her room for autonomy despite financial regulation from her parents, which also becomes part of her individual style. Therefore, material relationships can account for how the girls understand themselves as autonomous, and self-reliant.

6. Mediating privilege

This chapter addresses conceptions of good style and 'getting it right' in which I demonstrate the variable subtleties in which relationships to privilege become invested and divested in these constructions. As I introduced in chapter two, senses of self and peer inclusion can be formulated around style success and failure (Croghan et al. 2006). Style failures are commonly related to low income, viewed as 'poor choices' as opposed to 'poor opportunities' in an individualised self-ethic. This section offers the counter perspective of constructions of style success and failure but from the standpoint of privilege. This chapter builds on some previously introduced themes of girls' relative wealth and brands as a tool to describe social hierarchies and relationships.

This chapter has much to do with brands and not much to do with them simultaneously. Brands offer material exploration of how relative wealth is negotiated, in which conceptions of 'excess' are used to articulate authenticity. Authenticity here relates to what constitutes legitimacy in practices and styles. As Wilk (1997) points out, relationships to material and practice are often more easily articulated through what is not liked rather than what is. Similarly, here, brands offer a medium for girls to make sense of what they are through what they are not. Brands become indicative of wealth (or performed wealth) as 'cost symbols' (Yuran 2016), as well as their prescriptive characteristics of being bought 'off the rack' lacks genuinity (Grazian 2010). In that sense, 'brands' can encompass a wide range of 'costs', from high-street Nike to high-brow Louis Vuitton. While Bourdieu might have pointed to taste not as wealth but as what one has been taught to desire, I will show an implicit subverted relationship with wealth, in which the girls navigate complex judgements against actual or performed wealth. This involves a mediation of their privilege, which requires a relationship to the category of 'ordinary'. Ordinary being both an ambivalent relationship to class, as class pollutes the 'individualised ethic' of self (Savage et al. 2001), and also a mundane, routine processes of dress, which consider emotional and social reflections (Miller and Woodward 2012). In that sense, this chapter has two focuses: uses of fashion and dress as mediation of and against positions of privilege and how forms of dress are read and negotiated to understand the self and social relationships. In this, I will reflect on constructed narratives of

'brands', as this offered the most explicit medium through which girls articulated a sense of class position.

The chapter begins by exploring these relationships to embodiment and brands, in which brands are posited as materially adjacent to 'wealth', antithetic to embodied understandings of style. I utilise concepts of embodiment to explore the legitimation of style and conceptions of ordinary, which can account for the ambivalences of class relationships within this. Embodiment relates to corporeal style, *how* an item is worn, and what is worn. This involves exploring the existing hierarchy of values (Karademir Hazır 2017). Looking good is argued to be an embodied process involving a negotiation of cost, creativity and authenticity in style. Getting it right requires a complex set of resources which incorporate tensions of being stylistically and aesthetically 'oneself' with what is considered as being fashionable subject to wider cultural productions. Authenticity also necessitates a level of embodiment or ambivalence (Banet-Weiser 2013) which require a certain indifference to be authentic. There are also indications of how successful femininity and self-reliance are embodied in dress; in what Favaro (2017) argued, 'just be confident' is of primary importance to producing successful femininity. Within this, discussions of confidence indicate a means of performing legitimacy and a neoliberal prerequisite for 'self-reliance' (Favaro 2017). I then move on to a discussion of second-hand fashion as a form of legitimised 'cool' consumption. I will here present second-hand fashion as 'cool' in its ambivalences in the sense that it is viewed as a more autonomous form of consumption – as more affordable and less coded than the uses of brands. The chapter concludes with a case study of 'joggers' in which I extend material works on jeans to consider joggers as also having 'post-semiotic' elements. Still, I also show there are limits to this. What is evident in how forms of privilege are mediated through dress is that subtle hierarchies in understandings of style and embodiment are evident in material practices.

Modes of embodiment

Looking good

Beth was 15 when Tabby introduced me to her, Lizzie and Kate. In our discussion group, she appeared to have lost interest about halfway through, taking up some artwork on her

bedroom floor and occasionally glancing over or volunteering an opinion. I was somewhat surprised when she was the first to return her consent form and said she would be happy to do a follow-up interview. Throughout messaging on Instagram to arrange this and setting up the zoom call, I was half expecting a no-response or no-show. She surprised me again by logging in on time and seemed easy enough to engage in conversation. Throughout this second chat, it became apparent that she had not gotten bored of our conversation but had instead disengaged because she disagreed with Lizzie and Kate's perspectives within our discussions. Unlike Lizzie and Kate, who made clear they relied heavily on friends' opinions and enjoyed participating in popular trends, Beth did not seek the approval of her peers. Confident and self-assured, she did not care about popularity or seem particularly vulnerable to the pressures many of the other girls described. She said what she wanted and didn't think too much about how that landed. Beth confessed she often got in trouble with her friends for accidentally insulting them but that she didn't mean to, she wasn't saying anything she would mind someone saying to her (though, I suspect, no one would actually say anything to her). In conversations, she held disdain for Chavs due to past personal encounters and did not like clothing which appeared flashy. Beth avoids such an image, preferring non-branded clothes to those with logos. For her, non-branded garments are worn for aesthetics rather than monetary value.

> its more like... it looks good. And that's kind of the end of it. You look good.

What it means to look good is complicated and difficult to define; it's an impression. However, the implication is that brands are something worn because of the brand, which has a particular relationship to its monetary worth. Non-branded clothing is also less distinguishable by cost and thus more associated with the item's aesthetics. Seemingly non-branded clothing also reflects more personality and style. For Beth, this is not in the value set of her family, and her consumption is defined in resistance to narratives of conformity or spending to excess. Comparatively, she associates branded clothing with being too easy or prescribed, the emphasis being on appearing to have money rather than knowing how to spend it.

> My mum brought me up to be very like don't care if you're popular, don't care if you have a lot of money and I think brands are like the way people show that they're rich.

> Like I've never wanted to be rich. Like I've always been perfectly happy being middle class and I never want to be more than middle class. Or like, it's always been my opinion that if I was rich then I would still shop at Primark. Like I have a 7 right now [holds up iPhone] and I'd probably still have a 7 if I was rich. And I'd probably still shop at H&M and Primark. It's just the way I am I guess.

There is part of the relationship between narrative identity and consumption. In this case, Beth imagines herself both now and in the future through her consumption practices. However, more than that, it presents a clear link between this and her class position. Beth defines herself as 'just middle class' in a way that assumes a level of stability in her opportunities for consumption both now and in the future as an independent earner. Stability, too, is defined in terms of moderation, in not spending more than is necessary or having 'too much'. Primark, in this respect, offers an example of a high-street brand that, due to its low-cost point, allows for stable engagement with consumption, in which girls can "regularly and routinely consume and discard fashionable clothing" (Buckley and Clark 2012: 21). In Beth's imagined future, if she were to find herself rich, her consumption practices would be a way of keeping her grounded, in shopping at cheaper high-street stores and not having the latest technology, she would continue to spend concerning her values as opposed to her economic means. This, too, may well relate to the kinds of *naturalness* that Karademir Hazır (2020) discusses in her work on narratives of getting it right in clothing; Beth locates her position as both stable and natural and does not seek to be aligned with forms of excess.

How consumption choices are formulated and clothing chosen is tied up with how the girls see themselves and want to be seen. In this, and the desire to be their authentic selves, true to how they see themselves, they think about their consumption. I will focus here on thoughtful consumption, often dichotomised against 'excess'. I draw on Karademir Hazır to connect the relationships between dress and respectability. She argues, "excessive engagement with self-fashioning practices indicates the lack of competences to know the right measures; it threatens respectability, and also signifies an unapproved eagerness to claim a higher social status" (2020: 158). Excess here is discussed mostly in relation to cost, while the following chapter will take up 'excess' in relation to consumption and environmental implications. Emma, Rachel and Jennifer attend an international boarding

school in the UK. Jennifer lives close by and attends in the day for school, while Emma and Jennifer board throughout term time. In the following discussion, they discuss their economic positions in relation to their peers

> Emma: and then you have the military kids and because I'm Shell, like I moved around a lot so you have us who aren't rich, right
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> Rachel: for me I'm not rich rich, I have money, my family has money to send my siblings to England to a private school so we're not average, we're above average but not to the point where its like 'woah, rich'.
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> Emma: its not like you're going to be pulling up in like 5 different louis Vuitton jackets.
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> Rachel: exactly.
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> Emma: but most people here are like family money, there's no new rich people, so its not really like anyone shows it off, at least in our house.
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> Rachel: its like my parents yeah we have money and everything but they always remind us like don't be spoiled, think about the value of money kind of thing and then I come here and like yeah you're right there are some people that are like woah. Like sometimes we go to a restaurant with our friends and stuff and they don't eat all their food they just eat a bit and its like expensive and I'm like oh you're not going to eat that and they're like oh its fine and they just take out their card and they just do that [waves it] and for me I'm just like come on, because for me my parents always taught us to finish our rice, because we eat rice everyday back in Thailand always finish and everything else like I would never say that I'm spoiled because I still know the value of money basically

Emma establishes her parents work for Shell, and as it is an oil company, her family are prone to moving around a lot, which offers a pragmatic rationale for attending boarding school. Rachel acknowledges her situation as a private boarding school attendee does imply a wealthier position but that her privilege is mediated through knowing the value of money. What is striking is the codification of branding in which Louis Vuitton is used to signify

'extremes' of wealth and consumption. Although these girls are probably amongst the 'richest' I spoke with, it echoes the same uses of brands to illustrate perceptions of wealth and cost that Beth and others drew on. As most of the kids at their school come from money, it isn't something which is shown off, unlike the implied nouveau riche. Rachel stakes out her position as both knowledgeable and grounded compared to her private school classmates, who consume excessively and wastefully; this is a key theme in how consumption relates to the self. This becomes implicated in the knowhow of self-fashioning that Karademir Hazır (2020) discusses in how we understand the lived experiences of ordinary clothing, extended here to consider the *knowhow* of consumption. There is also a certain reliance on coolness, which taking from Pichler (2009), is defined as 'tame non-conformity' as middle-class girls disidentify from their less socially aware private school peers. There are coded moral values in these relationships to excessive consumption, offering insight into how the girls mediate their privilege; it is not what you spend but how you spend.

In these conversations, the relationship between privilege and humility -as a form of socially aware - become apparent, contrasted against excessive displays of consumption, which is more likely to be seen as tacky. Tamara from South London also reinforces this.

> I would rather spend £10 on something I like than get the same thing for 3 times the price just because it has like a logo on it. I don't see the point in that. I feel like it comes back to the thing I said earlier about bad outfits being tacky... like clothes that have got the logo all over them just to show off that you've got this expensive thing. I feel like if you're actually rich you don't need to show off that you've got loads of rich clothes

Buying a brand which is semiotically linked with expense can have the knock-on effect of not only appearing tacky but conversely implying a level of falsity. Tamara questions the authenticity of those who have spent money on branded items, feeling that those with money do not need to show it off. In a separate conversation where Beth had told me that she's 'not a big fan of chav', she illustrates this point further

> I think, they're not necessarily rich, but I think they save up a lot to appear like they're rich. So like you have to save, but like, it makes it seem like you've got loads of money and I don't think you necessarily do.

These assumptions were acknowledged elsewhere. Lizzie, for example, describes how while a 'roadman'[3] has a different personality, they have a similar style to a 'chav'. This style is depicted as investing in one branded item and wearing it a lot, which differs from Lizzie, who prefers non-branded clothing as she feels it is more personal. For both of these groups, the styles are considered "not necessarily bad but basic". There comes then a complicated dynamic which Lizzie attempts to dissect, in which 'chavs' are associated with having less money but wearing branded clothes, which implies spending more. Meanwhile, 'West London girls' in her area - who are generally considered wealthier - tend to wear clothes that may or may not be expensive but are baggy and less fitted, which is often attributed to being poor. Lizzie finds this complicated to navigate, as she's heard people saying, 'oh chavs parents put all their money into their kids' clothes and getting them branded things', whereas for West London girls it is the opposite response. For her, these associations are two sides of the same coin, but neither party can really avoid hitting a certain stereotype.

Thus, indications of cost and spending become implicated in the reading of others. Privilege is then mediated through humility, in understanding what they have and being humble in this. Clearly (and may I add beautifully) articulated by Beth is how her mum brought her up; it is not in wanting to be rich, or indeed in displaying wealth, but in being comfortable, in having enough. The dichotomy of this is what is considered tacky, in having – or appearing to have – too much. Their class identities have ambivalences, wherein they focus on a comfortable yet ordinary positioning. I will continue to explore this in the next chapter, focusing on the knowledge embedded in consumption choices and how these relate to discourses of morality and ethics within consumption. The underlying principle is not what is worn but how it is worn. Looking good is an embodied practice.

[3] While 'chav' has distinctly white connotations - 'roadman' is often a more racialised term for inner-city (often London) boys. Although the term can be connected with the taking and selling of drugs, in the context of the thesis it refers more to an aesthetic style – which commonly consists of matching tracksuits. This style harbours a kind of racialised 'cool' that distinguishes it from 'Chav'.

Emma: when you overdress with brands that's not style, that's just trying to show that you know brands

Rachel: yeah and that you're rich and people will think you're spoiled and they won't really want to come up to you. Good style would just be creativity, being creative, being original.

Jennifer: like with what you said earlier you want to be slightly different from everyone else but not the same, I mean you don't want to be too different

Rachel: like good different like people will come up to you and be like hey I really like you blah blah

This is a very specific positioning for these girls who attend an international private school, the levels of wealth likely differ from those attending state schools in the UK, and thus the types of brands bought may reflect this. However, what is apparent across the groups is that focus on authenticity – as Rachel defines, being original and relatable as reflected through style. This, too, raises issues of the tension of fitting in and standing out, which in other environments may also relate to the desire to wear brands (see Elliot and Leonard 2004; O'Cass et al. 2002; Hamilton 2012). However, the girls of privilege emphasise how items are worn, as creative and approachable, illuminating the everyday tensions of being the 'fun' and 'pretty' girl. The sense is that successful presentations of self are approachable and thus unthreatening, reliant on not being 'too much' of anything, in this case, too rich. Therefore, it is possible to draw on this conception of ordinary to illustrate not only the kinds of mediation against the apparatus of the perfect (McRobbie 2015) or as a means of fitting in but also in terms of mediating these perceptions of wealth and privilege.

This originality and creativity are implicated in consumption, juxtaposed against assessments of excess, most notable in the discussion of brands. By contrast, the implication is that good style is embodied yet worked for – through creativity. In my conversation with Lydia, she did not buy brands because she felt she didn't have the money for them but also prided herself on her weird and individual style. For her, a bargain is more impressive than a big spend. Looking good requires more than cost.

> when we all went to prom and it was like the first time that we were able to like, wear a nice outfit. And everyone was doing it sort of thing. And people did spend more money than they normally would like maybe 100 pounds or something on a dress or 100 pounds on the whole outfit. But then, people, like, one of our friends, she turned up in something that she bought in Primark and just found it in her cupboard or something and she looked really nice in it and we wouldn't have noticed if she had said, hey, guess how much this cost me sort of thing.

Lydia's friend seems to perform a level of disinterest in her dress. Crucial to debates on embodied cultural capital and a sense of coolness amongst middle-class teenage girls (e.g. Karademir Hazır 2017; Pichler 2009). Her friend illustrates her process of 'discovery' in her chosen outfit as something she has found simply 'lying around' rather than something that has been actively sought, thus consecrating her outfit as authentic. Lydia continues

> And then it's the same with. Um there was.. one of the other girls in a different group of friends. And she spent over a grand on her dress, and it didn't look any nicer, no one really noticed except for that she made a massive deal about how much she spent, but no one really cared. It was just, oh you look really nice… But no one really like asked for it, it was like if you had spent a special amount of it. Like if you only spent a tenner or if you spent 1000 pounds and those were the people saying about cost, but no one was like, Oh, that looks scabby How much did you even spend on that like most people didn't care about the price. It was only if you'd went over and above with it that you mentioned it

For Lydia, spending lots of money on an item did not automatically accrue value, as she was just as impressed with her friends' thriftiness in finding something in her cupboard that she was able to work for the occasion and came from a cheaper shop. So, whilst cost is of considerable importance in consumption choices, this is not a linear relationship between price and value. What Lydia references is this embodiment of looking good which was irreducible to cost yet also indicative of a wider youth culture of simultaneously investing and divesting in style through these cost negotiations. The fact they feel worth mentioning in their social environments is informative of their importance.

Instead of spending what is to hand, there is almost a competitive-like element amongst some of the girls to show that they can spend as little as possible, and this is turn, is positioned as authentic. Comparisons between those with the freedom to choose (on account of rich parents) and themselves are common. Although it would be nice to buy whatever you want, there is an extent to which buying everything, and indeed expensive things, is equally subject to judgement. The 'rich' girls who can buy costly designer brands can fall into the same category of 'easy' consumption as those who buy from the high street – where's the creativity? Where's the skill? In that vein, having too much money, or at least appearing to, can be subject to judgement. Instead, the girls engage creatively to make their money go further and create individual looks that reflect who they are. Thus, this embodied knowledge of value and creative license underpins what constitutes legitimate style amongst the girls.

Wear it with confidence

What constitutes good style varied to some extent, although generally speaking implied the cultivation of an individually representative outfit and a general knowledge of what 'works'. Outfits were felt to be more desirable when everything fit together well, and this was often articulated against clashing colours or patterns. That being said, the confidence embodied in dress was tantamount to an outfits success, as there was a general sense that if body language indicated discomfort (slouching, fidgeting), any outfit could fall flat. Thus, being comfortable in oneself and expressing confidence was an important element of good style. In the following conversation, I asked Jessica and Zoe to give me two words to describe bad style and two for good. As the previous chapter outlines, Zoe has described bad style as 'Chavvy'. I then asked Jessica which she would like to start with.

> Jessica: probably bad [laughs]. I said like, like clashing clothes. So like, it just annoys me slightly when people just wear completely clashing. Well, like I don't mind people can wear what they want, I don't really care but when I wear something which is like clashing with each other, it just annoys me. Like I always try to-
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> Zoe: I completely agree

> Jessica: colour coordinate myself, if I'm organised. Also I know we were talking about this a little bit earlier but I feel like people should just at the end of the day like yeah obviously like you will… Everyone's cautious of themselves being judged, but I think, I just love it when people wear like, something that represents themselves rather than just something basic like really basic just like brandy clothes and urban clothes, just like basic basic clothes that anyone wears. So I think basic was another one I've put as bad because that's just like it doesn't really show yourself it's just a bit plain or a bit boring. And no one wants to be like bor- I think that's like the worst words that I personally, that someone could call me is boring I just wouldn't want to be boring. ever. But um, I said for good something you're comfortable in like comfortable clothes. Because I think half of what you're wearing is sort of like how you wear it. And like if you're comfortable- wear it with confidence, and with fashion and like the swagger.

While Jessica acknowledges a level of freedom in expression in 'everyone can wear what they want', she follows similar style guides to many of the girls I spoke with; thoughtful style and a coordinated self. Thus, she acknowledges these tensions of judgements but emphasises the ability to 'stand out' in appropriately creative and interesting ways. 'Basic' style is defined by the high-street stores shopped in, as well as particular items. It is commonly acknowledged that baggy joggers and cropped or small tops constitute 'basic', yet on-trend, style. In their popularity, high street shops such as Brandy Melville and Urban Outfitters have become boring. Their popularity works against the value of creative skill in that they risk everyone looking alike. They can also reveal a lack of social awareness - which is subject to further development in the following chapter. But as Jessica outlines, playing it safe in style connotes a sense of being boring. Personal style performs confidence, as defined in 'swagger'. Yet, this confidence is also required in how an item is worn. Generally speaking, clashing colours were associated with bad style, yet they could 'work' if worn with confidence. Similarly, Favaro argued confidence is a "primary imperative for the production of successful femininity" in white middle-class metropolitan circles (2017: 283), which is no exception. However, this also reflects an ambivalence - not being 'superior' -assuming a self-reflexive humility.

The sense is that confidence mediates judgements; it is unlikely anyone would comment if you look comfortable in what you're wearing. The onus is on the girls to mediate multifaceted forms of judgement to perform confident style successfully. Lydia, perhaps one of the most quirky and confident girls in my study, cultivated her style around clothes as fun. When we met again on zoom for a follow-up interview, Lydia arrived bang on time, despite professing later to be late to everything. The weather was incredibly hot, closing in on 30 degrees. I was wearing a leopard print t-shirt which I felt would be ok with someone who preferred a wacky style. We noted how hot it was, and she pointed to the chocolate ice cream bowl she had to cool herself down. She took one tiny spoonful of it to demonstrate, and then I didn't see her touch it again. Her style is meticulously developed to show her individuality, from her shaved head with a green stripe down the middle to her repurposed, self-created fashion. I loved the top she was wearing, which I was told she had created herself. It consisted of (as far as she showed me on webcam, and how she described it) a black jersey skirt with little grey crosses over it, with leather straps created from a leather belt, halved and sewn to the top of the newly fashioned top. Both were bought from a charity shop and adapted to fit her quirky, punkish, and unique sense of style. Clothes are to be 'fun', to amuse her from the mundane elements of her middle-class life, where I imagine a lot of things revolve around her as she has the confidence to demand it that way, whilst most of her friends seem shyer, more reserved. Lydia often chose clashing colours and patterns from her wardrobe to match together, sometimes getting weird looks on the street or, as previously mentioned, heckled by teenage boys. But Lydia seemed to revel in them instead of hiding from such encounters. Style was defined by the ability to stand out, gain attention and generally be different. This still represented a validation from others but to a different degree. And it was a style which, according to her friends, worked for her because it felt authentic. She had the confidence to pull it off and stand out comfortably. Unlike others such as Izzy, whose confidence came from trust in her mum's opinion – she wouldn't let her leave the house looking bad – and the love from her family that felt deeper than the judgements of others. Or indeed, in validation through compliments from friends and acquaintances, Lydia's confidence was far more internal. I asked her where she thought her confidence came from, to which she felt that she, in a sense, enforced it upon herself. As mentioned in chapter 4, Lydia had felt restricted at school through teacher regulations and had felt herself becoming less confident. As a result, she began to actively resist this by dressing wilder and wackier to

resist felt regulations. Although it should be noted that her family inevitably play a role, as they are also described as punky and weird. She illustrates the 'just be confident' attitude within dress amongst the girls, in which she takes full responsibility for her situation. While there are various avenues they take to inform this, often in validation from family and friends, in compliments, honesty or even the act of being noticed, what is apparent is that good dress is not simply material but embodied, reliant on their own self-regulation.

This next section exemplifies what is at stake in not being confident, in which dress can also mediate embarrassment or judgement. For Jennifer, Emma, and Rachel, being at an international private school means there is a lot of money around, and in this case, a lot of branded clothing. The following discussion outlines some of the debates prevalent amongst many of the girls I spoke with.

> Emma: I feel like you can look better in non-branded clothes. To pull of branded clothes you have to be really careful so sometimes it's just easier not to have the branded clothes
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> Rachel: and its hard to get, and when you get branded clothes, you need to keep up with the trends too. You don't want to get a Chanel purse or whatever that is from 2012. That is just not it like the trend is already dead
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> Emma: I get bullied for still having superstars, adidas superstars from 2016
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> Jennifer: it's like airforce now, not superstars
>
> Emma: yeah and I have superstars, so I'm called basic all the time cos I still have them
>
> Gaby: is that a thing that happens at school then?
>
> Rachel: yeah well, we have uniform so it's not often
>
> Emma: yeah, it's just for own clothes day and people do forget about it pretty quickly

Understanding the social space and what is acceptable gives them the confidence to situate themselves. Branded clothing can be considered risky because there are still rules about what is on trend. Certain brands and items are coded in style, and getting that wrong can be more

embarrassing than not wearing any. In that sense, sometimes non-branded clothing can represent a 'safer choice', relating to coded ambivalences in dress or to avoid potential embarrassment. The embodied nature of this is illustrated elsewhere where the girls tell me about how someone embarrassed themselves on their own clothes day by coming dressed in brands 'from head to toe' and, in essence, looking as though they have just thrown things together purely because they were branded. This was defined in opposition to having thought about their specific look and it was ultimately described as a style failure. Brands can also date an outfit, making it in a sense, harder to keep up with trends than non-branded clothing. Despite saying that everyone forgets about what people wear quickly, this has obviously stuck as an example of getting it wrong for the girls. And so, as Emma brushes off being bullied for her out-of-style trainers, the fact this is commented on clearly resonates with her enough to mention it. When it comes to choosing branded clothing, brands are subject to critique if worn in excess or if the wrong item is worn. Having the wrong item runs the risk of being referred to as 'basic' but also being 'not it' and out of fashion. In that sense, they can be difficult to 'pull off'. Of course, some people can pull off branded clothing – likely the people able to pass judgement on Emma's outdated trainers – particularly at a private school, where at least some (although likely most) have enough money to afford high-end clothing. In their experience, many of them just wear branded clothing, so in a sense, it becomes normalised; no one is hiding it, but no one is showing it off either. Having wealthy counterparts throughout their school years means they have learned how to 'be' around it all. Yet they mediate their consumption so as not to be 'rich rich'.

Humble consumption

In our discussion groups, I showed the girls a news article about a school that banned certain branded coats that cost between £1,000-£4,000 in an attempt to address poverty shaming. Emma found this ridiculous, exemplifying a friend who had a coat of one of the brands, Moncleur. Emma had borrowed the coat on many occasions, it was nice and warm, and in her opinion, her friend didn't wear the coat to show off she was rich but because it was her style. Emma demonstrates in this objection and reasoning the general tensions between individualist and structured forms of 'taste', demonstrating multilingual fluency across the two. Previous examples make it perfectly clear the alignment Emma feels between fashion

styles that show wealth, which could be extended to her friend in buying an expensive coat. In this case, Emma aligns the coat with her particular style rather than related to the cost. Thus, cost too can be mediated if felt authentic. Although Emma's friend's family is rich, she is not spoiled and doesn't so much care about the brands but will wear what she likes. Emma felt that schools shouldn't be able to ban people from dressing according to their tastes. People should be allowed to express themselves. On the one hand, it is not unreasonable to argue that in the case of coats with price tags of upwards of £1000, there may be a limit to who can afford to consume the coats and whose 'tastes' will remain an aspiration. On the other hand, although this conversation occurred in a private school with wealthy students, the sentiment that people should be able to wear what they liked was not reserved only for private school girls.

Both discussion groups for the friendship group of sixth formers in South London agreed that excessive showing off or throwing wealth in someone's face is one thing, but as long as someone is humble in their wearing of expensive items, then it shouldn't be an issue. As Lilli said, 'just wear it confidently, don't show it off'. They don't see themselves as 'designer designer' people, just little brands in which Zara exemplifies Nike. Although both Tamara and Frankie understand the motivation behind the ban, they have questions about how to implement it. Practically, Frankie questions what a family would do if they spent all their money on a coat which gets banned, and they can't afford to buy another. Tamara relates in a more personal way, exampling when she was at primary school, and everyone had the same trainers, and she felt left out. However, she fronts this with how she didn't feel it affected or hurt her that badly and eventually got over it.

> I feel a bit harsh saying it but youre going to go through life going through the same thing. The parents would have to spend more money on a new coat which isn't fair. They should end the bullying or where the peer pressure is coming from rather than the coats.

Tamara instead advocates for a focus on the root issues. However, there is an element of learning how to make do with your individual situations. Lilli adds that there wouldn't be restrictions like that in a workplace, so it might be better for kids to learn younger, as there will always be someone who has something better than you. This narrative also relates to

individualising discourse in which the individuals are accountable for their own self-regulation (Coffey and Watson 2014). Personal responsibility narratives are integrated into conceptions of wealth and consumption, aligning with Croghan et al. (2006) that style failure represents a social code for personal responsibility and self-reliance rather than inequality. Moreover, as 17 years old's, they are entering a phase of increased autonomy and interests and are reflexively seeing their own positions as 'preparing for work' (ibid). Reinforcing McNay's (2009) argument regarding uniforms, schools reinforce the idea of the 'self as enterprise'. In this sense, the girls view unequal access to goods as a learning opportunity for everyone, for those who have less to either be ok with it, or find other ways around it, and for those who have more to be humble about it. This is furthered by where value in fashion is placed

> I feel like there's a big, not really a problem, but there's a big thing with flexing things now and people buy like- like sometimes I don't really get the point of it-and I think it's really dumb but supreme tops I always thought that was so dumb, it's just a white t-shirt with like a red block on it and it sells for £500 and I just, it's just so stupid to me I would never spend £500 on just a plain top. It would have to be something that has art and creativity in it for me to spend that much money

Tamara here outlines a certain trend of 'flexing' with outfits in spending lots of money. This concept of flexing offers an opposite point of reference to being humble in consumption; flexing is showing off, wearing something which is presumed about the cost rather than the style. Moreover, this is aligned with the antithesis of creativity. For Tamara to want to spend more money, it has to be "art", demonstrating a lean towards the creative dispositive (McRobbie 2016), as well as a rejection of commerce (McRobbie 1998). Thus, there is a mediation away from 'flexing' or spending 'too' much in favour of creative modes of dress. These forms of 'flex' typify away from authentic uses of dress or authentic spending, and may relate to earlier discussions of excess. This may, too, offer insight into the implications of the self, in which excessive spending typifies away from a more ordinary or self-made style. Tamara denigrates the trend, valuing creativity instead of style. In doing so, the brand can be considered basic, lacking individuality or creative thought. Jessica also highlights the moral reading of appearances, in which appearing to have money is associated with superiority.

> I feel like people who dress with maybe more expensive clothing like more designer, or I don't know they sort of, like, have more of a superior complex super- is that how is it? like God complex people who think they're like above other people. And, yeah, I don't like people like that. Who just think they're better than everyone else it really annoys me, but it's just like I feel like people get judged if they're sort of not wearing like, I guess it's to do with if you were judged on what you're wearing.

In discussing perceptions of superiority, Jessica indicates the tensions of what privilege and wealth are perceived to embody which, as I demonstrated at the start of this thesis in the case of B Gove, consequence in mediations away from such performances in dress. Superiority would also convey a lack of relatability in similar ways earlier highlighted by Rachel. Instead, as has been shown in the discussions of these girls, and others like Jessica and Zoe, speaks to a form of the self as enterprise – in how they illuminate their social positions as earned through creative style. But moreover, that requires reflexivity across what is coded in forms of excessive consumption and a mediation away from such moral readings. In mediating these, the girls maintain an ordinary position which allows for their own embodied autonomy in style. The next section focuses on how second-hand offer a form of reflexive consumption and how that is aligned with perceptions of cool style.

Second hand as 'cool'

This section will focus on how successfully managing second-hand consumption and the creative work involved comes to be seen as cool. Pichler's (2009) analysis of middle-class girl shows how they believe social awareness to be part of positioning themselves as 'cool'. In this study 'cool' requires an awareness of the ingenuity and judgments of excess spending. Second-hand consumption offers opportunities for autonomy and enterprise through *resourcefulness* – in not spending more than they have or need to spend. There is a complicated relationship to 'money' in which authenticity necessarily seems to require having to 'work' for clothing; buying clothes simply because one can afford it would be felt as authentic. Second-hand clothing is far from a new concept. Subcultural studies show a long engagement between young people and second-hand clothing (Hebdige 1979; McRobbie 1989). Yet, for the most part, it seems not to enter young girls' shopping repertoire until they reach their teens. This may well be in part because, as many cited, years 7 and 8 were mostly

about trying to 'fit in' and wear similar to what everyone else was wearing, whereas many of the girls claim to have found their stride more when it came to fashion as they started year nine and beyond. Perhaps at this time, they have more freedom to explore consumption practices. Equally, perhaps, teenage girls take more stake in their wider social positions and relationships as they hit 14-15. Being individual and having individual style is of tantamount importance for the young people concerned and separates them from their younger 'cringeable' selves who wore the same as everyone else.

For all intents and purposes, it is useful to see Jessica and Zoe, if not as trendsetters explicitly, at the forefront of embracing new trends. It is important to mention that I can only speak about them in these terms because of the other groups I have chatted with, which has allowed a small insight into the dynamics at play in the world of teenage girls' fashion. I met Zoe and Jessica in a roundabout way through my initial ethnographic research in shopping centres, as they came from snowball sampling from Tabby and Sarah. Clearly popular, they had the confidence to be self-deprecating, telling me more about body insecurities and making fun of their 'teenage girl' behaviours (TikTok videos using colour customisers and including 'bleming' [smoking], trends stereotypical of rich girls in the area) than those so riddled by them they become unspoken. Online shopping had become 'such a big thing' over lockdown, a commonly cited pastime amongst many of the girls in my study. Certain trends had come in, while others had vanished. Zoe and Jessica prided themselves on their innovative fashion senses, seemingly ahead of the curve in fashion. Jessica cites selling clothes as the main way she can buy more. The flow of fashion in this way becomes apparent as some of the other girls I spoke to were more likely to be beneficiaries of this; as the trends became mainstream enough for them to feel comfortable wearing it, Jessica was able to capitalise on this, often selling her clothes for a higher price than she had bought them for.

In the eyes of Jessica and Zoe, second-hand shopping is something gaining popularity amongst their age group, but a pastime they have been doing for a long time. In the discussion of their styles, the use of second-hand clothing occurred on multiple occasions, prompting me to ask about various motivations.

Gaby: is the cost important?

Zoe: yeah [laughs] For me it's, for me it's a cost but for a lot of other people it's like just because its second-hand, but for me it's because I genuinely just don't have money [laughs] to ever buy anything more expensive than like Primark and stuff like I just couldn't. And the thing is I've been charity shopping since I was, liter-like, when I was younger, my entire wardrobe was just charity shop stuff because my dad. So then my dad used to start taking me with him when I was in like year five or year six, and then I used to start going we used to go charity shopping every single Saturday after my drama club every Saturday. And then when I came to um my school, everyone was like no one had really caught on to the charity shopping thing. And then I remember Jessica I was actually with you, and we started talking about charity shops and I was like, you are literally the only person I know who charity shops.

Jessica: yeah I was the same

Zoe: because like we start- I swear we started it way before it became cool

Jessica: we started the trend

Zoe: now everyone's like let's all go charity shopping and like I'm like doing it cos I'm like broke and everyone else is like let's do it cos we're edgy and I'm like.. its cos I don't have money [laughs]

Jessica: I think I probably got into it because,

Zoe: but I love it

Jessica: like in my house in Wales it's like right next to loads of charity shops

Zoe positions her charity shopping not only for pleasure. She needs to rationalise her reasons beyond just being 'fun'. In this case, it is because it is the only way she can afford to get the things she wants beyond going to what arguably represents one of the most basic and mainstream 'safe' high street stores, such as Primark. The justification for Zoe is that she is broke but attends a private school. She discusses this as a pastime she would go to after drama clubs and activities typically associated with the middle class whose parents can

usually afford expensive clubs. Equally, for Jessica, her second family home in Wales is close to lots of charity shops with good stuff in them (which we could then suppose the area is quite nice, as it's common knowledge that you go to the posh places for the best-donated stuff (see also Gregson and Crewe 2003)). Given the previous chapter's discussion of their forms of income, there may also be a case for arguing that what feels like their money varies, and making what are effectively limited resources, cover a wide range of social activities may, in turn, consequence in them not feeling as though they have much of their own money. However, the alignment of being 'broke' while talking about extra-curricular clubs and second homes feels worthy of further investigation. There is a legitimation of the use of second-hand consumption, not as a performance of 'edgy' but out of necessity. This creates a complicated dynamic between McRobbie's (1989) argument that second-hand fashion is distinct from second-hand, which will be elaborated on further in the following chapter, whilst there is equally a performance of necessity in consumption. My point here is not that Zoe shops second-hand out of necessity but that her coolness is authenticated over her private school peers in her disassociation from this position of privilege. Much like the findings of Pichler (2009), Zoe creates space for herself that is distinct from others who take for granted the privileges of wealth by emphasising her authentic engagement in practice. Thus, this relationship between 'brokeness' and autonomy in spending within their means ensures their consumption is their own, related to their individualised economic positions.

For Zoe and Jessica, they delight in their trend-setting ways, having started charity shopping before it became cool. Cool, in this regard, reflects individuality and is about knowing the 'right' places to shop and the 'right' items to purchase for the 'right' price. While we are talking about similar price points to cheaper high-street stores such as Primark, the relative uniformity of the high street involves different mediations of cool. Second-hand becomes legitimised because it offers a non-conformity to the high street, which also reflects on a non-conformity to the capitalist mechanisms of 'fast fashion' (see Horton 2018, and next chapter) but also their wider social milieu in recognition of judgements on account of either boring or excessive style. Charity shopping and second-hand clothing generally offer a way to individuate themselves from associations of privilege and excess.

The relationship between proclaimed low funds and charity shopping was prevalent across groups. Lydia declared that she doesn't have enough money to buy brands and thus wears clothes she finds in charity shops or hand-me-downs. Adele will buy second-hand or from brands she deems ethical, something I will focus more on in the next section. Adele also volunteers in a charity shop, which comes with the added benefit of giving her first eyes on new stock, and she says she has got some good clothes this way. Adele and Lydia reckon that second-hand is better because what people tend to donate tends to be better quality, as typically, it has lasted long enough to be donated. Therefore they can get more interesting or expensive items at a lower cost that other people are less likely to have. In this group, Amy – who is generally quite resistant to the 'edgy' category of second-hand or vintage - disagrees and feels charity shops remain overpriced. Adele's dad pays for her to attend private school, which leads the other girls to question her authenticity. Adele thinks she gets £10 in pocket money, as she doesn't want to spend much of this on clothing. She tends to wear things until they wear out and beyond. She gives an example of some Vans trainers she bought second-hand, which are 'mainly hole now'.

> Adele: Well, I've worn the same pair of shoes for about three years and they now have holes in like every part of the shoe and I will continue to wear them until the top falls off.
>
> Amy: are those your vans?
>
> Adele: Yeah. I didn't even buy them new I bought them for like four pounds, and then have worn them for three years and they are 90% hole, and I will keep wearing them

Adele's shoes are comfy and look nice, and the design isn't available anymore, making her even less keen to get rid of them**.** Their run-down, worn nature contributes to a more second-hand or 'used' aesthetic. Although she downplays that she is deliberately engaging with this particular style, claiming that she just rips her clothes a lot and doesn't replace them, the fact that she brought up the example of her vans in both the discussion group and individual interview indicates otherwise. There is a similar aesthetics of poverty or 'homelessness' that the case of B Gove demonstrated in the introduction. Shoes with holes in them elicit a general down-and-out or 'homeless' aesthetic but, in the case of private school

or politically elite girls, perhaps represents more of a subversion of their economic position. As has already been stated by McRobbie (1989) and Skeggs (1997), only the rich can afford to look poor. This also offers a sense of non-conformity to the rules of respectability and class that Skeggs (1997) found in her ethnography of working-class women. But it is also reminiscent of a kind of bricolage, in which the poor condition of the item seems to add to the aesthetic rather than rendering it no longer useful. The symbolic value for Adele is in the style of the shoe and the origin of consumption, exemplified through the fact the Vans in question were in style no longer available elsewhere. The next section continues the discussion of trends and wealth, in which I unpack codes of privilege and style through the use of joggers.

Case Study: Joggers

As I outline in chapter 1, jeans can provide much insight into the mundane, routine processes of dress and affective mediations of environments in which material items can be used to 'fit' into a specific milieu (Miller and Woodward 2012). Miller and Woodward (2012) argued that jeans are seen as both ordinary and can be used in most social situations, and can also be used to provide anonymity, comfort or relatability. Although Miller and Woodward's work primarily addresses localised relationships and experiences of migrants in North London, the evoking of ordinary positions can also work to evade the kinds of social fixings Savage et al. (2001) highlight in their work on class relationships. Miller and Woodward's (2012) work on jeans also tells of a specific *moment* in time, as one of their older participants exemplifies jeans were transgressive items in his youth, but this was a category he now reserved for joggers and hoodies. Moreover, a specific *locality* in that London as a location has a more cultural aversion to displays of the 'vulgar' in favour of ordinary presentation (ibid). What was missing from their work on this was a critical reflection of the social and cultural reproductions of transgression and legitimation. I would argue this example offers insight into perceptions of class and youth and the means of appropriation in how fashion can shift from 'transgressive' to 'ordinary'. In this section, I want to extend jeans as means of comfort and ordinariness to the uses of joggers. However, while superficial discussions of relationships with joggers highlight their importance in offering dress that is both comfortable and reliably on-trend, deeper reflection reveals significant relationships with

class, highlighting affective modes of embodiment in which joggers legitimacy is constrained to specific social locations.

Joggers have become a staple in the teenage wardrobe as comfy yet trendy choices for many. Yet this is also conflicted against the more recent historical associations of the jogger with chavvy style (Tyler 2008; Atkinson 2010b). As I have already outlined in this thesis, the function of 'Chav' offers a description reflecting a lack of success and work (Francombe-Webb and Silk 2016) while also affective relations of power in which they subject and are subjected to judgement. This section aims to unpack how this historical legacy features in the uses and functions of the jogger. Although there is some overlap in terminology, joggers can be differentiated from 'tracksuit' in small ways, as tracksuits generally relate more to matching top and bottom, shell-suit style. While 'trackies' referred to specifically the bottoms but were more commonly referred to as joggers. But there are, of course, similarities in the general design and function of the bottoms, generally a knit type fabric, elasticated waist and baggy style, which preferences comfort over 'fit'.

Joggers for comfort

Much like the work of Miller and Woodward on the universality of jeans, joggers served a similar function in offering a neutral dress ensemble, a combination of both common and 'on trend' yet a reliable fallback in moments of anxiety about what to wear. For those interested in trends like Zoe and Jessica, jeans had only just 'come in' to trend again during the lockdown. And even then, the trend has been towards baggy jeans, which also allow for comfort. Joggers have somewhat dictated the baggy style, as Izzy told me she wouldn't understand why anyone would buy fitted joggers. Likewise for Jessica, when it comes to embracing the newly back-in-style jeans, she doesn't conform to 'fit' and doesn't know her actual size, but instead buys second-hand oversized jeans, if at all, preferring joggers as they are more comfortable. Thus, even when jeans are purchased, they somewhat mimic the comfortable function of the jogger. Comfort offers not just physical benefits but is also ephemeral in being described as the opposite of being self-conscious (Miller and Woodward 2012), as offering deflection from the 'imagined gaze' of others, which is the most uncomfortable (Woodward 2005). Thus, joggers will be here shown to provide a form of mediation of imagined gaze and privilege.

Joggers were a staple wardrobe item for many of the girls. Figuring out what to wear can be a challenge. Having an item to start with and work around can eliminate anxiety associated with getting ready. In our discussions, I ask the girls to show me or describe an outfit that sums up their style. Zoe informs me that she wears a lot of small tops and baggy bottoms. The outfit she shows me consists of a laced camisole, Nike joggers and a little black bag/purse. Kate also claims to wear joggers all the time; when we spoke, she mentioned her Kappa joggers, which 'give her big 90s vibes'. They have a second-hand or 'vintage' style and are easy to pair with a cropped top. Joggers had become the same kind of 'blank canvas' for outfit creation that jeans were found to be (Miller and Woodward 2012). For Kate, this pairing of joggers and cropped tops are the easiest way to look good. It also points to the relationship between cropped tops and bodies, exemplified in chapter 4, in which she mediates between more sexually suggestive short tops and both gender and sexually ambiguous jogger bottoms. Likewise, Tamara likes joggers because they are easy to wear and go with everything. The prevalence of joggers is now also noted in institutions, with joggers (and trainers) having recently made it to the permissible dress code list in schools amongst sixth-formers. They had become a common choice for college and more relaxed events, assuredly fashionable and comfortable. For the friendship group of sixth formers Tamara and Frankie, joggers offer safety because they are both on trend and comfortable, can be worn up or down and are permitted under the school clothing regulations. Joggers echo the findings of Miller and Woodward (2012) in which jeans could be dressed up and dressed and worn out of comfort and safety; so ordinary they reduce the risk of 'getting it wrong' while also allowing for creativity with other clothing in conjunction with the 'safety' of jeans.

Joggers for the home

While joggers are on trend, and a staple and easy outfit choice for some, they also fulfil a more functional purpose of comfort around the house. During a lockdown, when going out or dressing 'for' anyone became very limited, this was a prudent choice. In the house, Izzy will *only* wear joggers or leggings, and post lockdown has found jeans to feel weird when venturing out and seeing family. These joggers come from a range of stores and brands, with Urban Outfitters joggers being both stylish and comfortable but they can also be simpler Primark ones as long as they are baggy.

Unlike some of her friends, Beth refuses to wear joggers outside the home. The girls discuss incredulously how even though Tabby lives, but 20 minutes away from Beth, she refuses to wear joggers to her house, which Tabby finds strange as they spend much of their time indoors. The emphatic and affective ways in which this is described in which Beth 'refuses' to wear joggers outside of the home is reminiscent of the work of Appleford (2016b) in which distinctions are made between public and private spaces amongst middle-class women. Home-wear (in Appleford's case, pyjamas) is only 'acceptable' in private spaces. Moreover, this aligns with Karademir Hazır's (2020) finding of the antinomy between public and private spaces, which relates to embodied 'good' style. For Beth, her focus is more on her individual style, so the comfort of joggers is permissible inside the home, while to leave the house is to present her individual style

> Lots of people my age, a big outfit is air forces grey joggers a cropped tank top and a hoodie. I never do that, only when I'm at home. And I refuse to buy air forces. I don't like wearing what everyone else wears. I get bored with it. Even my converse I will go out of my way to try and find converse that I've never seen anyone else wear.

In describing 'basic' style, Beth cites grey joggers, white air-force trainers and Brandy Melville. She says she's not saying anything 'bad' about this style, as they are some of her best friends, but that she would not engage in this trend, as she doesn't like to dress like 'everybody else'. Thus, there is a need for Beth to perform her authentic self in public spaces. For others, too, joggers can not only connote basic style but a sporty aesthetic which feels out of reach for some. Nancy, too claims not to be a fan of joggers, neither owning any nor desiring to. She claims that this is because she finds them shapeless, and as she isn't sporty so they would feel out of character. For Georgia too, joggers are what every boy wears, reinforcing that they are too common and not reflective enough of an individual style.

The complication of joggers for comfort or style is made harder for those at boarding school. Rachel makes an effort all the time because, at boarding school, there are people everywhere. For her, there are only a few scenarios in which joggers would be appropriate, as she directs to Emma

> like no offence but I wouldn't wear joggers unless its at night and its really cold and I just can't be bothered to dress up but if it's a day like this [cloudy but warm] I would be more dressed up

Emma, who generally claimed to be less concerned with being 'dressed up', says she's been at their boarding school longer, so she is more comfortable wearing joggers around the other boarders, as she's known most of them for a long time. In this, she says they have known her since she was 13, which is 'like the most embarrassing point in your life'. The wearing of joggers is far secondary to that. Jennifer also agrees that there is nothing she could wear that would make her any more embarrassed than that. Joggers here offer various mediations which centre around comfort; comfort in physical spaces which can draw on individual style or as a form of loungewear. There are also differing reflections on what is appropriate in a space. Emma positions herself as more comfortable in the school setting, so she is more able to 'dress down' than Rachel, who would not think joggers were appropriate dress in most situations. So, while we see some variation between joggers for style and for comfort, what is apparent is that, joggers seem to, at minimum, offer a form of home-wear, and for many offers forms of physical and social comfort. I will next discuss some of the semiotic links of joggers with 'lazy', which perhaps prevents some from wanting to wear joggers outside the home.

'Just' joggers

As has been discussed, joggers can represent a safe choice in terms of outfit; easy to pair with cropped tops, on trend, and comfortable for situations that require it, like school. Frankie feels she is bad at making decisions, so to make her outfit choices easier, she chooses one item to base the outfit around. The item will often be a pair of bottoms, which she rotationally picks from the back of her wardrobe to ensure outfit variation. But she ultimately describes her and her friends' styles as lazy, not wearing makeup often or getting dressed up, but one of convenience.

> I mean, no yeah I just I'm quite lazy, like whatever is easy.

It is in this term ‘easy’ that joggers come to be associated. Joggers have become not only a staple item in terms of fashion but have come to be associated with lazy dress.

> And then on a few days I'll just wear joggers, if I'm going to school I literally just like wear Slazenger joggers every day. But I think when I want to like mix up or pick something, I don't really know what it's gonna be

Thus, joggers are for situations which don’t require effort, such as school – around people they have known a long time – and close friends. Joggers aren’t even necessarily appropriate for family; Frankie claims she would just wear joggers around one side of her family with younger cousins, as she doesn’t feel the need to impress them, but for grandparents and older cousins, she will dress up.

Another conversation about understanding social spaces and modes of acceptability echoed these thoughts. Emma, for example, won’t bother making an effort with Jennifer because - as Jennifer puts it – she knows Jennifer won’t make an effort, so she doesn’t need to. Although not quite as ‘fashion forward’ as Zoe and Jessica, when it comes to going into town, she will put skinny jeans on and won’t wear joggers unless necessary.

> I will dress up a little bit if I'm gonna go into town knowing that I will bump into people for a while... And then, let's say if I know that we're meeting up with the group, like, because we have a little friend group here, then I will dress up a little bit nicer… I wouldn't go completely homeless, you know

The girls are further reflecting on the link between joggers and lazy style, in which Emma says she would not dress in joggers to go into town with friends. She would instead make the effort of wearing jeans so as not to look ‘homeless’. The pressure within an international boarding school may be more challenging owing to the additional levels of wealth they are surrounded by. The girls discuss how their own clothes days are very stressful, describing how there are ‘the Bulgarians with their high-end branded Louis Vuitton, the Chinese with their rich stuff’

> Rachel: the borders yeah theyre rich

Emma: not us, but theyre rich

Jennifer: like, there are so many people in the school in general, that only have branded stuff

Rachel: then again it's a private school so what do you expect

Emma: but then you don't want to look too.. sticking out. You guys know what I'm trying to say

Group: yeah

Emma: you don't want to stick out too much with everyone in their branded clothes you have like, you have to choose and think about it a lot

Rachel: you want to be different, but at the same time not too different.. like you want to..

Emma: you wouldn't show up to class in joggers and a hoody when everyone else is in Louis Vuitton

Emma and Rachel also board, while their families live in Brunei and Thailand, respectively. Only Jennifer is from the UK. Once again, joggers illustrate a hierarchy in clothing styles, acknowledged as on trend and comfortable, but also appropriated from poverty and the same 'chav' legacy as is shown to denigrated elsewhere. Joggers remained linked with modes of acceptability, utilised as examples of 'lower class' style compared to high-end brands. Thus, perhaps why they are appealing as a form of mediating privilege and subverting relationships to class, in which they can perform non-conformity to their class position and that of their peers (Pichler 2009). Their relationship to wealth is inverted, but as was discussed previously, it can also be related to notions of 'basic' and, thus, lazy consumption. Branded clothing is not a clear pathway away from associations of easy consumption, often considered as lacking creativity and too prescribed. But the point is here that joggers are limited in their acceptability. Joggers here have been described as simple and easily on trend, but there are limitations to their uses, in which undertones of 'homeless' or 'poor' style are

negotiated in their uses. Coded in their dress is their ability to flex across cultural and class landscapes and look 'homeless' while displaying vast levels of knowledge - and at times leadership - in the fashion world. Moreover, these discussions are indicative of how they navigate different social situations which exemplify their successful reading of differing social contexts and modes of acceptability. The next chapter will explore how these practices relate to knowledge.

Chapter comments

This chapter sets out the modes of embodiment that are intertwined with 'good style'. Discussions of style position forms of 'excess' with regards to spending and wealth as both subject to judgement and socially unaware. What becomes apparent is how the girls manage perceptions of privilege, engaging with practices that signal value, creativity and authenticity. In the previous chapter, money was integrated into my analysis. And in doing so, I introduced the relative stability of the girls economic positions. I have here further illustrated this through their relationships to fashion consumption. The girls indicate their stable socio-economic positions, or, to draw on a term I can closer connect to material culture in ways which relate to the case of joggers, their *comfortable* positions. As shown in this chapter, the cost can equally be thought of as an important part of the legitimation of style. Brands become a specific material code for these cost evaluations, inauthentic in having too much or wanting to appear to be something they are not. While it does offer insight into confidence and governmentality in girls' everyday practices of dress, the framing requires closer investigation alongside embodiment as a conceptual tool to understand the legitimation of style. Successful performances rely on confidence (Favaro 2017). Confidence is also weaponised as a form of legitimation, invoking individualised senses of freedom in dress, while requiring an ability to engage with the 'rules' of embodied style, which is subject to judgement if not successfully adhered to. Success requires *knowhow*; an ability to naturally situate themselves in various social environments (Karademir Hazır 2020). What is uncovered in this chapter is how the girls mediate against material relationships to class in which they position themselves as humble, dichotomised against 'excess' forms of consumption and in line with these conceptions of ordinary, which preference their autonomy of choice.

Successful embodiment relies on humility in consumption and style, giving rise to second-hand consumption's preference as authentic and autonomous.

Although these conceptions of excess can be levelled at both richer and poorer young people, there are some crucial differences in how these are constructed. On the one hand, this makes sense when we consider the negative connotations of being rich and a desire to be relatable, as discussed. On the other hand, this is constructed against those from poorer backgrounds as they see it as showing off with a little reflection on privilege, stability or room for variations in style. The girls' deployments of material items and modes of consumption allow for mediations which render their practices resourceful and implicate the self as enterprise – all of which indicate an evasion of social fixings (Savage et al. 2001) to 'fit in' and also be oneself while leaving more scope for autonomy. Joggers act as a kind of affective imaginary of the ordinary. What is demonstrated is that this requires a wider reflection on what is considered 'appropriate' to a given situation. This embodied knowledge requires reflection not just on what is worn but *how*. One aspect of this is how comfort is inflected with assessments of laziness, exposing joggers as judgements of character and wider reading of senses of appropriate forms of presentation within spaces. Second-hand consumption offers an exploration of practice which mediates excess and provides a useful terrain for exploring the creative and exciting processes of fashion and dress. Moreover, there is the possibility for symbolic reward in this practice, highlighting class privilege. As previous work on second-hand consumption points to, second-hand offers privileged young people the opportunity to play with class constructs which McRobbie described as "an act of unintended class condescension" (1989: 27). This mediation against 'having too much' at times sways into full class condescension in which private school attendees reflect on their positions as 'broke' and play with constructions of 'homeless' style. The argument is that successful style is able to embody knowledge of wider socio-economic constructs and negotiate these through dress. The girls align themselves as ordinary as a means to mediate negative affects of privilege and wealth. The next section will further think through constructions of style success related to performed knowledge in consumption and dress.

7. Personal politics of appearance

While the previous chapter draws attention to the divestment from styles considered 'easy', this chapter demonstrates that deployments of creativity perform skilful style and consumption while also being a political tool to divest from forms of mass consumption. I demonstrate how girls both negotiate authenticity and assert autonomy in their practices. This is legitimised through creative and political knowledge, which I describe as *informed* practice. As I have already established, second-hand fashion is a form of enterprise and a creative process. In drawing on understandings of shopping and consecration work on the process of 'discovery' incites images of thrill and excitement, in the finding of something new and interesting (Melkumova-Reynolds 2021), while the hunt for the 'right' clothing can take on a predatory form. Moreover, second-hand consumption offers mediated forms of consumption considering their awareness of the perceived ills of 'fast fashion'. The juxtaposition to this is 'basic' style which does not successfully negotiate the political landscape the girls inhabit. In this, it becomes clear that second-hand consumption is used as a means of informed practice. While McRobbie argues that creativity is a tool to enjoy the good life (Berlant 2011), amongst teenage girls, creativity is employed as ethical practice, reliant on a 'knowingness'. The parsing of fashion and the industry become entangled in their uses of fashion to identify themselves as knowing when it comes to trends and moral in the ways they consume. Consumption is subject to regulation on account of moral and political knowledge and the onus on the girls to constantly 'work' on themselves from the perspective of their political engagement and knowledge. In this context, aesthetic labour constructs consumption as a form of work that requires engagement in reflexive practices in order to perform success through market competence and knowledge.

I will begin by briefly stitching together fashion and political trends in their circulation on social media. Social media creates everyday interactions between social networks (Pitcan et al. 2018) and brands (Carah and Shaul 2016) and is arguably a space in which new trends and styles circulate. I introduce TikTok and Instagram as sites through which fashion trends and political information circulate and are engaged with. Contextually for the proceeding sections on the girls' everyday personal politics in their fashion choices, girls are shown to be accountable for how they engage with politics and how this informs their fashion practices. I

discuss variations on trends and a general distinction between 'alternative' and 'basic' style in which 'alternative' can be categorised by a preference for an individual style. All of this points to how girls access political and fashion knowledge, which informs how they construct their personal system of aesthetics. The focus is on an aesthetic based on knowing what to wear to suit the body. I illustrate how 'dressing for one's body' mediates previously explored judgements and regulations while adhering to hegemonic standards of femininity and desirability. Ringrose and Renold (2016) show how this applied to sexualised bodies drawing attention to how girls both invest and disinvest in being 'non-slutty', I also think of how this relates to the 'rules' of fit. Rules of fit relates to Jolles (2012) argument that successful style involves a detachment to social codes and the people who follow them, which she refers to as 'breaking the rules'. Yet, this detachment is an iteration of class privilege. I then introduce the case of Brandy Melville, in which I argue that the notion of what it means to be 'basic' is politically charged. That is the critical assessments of high-street stores where the girls challenge relationships to normative constructions of bodies and whiteness in design. 'Basic' is also coded as rule following. I then outline how the girls express concerns for the environmental impact of fast fashion and how second-hand consumption can be used to mediate this. But consumption and choices are irreducible to one element; understanding the moral implications of clothing is complicated by what is enjoyed and liked, what is trending, and the desire to 'fit' in. Conceptualisations of ethical fashion are both politically charged, passionate practices on the one hand and a means of moral licensing in consumption on the other. Such discourses allow consumption practices to largely stay the same, with small shifts premised on where clothing comes from. There are broader debates on 'ethical consumption' in which what is consumed is linked to forms of moral superiority (see Littler 2009; Steward 2017; Tse and Gheorghiu 2022).

What's trending: social media as a political resource

In outlining how the personal politics of appearance relates to *informed* practice, it is worth briefly establishing social media as a resource for information in girls' everyday lives. Throughout this chapter, I will demonstrate how practices draw on various forms of knowledge related to the politics of identity, fashion production and ethics. What must first be sketched out is how these markers of political knowledge are also forms of trends with

aesthetic codes. It is important to connect how trends circulate online and how political knowledges become part of these trends. I will establish how fashion trends and political information were discussed as circulating via social media. A trend refers to popular movements or emergences of collective patterns of behaviours or styles which can have cultural, social, and economic implications (Welters and Lillethun 2007). These can be localised in subcultures or more global movements and can be applied to studies of both fashion and politics. Trends are ephemeral and performative, influenced by social actors. The purpose here is to provide some context for the girls' social worlds and what holds social currency. This section foregrounds insight into how girls disseminate and distribute information that influences fashion and dress regarding political and bodily knowledge. Social media is by no means the exhaustive mode through which this is done, but the point here is to illustrate a mechanism through which they gather and share information. Although there is much literature about teenagers and their relationships with social media, which have important implications for social worlds and identity, I do not focus on these here. Social media is here viewed as a site for performing the self (Pitcan et al. 2018) and engaging with social and political issues outside of traditional broadcast mediums (Caliandro and Graham 2020).

The short video platform TikTok gained popularity during the lockdown as a creative outlet for bored teens and -drawing on Carah and Shaul (2016)- an additional image machine. Thus, while people were not much allowed outside the home, trends still circulated virtually, with some clothing styles coming in while others faded out. Jeans had become very 'in' over lockdown, but not just any jeans, baggy, oversized and technically 'ill-fitting' jeans. The jeans Jessica had worn the day before our chat didn't fit her at all, so much so she had 'had to' tie them up at the waist with a shoelace, a trend that elsewhere, Frankie informed me, had been popular on TikTok. Thus, drawing on Marion and Nairn's (2011) use of bricolage as an opportunistic and creative use of objects that draw on what is available, I could argue that forms of bricolage trend on social media. Bricolages are then used to construct this narrative identity (ibid). There is a wider aesthetic of resourcefulness, reconstructing the meaning of objects to create something new, which is further exemplified by the previous chapter on the 'homeless' or low-income aesthetic. Why use a belt when a shoelace will do? If we understand social media as a site for performing the self (Pitcan et al. 2018), we can draw

links to bricolage as performance. Similarly, Zoe and Jessica tell me about the popularity of lace tops. Although they had been 'in' since the year before, they were now 'the biggest thing ever'. They discuss how Urban Outfitters ones had particular popularity, so much so that people would buy them at retail price (£13) and sell them for more via the popular second-hand fashion app Depop (£40). Over-the-odds pricing was possibly due to the popularity of lace; Zoe informs me, 'you literally put lace on a camisole, and everyone goes crazy'. The reference to 'going crazy' offers insights into the affectual relationship to trends as they circulate on social media, which may, be informed by how the wider performance mode of social media operates. Still, there are differences in how these are constructed. Zoe and Jessica perform their resourcefulness in declining these price tags but engaging in the trend by raiding their mum's wardrobes and wearing their lace camisoles. Their tactic is to then claim the authenticity of the item by proclaiming it as 'vintage'. Hemetsberger et al.'s (2011) work on 'retro' brands demonstrate how conceptions of retro, or vintage, offer authenticity through ambiguity as young people learn to express their identities. In this case, vintage and second-hand offer opportunities for the girls to position themselves against 'mass' consumption (ibid). Meanwhile, 'basic' represents a safe, on-trend style which is ultimately viewed as lacking in authenticity. This construction of vintage as validation is important for this chapter, as I will endeavour to show the 'vintage' or 'second-hand' style was popular for a multitude of reasons, offering a more individual, alternative style, one that could not be easily replicated, but also wasn't 'new' and therefore did not contribute to the seemingly growing problem of 'fast fashion'.

As trends circulate digitally, so do names for different trends, and fractions of the site reflect this, with Frankie differentiating between 'alt' [alternative] and 'basic' TikTok. Within this, there is political recourse, in which I want to establish hierarchies of trends and styles amongst the girls. In a discussion between Frankie, Zara and Claire, I learned that 'alt' TikTok looked down on 'basic' TikTok for being generic. Thus, the 'alternative' style is one that more successfully integrates bricolage and, therefore, creativity in style, while 'basic' is more closely associated with high-street style, which is more uniform. 'Chav' too seemed to be having some sort of resurgence on TikTok, in which people did impressions of them which implied they were lazy, illiterate, promiscuous, always getting pregnant, didn't wash, and wore too much makeup which was badly applied. Tyler (2008) articulates these and many

other typical tropes in her work on 'Chav mum, Chav scum', demonstrating prejudicial and cultural stereotypes of the 'lower' class. Moreover, antithetical to the 'naturalness' that Karademir Hazır (2020) attributes to narratives of getting it right. Counter to these stereotypes, the 'rich white aesthetic' was also scrutinised and is described on TikTok as people who wear expensive clothing or 'dress homeless' because they think it's cool. The girls generally felt frustrated with the labelling of different groups. It felt as though it put people in boxes, quite antithetic to the creative possibilities of a platform such as TikTok. Many of the girls thought this could be constraining; for example, Frankie feels she has a more alternative style but doesn't like the mindset behind some of the attitudes. Meanwhile, Zara thinks style is sometimes too confused with personality, in which 'basic' comes to be seen as less fun which she doesn't think is necessarily true. Nevertheless, the hierarchy felt clear regarding who was being 'looked down on' and who received backlash. TikTok was judged to have made switching between style groups more restrictive, as this labelling of different styles worked to pigeonhole people. It also leaves everyone open to criticism. Popularity in the sphere of styles and trends could become a double-edged sword, with more followers meaning more people to impress and more pressure to 'get it right'. As such, many girls think their generation cares more about their appearance because there is so much to keep up with. And with that comes a pressure to act or look a certain way, with many girls feeling pressures of accountability as a result.

But it is not just trends that circulate in this way but also political and activist information and ideas in which people come to be accountable for not only their style, but what it indicates about their political positioning. The Black Lives Matter movement gained global attention and traction after the unnecessary and brutal killing of George Floyd by police officers in the USA went viral on social media. The movement incited public discussion on racism and challenging white supremacy, and much of this information was circulated over social media (Chang et al. 2022; Auxier 2020). The girls, too, often posted opinions and information in solidarity against racism and, more broadly, on issues of inequality and politics. Tamara believed the rise of the discussion of racism was partly due to the lockdown, as people have had more time to research and learn about things, which was one of the topics. She also attributed what she saw as a broader political awareness amongst her peers of global debates on inequality and social justice because everyone was at home and 'glued to their

phone'. Moreover, Tamara felt events like the upcoming 2020 presidential election in the USA gave these debates public prominence. As a Black woman, the BLM movement had been cathartic for her in some respects. Tamara recounted how she had previously experienced racism in a youth club she had been a part of. Since the rise of BLM discussions, people have started coming forward and apologising to her either for their involvement or for letting it happen. She was now part of discussions at school, alongside a neighbouring boys' school, about how to enforce zero tolerance of racism for lower years. When I asked her where she and others accessed their information, she told me there are many information accounts on Instagram, some of which come up on her or her friends' feeds, and then the information is shared and spread.

Tamara noted she 'couldn't look' on social media without seeing new posts, suggesting the infiltration of political engagement in everyday life. It was thought to be quite apparent who was (at least) performing engagement and learning. For those who did not participate in this circulation of information, it opened up questions about their political alignment. When I spoke with Lydia, she confessed to creating a new Instagram account solely to watch funny videos, as her regular account with friends had become 'too political'. As a white female, her ability to simply disavow these conversations perhaps also reflects her privilege and would no doubt have been pointed out to her in various social media circles. Yet it also points to the increasing ways in which posting on social media comes to be seen as actively engaging in wider debates relating to politics and inequality and can be criticised for not engaging in this way. There is an investment in issues of social justice and a performance of 'liberal tolerance' (Kehily and Pattman 2006), which becomes a part of trends which will be extended throughout this chapter. In this way, it also becomes a form of enforced accountability. Much like Ringrose and Renold (2016) discuss how teenage feminisms invest and divest in 'slut', teens also invest and divest in forms for 'socially aware' – which Pichler (2009) argued was vital to constructions of 'cool' among teenage girls from privileged backgrounds. These forms of socially aware are then dichotomised against 'unaware', which will be furthered in discussions of how morality is coded in practice in a later section.

This section has thus introduced TikTok and Instagram as resources for the personal aesthetics of style, which are also political. It highlights TikTok as a site where trends and

political information circulate and how these forms can be quite dichotomous between stylistically 'alternative' and 'basic' and politically 'informed' and 'ignorant' in ways favouring a knowledgeable political aesthetic. It also highlights the specific forms of political knowledge that shape how the girls come to understand the world around them. It is not my intention to exhaustively analyse how or why trends and political movements circulate. What I hope to have done is illustrated forms of social media as a resource for fashion trends and political information to offer a useful context from which to springboard into the rest of the chapter. I will cover how issues of race, ethics and bodies feature in fashion consumption practices.

Dressing for your body

As has been discussed, 'good style' is often related to confidence in what is being worn. I come back to a previous quote by Jessica, but here offers more detail into how dress also requires assessment of 'fit' concerning bodies.

> Yeah, I feel like it's definitely to do with like, how things are like the media obviously and I feel like people who dress with maybe more expensive clothing like more designer or like I don't know they sort of, like, have more of a superior complex super- is that how is it like God complex, people who think they're above other people. I don't like people like that. Who just think they're better than everyone else it really annoys me, but I feel like people get judged if they're not wearing like.. I guess, it's to do with if you were judged on what you're wearing. I think it's to do with one: what the actual clothes are and two: some people are judgemental of body types. So if you were wearing - like obviously there's a whole thing about – its like crop tops are made for people who are particularly quite skinny and stuff, I guess, because that's how it sort, I don't know if that's how it's sort of portrayed, and then you can be judged- like people could be judgmental if you're not the right body type, certain clothes or like stuff like that. Like wearing super skinny jeans with like, no bum or something like that with like a really low-cut top like small boobs. It's that sort of thing.

Here, Jessica illustrates the expectation to know how to dress for your body. While this points to how modes of embodiment are relevant in constructions of 'good style', it also demonstrates critical assessments of female bodies in which 'good style' is also predicated on

wearing what will best enhance the female form. The idea that clothes need to 'flatter' reproduces (hetero) sexualised ideas of the body and works to regulate girls' engagement with fashion. Style success requires identity work in demonstrating knowledge of bodies and fit and how to apply these to their bodies. Much like Karademir Hazır discusses (2020), there is a contextual appropriateness to style which depends on body shape. Body shape is evidently linked to racialised ideas of the body. Ideals of not having a 'bum' or the ability to show cleavage are more closely aligned with bodily ideals of a white 'aesthetic of thinness' (Appleford 2016a; Malson and Burns 2009; Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2003; Tate 2014). However, in line with other scholarship, a 'fuller shape' has become more desired amongst white western women as popularised by celebrities such as Kim Kardashian, which is necessarily appropriated from Black female bodies (Cohen 2014; Orbach 2009). Here, there is a reflection on how body shapes dictate appropriate styles of dress depending on the physical shape of their bodies. The next section will provide further detail on the girls' reflexivity for their bodies and dress and how trends rely on white skinny 'shapeless' form through the case study of Brandy Melville.

There are then tensions between fitting in and standing out, which incorporate knowledge of appropriate styles for body shapes. A range of possible emotional responses will be demonstrated at various points during this chapter but concurrently makes the *ease* of dress related to bodily dispositions. For those like Jessica who fit what is often amongst the girls recognised as a white middle-class aesthetic of the thin body, there are coded in her discussion a knowledge that she will not be subject to judgment for wearing cropped tops in the same way as someone who is not 'particularly quite skinny'. Many acknowledged the pressure to fit a certain body ideal, in which they came to understand the normative aesthetic expectations placed on them as young women. However, as with other areas of body and identity politics, the girl's relative knowledge of this was also subject to negotiation. When asked if feeling pressure influenced decisions, Izzy responded:

> definitely really, because I have a friend called Zara, and her boobs are size, 34, double F, which I cannot comprehend. And she wants to wear these little baby tees and these crop tops and stuff but she just can't. And so she hates it. But then there's so many people that have tiny boobs and wish that they could wear all these things

> that are more flattering. Like, it's always not a thing to just be happy with what you've got at the moment. And I know it's hard because you might think like, Oh, I can't wear that because it's not flattering to my body type or shape or something but not everything you wear has to be flattering… I keep seeing these things on Instagram of like a row of women, and they're all the same weight, it says they're all the same weight at the bottom. And they all look completely different. And essentially, it's because one lady she was really tall, quite thin, and the other was really short. And a bit more stout kind of thing, polite way of saying [laughs] but they both weighed the same amount and there is another account that I follow of this lady I think she's between 30 and 40 years of age. And she's had kids and stuff but she works out a lot and she's got quite good abs and she shows one angle of her posing, and they're kind of on her toes a little with her arms posed so they kind of elongate her and makes her, figure look slimmer and more toned and then she does another one of her legs sat down like this, grabbing something, and she's got rolls in her stomach and you can see cellulite on her legs and stuff and she just tries to normalise it a bit more that angles can just be everything.

Here, Izzy recognises the expectations felt to 'flatter' your body type but resists what she felt to be normative expectations for bodies as represented by models on Instagram. Instead, Izzy aligned herself with social media accounts that differentiate between 'Instagram vs reality' in which models and fitness influencers provide photos to show how they make themselves look thinner or fit clothes better to bring about better 'body positivity'. These are the everyday reproductions of the 'love your body' movement that Favaro (2017) discusses, which involves a vocal normalising of 'real' bodies, offering a fresh perspective on the perfect, where the onus remains on women to account for their 'flaws' and reassure others of the same. Izzy positions these influencer accounts as allowing for disinvesting in the 'perfect' (McRobbie 2015). However, there is still a requirement for a strong relationship between women and their bodies. It is a practice among women who also 'work out' – suggesting physiognomic assertions of self-improvement and maintenance.

In conversations about what might make outfit choices difficult, many girls felt that the modern-day pressures they faced as women made it harder for them to decide what to wear

owing to many factors to consider. Zoe had complained that she couldn't get away with the same clothes that girls with smaller breasts could without being called 'sketty'. It becomes clear here that awareness of outside judgements impacts how girls make clothing choices; the expectation that clothing must 'fit' their body types has also been considered. Zoe, too, demonstrates an awareness of the erotic capital of her body (Hakim 2010). 'Sketty' is another sexualised pejorative similar to the affects of 'slut' that Ringrose and Renold (2016) found girls manage and negotiate. In this case, Zoe feels removed from buying certain forms of dress to mediate against this presentation. Racialised assumptions of the body are reflected in their milieu, but the association of 'bad' style with 'chavs' also likely relates to appearing respectable within one's social group. Amongst the girls, many felt that social media contributed to these expectations and put additional strain on how they came to see themselves. Instagram, in that way, became conflictual as a site for body pressures, yet also providing access to a community resisting these.

Discussed expectations of dressing for body shape also raise issues of fit. The current 'baggy' aesthetic may also work to mediate these kinds of bodily expectations – as a blank canvas. There are opportunities to both invest and divest in both 'non slutty' and normative constructions of the body. Baggy forms of dress may offer more possibilities to play around with clothing and form, which may also contribute to the use of joggers. The fluidity regarding fashion lies in how the produced constructed garment concerning gender, type (i.e. lingerie, skirt) and size are not as important as fit. Wearing men's clothes, turning skirts into dresses/ tops, and wearing oversized clothing, can signal further that they understand their bodies enough to play around with the constructs. In that sense, baggy forms of dress can also be a means of performing knowledges. Through their subversion, girls demonstrate their ability to 'break the rules', which necessarily requires understanding the rules of acceptable forms of dress (Jolles 2012). But as Jolles (2012) points out, the ability to successfully break the rules requires social privilege.

'Basic' style: The case of Brandy Melville

The section illuminates debates from the previous two sections by spotlighting Brandy Melville as a store which becomes subject to criticism for offering 'basic' forms of style and reproducing inequality of body pressures in its 'one size' clothing. In contrast, it also offers

opportunities to consume popular styles which draw on vintage aesthetics within the safety of the high street. Brandy Melville is worthy of note in this study as it was used commonly across groups to connote a particular style of the moment. In this case, that is the 90s 'vintage' revival but could be likened to previous work on 'prep' styles (Smith 2013). The discussions of Brandy Melville are indicative of a wider secerning practice of fashion consumption.

I spoke with Izzy, Pippa, Emily and Jade in the summer of 2020. Izzy was mortified to discover that everyone would be on camera, thinking it would only be an audio conversation. She had her hair scruffily on top of her head, wearing grey joggers and a jumper, a 'for home' attire she was not expecting anyone to see. Apologising and going slightly red, she recovered from her embarrassment quickly and was chatty and directive in the conversation. In the discussion of shopping, the girls had made multiple orders online over the lockdown period. Izzy had just done a big order from Brandy Melville. The store was described as being quite expensive, but as Izzy had managed to save quite a lot from payments for cleaning the house, she had saved up enough to do a big order. The influx of new clothes felt exciting. Brandy Melville was explained as follows

> Izzy: I think it's very kind of trendy and girly. I think that like Emily said its kind of 90s 00s style like cropped little tops, everyone. Like all of their models are always so petite
>
> Emily: so small
>
> Izzy: and there is only one size of clothing so if it doesn't fit you it doesn't fit you which is kind of annoying,
>
> Emily: yeah it definitely, definitely aims for like one set people like.

What this conversation offers is both the aesthetics of the brand, which pertain to forms of 'vintage' or 'nostalgia', which has also been linked to second-hand style (McRobbie 1989) in ways which fit current trends. It was also generally described as being better quality than some of the cheaper high-street places. In being both 'trendy and girly', Brandy Melville is arguably stylistically feminine, conforming to forms of heteronormative femininity. The

complication of only offering ‘one size’ clearly fits this idea, framing ‘petite’ as both feminine and stylish. The concept of the body is implicated, in which the one-size clothing reinforces ‘acceptable’ body shapes and sizes. Worse still seems to regulate its consumers by creating exclusivity because of size; who is permitted to wear the clothing. There were negative affective responses on how the girls’ felt about themselves, but they also read this as politically incorrect, which had implications for shopping there.

> Izzy: I think it's kind of unfair because that's sometimes what puts me off shopping there because it's always very like tiny white girls and [inaudible]-
>
> Pippa: -you have to be small-
>
> Izzy: there's no like diversity at all.
>
> Emily: and I’ve seen so many videos of YouTubers like ‘losing weight so I can fit into Brandy Melville’ so it definitely has like…. Yeah.
>
> …
>
> Izzy: Yeah, that's, again something that puts me off shopping there. But I don't follow any of their social media just because it seems a bit dodge, I dunno. I do like their clothes, and it's so hard to find ones similar at other places. But
>
> Pippa: yeah
>
> Izzy: it makes me feel like a bad person but at the same time I like the clothes

The implication of high-street stores only stocking one small size is that it contributes to a diet culture which becomes performed online, as Emily says, with people YouTubing their journey of moulding their bodies to fit the shop sizing. I also learned from Izzy that Emily would actively lose weight each summer to make her waist a certain number of inches to fit what she considered a desirable ‘summer body’ size. There are broader implications for girls' relationships with their bodies and physical health, which like McRobbie (2015), points to the standard of the ‘perfect’. The thin body can signal self-discipline and control, yet the experiences of this can be detrimental. Indeed, in a separate conversation, Zoe recounted

when she and three friends, all of whom had different body shapes, tried on the same pair of jeans in Brandy Melville and all walked away feeling bad about their bodies. Although this can also be resisted, with Izzy following more 'body positive' social media accounts as Izzy says the unfairness of the sizing does put her off shopping. The lack of diversity in sizing doesn't feel 'very 2020', according to Izzy. Therefore, more ethical considerations are apparent in consumption choices and the pressures they face as girls to conform to a particular beauty standard. What was recognised within this was how ethical and moral considerations relate to the body and how fashion is often designed for the white, thin bodily aesthetic. Yet this is too torn against Brandy Melville offering them exciting, trendy and accessible fashion. The kind of fashion that is guaranteed to hold some symbolic status, easily within the lines of 'different, but not too different'. The tension then lies in the personal pleasure procured from the items and the wider awareness of the 'dodgy' business model, which works to reproduce normative standards of the 'thin' white aesthetic.

Brandy Melville came to symbolise a shop for reasonably well-off girls who fit the 'one-size' aesthetic of skinny. The girls themselves recognise Brandy Melville as a kind of aesthetic of white privilege. Moreover, it was commonly denoted as a 'basic' store, where all those who shopped there looked the same. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Jessica reflects on what she would constitute as 'bad' style.

> I just love it when people were like, something that like represents themselves rather than just something basic like really basic just like brandy clothes and urban clothes, just like basic basic clothes that like anyone wears. So I think basic was another one I've put as bad because that's just like it doesn't really show yourself its just a bit like, just like plain or like a bit boring.

Jessica highlights the impetus for utilising Brandy Melville in this case study, as it was often synonymous with what was described as 'basic' style. That is, popular clothes 'everyone wears' feels inauthentic in illustrating the self through dress. There are possibilities to mediate between 'basic basic' (very basic) in dressing head to toe in one 'brand' and more creative in how outfits are curated to be slightly different – buying vintage pieces, niche brands or styling clothes from different stores. It is also worth mentioning that both Brandy Melville and Urban Outfitters were most frequently described as expensive places to shop.

Zoe and Jessica pointed out that Brandy Melville is also a 'basic' construction aimed at more privileged girls who can afford the more expensive price tags associated with Brandy Melville than the cheaper stores like Primark. Thus, 'basic' is associated not just with a boring style which lacks creative flair. In the case of Brandy Melville, this also involves a critical assessment of who can consume in certain stores in ways that relate to the body. In this sense, 'basic' is also constructed as politically so, unaware of the problematic inferences of the normal 'white' body and unimaginative in consumption. What has been established here is how the girls reflect on trends concerning whiteness and privilege in ways which hold particular political salience. I will continue to explore the political motivations within consumption through analysis of 'fast fashion' and mediated 'good' consumption, which reflects ethics and sustainability.

Concerns for 'fast fashion'

Resistance to high-street stores is also motivated by an awareness of exploitative and environmentally unfriendly practices which can underpin them. More broadly, increasing awareness of climate change prompted the creation of the environmental protest group Extinction Rebellion. It is worth mentioning that environmental considerations are viewed differently from other social movements. The group involves a lot of young people, particularly white and middle-class, and some of the girls I had spoken with had been involved in protests. These were considered quite different from the Black Lives Matter protests, with Lydia – who had made a separate account on Instagram to avoid the 'too political' information sharing of her friends – describing a local protest as a 'family affair, very sweet'.

'Fast fashion' became a buzzword amongst girls to describe environmental and social concerns for the fashion industry regarding the overproduction of garments (see Horton 2018). In discussion groups, I asked the girls to write down two words which surmised good style and two for bad. Style could be bad if it were boring or not well thought through, but also if it involved certain 'unethical' elements, such as fur, or supporting 'bad brands'. Primark had become synonymous with 'fast fashion' (see Buckley and Clark 2012) and was often cited as a 'bad' brand. While this did not preclude the girls from shopping there, there was an internal dilemma between what was ethical and what was both enjoyable and

affordable. The complexities of this are exemplified in a conversation between Izzy, Jade and Pippa.

> Izzy: Especially when you don't have a job, and you don't earn money, it's like, oh I could get a vest top or something like a plain little top from Urban Outfitters for 30 quid or one for.. 4 from Primark and it's like, obviously you're gonna go for the cheaper option
>
> Jade: but even places like urban outfitters still have fast fashion in them, it's like how do you avoid it. It's so hard.
>
> Izzy: Yeah, Nike or Nikey [sic] however you wanna say it, people buy clothes from there and they're so bad. And they burn, like rubber or something from the leftover stuff.
>
> Pippa: Yeah
>
> Izzy: outside their sweatshops, and, I don't know how you're so popular and have such a high [profile]. But make stuff for so cheap it's just. I don't understand it.
>
> Pippa: Yeah
>
> Izzy: but you feel kind of out of control like you cant- there's not very much you individually feel like you can do about it other than shop at different places.
>
> Pippa: Yeah the problem is there's like few shops that even if they say they're like good and everything they're not always…

This conversation highlights the conflictual nature of consumption. In understanding how large fashion corporations contribute to climate change, environmental devastation, and exploitation of others, their consumption comes at a price. The sense is that they are contributing to large and wide-scale political problems. Despite a sense of helplessness with the knowledges of production processes, there remains a form of individualised responsibility for what constitutes 'good' consumption. But this is also conflicted against what they individually want – clothing at a price that feels affordable for them. It is understood that it is

hard to find companies not engaging in these 'bad' practices, as even the more expensive high-street stores such as Urban Outfitters or Nike are just as culpable, and this becomes part of the mediation. It's hard to find affordable brands that are doing good things that fit their aesthetic preferences.

Pippa had chosen the topic of fast fashion for an assigned English speech at school, which equipped her with information on the relationship between the fashion industry and climate change. However, as will be discussed more, this is always in connection with the enjoyment of fashion and the desire to follow trends. Being 'sustainable' isn't always cheap, either. As Pippa points out, certain high-end brands like Gucci have reduced the number of seasons they produce new lines in a bid to be more sustainable, but this isn't an affordable outlet for many. Instead, Pippa hoped this would also influence high-street brands going forward.

The debates among the girls and their friends around the problem of fast fashion were complex. Some felt it didn't matter whether they avoided certain places, as the clothes would get made regardless, while others felt they should play their part in combating the problem. Tamara felt she could see both sides, yes, everyone should do their part, but her individual actions wouldn't do much in the grand scheme of things. Where she landed was somewhere in between

> There's like Shein which produces thousands of new clothes every day which is quite a lot so I try to like stick to brands that are maybe more conscious of it rather than ones that don't care at all

Tamara tried to avoid the brands she considered most notorious for their wasteful practices but, like Pippa, also felt constrained by what was reasonable, affordability-wise. Instead, Tamara preferred a brand that at least acknowledged the problems of the industry 'rather than churning out new things'. These included Zara, H&M and Topshop, which have sustainable lines, that indicate a company is at least trying to make changes. Thus, what becomes apparent is how consumption practices become, to an extent, mediated in line with social, political and environmental knowledges. That is an informed practice. But this is not simply about adjusted practices to fit specific personal values but in the *performance* of this; in what these adjusted practices indicate about social and political positioning. In other

words, this chapter highlights how the girls utilise fashion as part of their narrative identity. In this case, it is a positioning of autonomous, conscious consumption and dress which girls mediated in line with their socio-political knowledges.

Second-hand consumption as mediated consumption

Jessica felt passionate about avoiding fast fashion after learning more about the issues with the fashion industry when she, too, had researched for an English project.

> Jessica: I'm so passionate about this, we had to do a speech thing at school about something like I don't know just about anything, and I did mine about fast fashion and like all of that and I've forgotten all the statistics now, but I had like all the statistics down like how bad first-hand clothing is and stuff, and now I just like
>
> Zoe: I don't
>
> Jessica: sort of refuse to buy things first-hand
>
> Zoe: same

This concern for 'fast fashion' prompted Jessica to amend her consumption practices, trying not to buy anything 'new'. Her concern is for the fashion industry's unsustainable practices and their impacts on the environment. Second-hand or vintage clothing is discussed here as a way to reconcile practices of shopping and fashion without contributing to the wider problems of the fashion industry. As mentioned elsewhere, second-hand clothing has come to be seen as cool because of the possibility for individual style, and likely related, the particular 'vintage' trend of the moment. That is, second-hand consumption offers mediated consumption and an individualised response to wider concerns for the environment. I term this 'second-hand' fashion as opposed to denoting a particular store because there are many avenues and facets to second-hand consumption, from charity shops to apps to vintage stores (Gregson and Crewe 2003). Although there are differences, they tend to blur into one in the sense I want to uncover. This section outlines how second-hand fashion offers forms of consumption that allow for negotiation between political concerns, symbolic value and

pleasure and, in the process, becomes authenticated through the practice's various forms of knowledge and skill.

As I have mentioned, second-hand can incorporate a range of forms of consumption. However, it should be noted that in the case of this study, apps had a particular appeal amid the pandemic of remaining functioning and accessible from home. Zara uses Depop quite a lot which she explains as a thrifting app but has also been to different marketplaces like Brixton and Brick Lane. Although she also goes to more mainstream shops and can find things she likes, they do not feel as exciting. Apps also allow for endless consumption, searching for different types of clothing and scrolling through the multiple and varied options. Apps offer a 'digital image machine' that simultaneously allow for 'point, tap, swipe, glance' (Carah and Shaul 2016) *and* shop – in both the aspirational and transactional sense. For Zara, thrifting is more exciting because what is found is more individual and involves elements of organic 'discovery' as what will be found is unpredictable. Thrifting is then positioned as consecration and is more gratifying than a purely economic act (Melkumova-Reynolds 2021). It is a practice reliant on a market knowledge, awareness of trends and a sense of cool involving high stakes in not only finding pieces but the 'right' pieces. That is the affective and creative skill which, in turn, authenticates the practice. The same was felt for Frankie and Claire, whom I spoke to with Zara and resonated with others like Jessica and Zoe. These practices are interrelated; going somewhere new, the potential for finding something new and how what is found relates to knowledges. Finding one-off pieces provides a rush and a sense of thrill. However, the individuality of the pieces also makes them more ephemeral. Second-hand consumption can be a lottery regarding what is available and what is found. The transient nature of stock can also lead to disappointment.

In a conversation about what they would wear to a party with their friends, Jessica shared her pain in missing out on a Guess leather jacket she had found in Traid, which cost £40 she did not have to hand and by the time she had secured the money and gone back for the jacket, it was gone.

> Jessica: I'm so annoyed. I went there last week see the prices in Traid have gone up so much like after quarantine. And so, I went there, and I found this

> jacket, and it's like this black leather jacket and it was from Guess and it was so peng, it was so good. But it was like 40 quid and I didn't have enough
>
> Zoe: so annoying
>
> Jessica: and then I got enough money so I came back like few days later, it's gone.

Jessica was disappointed to have missed out on what she considered a good find, a second-hand branded item that fit her style. Jessica also illustrates a market knowledge of the cost of second-hand goods pre- and post-pandemic. By finding a Guess jacket in a charity shop, Jessica can engage with branded items that hold symbolic value but in a way which feels both more skilful and adheres to more 'sustainable' practices. There is an example of a means of mediating conceptions, as mentioned earlier, of 'excess' that were shown to be associated with buying brands new and providing socially valuable clothing in a more skilful, less costly way. In buying second-hand, she can 'flex' on the price compared to purchasing new, but also on the skill in understanding the value of branded goods (Gregson and Crewe 2003) without simply going to a stockist. Brands become another way of demonstrating market knowledge, but a fine line exists between understanding what holds value and retaining creative control of clothing. There are two levels of value; monetary and social. What is consistently valued is individuality in choices and the skills involved in expressing this in creative and frugal ways. Meanwhile, Zoe was able to show her in-depth knowledge of where in a shop to find the best deals and her interpretation of clothes for her purpose.

> Zoe: ahh. no, what I do is I go -it sounds really gross- but I go in to the big bucket at the back of the shop, which a lot of charity shops have which they keep really under wraps and then you go there and it's where they sell all these like weird sort of one pound pairs of like really gross pants which no one wants, but then sometimes in there you can find lingerie things which you can wear as tops and that's where I got it. So this red corset that I wore to a party was probably, I think two pounds 30 such.. because it's just, along with the pants. So good.

Gaby: So, it's more like lingerie vibes with friends?

Zoe: [laughs] so bad. But yes. sometimes skirts and big t-shirts.. but basically just way more sketty [than for family gatherings].

Here, Zoe simultaneously sympathises with Jessica's disappointment and then moves into her discourses of 'discovery' (Melkumova-Reynolds 2021). Zoe has multiple strategies for finding one-off pieces; she knew certain store areas which housed particularly cheap clothing. She could successfully rummage through unwanted parts to find a lingerie set, of which the top half could double up as a wearable top for a party. Moreover, this purchase of lingerie involves an investment in dress that is aligned with their sexual bodies, investing in forms of 'slut' (Hakim 2010). More than this, it likely also fits localised trends, in which everyone 'goes crazy for' lace. Style is valued in terms of time investment in finding the 'right' item and the skill it takes to spot something (Gregson and Crewe 2003). Both Zoe and Jessica, throughout the conversation, sometimes refer to their use of clothing as 'bad', particularly in relation to the 'edgy' use of clothing beyond its supposed intended purpose. The embodiment of second-hand becomes consecrated as a practice through discovery and skill. The stakes are higher as, again, unlike a high street store, the likelihood of finding something of value is both ephemeral and situationally dependent. In this way, second-hand shopping is here represented as a specific skill which requires 'an eye' for style and flexibility in approach to consumption. Therefore, second-hand shopping provides higher risk and a higher (symbolic) reward.

Finding bargains is sought in the varying forms of consumption and represents the creative forces in style and consumption through resourcefulness. Second-hand shopping provides a greater sense of thrill when successful. Unlike Miller (1998), this form of shopping for teenage girls is not about devotion or sacrifice but is almost predatory (McRobbie 1989). The popularity of second-hand consumption was growing at the time of my research. In fact, according to Zoe and Jessica, the most mentioned app Depop had become increasingly popular over lockdown, leading to sellers increasing their prices and prompting Zoe and Jessica to move elsewhere in search of second-hand bargains.

Zoe: Depop is so expensive

Jessica: yes! The price has gone so expensive over quarantine

Zoe: so expensive. it's all like brandy girls buying like...

Jessica: yeah. Actually I just got a really good bundle this morning. Like really cheap.

Zoe is frustrated that the popularity of Depop has essentially made it more mainstream and, in turn, more expensive. Second-hand consumption is then authenticated in market knowledge. To not have this is to be denigrated as 'basic', as indicative in the disparagement of 'brandy girls'. The value is knowing how to work the system to get something for less than the value price, as 'basic' consumption dictates- contrasting with Jessica, who knows how to work her consumption to get good deals on clothing – buying a bundle for a low price. There's a competitive spirit in being authentically allowed to consume second-hand. The denigration of 'brandy girl' highlights how they differentiate their practices as more creative and involving greater autonomy and legitimacy. Thus, the embodiment of knowledge in *how and where* to buy is favourable over the ability to simply pay for goods. It is this market knowledge that transfers to embodied confidence when it comes to discussing and making clothing choices. Spending less is a way in which they can perform market knowledge. It not only involves skill but is a form of work. Second-hand involves more work in finding items that fit the specifics of environmentally conscious, alternative, and a 'bargain'. On the other hand, high street stores tend to be set up in ways which make it easy for consumers (McRobbie 1989). In consuming clothing in this way, autonomous elements focus on the forms of work and skill that have gone into the practice.

These forms of value in second-hand clothing transcend 'consumption' to include aspiration (Willis 1990; Chin 2001). In this instance, second-hand fashion's importance can also be seen outside of active consumption practices. I will therefore introduce Izzy as a way of illustrating how second-hand clothing becomes engaged with consumption and aspiration. I met 15-year-old Izzy with some of her school friends who represented a fairly diverse group in terms of styles; they felt they were more united by their hobbies than their fashion interests, but they proclaimed to have enjoyed the opportunity to discuss fashion with each other more than they would usually. For Izzy, shopping happened both online and in person, and

although she mentioned Depop as somewhere to buy clothes from, she did not purchase anything herself.

> Izzy: I really like, I haven't ordered anything from there but I love looking at Depop. Because I.. You can find more like kind of one-off things, cos its vintage as well, Urban Outfitters.

Izzy highlights her acknowledgement of the value associated with second-hand clothing and the possibility of one-off things. She then mediates this through her perceived relationship between Urban Outfitters, retro style and individuality. Urban Outfitters provided Izzy with access to 'vintage' stuff that she recognised as cool within the safety of the high street.

> Izzy: yeah Urban Outfitters…that's always in that kind of typical things just because it has nice clothes and they're quite different, like I like that, urban renewal stuff where it's like vintage stuff and there's only like one of it... I don't actually buy them um but That's quite cool to look at, because even though it's expensive it's just feels nicer because you know that not everyone else is gonna be wearing the exact same thing.

In this context, Izzy recognises the promise of 'vintage' or second-hand items in offering individuality, but for her, it is something to look at instead of consume. There is weight to the legitimacy of vintage and second-hand consumption, which is acknowledged in aspiration as much as practice. Much like the work of Chin (2001) and Willis (1990), aspiration can circulate as much as commodities. Depending on the level of aspiration associated with charity shopping, the sentiments of being for a good cause or environmental factors might hold more weight than those who engage in second-hand consumption, who are more preoccupied with bargains and findings on-trend items. Unlike in Chin's (2001) findings, aspirations do not circulate because of a lack of income. Although Izzy points to cost in relation to consumption, it is clear in our conversations that she is not excluded from the market in this way as she goes shopping with her mum regularly and can-do work around the home to earn money. In this instance, aspiration circulates in recognition of what holds social currency, but without the confidence to consume, further legitimising the practice as 'cool'. High-street stores have long been adopting a market aesthetic within stores (McRobbie 1989) in response to the trend for authenticity in the 'find'. We can see how high-street

stores such as Urban Outfitters and Brandy Melville respond to the vintage trend and how Zoe and Jessica will call out the authenticity of this. At the same time, Izzy utilises this to relay knowledge of what holds political and fashionable salience in an accessible way.

The discussion of Urban Outfitters as offering cool individual clothing is also different to Jessica, who, in an earlier quote, positioned the store as 'basic'. This converse positioning between Izzy, and Zoe and Jessica is symptomatic of the wider reading between 'basic' and creative style. Fashion can be read in line with the emerging capital hypothesis, in which Prieur et al. (2023) argue that it relies on a *knowingness* of how artefacts are appropriated. In that sense, the embodied knowledges of Zoe and Jessica, and their positionings as cool, also offers further insight into Karademir Hazır's (2017) findings on the emotional responses of Turkish women with higher levels of cultural capital as self-confident and superior in their narratives of good style. However, this positioning deviates from the discussion of 'taste' to align more closely with knowingness and moral values. Second-hand is positioned as both more creative but also politically better in the way it is informed by the problematic production processes of the fashion industry. Moreover, it points to these constructions of 'basic' as antithetical to successful femininity, which requires self-invention and self-regulation (Jolles 2012). The 'brandy girl' instead "plays by the script, does not deviate, is not liberated. In her conformity, she is unknowing, uncool, and unfun, against the sexy heroism of the rule-breaker" (ibid: 54). In their authentic non-conformity to the traditions of the high-street, Zoe and Jessica are cool, and self-regulated in their mediated consumption.

As has been shown, awareness of the fast fashion industry can be mediated by second-hand consumption or how consumption choices are made. However, second-hand consumption itself is also subject to scrutiny. Frankie had told me that second-hand fashion was becoming more popular in general, and I asked her to tell me more about it

> I think because of climate change and everything and the spotlight on it, everyone wants to be more sustainable so charity shops are a good place to do that with but then there's the fact that people who can't afford clothes will go there, and like I don't know, I think it's good to shop in charity shops but if youre going to be sustainable you don't need to do a big haul either. I think people will cut out branded places but then they'll buy so much and it's like well that's not sustainable either,

> because theyre going to run out of stock and it just doesn't make sense. And then I think people just buy it because it's cheaper. I definitely think the view on charity shops has changed like I don't know what it was like when my parents were younger but I'm assuming it was more of a judged thing. I remember when I was younger and people would be like charity shops, 'meh' [sic]. Like it wasn't an often-said thing. I just remember one girl saying it whereas we're all like oh charity shops, bargain. So I think it's quite trendy to go to a charity shop now. And second-hand stuff like Depop is such a big app now. That is the biggest second-hand app. And it's got good parts and bad parts.

Frankie reflects an awareness of the problems of 'fast fashion' that extend to excess consumption and over-production. Thus, while forms of second-hand consumption are viewed by many as having gained popularity for offering individual items at lower prices, it too can become part of the bigger problem of excessive consumption. Buying 'too much' or big hauls adds to the 'problem', further demonstrating the critical nature through which the girls consume fashion and dress. Second-hand offers a mediated form of consumption, legitimated through political knowledges and the lesser extent to which it has environmental impacts. Yet as Frankie indicates, there are limits to this in which consuming second-hand to mediate 'buying new' is not a radical departure from overconsumption, nor necessarily a revolutionary improvement for the environment, and certainly not for cultural hierarchies of practices. The complexities of this continue to be illustrated in the following section, in which practices are subject to moral regulation.

Moral consumption

This chapter illustrates the moral implications of consumption. Shein was exemplified more than once during my fieldwork as 'bad' consumption. Izzy also commented on her sister's use of the shop to buy multiple items at a low price.

> My sister has done a couple of orders from Shein, and I've not ordered anything from there before. She can get over 10 different things for under 40 quid or something like that. And, I'm like that's so bad. I did used to shop at Pretty Little Thing quite a bit and Primark but I think now I've kind of

> matured a bit I realise how bad it is. To be honest I do love Primark, I can't help it I just love having a look in Primark but...

Shein is an online store where people can buy many clothes for a little money. However, this practice was more often considered vulgar among the girls in my study. Mostly in line with consideration for the environment, buying a lot of clothes considered low cost and low quality showed a lack of respect for the environment as the clothes would likely not be worn much before breaking and would soon be discarded. I would also extend this to consider the 'excess' in consumption, judged through an environmental lens of respectability and care. In doing so, we can think beyond what has already been developed concerning the concept of excess in relation to style, which has traditionally been associated with 'Chavs', and think more broadly about a relationship between environmentalism and excess. Knowledge was used to mediate the consumption in an 'I know it's bad, but' sense and judgement was instead placed on those who also consumed from these stores, but either did not 'know' it was bad or did not seem to care. I would argue that judgement against 'excess' is more individualised in line with public discourse, encouraging individual (female) consumers to change their habits rather than focusing on wider capitalist production causes for environmental damage (Horton 2018). Excess is not delimited by relationships between social class and style. Still, it is more generally utilised by opponents of fast fashion to stigmatise buying multiple items of clothing from 'fast fashion' companies.

When I followed up with Jessica in our one-to-one chat, we discussed some of the variations in shopping, as second-hand consumption was more likely to happen online as opposed to high-street or new items. Jessica outlined the challenges she faced in making consumption choices owing to her awareness of problems within the fashion industry. The following conversation revealed some difficulties associated with making choices when I asked where Jessica tended to buy her clothes.

> I'll have to get clothes first hand unless it's like charity shopping or something. So, I got a pair of shorts from TK Maxx the other day. And.. something else I got like a few weeks ago, oh yeah, I got skirt from H&M. First hand I don't really order things. Oh, except I feel so bad, but there was a really nice top in AliExpress that everyone was getting. And I got it, and it was

like three pounds but I do wear it. What really annoys me is what loads and loads of people do is they find these things on like Shein and AliExpress and stuff which is really really cheap. And then they sell it on Depop for like, there's a top that I got off AliExpress for like four pounds. And I saw someone selling it on Depop for like 25 pounds or something like that like it was crazy. And it's really cheaply made clothes like it's definitely not worth 25 pounds and it's, like it's ridiculous.

Shopping is also a social practice (see Chin 2001; Miller 1998; Zelizer 2005), so Jessica distinguishes between her online and in-store shopping practices. The latter of which may relate more heavily to socialising as part of the shopping experience. The examples of Shein and AliExpress as online stores producing cheap but poor-quality clothing exemplify a tension between awareness of what is considered 'wrong' and what is in style; Jessica struggled to reconcile her desire for nice clothing that her peers had with her values for fair fashion. Jessica offered a rationalisation for her consumption, arguing that she would sell the clothing when done with it rather than dispose of it. She could avoid adding more clothes to the landfill. Although tensions also existed between this and what Jessica felt to be exploiting others through selling cheap clothing for profit, which she did not feel comfortable doing. She also considers the relative worth of items based on quality. There is a conflictual relationship between stated values and style desires, and these moral codes of 'bad' consumption must be negotiated in everyday practices.

Where clothing comes from becomes a big part of how the self is constructed, reflecting a level of consciousness in practice. In essence, blame becomes placed on the individual, and judgements are made either loudly or quietly about what others are consuming, which in turn, becomes reflected in what one is wearing. People may then be shamed into submission.

Tamara: I also think there's a lot of guilt put on people for like shopping it because I remember the other day, I was on TikTok and I watched a video of a girl showing all the things that she bought from Shein and I looked in the comments and literally all of them were just like 'how can you'. It was like she had bought like £400 worth of stuff from there and everyone was like 'if you have enough money to buy £400 worth of this then you could have done this sustainably' and you know like people were kind of like shaming

her a little bit and I that probably is- like people probably don't want that to happen to them so they'll probably be more conscious about it

Gaby: how do you feel about that?

Tamara: I don't think that, well I feel like one of the main problems that people have with fast fashion is that it's not like so just shopping sustainably is not accessible to everyone. And I don't think you should send people really rude messages over like, I mean it is over clothes I don't think that anyone should say anything really horrible or be mean, I get people wanting to like inform them and help them make better decisions but yeah I think that some people online can take things too far.. like they're not a bad person for doing it

The implication is that buying clothes from certain places becomes associated with being a 'good' or 'bad' person. Tamara resists this, arguing there are nuances beyond where people shop. Affordability is a part of this. But she also sees that informing people to help them make 'better' decisions regarding consumption could be beneficial. It is thought that it should be a moral issue in which those more 'basic' consumers are subject to shame on account of excessive consumption, which contributes to environmental problems and lack of creativity. This moral consumption could also be extended to brands as either excessive or showing off – the production of branded clothing can be bad for the environment and is also associated with being flashy. Moral boundaries become drawn in consumption practices in determining 'good style' as ethical. There is an awareness of what they 'should' buy from an ethical perspective and a desire to justify when they have deviated from this. While Jessica felt that people could ultimately wear what they wanted, she too distanced herself from the forms of consumption that she saw as 'for others' whilst remaining focused on clothing which represented herself. Tamara, too, could recognise when others were being shamed, and although she might not agree with that, she would say, 'but that's just not my style' or wouldn't wear it personally. Thus, we see hierarchies in terms of how styles are viewed. The girls draw on codes of excess and ignorance to regulate practices. There is a tension between their sense of what is morally 'right' and the implications of getting this wrong which mirrors earlier discussions of Brandy Melville as 'basic' style. Styles become legitimised through performances of knowledges, and hierarchies are enacted through moral codes of 'basic', which connote a lack of creativity and political consciousness.

Chapter comments

This chapter has sought to highlight the various forms of knowledges that relate to informed practices. I illustrate how the girls mediate between expectations of acceptable dress, creative style and ethical standards and how this is enacted in everyday practices. The girls negotiate passionate feelings about the problematic dialectics of the fashion industry, their creative means, and a desire to keep up with trends as they circulate. Social media is situated as complex and contradictory exposure to both. These are, in essence, codes of knowledges of constructions of fashion – from bodily fit to production processes. The girls negotiate expectations of bodies which involves a knowledge of how to dress. How to dress is complicated by political discourses of sustainability and moral consumption through 'excess', which is in some respects an extension of the previous chapter, but also about the morals of excess in fashion consumption. What is emphasised is how these are negotiated in the girls' consumption practices.

'Basic' indicates lacking authenticity and having poor knowledge of environmental and social concerns. Moreover, it suggests a style failure in lacking creativity in style. Instead, narratives of getting it right – or indeed style success – in part rely on a *knowingness*; of the rules of dress and performing an ability to play with these alongside socially aware positioning against criticisms of production processes of the fashion industry (Jolles 2012; McRobbie 1989). This is complicated by Brandy Melville's 'vintage' (which is actually 90s, but vintage to 15-year-olds) style of dress, which at the same time as being denigrated for being a marketised version of vintage, offers opportunities for some of the girls who don't feel they have the skill to shop second hand to broader engage in vintage style trends of the moment. Second-hand consumption becomes a symbolic means of expressing these knowledgeable positions, which mediate issues of 'fast fashion', and involve a level of creativity in terms of finding items and their valuations of these items. Creativity thus allows for performances of skilful consumption practices while is also employed as an ethical practice. Moreover, the DIY approach to cool consumption becomes evident in examples such as using a shoelace for a belt, in essence constructing a style of 'making do'. In doing so the girls divest from forms of mass consumption and show knowledge and care for the environment in their practice (Horton 2018; Gram-Hassan 2021). My arguments are an extension of McRobbie's (1989) work on

second-hand consumption to consider how performances of knowledge occur in everyday dress. Amongst this group of girls, I would argue political investments in the processes of fashion need to be performed for style to be legitimised. Moreover, this work links with Pichler (2009), who positioned coolness as socially aware. It is evident that the girls' positioning of themselves as knowledgeable against the conformity of simply buying from the high street – the personal politics of appearance involves critically assessed, informed consumption practices.

There are also indications of the hierarchy of practices in which informed practice is positioned as cool and morally superior. The final section discusses this concerning the ambivalences of consumption in which morals and desires are not always aligned. Second-hand instead offered a way of justifying or allowing for consumption while adhering to the moral codes. In that sense, second-hand consumption can also be argued to be a form of moral licensing, allowing girls to continue to engage in consumption practices under the guise of 'ethical' consumption. Thus, second-hand consumption can be multifaceted along the lines of performances of self, creative expression and politically charged, in which 'new' and 'old' can be juxtaposed and fashion can be transformed (Gregson and Crewe 2003) but also a continuation of normative gendered forms, class boundaries and shopping practices.

Conclusions

This thesis has mapped girls' social worlds in ways which critically explore their relationships to their social positions, reflect on the complexities of their positionalities and how they make sense of them. Fashion is an instructive conceptual tool to explore relationships between practice and power in girls lives. This thesis shows, on multiple levels, how girls assert authority in fashion practices and how in wider spheres, they find themselves at a disadvantage on account of their gender. I have long been frustrated with cultural class studies that have glossed over how consumption and fashion contribute to everyday reproductions of inequality. And indeed, the ways in which a specific focus on 'class' can overlook intersections, such as those of gender and age – as though youth isn't a formative period which foregrounds individuals' futures and possibilities. Contra to grandeur conceptualisations such as 'cultural capital', the micro-processes I uncover demonstrate how privilege comes to have its own aesthetic life. Meanwhile concepts of domination are not how the girls view themselves or their practices. For one thing, being a girl is shown to come with its own unique set of challenges, and as I discuss in chapter 3, the starting point seems to be not to take girls seriously. Yet these girls are showing us something important about how privilege is embedded in everyday choices and interactions which extend well beyond any frivolous assumptions of fashion and girlhood. Instead, it is demonstrated throughout that girls uses of fashion are highly political, illuminating their understanding of and how they situate themselves within wider socio-political struggles.

Chapter contributions

This study has required a nuanced approach to theory. I have addressed through material culture the embodied ways fashion is used to mediate relationships, external pressures, and the ways girls perceive themselves. I have also demonstrated the power dynamics prevalent in these interactions, which has required reflections on issues of class and cultural reproductions and the neoliberal sentimentalities of self-reliant, successful femininities. This has informed the theoretical approach of adjudicating between senses of self, and wider cultural implications and too informed the ethical emphasis on ensuring that teenage girls are represented as multi-dimensional social actors. This section will reflect on the four

empirical chapters. I will here conclude the key points from each chapter as they contribute to the research questions and wider sociological debates.

Navigating relationships

This chapter draws on what is outlined in 'mapping post-feminist concerns' chapter 2. It provided empirical evidence to illustrate the challenges of 'being a girl' and how girls navigate everyday governmentality. Moreover, the chapter contributes to material culture understandings of dress as a form of mediation, drawing on Woodward's (2005) discussion of the 'imagined gaze' as a guiding principle for how the girls discuss their uses of dress in different spaces. However, as I show, it is not only a matter of an imagined scrutiny of others that the girls contend with, but there are more physical forms too. I demonstrate the physical regulations of their bodies in dress codes, of uniform in schools and codes of acceptability in families, highlighting the sexualised gazes on girls and how the girls use dress to negotiate their positions in these spaces. This also raises concerns about the commonplace of sexualisation of girls that occurs in everyday ways, and what this means for their understandings of themselves and their mediations of dress.

In agreement with existing research on the topic, girls' friendships are both intimate and complicated (Frith 2004; Hey 1997). Friendships offer freedom to express themselves in ways requiring less calculation for wider subjectification. Class boundaries are also drawn in these more intimate peer relationships. The girls view their teenage years as particularly scrutinising and reflect on the anxieties of 'getting it right' amongst their peers. 'Chav' operates as a descriptive term for a specific style, with pejorative and derogatory connotations. While there were various expressions of this and resistance to 'labels', the underlying indication was the 'Chav's were assumed to be mean and also a form of excessive style subject to forms of judgement. This demonstrates localised power dynamics and how the girls understand classed positions. Thus, girls still mediate between understandings of what is considered 'appropriately' feminine, in being 'nice' and embodying a more naturalised style (Karademir Hazır 2020). Mediations of dress in environments reflect modes of 'appropriateness' in social relationships, which vary between institutions, families, and peers. All of this contributes to the 'messy realities' of girls' lives as they navigate differing

forms of scrutiny and judgement in different spaces, influencing their understanding of 'getting it right' regarding forms of dress.

Cropped tops, in particular, offer material exploration of how relationships are navigated and negotiated. The cropped top functions differently across social spaces. It offers insight into institutional regulation and sanctioning and the sexualisation of girls' bodies by adults – both by teachers and family members. Further illustrated through girls' discussions of 'the one dress' they wear with family that models appropriate modes of femininity to imply innocence. The dress allows for the enacting of boundaries that leave them less open to scrutiny. The girls' assessments of what is 'acceptable' depends on a given space, and this is also informed by institutional and social codes of dress. These social codes may also affect how the girls feel they can dress in public spaces, from the high street to local parks. In how these wider regulations and sexualisations may inform the 'imagined gaze' of their bodies. Conversely, cropped tops amongst friends can offer opportunities for modes of self-expression and individuation. In which cropped tops offer opportunities to feel more mature, both in terms of age and sexuality, affects that are expanded on further in the summarisation of the following chapter.

Performing separation

This chapter demonstrated various relationships of power and practice in friendships and families, in which girls make sense of their positions and negotiate their own autonomy. There is an exploration of the pragmatic and aspirational elements of their material relationships and how these are used to perform separation as autonomous young women. The case study of B Gove at the beginning of the thesis was the start of this analysis. The chapter utilises the concept of narrative identity to demonstrate how girls use fashion to individuate their dress and consumption practices. Fashion illuminates how the girls' senses of self are constructed in relation to the 'other', that being a 'style failure' (Croghan et al. 2006). Style success requires individuation from their opposites, demonstrated in how girls consider their opportunities for dress to offer more room for freedom and creative expression than boys. Moreover, their sense of self is individuated against younger versions of themselves as more autonomous and fashionable. This individuation provides insight into how the girls understand their dress as authentically 'them'. The example of copying

demonstrates the interrelationship of power and practice in which girls carve out space for their own autonomy. There are also forms of enterprise prevalent in how they manage money. From the engagement in second-hand cultures, which corroborates McRobbie's (1989) early work on second-hand cultures, to the ways in which they 'work' their parents for additional cash. The girls negotiate various forms of financial control in ways which ringfence their freedom. I demonstrate that in these spaces of freedom, the girls see themselves rather than be beholden to their parents in ways which resonate with entitlement (Zelizer 2017). It is equally visible in their consumption practices that the girls prefer creative means to accumulate clothing through strategies of finding bargains based on what they consider affordable.

Jessica's example of her pair of Armani jeans highlights the significance of creative means of performing separation. The jeans offered individuality in coming from a non-standard high-street store, less likely to be directly copied and they fit the oversized trend. The jeans thus performed creativity and authenticity, which individuated Jessica's style. As Jessica has been reprimanded for misappropriating funds in her consumption of the jeans, the story emphasises the unequal power dynamics in which the girls do not have full control over their finances and can be subjected to financial and moral regulation in their consumption. However, Jessica portrayed the incident as more of a funny anecdote, focusing instead on how she can earn her own money – by selling her clothes. The Armani jeans represent an enterprising opportunity, something she could sell to make her money back or even turn a small profit. Thus, offering a material illustration of performing separation in which individuation can take multiple forms. Despite a lack of wider sociological discussion on the means through which teenage girls (and teenagers more generally) access money and finance, the chapter demonstrates the potential for the exploration of money to illuminate everyday consumption practices, relationships to material goods and the girls' own senses of self and autonomy. These discussions of money by the girls complement their uses of fashion in which they ringfence room for autonomy. In this case, there is a marked individuation from their parent's positions – emphasising a self-reliance and enterprising spirit. Some of which informs the succeeding chapter in the humility and resourceful uses positioned against 'excess'.

Mediating privilege

This chapter explored the embodied principles of 'looking good', which draw on neoliberal sentimentalities of success and 'emerging' forms of class performance which prefer an ambiguity in dress. The girls mediate between an awareness of the implications of various forms of excessive dress, in either *trying too hard*, in how much is spent, or being socially unaware of being rich or *spoiled*. There are narratives of getting it right. The chapter thus draws on conceptions of the 'ordinary' to mediate this. I also refer to Pichler (2009) to argue coolness is performed as a tame non-conformity from their positions of privilege while building on the previous chapter that 'authentic' style is legitimated through creative and autonomous choice. In that respect, second-hand allows this performance because it is *resourceful*- embodied in not just what is worn but *how*. Brands are illustrated as a means of articulating creativity and privilege – in which overly branded clothing signifies excessive or lazy consumption. Contributing to arguments that emerging forms of cultural capital more acutely relate to popular culture (van Eijck & Knulst 2005; Warde et al. 2007; Prieur et al. 2023). Cultural hierarchies are maintained through embodied forms of dress and 'knowing' what wear, as demonstrated through their discussions of confidence. However, I present that this is more nuanced, as these embodied forms do not operate as modes of domination but rather as a strategy for mediating negative perceptions of wealth. This is argued to be antithetical to meritocratic forms of style in which style success involves creative work. McRobbie (2016) situated the desire to 'be creative' within a neoliberal landscape – as a form of labour. This chapter adds to her arguments of how creativity has become a form of work – and how women, in particular, come to take up 'passionate work' – by illustrating how this occurs in everyday interactions amongst teenage girls in which fashion and consumption are legitimised through performing 'work' in finding and styling items. In this, hierarchical assessments of dress are formulated through denigrating that consumption which is considered 'easy'. Moreover, 'working' to find bargains acts as a means of mediating privilege as they are not spending more than they deem necessary. There is equally a neoliberal narrative of personal responsibility in which one is expected to consume within their means.

Mediations of privilege emphasise that an 'ordinary' position is to not be excessive in consumption and to perform a creative disposition. At the same time, I have established that

the girls in this study are comfortable - comfortable regarding dress and class position. The example of joggers is shown to present affective imaginaries of 'ordinary', in which, on the face of it, joggers can appear 'post-semiotic' - relating to relationships of form, ambiguity, and fitting in. I combine material analysis of jeans in the work of Miller and Woodward (2012), which offer analysis of comfort and 'ordinary' and overlay conceptions of embodiment. I argue that despite superficial first discussions of 'ordinary', this is, in fact, layered to include subtle hierarchies according to *how* it is worn, in which comfort is also coded as easy – while preferences for consumption practices focus on an earned style. I demonstrate the particular modes of embodiment which allow mediations of class in which the girls play with forms of 'homelessness' in ways that appropriate poverty while still engaging in hierarchical productions of what constitutes legitimate fashion and dress.

Personal politics of appearance

This chapter builds on conceptions of knowingness as a means of *informed* practice– characterised through political knowledge – of fast fashion and issues of bodies, race and whiteness. What is apparent is the moral codes that become tied to consumption practices. These are often described stylistically as either 'basic' style, which follows high-street trends, or 'alternative', which becomes shorthand for a legitimate style that successfully performs individuality and creativity and is informed by 'ethical' consumption practices. Second-hand consumption is seen as the successful decoding of legitimate trends in a way which still performs a 'knowingness' (McRobbie 1989), but this is extended to think about how the creative dispositif informs embodied forms of style. What is at stake for them as teenage girls is knowing their bodies and what suits them and having a wider knowledge of the implications of the fashion industry – their consumption practices are built on these knowledges. That is, to take up socially aware positions (Pichler 2009). The positions range from conformity and resistance to heteronormative ideas of 'thin' bodies to how there is an implicit whiteness in thinness to broader social justice movements. Social media offers complex and contradictory exposure to trends and political information but is also where hierarchical patterns of authenticity and legitimacy circulate and reproduce. One way these circulations of trends are evident is in the use of a shoelace as a belt – which Jessica had informed me she had done with her Armani jeans and that Frankie, in a separate

conversation, told me was a trend circulating via TikTok. This too, informs not only trend circulation but illustrates a form of bricolages that richer girls come to be associated with. Thus, further illustrating appropriations of low-income positions while performing creative skill in style. Aesthetics of baggy are also suggested to allow playing with gendered expectations through understanding expectations of 'fit' for body types well enough to play around with the constructs while also indicative of the second-hand aesthetic.

Despite marketing constructions of girls as 'fun' and feminist concerns that this deployment works to de-politicise girlhood and produce ideal neoliberal subjects (Coulter 2021), girls' consumption of fashion is shown to be highly political. In the context of this argument, there are everyday negotiations in which girls juggle the implications of inequality in fashion's infrastructure and issues of social and environmental justice, alongside their enjoyment of participating in fashion trends. But moral judgments are being made here too. In a sense, the girls are reifying critiques of 'mass culture' in which high-street consumption is considered mindless and easy. But we know enough from cultural studies to understand that this is rarely, if ever, the case. Consumption of the symbolically most 'mass culture' forms still has multiple forms of practice and value intertwined within them (e.g. Willis 1990). What we see then is an everyday form of cultural critique, enacted as excessive, inauthentic or easy, but actually imbued with an intellectual hierarchy which, at a very basic level, simply denigrates personal choices and practices, on a more concerning level, reproduces cultural class privileges through hierarchical notions of ethical and authentic forms of self. Conceptions of good style were far more grounded in embodied forms, drawing on discourses of class and neoliberal sentimentalities of 'ethic'. This conception was varied from moralistic to individualised performances of confidence, but underlying is the conception of work; work to make oneself presentable as self-reliant, confident, and self-aware through positioning themselves as knowledgeable of wider political stakes in the fashion industry. What is underlying is how these become embodied in the construction of style; finding clothes which fit, understanding the rules of what looks good and the rules of moderation, discussed through not taking or having more than is considered needed.

Key contribution: narratives of autonomy

This thesis offers nuanced insight into how fashion and dress are used to negotiate identity and mediate social positions among teenage girls. Exploring girls' uses and experiences of fashion and dress uncovers complicated power dynamics. As I outline, narrative identity is the means of telling the story of self; thus, it is performative and reflexive. Drawing on the work of Marion and Nairn (2011), narrative identity can be used to demonstrate how girls tell these stories through fashion. The girls discuss various forms of regulation of their bodies and sexuality and forms of financial and moral regulation. Yet, practices are shown to be highly calculated to ringfence room for their autonomy across different social landscapes. These involve complex forms of negotiation and calculation and are reliant on understanding wider social codes to navigate social spaces successfully.

Despite various ways in which the girls experience regulation on their bodies in social spaces, discussions focused on pragmatic responses to this in how the girls had learned how to use dress and style to negotiate forms of regulation and judgement. In some ways, this relates to the attention paid to outfits dependent on social situations to mediate the imagined gaze of others (Woodward 2005). Yet, in other respects, the girls draw on forms of femininity, age and 'appropriateness'. While these also reflect the class presentation of 'good' girls with 'good' style (Francombe-Webb and Silk 2016), I will first focus on how the girls negotiate their autonomy through illustrating an embodied understanding of what it means to be a girl, and how codes of femininity can be drawn on for their own purposes. The girls demonstrate an acute awareness of the sexual reading of their bodies (Ringrose and Renold 2016) and how they use this to navigate spaces in which they simultaneously invest and disinvest in forms of sexuality. From 'flowery dresses' to 'cropped tops' girls mediate their own experiences and respond to wider social codes of acceptability. In their understanding of the codes of young femininity as innocent, the girls demonstrate how they can 'hide' the maturing part of themselves in floral dresses that reduce the possibility of them being subject to scrutiny. Thus, while Coulter (2021) argues "the implications of not being pretty, as girls are constantly told in consumer culture, are to not have value and to be invisible" (2021: 496), the girls demonstrate their uses of these codes of femininity and in/visibility to navigate their positions in spaces. All of this points to the forms of calculation in dress, which enable

the girls to actively negotiate everyday governmentality. Likewise, despite these deep-rooted relationships between their dress, bodies and gender, the girls utilise creative expression in dress to set themselves apart from boys. By focusing on creativity and skill, they ameliorate their practices in ways that position their embodied understanding of different social spaces and their ability to command their place within them.

The work of Zelizer (2017) has been instructive in thinking through how material relationships – in her case, money – can offer power and control, freedom and constraint. This thesis contributes to this by demonstrating how the girls negotiate varied and complicated forms of access to money in their everyday consumption practices. The girls have biographical reflexivity in which they view their styles and practices developing as they 'mature' and how they ringfence room for their autonomy within this. As Zelizer sets out, money is unequally portioned out on account of identity markers such as race, gender and class. As I demonstrate here, it is particularly complicated amongst youths who are, to some extent, reliant on their parents, despite their own personal narratives on this. However, by combining McRobbie's (1989) work on second-hand dresses and enterprise culture with Zelizer's work, it is possible to explore the enterprising means of buying and selling their clothes acts as a means of making their money go further, and in circumventing parental control. Prieur et al. (2023) highlight the need to reconsider economic capital as part of a wider economic and sociological concern for growing wealth inequalities (Piketty 2014; Savage 2021). I demonstrate that money is a dynamic concept, leaving room for exploring systemic and interpersonal inequalities. Critical reflections on this approach are particularly necessary in debates on young people for whom we cannot simply locate within the labour market. At the same time, enterprising cultures suggest we cannot singularly look to 'pocket money' or allowances. I will first explore second-hand as a specific means of consuming, which can incorporate these economic tensions and wider secerning and political positions of the girls' practices.

In their discussions of fashion and consumption, the topic of 'fast fashion' came up more than I had expected. I anticipated far more positive discussions about the high street than I found to be the case. Perhaps this was a reflection of the *types* of girls I spoke with. Reflections should, of course, consider that these discussions will at times differ from

practices – even Jessica, the most staunchly anti- 'high-street' did also buy from high-street stores, and local shopping centres remained something more than 'shopping' – a space to socialise and spend time with friends (Chin 2001). Nevertheless, the discussions illuminate how valuations are made based on fashion consumption, how these relate to wider infrastructures, and concerns for climate change. Second-hand became the means to mediate these environmental concerns while still engaging in consumption practices, from the enjoyment of shopping (and the consistency it brought during the tumultuary of the pandemic) and keeping up with trends. Second-hand consumption offers opportunities to fluctuate between trends, in some respects increasing opportunities to engage in different styles and move along in the flow of new trends. Moreover, second-hand offered a form of consumption of fashion that is more directly related to their own uses of knowledge and creativity. Market knowledge indicates autonomous practice, and in having such knowledges comes the ability to play with forms in ways that align with tame non-conformity to the high street while maintaining an alignment with popular trends. Second-hand is also a sort of trend – the ability to find fashionable pieces with a more individualistic flare at a cheaper price point than if bought 'new' represented a certain kind of 'cool'. Cool in performed social awareness (Pichler 2009) of why second-hand is 'better' for the environment, in not conforming to the 'basic' consumption of the high street, and in exercising creative skill to find fashionable goods or direct new trends. In doing so, in both avoiding the ease of high-street consumption and finding bargains, second-hand becomes a form of autonomous style. It both mediates concerns for financial limitations, as the focus is on finding bargains and is 'discovered' in finding more individual pieces. Moreover, the specific political rationale furthers this in the sense that it performs dress predicated on *choice,* wherein practices are informed.

Finding bargains makes sense prima facie, alongside discussions of complications of getting money in which they are subjected to regulation and control. Yet, how this is positioned relates to forms of 'work', an individualised ethic of having worked to find the 'right' pieces, further illustrating similar arguments made by Gregson and Crewe (2003). This preference for second-hand and the political reflections in consumption could almost be a promising resistance against the monotony of the capitalist machine. Yet they are positioned in ways which assert the legitimacy of the practice over those whom they consider basic, boring, or

worse chavvy. The girls become secerning in their readings of appearances, but aesthetics is extended to cover consumption practices – where items come from as indicative of a moral or political standpoint. What becomes apparent is the moral superiority of these types of consumption, which reflect on issues of environmental and political implications of sizing and the industry, in which there was a marked deference to consumption practices which considered this, even amongst girls who don't actively consume 'second-hand'. The trend towards vintage-appearing items, or awareness of the benefits of second-hand were apparent. What was recounted as symbolic value was the knowledge and creativity to find items permissible in political terms, feasible with limited and disparate incomes, and promoting individuality in style. Successful navigation of this through style acts as a social code for creativity, which can incorporate codes of personal responsibility and self-reliance (McRobbie 2016; Croghan et al. 2006). What is apparent is that hierarchies of style reflect wider reproductions and illuminate the aesthetic life of privilege.

What has been clear is the relative *comfort* of the girls, and that privilege had cultural and economic elements. Rachel, for example, was not 'rich rich' because she understood the value of money. On the other hand, private schooling was seen as an indicator of privilege, evident in Jessica's discussion of B Gove. She felt it important to point out that Gove attended the local state school in response to discussions of her privilege. Disidentifying from a class position is not new by any means. As Skeggs (1997) discussed in her seminal work on class and respectability, class is affective - drawing on how people feel in spaces and the desire to present oneself as respectable. In the case of this research, respectability was not sought after in the same way. In this case, it related far more to a neoliberal work ethic. Savage et al. (2001) discussed the ambivalent, sometimes defensive affects of class, in which describing oneself as 'ordinary' left more scope for meritocratic success. Like Pichler (2009), privilege is associated with being 'sheltered' and socially unaware, but I would also extend this to the narratives of autonomy, which inflect style success as being earned. It is also tied up with aspirational affects of 'cool'.

In this sense, 'ordinary' becomes a means of mediation. It indicates discourses and attitudes which reprimand privilege for not being earned. Rather than seeing this as some form of 'cultural capital' then (Pichler 2009), instead it would be more closely aligned with new

'emerging' forms of capital which should account for social and political knowledge as well as varied popular cultural knowledge, but perhaps even more so simply with an inverted, ambivalent, or defensive relationship with class. Studies of 'emerging forms' of cultural capital discuss trends of cultural consumption which indicate the more ambivalent positions that young people occupy, demonstrating a change in consumption patterns since the time of Bourdieu (1984). I here offer a deeper exploration of the everyday practices and mediations that occur within these spaces. What is demonstrated in this thesis is how the girls simultaneously contend with hierarchical understandings of embodied style - which also consider their subjectification - and constructs of the inauthenticity of wealth. In elucidating this, the implications are that emerging forms of capital need to further address the political landscape in which young people reside. As I argue in this section, further attention needs to be paid to these subtle dynamics, as indicative of wider reproductions of class and privilege. The knowing way of dressing has implications for the ability to not only feel comfortable, but also feel a part of privileged spaces. The girls discussions of 'excess' in style and consumption are seen as lacking social awareness of privilege and knowledge and thus 'tacky', which, while most explicitly discussed in relation to spending 'more than one has', can speak across social and economic positions. In this, the girls find ways to mediate their privilege through valuations of cost and spend, of certain spaces, or performing authentically constructed style. As I endeavour to argue here, there seems little room for positive identification in this area. There is a sense the girls feel 'damned if they do, damned if they don't'. Thus, to distance oneself from it acts as a form of protection - however misguided or appropriative. In some ways, conceptions of 'ordinary' describe a desire to fit into one's social landscape. In Blue Jeans, Miller and Woodward (2012) argue that denim offers a localised form of cultural fit between naturalised British residents and immigrations on the streets of North London. Likewise, here joggers have been a means of middle-class girls blending into 'basic' style. However, I also highlight how understandings of social class are enacted in these scopes of 'ordinary'. Moreover, in line with McRobbie's arguments of the apparatus of the perfect, a particular disease of the middle class, the girls discuss how they use social networks to contend with being a 'normal person', which too can draw on conceptions of the 'ordinary'. While my research shows to an extent, a focus on the 'ordinary', particularly in resistance to being labelled or 'put in a box', this is not always so innocuous, with certain indicators of 'individuality' as a form of performed neoliberal 'success' which links ideas of meritocracy –

that what is consumed is ‘earned’. The discourses surrounding issues of having or not having money are illustrative of the girls’ deeper relationships with their social positions, as well as the wider neoliberal context in which the girls wish to see themselves as autonomous instead of benefiting from their economic positions. The most extreme case of this is reflected in the introductory case study of B Gove, in which she actively performs a separation from her ‘conservative upbringing’ in her aesthetic milieu and has been further evidenced throughout the girls' discussions of ‘necessity’ in their bargain-hunting. Moreover, Zoe’s explicit rationale for shopping second-hand is being broke. But it also presents the challenge of the potential for change in this regard, as this distancing also works to protect current rationalities. By proclaiming oneself as ‘broke’, there is little scope to have productive cultural interventions which address these subtle differences in conceptions of acceptable and unacceptable forms of ‘broke-ness’ and how this manifests in aesthetic dispositions. Instead, it is clear how the girls can flex across social landscapes, looking ‘homeless’ when they want to, but in line with their wider reflexive understanding of what is ‘appropriate’ for a space. All of this points to an appropriation of forms of dress while maintaining the privilege to differentiate dependent on social environments. Thus, practices focus on negotiating these complex senses of self in gendered disadvantage and class advantage without feeling defined by these categories. Autonomy is tied to authentic performances of self, which can mediate privilege through aesthetics of ‘ordinary’. Codes of aesthetics seem to simultaneously perform knowledges and prowess in fashion while removing possibilities for the challenge of privilege. This thesis offers a closer look at the nuances which underpin these relationships to class categories through the ways they are mediated in dress.

This thesis demonstrates the calculated ways girls ringfence rooms for freedom across social landscapes and how political, economic and social knowledge of fashion and consumption help to perform autonomous choice. The girls demonstrate the multifaceted ways in which the girls experience social environments which incorporate both micrological and wider power relationships and how their practices are informed by these. Looking at fashion and dress offers insight into a whole complex system of mediations between relative regulation of their bodies in ways which reflect their specific gendered and aged position, while also providing insight into how they understand their economic and social positions. They negotiate their complex senses of self and social positions through their narratives of

autonomy. I highlight how experiences of gender and privilege are embedded and negotiated in everyday interactions and how positions of 'ordinary' allow the girls to mediate their privilege. Second-hand offers many of these mediums, from shopping on a budget to deciding what kind of implications they want their consumption to have. To 'be creative' has specific implications in the neoliberal market, but within their particular culture, it is also a means of owning their gendered experience. This thesis positions girls' fashion practices as highly political, counter to concerns for their de-politicised or mindless positions in consumer culture (Horton 2018; Coulter 2021), but it also raises concerns about how in 'ordinary' positions which focus on meritocratic success, there is little room for discussion of productions of inequality and unfair advantage. In focus on ways they are autonomous, there leaves less room for accounting for the kinds of inequalities in access to resources; how second-hand is argued to be a particular privilege in who can afford to look poor (McRobbie 1989; Skeggs 1997); how limited access to resources can lead to poverty shaming and which takes on a meritocratic form wherein a lack of economic resource is seen as a lack of care in appearance (Croghan et al. 2006).

Implications

Markets

There is a noted trend towards second-hand consumption, underpinned by political concerns. I want to suggest that these practices and moral codes have wider implications. Part of my argument is to contribute to how practices are informed by knowledge principles that contribute to hierarchies of legitimation. But this is not based on superficial concerns the 'fashion industry' produces 10% of carbon emissions, contributes to polluting and overuse of water sources, while 85% of postconsumer textiles under up in landfills each year (UNECE 2018). There have been growing public discourses on 'fast fashion' and media reports which highlight the very real environmental consequences of this kind of overconsumption – in documentaries like Stacey Dooley's 'fashions dirty secrets', Aja Barber's book 'consumed: The need for collective change; colonialism, climate change & consumerism' and social media based activist groups such as Learning for Labour and the War on Want. This activism targets excess production and consumption, the impacts of these on climate change, and the exploitation of people who make clothes. Since conducting this work in which the girls

activated buying and selling practices on second-hand forums such as Depop and Vinted, I have informally observed changes in the operations of some of the most popular and cited fast fashion brands. Indeed in 2022 popular reality TV show Love Island changed its sponsor from Pretty Little Thing to eBay – championing the 'second-hand' nature of the platform. In turn, Pretty Little Thing set up their own second-hand marketplace, where their consumers can buy and sell their clothing second-hand under the guise of the 3 'r's' 're-selling, re-using, and re-wearing' (and Pretty Little Thing can take a percentage of the sales- but that is a whole other can of worms). The need to be seen to be responding to this movement is palpable. The popularity and trend of doing this have not gone unnoticed by broader corporate structures and would thus indicate that these girls' influence on market structures is wide-reaching. I do not want to overstate this impact. Viewing fashion as an assemblage means recognising flows of influence span production, intermediaries, and consumption and that girls themselves will have been influenced from elsewhere (social media, for example). However, this problematising of the fashion industry and ethical' consumption has largely been women's work (Horton 2018). I think that the girls' everyday practices and assertions of these trends should not be underestimated within this, particularly as this thesis offers insight into the modes through which second-hand becomes legitimised.

Money

What I have set out to argue so far is that the meaningful consumption practices of girls rely on political know-how and forms of work, which have wider market impacts. The importance of second-hand is highlighted as a means of devolving issues with 'fast fashion' but is also enjoyable, involving forms of valuation in terms of getting 'cool' items for bargain prices. For the purposes of this argument, therein lies a relationship between consumption, money, and fashion. I argue that the girls' relationships with these relate to their understanding of class positionings. Yet future directions could more clearly explore the connection to money's social and economic functions. I would argue that studies considering youth experiences, fashion and consumption, and social issues of class and gender should more directly address how people get money. Although I did ask about the specificities of how the girls consumed clothing during my fieldwork, it was not until later in my data analysis that I realised how much it tied to recurring themes of excess and valuation in how the girls discussed

consumption and fashion choices. Regarding wealth divides and discussions of privilege, economic capital should more explicitly reinforce how young people get and understand money. In the context of youth, the fragmented means of income, reliance on various forms of formal and informal employment, and family make this particularly interesting. While my research has primarily explored relationships between fashion, gender, consumption practices and privilege, I would be remiss not to mention the 'gap' of money in existing studies on such topics. Thus, I want to advocate that future directions for research could consider money as a more central discussion point in everyday relationships to class and interpersonal dynamics. As this thesis has demonstrated, these relationships between money and consumption illuminate more than points of purchase but a whole social system of moral and material valuations.

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Appendix A: Information and Consent Form

Research on Clothes

Information sheet

- **Who is doing this research project?**
  My name is Gaby Harris and I am a student researcher at the London School of Economics in the Department of Sociology.

- **What is the research about?**
  This research is about you and your experiences as young people. We will discuss the kinds of clothes you wear, the kinds of clothes you like and some good or bad experiences you or others may have had with clothing.

- **How will the research happen?**
  The first stage of the research will be for a group of us (you, your friends, and me) to meet and get to know a bit about each other. You'll be able to ask me anything you'd like to about the research and I will also ask you some questions about yourselves, your friendships and your clothing choices. There are no right or wrong answers, it's just about finding out what kinds of clothes you like.

  If you'd like to chat to me further, I will also be running individual sessions where we can chat one to one about your experiences. It's a good opportunity to add to anything we discussed in the group or to say anything that might have occurred to you after the session! These will be completely confidential, I will have some questions I might like to ask you about, but you can also feel free to just tell me what you think is important too.

- **What happens when the research finishes?**
  The information you give me will be used as part of a research project on clothing and dress. After our conversation, I will start writing about your opinions and what you've shared with me, and comparing this to what other people have told me and other research projects. This will make up the larger piece of coursework which I will submit to the university and may write about in other publications such as newspapers, journal articles or books.
  Your consent form and any recordings will be safely locked away at the London School of Economics when the research is being written up, and safely destroyed of when the project is complete.

- **Will people know what I've said or who I am?**
  No! You will be completely anonymous in this research, I will change your name and never reveal any personal information about you to anyone. Your identity will never be revealed.

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- What if I change my mind about being a part of this research?
  You are free to change your mind about being in the research at any time, with no negative consequences. This research is about you and your experiences and you can always let me know if you feel uncomfortable about anything or if you no longer want to be a part of the research.

- Can I know what you find out in your research?
  Yes! It will take me some time to collect all the information and write about it but I will let you know what your knowledge and experiences have helped me understand when the research project is finished.

Consent form

Please look at the below statements and tick which ones you are happy to agree to. Whatever you tell me during the research may be used as part of the final project but I would like to assure you that you will remain completely anonymous – no one will know it is you that said it!

	Please tick
I have read and understood the information sheet for this research project.	
I understand what the research project is about and agree to take part	
I understand that taking part in this research is my choice and I am happy to share my views.	
I understand that although I am agreeing to take part in the research now, I can choose to no longer take part in the research at any time in the future.	
I understand that anything I say will be kept completely **confidential** (unless the researcher is worried for my safety) and the researcher will not use my real name in the research.	
I understand that this form, and any research notes or recordings will only be handled by Gaby, who will keep to high standards of confidentiality and anonymity.	
I understand that my views will form part of Gaby Harris's PhD research and what she has found out from research may also be shared in future publications, presentations and the media but I will remain anonymous.	

Please share this information with your parents or guardians and be sure they know what the research is about and are happy for you to take part before you sign this.

I agree to participate in this study

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

For the researcher:

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I agree to keep your personal information safe & confidential and represent your views and experiences fairly, staying true to what you tell me.

Name: Gaby Harris

Signature: _____

Date: _____

And finally…

A few questions for you (please leave blank any boxes if you prefer not to answer)[4]

What is your age? (please tick the box which applies to you)

- ☐ 14
- ☐ 15
- ☐ 16
- ☐ 17
- ☐ 18

What is your gender? (please tick the box which applies to you)

☐ Female

☐ Male

☐ Non-Binary/ Gender Fluid

Which of these best describes your ethnicity/race? (please tick the box which applies to you)

- ☐ White
- ☐ Mixed/multiple ethnic groups
- ☐ Asian or British Asian
- ☐ Black/African/Caribbean/Black British
- ☐ Other ethnic group _____

[4] This survey functioned largely for my own use rather than for analysis, in order to not assign the girls to gender, ethnic groups or social positionings (through schooling) that they did not assign themselves to.

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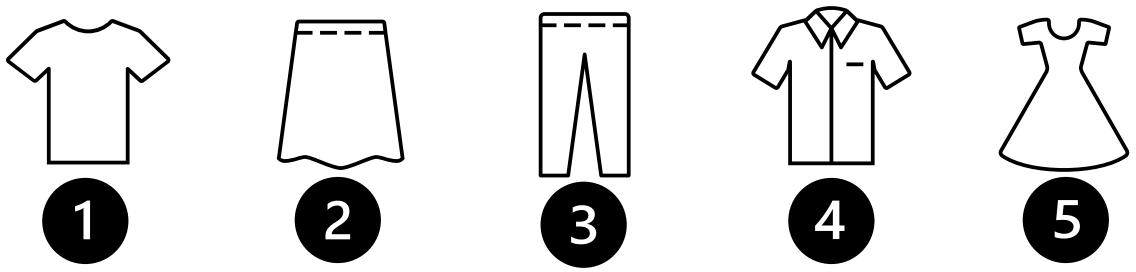
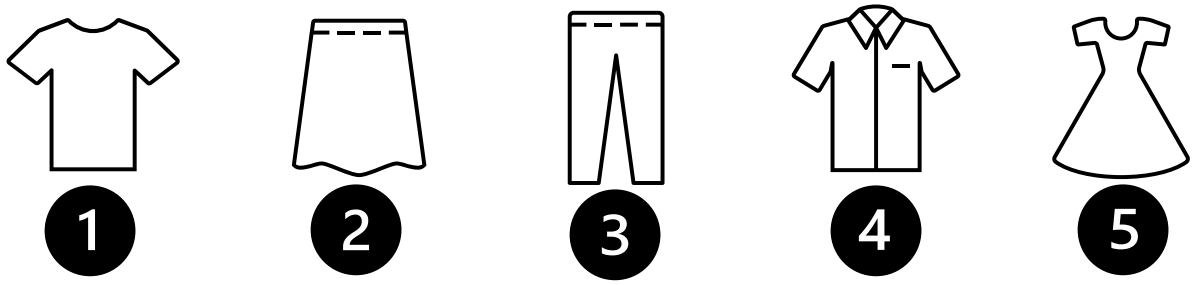
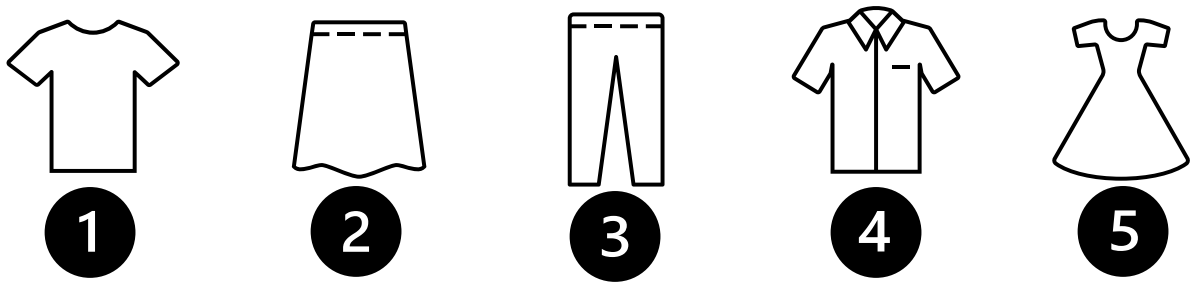
On a scale of 1-5 (1 being very important, 5 being not very important), how important do you think clothing or fashion is to people your age? (please tick the number which applies to you)[5]



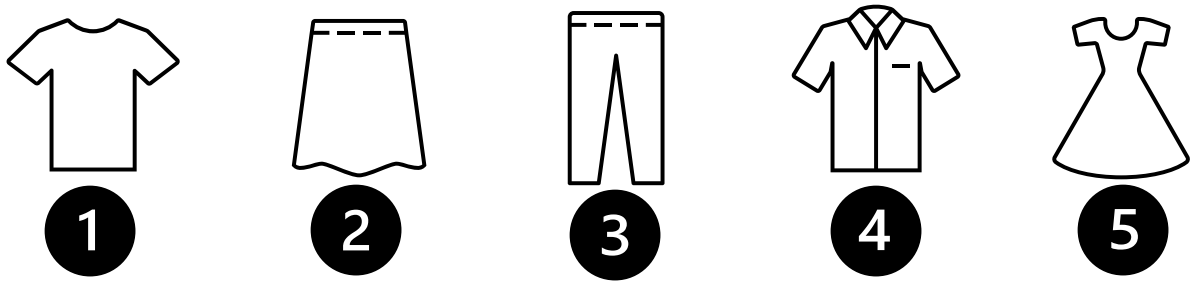
And how about for people in their 20s-30s?



And 40s-50s?



60+?



[5] I was interested to explore the contention of 'age' and how girls perceived the importance of fashion throughout the life-course, however, I believe the way I had structured the answers (1 being most important) caused some confusion thus limiting my ability to explore this further.

Please can you rank the following in terms of how important they are to you in your life – so how much you think about them daily (1 being the most important, 10 being the least important). There is no right or wrong answer!

	Hobbies
	School
	Celebrities
	Shopping
	Community
	Friends
	Social Media
	Family
	Clothes and Fashion
	Climate Change

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Is this the same order you would have put before lockdown?

☐ Yes
☐ No

What, if anything, has changed? And what, if anything, important is missing from the list above?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

What kind of school do you go to?

☐ Private (fee paying)
☐ Academy
☐ Comprehensive (no fees)
☐ Grammar

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Appendix B: News Article for Discussion Groups

High schools ban expensive designer coats

Schools ban pupils from wearing expensive designer coats in a bid to stop "poverty-shaming" among its students.

In a letter to parents, some High Schools have said pupils would not be allowed to wear branded coats such as Moncler, Pyrenex and Canada Goose.

Many head teachers say pupils and parents supported the move.

However, some people on Twitter have called the ban "absolutely ridiculous".

The labels banned by the school include children's sizes which sell for between £400 and £1,000.

The ban will be introduced after the Summer holidays.

Peer pressure

One headteacher said: "We are very concerned as a school about poverty-proofing our school environment and, as such, we met with groups of pupils and made the decision in consultation with them.

"The pupils spoke to us about the pressure on families and the pressure on themselves to wear particular branded coats. A few years ago we introduced a school bag for the same reason.

"We have had parents approaching us asking us to introduce a ban prior to us writing the letter."

There has been a mixed reaction on social media with people writing both in support and against the school's designer label ban.

One Twitter user wrote: "Absolutely ridiculous, banning those coats. It's a fact of life that there are poor kids, get over it."