

Gendered Embodiment and Critical Tourism  
- Exploring Italian Women's Sensuality

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## Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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## Abstract

This thesis is a study of Italian women's sensual embodiment in leisure and tourism experiences (involving beautifying in the city and tanning at the beach) in, and around, the city of Rome. The central link in this thesis connects the field of tourism studies with social cultural theories of the 'body', placing this research within the most recent theoretical debates on the body. It is argued that in everyday life people take their bodies for granted, yet the body is absolutely crucial to the way we engage with the world and the people around us. Through analysing Italian women's embodiment, this thesis seeks to gain in-depth understanding of Italian society and more particularly women's position in society, thereby positioning the field of tourism studies as a means for analysing people's quotidian cultural habits.

Embracing the critical paradigm, this thesis takes a reflexive and embodied approach to research, challenging the all-pervasive hegemonic dominance of positivist, masculinist Western academic approaches. Through postfeminist lenses, autoethnography, in-depth interviewing and document analysis were used to carry out the field work, with the central aim of capturing and contextualising Italian women's voices and embodiment.



This research shows Italian society to be strongly patriarchal, reflecting gender inequity and inequality. Women are dominated in discourse (politics, senior management and television shows being predominantly male), pressured into family roles, and objectified in society through the media and the male gaze. Paradoxically, women are empowered through choosing to reproduce patriarchal values of beauty and objectification (the power of the agency), and to embody these in a sensual and sensuous way, thereby reversing power relations in their favour.

Aiming to understand Italian society through exploring women's sensual embodiment, this thesis contributes to a broader understanding of the gendered construction of social identity, and of patriarchy and power relations, from a woman's perspective. It contributes to gender and body studies in the tourism field through bringing these separate fields together, through exploring the power of agency in embodiment, and through the critical research approach to the body.

**Keywords:** critical tourism, postfeminism, reflexivity, embodiment, gender, body, agency, women, beautifying, tanning, culture, society, patriarchy, power relations, Italy.

# **1 Introduction**

## **1.1 The subject**

I would like to introduce my research subject by summing it up in one sentence. I will then position my work within the tourism field, then present particular (and important) aspects of my subject with regards to gendered embodiment, culture, and the Italian research context.

Through exploring the way sensuality pervades the leisure and tourism experiences of Italian women from the new middle class, I use the body to capture femininity, objectification, and empowerment in Italian patriarchal society, from the women's perspective.

### **1.1.1 Positioning my research in tourism**

There are two important views I take in my thesis when defining what tourism is. The first is that I take a broad view of tourism. I consider tourism in a broad way, grouping it with leisure, my view being that through tourism and leisure activities (free time), we can capture social structure and cultural reality, in this particular case, Italy's social structure and cultural reality. In other words,

I consider the field of tourism field as a means for analysing peoples cultural habits.

The second view I take is a holistic view of tourism. I challenge the duality of work and tourism, considering that tourism is not removed from the everyday. In other words, I examine the tourist's experience as part of her wider life, that is, I give much importance to the context of everyday life.

The focus of my thesis being Italian women and their embodiment, it is naturally positioned in two areas of the tourism field: Gender Studies, and Body and Embodiment studies.

And, finally, my research is positioned within the critical turn in tourism studies producing what is known as 'new' tourism research. It is new through its focus on the body, its cultural aim, its interest in sensitive issues in society such as gender inequity, and its research approach which will be discussed later.

#### 1.1.2 Gendered embodiment

The central link in this thesis connects the field of tourism studies with social cultural theories of the 'body'. As such, I am contributing to the most recent theoretical debates in tourism studies that have begun to engage with these theories. I bring conceptualisations of the body and aesthetics into the tourism studies discourse to explore Italian women's embodiment and the importance of aesthetics in Italy. It is argued that in everyday life people take their bodies for granted, yet the body is absolutely crucial to the way we engage with the world and the people around us (Howson, 2004). Sociologist Alexandra Howson (2004) affirms the body to be a central part of our lived experience

rather than peripheral to experience as is argued by many Western academics. This is also the view taken in this thesis where Italian women's embodiment is explored in leisure and tourism experiences to reveal Italian culture and more particularly women's place in society.

Because the body is arguably the location from which all social life begins, it is the logical starting point for studying society and culture (Foucault, 1988). The shared attitudes and practices of social groups are played out at the level of the body, revealing cultural notions of distinction (Bourdieu, 1984, 1998) based on age, social class, ethnicity and gender. But cultural rules are not only revealed through the body, they also influence the ways in which the body appears and performs (Goffman, 1959). "Ultimately, it is through the body's actions and demeanor that the self is constructed and displayed to the social world" (Gimlin, 2002, p.3). The body indicating who we are to the outside world, it has become a commodity today, empirical evidence showing Western society to be obsessed with bodies. As such, the body has become central to the conception of gender and gendered embodiment (Howson, 2005).

While the body is important to the gender display of both men and women, it is particularly central to the concept of femininity (Gimlin, 2002). In effect, women are under more intense pressure than men to meet the criteria of beauty defined by society and represented in the media, their physical attractiveness being socially judged and given symbolic meaning (Bourdieu, 1998). Because men and women alike value women in accordance with their appearances (Gimlin, 2002), the way women look is assimilated to their selves and beauty

becomes signifier of social success. Valued gendered embodiment in today's Western consumer world is equated to being beautiful, sexy and young (Shilling, 2003).

I identified three key approaches to theorising the body in social science studies which I will discuss in Chapter Two as part of my literature review. The first approach conceptualises the body as biological, the second as discursive and the third as critical. The biological body reflects naturalistic views of the body, the body being presented as a pre-social, biological basis on which superstructures of the self and society are founded (Shilling, 2003). The discursive body reflects social constructionist views of the body whereby the body is not the foundation of society but the product of society (Turner, 1991). In this view, social forces impinge on the body (Bourdieu, 1984; Goffman, 1959). The critical body reflects post-structuralist views of the body whereby the body is perceived both to be defined by society (discursive body) and to define society (biological body). The critical body also acknowledges the fact that individuals negotiate with the structure through their agency. Individuals make choices, which are signified through their embodiment, and reflect whether they are reproducing or resisting the system. In this view of the body, the physicality of the body is not conceptualised uniquely as a location on which social structures are negotiated however. The materiality of the body – fleshiness, physical sensations, sensuousness, and sensuality - is acknowledged as an important part of the individual's embodied experience (Butler, 1993).

Through deconstructing leisure activities revolving around the body (such as shopping, going to the gym, and beautifying) and the tourism activity of tanning at the beach, I link leisure and tourism with the social pressure on appearance in Italy. I strive to unravel Italian women's social identity through their sensual embodiment and the way they display their beauty. The beauty of Italian women and the Mediterranean beach scene have been identified as an important attraction to international tourists. By focusing on aesthetics and Italian women's sensuality, I deconstruct this tourist attraction, placing it into the context of Italian cultural ways, revealing women's appearance to be an integral part of their existence in a patriarchal society.

#### 1.1.3 Tourism and culture

Given the clear link between tourism activities and appearing beautiful, I consider tourism to be an imbrication in the everyday rather than a special, separate field of activity and enquiry, adhering as such to Tim Edensor's (2001) definition of tourism. Traditionally, tourism is portrayed as removed from the everyday, rather than as part of the contemporary lifestyle of the wealthy and highly mobile (Hall, 2004), both in its common-sense understanding, and its theoretical understanding. Reflective of this is the fact that tourism is a separate scholarly field of enquiry. This traditional understanding of tourism implies tourism is perceived as a means for people to release their more 'authentic' selves, to try out new identities, and to take on new roles (MacCannell, 1976). Tim Edensor (2001, p.61) argues that tourism is, on the contrary, replete with unconsidered habits, and that rather than transcending the mundane, tourism is

“fashioned by culturally coded escape attempts” where the tourist carries with her quotidian habits and responses. As Margaret Swain affirms (2007a), tourism is a human activity, and as such, it mirrors important characteristics from the cultural contexts of our lives, in particular, social identity and gender relations.

In this light, tourism becomes a means for analysing people’s quotidian cultural habits, thereby revealing important aspects of the society in which they live. Through tourism, as such, it is possible to explore gendered construction of identity, the inter-relationship between men and women, women’s place in society and her social identity. Although I’m exploring social identity, in engaging with theories of the body, I’m taking a critical approach to naturalistic and socio-constructionist views, going beyond the dominant masculinist, structuralist and reductionist theories, into post-structuralism. Neither the biological reality of the naturalistic views, nor the discursive reality of the socio-constructionist views take into consideration the power of the agency. I consider that both the structure and the agency of individuals need be explored in order to have a full understanding of the individual and her embodiment.

As such, my view of tourism is a post-structural view, part of a larger move in tourism studies whereby the work-leisure dichotomy is questioned along with all dualistic thinking such as nature/culture, masculine/feminine, body/mind, which portray constructions of subordinate and subaltern, reflecting patriarchal thinking as such (Rose, 1993). Cara Aitchison (2003) explains the patriarchal thinking linked with dualisms (or couplings) in terms of the power relationship resulting from one part of the couple being dependent on the other

for its definition and identity. Moving away from the dualistic definition of tourism as something removed from the realm of everyday life I adhere to Candice Harris & Alison McIntosh's (2006) argument that the tourist's experience should be examined from a holistic, non-reductionist viewpoint, and in the context of their wider lives.

Distancing myself from dualistic thinking is an important step which guided my open research approach, enabling me to have deeper relationships with my respondents, and therefore a better grasp of the power relationship between men and women in Italy, from the women's perspective. Italian women's tanning at the beach and lives in the city are not two separate items of their existence. Tourism is a part of their everyday life and plays a role as such. David Crouch (2007) argues, in fact, that tourism experiences help give meaning to our lives, one way or another. He explains the way, as human beings, we are constantly negotiating, trying to carry out who we are, balancing out those moments where we wish to stay the same, holding onto our ontological securities, and those moments where we wish to push boundaries. He affirms tourism to simply be a part of this process, a part of living.

Given that leisure and tourism are together the fastest growing forms of consumption in the cultural political economy of today, I will not be concentrating solely on the tourism activity of tanning at the beach, but also on the leisure activities of shopping, going to the gym and beautifying.

#### 1.1.4 Empirical context: Italy, beautifying, and tanning



Italy represents a country where the postmodern importance of aesthetics is overwhelmingly present and where being tanned is perceived as a superior status in society. For this reason, the beach scene and tanning were singled out as a means for capturing the pressure to appear beautiful, women's embodiment, and the power play. Given that my aim was not understanding international tourists visiting Italy but rather Italian society, the area of study was narrowed down to the beaches closest to big cities, beaches that are not so beautiful and attractive to foreign visitors but used by locals as part of their city life in the summer, and getting a tan. Although I capture the 'local'/domestic performance of Italians at the beach, given that Italy is amongst the top ten generating international markets in the world (World Tourism Organisation W.T.O., 2006), this local performance can likely be translated into their international behaviour. Observing the local beaches of Rome, it soon becomes apparent why Italians are not described as part of the international backpacker scene despite their long history of international travel, but rather as part of more sophisticated forms of travel with higher levels of comfort. Although there is no literature affirming that Italians are not backpacking, they are never mentioned in the backpacker statistics and studies undertaken in backpacker research around the world (Hannam & Ateljevic, 2007; Ateljevic & Doorne, 2004).

My chosen area of study for observing the leisure activities of shopping, going to the gym and beautifying, is the wealthy suburb of Casalpalocco in the South of Rome as well as the center of Rome. In terms of observing the tanning performance, I chose the coastline around Rome, chosen for its convenience to

city dwellers, a mere 25 kilometers from the city center. Romans integrate the tourist activity of spending a day on the Roman coast into their summer lifestyle, along with their leisure activities. They benefit from the use of a beach whilst in Rome, giving them the opportunity to work on their tan (whilst not away on holiday) and keep it up throughout summer, hence bettering their appearance and raising their beauty status in the city.

The coastline near Rome is divided into a 'free' section – a non paying beach, open to all - and a '*stabilimento*' (beach resort) section – a paying area composed of many small beach resorts, open to resort members and day-trippers who wish to buy a spot on the beach for the day. The beach resorts target a particular market segment among the Roman population which can be described as belonging to the 'new' middle class, also known as the 'new' petite bourgeoisie or the educated middle class, as defined by Pierre Bourdieu (1984). This social group is known to lead a hedonistic lifestyle enjoying good food and wine, cultural activities, and travel (Abramovici, 2002; Bourdieu, 1984; Featherstone, 1995; Munt, 1994). They are attentive to dressing fashionably, living in the right residential area, and gaining knowledge (cultural capital) in areas of interest which they may then share in social situations. This social group is particularly sensitive to aesthetics, hence my interest in studying Italian women from within this social group, and more specifically the embodiment of beauty they display, including tanning. Therefore my fieldwork at the beach was carried out in the paying beach resorts of the Roman coast.

It soon became apparent to me that tanning was not the simple and natural gesture where individuals simply relax in the sun. I found tanning to be written into the cultural process of Italian society, anchored into a complex and sophisticated set of behavioural rules defining 'who can do what and how'. Every positioning of the body, re-arranging of the bikini and lingering of the gaze, was revealed to have a particular meaning. The beach scene unveiled the focal point of the female body to be the buttocks, which, depending on shape and age, are attributed a different set of rules. The city woman from Rome coming to the beach for the day has no conscience awareness of the complex set of rules she will be following as she dreamily lays down her body in the sun. She drifts into a second state on her sun-warmed towel, a state of total relaxation, or so it seems, whilst moving into the depths of the intricate world of tanning.

I will focus on women in their forties, this age group representing an understudied demographic group in Italian society and in tourism studies. In order to better capture the ins and outs of Italian society and women's social position, I will focus on women who are married with children, and who are part of the professional world. The husband is a window into better understanding gender relations. The children will provide a way in to generational balance within families. And the fact that the women work will help illustrate gender balance in employment.

To conclude on the empirical aspect of my subject, I would like to underline the fact that although shopping, going to the gym, and beautifying are an important part of leisure and tanning an important part of tourism, there does

not appear to be any research deconstructing these leisure and tourism activities as a means to understanding cultural ways. In my research, beautifying and tanning can almost be considered as a methodological point of entry into the understanding of Italian society, a window through which I investigate the socio-cultural reality of Italian society. As such, I place leisure and tourism into the broader context of national identity. Also, whilst issues of the body and embodiment have been addressed in tourism studies in recent years, this has been limited to the Anglo-saxon context. My Italian research extends existing research on the body as such, filling the gap through its empirical context, providing an insight into the strikingly different ‘Southern mentality’ of Mediterranean societies.

My research is about Italians, and I feel it is important at this stage to stress the fact that Italians do not consider their country as a united country. They describe the many different regional differences as though those from a different region were in fact from a different country. This reflects the fact that Italy has been united for little more than a century and, as such, its young and troubled national identity barely masks a deeply complex national set-up (Simonis, Adams, Roddis, Webb & Williams, 2002).

A definite split exists between the industrial north and the rural south. A regional patriotism can be felt through-out the country – a phenomenon known as ‘*campanelismo*’ (attachment to one’s local bell tower) (Simonis et al., 2002). Each region possesses its own dialect, culinary specialties and traditional street festivals. Only with the advent of national television did the spread of standard

Italian language begin. Italians will say that ‘being Italian’ is an elusive concept (Richards, 1994). Italy has, in fact, been described by popular Italian author Luigi Barzini (1963, p.214) as “a mosaic of millions of families, sticking together by blind instinct, like colonies of insects an organic formation rather than a rational construction of written statutes and moral imperatives”.

The many divisions described and felt by Italians regarding their country makes carrying out research on Italian society - grouping all citizens under the appellation ‘Italians’ - a delicate undertaking. However, I would like to underline two important factors which, in my opinion, bring Italians together as a people. Firstly, all the government documents revealing facts and statistics, all the sociological studies I explored, all the media representations I experienced, and all the ethnographic studies and popular readings about Italians, *do* address Italians as one people. As such, their characteristics as a nation are portrayed in a clear way, with reference to other European nations or nations of the world. Secondly, as a woman who spent her youth in Italy, then spent 22 years living in other parts of the world, and is now re-experiencing Italy through living in Rome, I capture characteristics which are embodied in Italians, not just Romans, emphasised through my outsider’s perception. So, despite the ‘regionalism’ of the country and my focus on Romans, my specific approach and study of women and beauty actually reveals certain sociological characteristics of Italy that are common across the whole country.

## **1.2 The critical turn in tourism studies**

### **1.2.1 Defining criticality**

The research presented in this thesis is positioned within the critical turn in tourism studies (Ateljevic, Harris, Wilson & Collins, 2005) producing what is now claimed to be the ‘new’ tourism research (Tribe, 2005). My thesis seeks to enhance the ‘new’ tourism research in the ‘newness’ of the focus, subject and concept of study to the tourism field (the body), in the cultural aim of the research (understanding Italian contemporary society in terms of women’s position), and in my research approach (open, embodied and reflexive).

Approaching my research from a critical perspective has had an impact on all aspects of the research process from defining my subject of study, to designing my research framework, to choosing my data collection and data analysis methods, to my communication with both researched and colleagues, to my aim in terms of the research outcome. Critical tourism academics Irena Ateljevic, Annette Pritchard & Nigel Morgan (2007a) highlight the researcher’s impact on the research process in the following way:

Being a critical scholar matters when taking on research in tourism in that your position (whether it is based on anti-oppression, social justice, pro-women, advocacy of emancipation or self-determination, or any other similar worldview) influences every aspect of the research process. (p. 7)

These authors advocate that thinking about the research and those connected to the research, from a critical point of view, “sharpens an approach to a project” (Ateljevic et al., 2007a, p. 7) through the understanding of power relations and varied contexts in which the research is carried out. In other words, within critical tourism, it is expected of researchers that they be aware of the

nature of their own academic collectives so that they may take into consideration the associated power structures and ideological underpinnings shaping knowledge production in their particular fields (Pritchard & Morgan, 2007a).

Annette Pritchard & Nigel Morgan (2007a) contend that in the tourism field we are beginning to see this change through a small number of researchers reflecting this new introspection, such as David Botterill, Cara Aitchison, John Tribe, and the recent contributions edited by Jenny Phillimore & Lisa Goodson (2004) on qualitative tourism research. The first international conference on critical tourism, *Embodying Tourism Research: Advancing Critical Approaches* (which took place in Dubrovnik in 2005), followed by Irena Ateljevic, Annette Pritchard, & Nigel Morgan's (2007b) very recent collection of inspiring contributions to the critical turn in tourism studies, and the second international conference on critical tourism, *The Critical Turn in Tourism Studies: Promoting an Academy of Hope?* (which took place in Split in 2007), all mark a big step in criticality, portraying tourism to be at a turning point today.

So, what is criticality? It is a research approach, developed by the Frankfurt School, which rejects positivism for its exclusion of moral or ethical nature which cannot be settled by an appeal to facts, and rejects interpretivism for trusting the accounts of the researched to give a true reading of the world (Tribe, 2007). In other words, in John Tribe's (2007, p.30) words: "whilst interpretivism might offer a voice to the researched and attempt thereby to reduce the power of the researcher this move does not necessarily relinquish the grip of other forms of power on the researched". Critical theory on the other

hand is interested in power relations, both in the research situation and in the research itself. This is reflected in my interest in Italian women and their place in Italian society, for I strive to reveal power relations. As for interest in the research situation, being reflexive in my research, I reveal my ideological and academic stance, my life values, and my relationship with the researched, throughout my research.

In terms of ideological and philosophical choices guiding my research, I challenge the all-pervasive hegemonic dominance of positivist, masculinist Western academic approaches (Aitchison, 2001; Johnston, 2001; Veijola & Jokinen, 1994), whilst rejecting the feminist totalising theories (Aitchison, 2001). That women often became the object rather than the subject of research is one of the fundamental feminist objections of the positivist research paradigm, where ‘othering’ was the norm, according to Cara Aitchison (2001). ‘Othering’ is defined as placing someone or somewhere as secondary in contrast to the main people or places (Rose 1993).

In response to ‘othering’ and through my critical approach, I adopt postfeminism where difference is celebrated (Tong, 1998). Postfeminism acknowledges the feminist critique in allowing woman’s voice and reality to come through, however it acknowledges multiple voices and realities for women, diversity among women, and multiple reality and diversity for men (Phoca & Wright, 1999). Along with postfeminism, I adopt an embodied and reflexive approach, studying my research subject from my own position as a woman who is a straight, Anglo, white, middle-class, European, middle-aged



researcher (Swain, 2004). Although one rarely discusses all aspects of one's persona at once, the whole of our persona affects the problems we see and the power dynamics we experience as researchers, says critical feminist Margaret Swain (Swain and Hall, 2007). As such, it is vital that research acknowledge the researcher's positionality intersecting with that of the researched in order to understand how our understandings are constructed (Ateljevic et al., 2005; Swain, 2004).

#### 1.2.2 My choice of research methods and analysis frameworks

The critical approach reveals significant progress in the methodological sophistication of research in tourism studies, and more particularly with regards to reflexivity and embodiment of the researcher (Swain, 2004; Hall, 2004; Hollinshead, 2004; Jamal & Everett, 2004), as illustrated in the previous section. The reflexivity of the researcher, or situated voice, is a critical dimension of the whole research process from its conceptual foundation through trust-building to the interpretation and analysis of data (Ateljevic et al., 2005).

David Botterill (2007) affirms that in tourism research, there is a very small amount of published literature incorporating the situated voice. He confirms Irena Ateljevic et al. (2005) and Sheena Westwood, Nigel Morgan & Annette Pritchard's (2006, p.124) theory in arguing that the situated voice "better captures the fractured, contradictory and context-rich social world". My situated voice and own embodiment are the two main features of my methodology, and are anchored into every step of my research process.

The criticality of my chosen research methods – auto-ethnography, interviewing and document analysis – comes across in the way I approached these methods. Through auto-ethnography, I chose relevant personal stories from my present time in Rome, my criticality bringing my focus onto my gendered embodiment and the power relations I lived. My in-depth interviewing was carried out through multiple sessions with each interviewee, enabling as such the necessary trust-building for deep communication. Thinking of my relationships with the researched, and thinking of the consequences of my research, I was sensitive to cultural ways. I broached the subjects I had planned only at the appropriate moment. I chose the right setting for my interviewees to feel at ease. In my questioning I was careful to respect local ways, querying them rather than judging them, and, as such, I learned from my interviewees who opened up to me. An open relationship slowly grew with each interviewee, as I took into consideration their different personalities, availabilities and needs, listening to their life-stories, opinions and feelings. As Candice Harris & Alison McIntosh (2006) affirm (based on previous work by McIntosh & Prentice (1999), Noy (2005) and Uriely (2005)), not enough focus is placed on details of the lived experience of the researched in tourism studies. It is through focusing on my interviewees' lived experiences that I captured their voices and revealed their agency.

As for the structure, I analysed Italian documents – academic books, popular readings, statistics, press and media – focusing on gendered construction of identity, gendered embodiment and power play. I deconstructed Italian

society through the analysis of these documents, highlighting the ways in which men dominate discourse in Italy. Through a holistic approach to my three research methods, I was able to delve deep into gendered power relations in patriarchy and reveal the way women paradoxically feel empowered and gain power over men through patriarchal ways.

In critical tourism, along with new research topics and a new approach to methodology, new frameworks have emerged for analysing the data. I engage with two frameworks in my work. The first is Cara Aitchison's (2003) socio-cultural nexus. This framework helps identify the relations between the structure of society and the cultural aspects of society. It reflects a post-structural understanding of society whereby society is said to affect individuals, but individuals are also understood to affect society. In other words, individuals' embodiment symbolises society but it also symbolises the choices they make in society, so that through their embodiment individuals either reproduce the system or resist it. This framework guided my analysis of Italian women.

The second framework is an adaptation of Erving Goffman's (1959) performance framework. In this framework, individuals are seen as actors performing on a stage for the people they are with (their audience), their embodiment reflecting their social identity. Contrary to Erving Goffman who considers there is a unique stage to a performance, with clear-cut front and back stage areas, I consider there are many stages, all stages becoming front and back stage during the performance. This more complex set-up enabled a more in-depth analysis of the performance of tanning at the beach. Through performance,

the women were portrayed both as complying to patriarchy (the structure) through their objectification, and as actively making choices as women (through their agency) through their embodiment on the different front and back-stages defined at the beach.

### 1.2.3 The body, women, Italy, and my position

Being a woman, and more particularly a European woman living in Western consumer society, I share with Italian women the social pressure on appearance where the body plays a fundamental role in terms of social identity. Presently living in Italy, in the city of Rome, I share with these women the feelings linked to the different looks and responses they receive in society depending on their physical appearance and embodiment. I fully understand the appreciation of femininity in Italian society, and more particularly the importance of sensuality. I can feel the power of the male gaze in society, shared by all, and through that, the objectification of women. As such, I am able to empathise with the women I research, and the women are able to talk to me for they do not feel judged or examined but rather understood. They feel complicity and, being women, this naturally is lived as an opportunity for deeper communication.

On the other hand, having traveled all my life, from my youngest age I have observed, witnessed and lived different realities relating to women's position in society and the power game between men and women. Italian society does not represent my home society as such, but one amongst others in which I have embodied my femininity. Due to my multi-cultural upbringing - my parents

being from two countries, my living in five different countries during my childhood, my attending international schools – and to my adult life choices taking me to different countries and cultures, I have developed a real sense of being a citizen of the world. As such, I am both a local citizen everywhere, fitting in and belonging, and a global citizen, my multi-cultural lenses enabling me to observe situations as an outsider (Swain, 2007). I have developed a faculty for sensing power relations in society, and am also sensitive to the way I am treated as a woman. As such, I perceive the patriarchal relation between men and women in Italian society. I am receptive to the pressure women experience in this society. I am interested in their forms of empowerment within patriarchy.

Having lived in Italy as a teenager and young adult, I embody my past with this nation, a past rich of experience, a past which I have cultivated through the relationships kept up from those days. I paradoxically love certain aspects of Italian society and have difficulty accepting others. I feel at home and feel a foreigner. This nation intrigues me and fascinates me. This affects my relationship with the researched for, triggered by my passion and desire to know and understand their society, the Italian women I interviewed felt the desire to explain and share. They in turn were interested in my views and ways and thus developed a relationship of mutual respect between women who are complice yet different.

My postfeminist views clearly influence, at both a conscious and subconscious level, my perception of Italian women, my approach to interviewing them, my appreciating their differences, and my observation and

interpretation of the power relations in society. My insider perspective influenced my understanding of the women's experiences and feelings they shared with me. My foreignness influenced my perception of the beautifying through leisure and the tanning performance at the beach, so different to other cultures, so representative of Italian society.

### **1.3 Aims and contributions**

The aim of my thesis, through my subject of study, my critical approach, my methodology and the empirical context, is as follows:

- Through my subject of study:
  - To portray the importance of leisure and tourism for understanding broader issues of culture and society;
  - To shed light on the Mediterranean empirical context.
- Through my critical approach:
  - To deepen the understanding of the gendered construction of social identity;
  - To deepen the understanding of power relations in patriarchy, and, in particular, the way women negotiate with a patriarchal structure;
- From a methodological perspective:
  - To enrich tourism research through the criticality of my research approach, both through my reflexivity and my embodiment as the researcher;
  - To show the value of personal stories in research;
- From an empirical perspective:

- To explore the under-studied region of the Mediterranean and its Southern mentality, in the tourism field, through the exposure of Italian society;
- To explore women's position in this society;
- To explore the leisure and tourism activities of shopping, going to the gym, beautifying and tanning at the beach, in Western consumer society.

My contributions, as a consequence of the above aims, are therefore:

- To extend the existing research on the body in tourism;
- To extend the existing research on gender and tourism;
- To extend the literature on shopping, beautifying and tanning in the leisure and tourism field of studies;
- To extend the present research on Mediterranean cultural contexts;
- To extend critical studies in the tourism field, both through the methodological approach and through the sensitivity of the topic of women in patriarchy.

#### **1.4 Thesis structure**

Before describing the thesis lay-out, I would like to stress that I have situated myself in the writing of my thesis, describing the way I carried the research out, and speaking of my embodied perceptions. My situated voice, as such, goes beyond the methodology, becoming part of the research process as a whole, thereby humanising my research (Botterill, 2007; Swain, 2004).

My thesis is composed of seven chapters. The first is the present chapter introducing my research. Given the subject of my research, the second chapter consists of a literature review on the body and embodiment. Before exploring theorisation of the body, I will position the body in Western culture, establishing the well documented culture of consumption, empirically establishing the body as an indicator of social identity. I will then review the different conceptualisations of the body in academia - drawing on the social sciences, and explore the different streams of studies on the body and embodiment undertaken in the tourism field. The present research will be positioned within the debate on the body and within existing tourism studies.

The third chapter explains my critical approach to research, my research methods and my analysis frameworks. This chapter is a natural continuation of Chapter Two through its focus on embodiment – of the researcher. It will discuss the main features of my critical approach: post-feminism, reflexivity and embodiment, focusing on my positionality, revealing the extent to which ‘being me’ has influenced, affected and enriched this research. The research design is based on my embodiment in being a woman, interviewing, observing and studying women, and in living in Italy, experiencing the power games of Italian society. This is enriched by my belonging to the social group under study, possessing their socio-demographic characteristics, and speaking their language. Through my reflexivity, my insider perspective guides my fieldwork and analysis. My simultaneous ‘outsider’ position helps enrich my interpretation through contextualisation.



The fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters reveal the findings resulting from my three years living in the field collecting data. In Chapter Four, I unveil social and cultural realities of Italian women's lives, discussing power relations inherent to these realities. I focus on society's pressure on women – the effect of the structure on the agency – and on the way women's own voices and choices, in turn, shape the structure through their negotiating – the effect of the agency on the structure. I reveal the way social identity is gendered in Italy and shaped by social and cultural relations, highlighting the way the interrelationship between structure and culture serves to consolidate and maintain gender inequity in society. Much of my interpretation of structure comes from sociological, historical and journalistic accounts of Italian society.

In Chapter Five, I explore femininity, an important part of women's social identity. I explain the gendered beginnings of the patriarchal outlook on beauty and describe the objectification of the female body in society, discussing the power of the media and the male gaze, and the resulting pressure on women to appear beautiful. I show the connection between beauty and sensuality, revealing the body as a site where dominant discourses and wider hegemonic socio-cultural relations are negotiated through sensual embodiment. In this chapter, I explore the leisure arenas of shopping, fitness and beautifying, and strolling in the streets to be seen.

In Chapter Six, I focus on the materiality of the body, using the performance metaphor to deconstruct women tanning. I reveal the way sensuous ways and sensual embodiment enables the reversing of the power relations

between men and women. The writing of this chapter reflects a unique approach in revealing the stories of the women I interviewed. I bring all the stories and voices together in the essential story of Silvia, a fictional character. Describing what is going on in Silvia's head, the pressure on appearance, the competition with the other women, her own sensuous pleasure at the beach, and her desire to attract men's looks, enable translating the lived experiences and the sensual embodiment of my interviewees in a more powerful way. Through reading as a novel, this chapter helps the reader enter the mentality, feelings, anxieties, hopes, and desires of Italian women as they tan, and highlights the extent to which appearing beautiful and wanting to attract the male gaze is embedded in women and their sensual ways. It also enables disclosing the complexities of these women feeling both the pressure of being objectified and the pleasure of being looked at, resulting in the feeling of empowerment.

The last chapter, Chapter Seven will draw all my findings together, discussing the outcome for both gender studies and body studies in tourism. I will finish by opening a discussion on furthering critical studies in the field of tourism studies.

## **2 The Body and embodiment**

### **2.1 Introduction**

I established in the first chapter that within the critical turn, issues which were either marginalised or simply not researched in tourism, were slowly moving to the mainstream within this multidisciplinary field which has come to be perceived as a significant realm for understanding broader issues of culture and society (Hall et al, 2003; Urry, 2002). In this chapter, I present a literature review of the body and embodiment, turning to social science literature in order to cast the net of social and cultural theory in tourism (Franklin & Crang, 2001). I explore more particularly sociology, cultural studies and feminist studies, which engage with the body discourse.

I position the body in Western culture, establishing the well documented culture of consumption, revealing the importance of the body as indicator of social identity. I then review the different ways in which the body has been approached in academia. I start by presenting the foundations of Cartesian legacy on which conceptualisations of the body initially developed, and which can still be felt in academia today. I then move to a discussion of existing body

theorisations, grouping them according to whether the body is conceptualised as a biological, discursive, or critical realm.

The body appears as a very complex and unstable topic of study, and has in fact been described by sociologists Alexandra Howson & David Inglis (2001) as a battleground over which different scholars fight. No agreement appears to have been reached on how the body should be conceptualised or on what the body actually is. Synthesising existing research on the body - through the way the body is conceptualised, enables clarifying naturalistic, social constructionist, structuralist and post-structuralist views. It also sheds light on the multiplicity of theorisations existing in different academic domains (each domain using its own terminology to refer to the same conceptualisations). I use tourism terminology in presenting conceptualisations from sociological studies, cultural studies and feminist studies, bringing as such all the different debates into one.

Finally, I discuss existing studies on the body and embodiment within the tourism field, bringing them into the body debate from the social sciences. Soile Veijola & Eeva Jokinen (1994) had called for the need to study the body for a deeper understanding of the tourist's experience over ten years ago, however it is only in the past few years that the body has been explored in the tourism field. Three different streams have emerged around the body: sensuous tourism, tourism as a stage, and socio-cultural networks. I will strive to position my research within the existing studies revealing the way it fills a research gap and extends existing research on the body and embodiment in the tourism field.

## **2.2 Consumer society and the worshipping of the body**

In this section I discuss issues of the body and identity, issues of transforming the body, and gendered social pressure through the body.

### **2.2.1 Individualisation of the body and social identity**

The dominant context of contemporary Western society in everyday life depicts consumption rather than production (Lash & Urry, 1994). In effect our society has become characterised by an ‘intensity’ and ‘sophistication’ of the process of commodification of consumption (Doorne & Ateljevic, 2005) where production is increasingly aestheticised, and where meanings and visual representations are systematically attached to material objects (Ateljevic, 2000; Britton, 1991; Lurry, 1996; Rojek, 1995). Stephen Doorne & Irena Ateljevic (2005) explain how this affects tourism by exposing the Frankfurt school of thought (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1971; Marcuse, 1964; Lefebvre, 1971), revealing the way the logic of commodity production transferred to the leisure sphere through the formation of the ‘culture industry’. The culture industry was described as a filter for leisure time pursuits and the cultivating of all activities alleviating the mundaneness of everyday life. The well established concept of ‘culture of consumption’ thus emerged acknowledging the importance of culture in ensuring consumption, with leisure and tourism developing as significant features of Western society (Featherstone 1987; Rojek, 1995; Sharpley, 1996).

Numerous authors claim that lifestyle and taste is communicated to the surrounding world through consumption choices - the way one dresses, where one lives, how one's house is furnished, what one reads, where one goes out, and where one goes on holiday - all consumption possessing symbolic value and indicating, as such, social identity (Featherstone 1987, 1991; Fine & Leopold, 1993; Giddens, 1991; Kernal & Domzal 2000; Lash & Urry, 1994; Miller, 1995; Richards, 1996; Sharpley, 1996). The products and services consumed are, in effect, identified with the narrative and lifestyle in which they are embedded, reflecting cultural level (Wernick, 1991).

Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital underpins the importance of consuming culture to establish social class, hence status, and has been used by many academics in the social sciences to explain social identity (Crewe & Lowe, 1995; Goodwin, Ackerman, & Kiron, 1997; Jackson, 1999; Jackson & Holbrook, 1995; Jameson, 1981; Miller, 1995, 1998; Pearce, 1997), and a few in tourism studies (Britton, 1991; Urry, 1990). Cultural capital is defined as the cumulated knowledge one possesses, and is stated through the cultural objects one owns (books, paintings, music, travel souvenirs), the qualifications and diplomas of cultural standing one detains, and the competencies and knowledge one has acquired with a cultural value (knowledge of certain forms of art, music, etc) (Bourdieu, 1984). It is cultural capital that determines what one may appreciate and talk about in society, revealing as such one's cultural level, one's social standing.

Pierre Bourdieu (1984) had also noted concern about the body among the ‘new’ middle class, in his study *Distinction*, however in recent years the number of people concerned with their bodies has spread well beyond these narrow confines (Duret & Roussel, 2003). The body is perceived as the external sign of success in Western contemporary culture where being in control of one’s body signifies, or is perceived to signify, being in control of one’s life (Detrez, 1998). Nick Crossley (2001) explains the tendency of placing ever more importance on the body as constitutive of the self in Western society as a result of both the decline of formal religious frameworks (which played a significant role in constructing and sustaining existential and ontological certainties residing outside the individual) and the massive rise of the body in consumer culture. The space left by prior religious frameworks is taken up by the worship of the body, investment in the body being perceived as a way of getting in touch with the self (Borel, 1992).

Concern for inner well-being is reflected through the fact that more and more ‘new age’ products, services and places are being consumed (Pernecky, 2007a). Tomas Pernecky (2007a, p.217) explains that ‘new age’ in the 21<sup>st</sup> century represents a shift in the mind of the world noticeable through “the renewed interest in spirituality, the abundance of literature on spiritual awakening and enlightenment and the presence of psychic mediums on television channels”. The body is part of this shift as it is the harmonisation of the mind, body and spirit that is sought after. Along with self-help books on ways of getting in touch with the self, classes and retreats including yoga,

meditation, aromatherapy, homeopathy, and the perfect way to love, to name but a few, are flourishing. The body takes on the place of the vessel to immortality and is glorified through the consumer world.

In recent years, the body has taken on a more prominent part in the emphasis on visual appearance, as captured by the notion of the 'flâneur' who strolls purposeless, gazing and being gazed upon (Grosz, 1995; Tester, 1995). This has produced a new consciousness in which individuals are increasingly aware of being looked at by others. This consciousness creates new points of comparison between who we are and who we might become, and places emphasis, as such, on body work, body transformation and body maintenance (Featherstone, 1991). The body is transformed as such into a commodity, or a consumption object, through techniques of body maintenance such as muscle-building, tanning, aesthetic treatments, plastic surgery, and general body grooming (Borel 1992, Detrez, 1998). Bodily consumption choices are then interpreted as identity statements.

In effect, all social groups (defined by social demarcations such as gender, age, etc) are targeted by publicity on body and appearance as market segments in their own right. Illustrating this, Andrew Blaikie, Mike Hepworth, Mary Holmes, Alexandra Howson, David Inglis & Sheree Sartrain (2003) describe the way children and teenagers, for example, are addressed as independent fashion and clothes consumers, individuals with a budget and the time to spend it. The media has a strong influence on this social group, and presents body modifications for example - like body-piercing – not only as a way of keeping



up with fashion aesthetics but also as a means for expressing resistance against adult, class, or gender norms (Mellor & Shilling, 1997). In this way, piercing - along with all other body modifications - provides a means for self-expression, for affirming social identity, in contrast to traditional cultures where body transformations are associated with cultural rites of passage (Brumberg, 1997). Both this unprecedented individualisation of the body in Western society, and the heightened degree of reflexivity about what the body is, have resulted in an interesting paradox where although the body has never been used so little, it has never been referred to so much (Borel, 1992).

Interest in the body is, however, by no means new, explains French sociologist Christine Borel (1992) who carried out a study on body modifications in contemporary consumer culture. This author highlights the way human beings have always been marked through their bodies at birth, affirming that it is society's way of taking possession of newborns. Christine Borel unveils family, clan, and tribal traditions in manipulating newborns, emphasising the change in their natural appearance and the way this indicates social belonging. In certain African tribes, mothers repeatedly massage the skulls of their newborns to make sure the shape complies with the current beauty criteria of their tribe; Indians of America flatten their babies' heads by using a particular shaped cradle; in Polynesia, a non-tattooed woman will not find a husband; in Nigeria, women attract attention to their legs by elaborate scarifications and pearl anklets; in Tchad women laugh of men who do not possess incisions behind their ears and will not have them as husbands. These are but a few examples, however the list

goes on, illustrating the importance of the body to all societies round the world, and illustrating the extent to which interest in the body is effectively not new to Western contemporary society. However, what *is* new is the individualisation and commodification of the body within popular culture where being successful is shown to the world through a successful body, that is, a body corresponding to the beauty criteria defined in the media, by society, for society.

### 2.2.2 Transforming the body

So as to achieve one's identity and feel socially acceptable, the body is transformed, inspired by the ideal body presented in media imagery (Detrez, 1998). The media is replete with features on body image, cosmetic surgery and "how to keep the body looking young, sexy and beautiful" (Shilling, 2003, p.1). Christine Borel (1992) explains that in order to promote the possibility of developing one's identity in a unique fashion amid a mass practice where all individuals are on the same quest, society offers an innumerable combination of options to transform the body or its image. This is evidenced by the boom of the fashion industry, fitness clubs, beauty salons, and cosmetic surgery.

Adverts on fashionable clothing have innundated our society, a constant reminder of the possibility of transforming our image through clothing. Buying clothes is the easiset way of changing the way we look which is why the fashion industry has boomed, both chain-shops and boutiques always within easy reach for a quick change of style, an update, or a simply grooming of the body. We see reflections of trendy mannequins in shop windows as we walk or drive to destinations; we constantly see fashion on publicity panels, in glossy magazines,

in the catalogues dropped into our letter boxes, and in bookstores too. Shopping has become a leisure activity in its own right, as expressed by France Borel (1992) Christine Detrez (1998), and Jean-Pierre Bourdieu (1984) when describing consumer society and the body in the Western World.

The importance of shopping as an activity is reflected in the academic world where a considerable number of researchers have undertaken studies in the consumer and leisure areas relating to shopping behaviour, shopping drivers, and consumer satisfaction (for example, Arnold and Reynolds, 2003; Adams, 2008; Rook, 1987; Woodruffe-Burton, Eccles and Elliott, 2008). Stephen Adams (2008) from the Telegraph affirms that women love clothing so much that they are likely to keep their clothing items longer than they keep their husbands, even though they shop frequently (average number of years women keep clothing: 12; average number of years women stay with their husbands: 11.6). In the Mintel Group Online Reports, Stephen Adams reveals that in 2007 84% of the UK's population enjoy browsing for goods in person (as opposed to online). This shows the extent to which this activity has become popular in our society and clearly reflects the importance of the body in our society.

The rising importance of the body as an industry in Western society can also be measured by the figures of weight loss and keep-fit businesses which have been described now as multi-million industries (Gimlin, 2000). Illustrating the popularity of the fitness market in the Western world are the following figures collected in the UK for *The Times* magazine in 2002 (19 October, 2002) and by Market and Business Development in 2006 (MBD, 2007). In the first

study, it was calculated that the UK fitness market had grown by 81% between 1994 and 1999. In the second study, figures confirm this fitness trend with a 16% growth calculated between 2002 and 2006. In much the same way, the businesses of aesthetic treatments has seen a significant increase in the past 10 years (Gimlin, 2000). Advice can be found in all beauty or fitness centers as to how much individuals should weigh, what and how often they should eat and drink, and what fitness activity they should engage in to lessen the gap with the ideal body (Borel, 1992). Plastic surgery has also become more popular as a means to reach one's beauty goal in society today, producing the most tangible results regarding metamorphosis of the body (Gimlin, 2000). According to the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (2003), the most popular body parts to be transformed in Western societies today, are breasts (breast implants), eyelids (blepharoplastics), and lips and tummies (tummy-tucks) for women, and hair (implantation) for men, as well as nose and chin jobs which have been carried out for longer. This growing appeal to surgery reflects the extent to which people feel the need to comply with the latest beauty criteria in society.

### 2.2.3 Gendered social pressure

Although the rise of the body in consumer society affects everybody, the effect on women's lives has been analysed to be significantly greater than for men (Bourdieu, 1998; Detrez, 1998). To explain the extent of the pressure of society on women with regards to the ideal body, Annette Pritchard & Nigel Morgan (2007b) contend that the beauty myth and other cultural injunctions concerning the visual aesthetic appearance of the female body are not only over-

represented compared to those of the male body in beauty product advertisements, but are also more broadly deeply embedded in all products and ideals of Western society. Advertising portrays a privileged world of appearances, shaping and reflecting a society where the pursuit for distinction through the purchase of products and services is the norm (Wernick, 1991), thus influencing women to strive for unobtainable bodies.

In much the same way that beauty and youth represent the mythical dream image of the contemporary woman, age and ugliness, on the contrary, are dreaded and represent a negative, demoralising image; these features signifying weakness and failure (Shilling, 2003). The effect on women throughout the Western world is clear:

Women are lifting weights to build muscle, wrapping their bodies in seaweed to reduce water retention, jogging on athletic tracks, highways and mountain trails, attending weekly weigh-ins at their local diet centers, and participating in any number of other activities intended to alter the appearance of their bodies.

(Gimlin, 2000, p.2)

Paula Black's (2004) research on beauty salons in the United Kingdom reveals the pressure of society on women highlighting that as use of the beauty industry has rocketed, women's levels of satisfaction with their looks have decreased as they strive for the unobtainable body.

The pressure felt by women to appear beautiful is a tyranny according to Christina Hughes (2002) and Naomi Wolf (1991). Alexandra Howson (2004)

argues that, in effect, whilst the body is important to the display of both men and women, it is particularly central to notions of femininity, and this explains women's higher preoccupation with appearance and psychological, physical and financial investment in their bodies. This pressure of society on women's physical appearance completes the general picture of the rise of the body in society, as presented through the well established culture of consumption and the boom of the body industry. This completes the backdrop of the body and Western society. I will now explore the different ways the body has been studied in academia.

### **2.3 Theorising the body**

At the end of the 1980s, sociologist Peter Freund (1988) wrote that although sociology was supposed to be a discipline concerned with living, breathing human beings, sociological writing did not acknowledge the significance of the human body in the emergence of modernity. Like other disciplines emerging in the nineteenth century, the historical and conceptual development of this discipline was premised on the Cartesian legacy reflecting the ontological distinction between mind and body, and privileging the mind, contends Bryan Turner (1984). This fundamental dichotomy between mind and body has influenced all fields of the social sciences, including early feminist studies, as discussed by Elisabeth Grosz (1994), as well as the field of tourism and leisure studies. I will therefore open this section on academic approaches to theorising the body by introducing René Descartes' work. I will then give an overview of social science conceptualisations of the body, integrating tourism

literature to these conceptualisations and positioning my research, explaining in which ways it extends these conceptualisations. I will finish this section by reviewing tourism studies on the body and embodiment, with reference to the conceptualisations discussed, and positioning my thesis.

### 2.3.1 Cartesian legacy

René Descartes (1968) developed what is considered to be a classic statement on the relationship between the mind and body inferring the mind to be more important than the body, in stating “I think therefore I am”. For René Descartes, personhood is perceived as distinct to humanhood (Hollis, 1997). The concept that individuals cannot reduce their sense of ‘who they are’ to their bodies, or to parts of their bodies, is a fundamental part of the Cartesian perspective. Sociologists Alexandra Howson (2004), Chris Shilling (2003) and Nick Crossley (2001) describe René Descartes’ theory at length, shedding light on his work. Following are the main points developed by these authors in their analysis of the Cartesian view of the world.

A Cartesian understanding of the self reflects three main points: firstly, that mind and body are considered distinct from each other; secondly, that body is subordinate to mind; and thirdly, that the mind is considered the source of thought through which the self is produced. Vision connects the self to the physical and material world in which the self is located, however, no other senses are regarded as meaningful in terms of perceiving the world.

The Cartesian posits an external perspective on the body then, which breaks it down into smaller disconnected parts. This body is a body seen from

the outside in terms of what composes the body, but never from the inside in terms of the body seeing or otherwise sensing or engaging with the outside world. In other words, René Descartes conceptualises bodies through their perceptible qualities - how they can be seen or touched, but never in terms of their sensuousness - how they see or touch. This concept of the body is problematic as a description of perceptible qualities presupposes the sensuousness required to perceive them. Neil Crossley (2001) explains that dualism was René Descartes' way out of this problem.

Descartes' dualism explains the over-riding importance of the mind and consequent absent body in social science studies until recent years. In the same way, Descartes' dualism is explained to be at the root of the absent body in feminist studies, according to Elisabeth Grosz (1994: 3), Moira Gatens (1996) and Judith Butler (1993) who describe the human subject as systematically divided into two dichotomously opposed characteristics, mind and body, thought and extension, reason and passion, psychology and biology, in this view. Elisabeth Grosz explains the way bifurcation of being is not simply a neutral division of an otherwise all-encompassing descriptive field, as "dichotomous thinking necessarily hierarchises and ranks two polarised terms so that one becomes the privileged term and the other its suppressed, subordinated, negative counterpart" (Grosz, 1994, p.3).

The subordinated term is merely the absence of the primary term, hence the absent body through the primary mind in Descartes' view. Body is claimed to be what mind is not, body distinct from mind, body suppressed by mind. The



body is “what the mind must expel in order to retain its integrity” (Grosz, 1994, p. 3). As a result, in this view, the body can be defined as unruly, disruptive, in need of direction, incidental to the defining characteristics of mind, reason and personal identity. It is also important to highlight the fact that this concept of the body portrays an asexual body, as the mind dominates and is presented as a neutral mind.

The consequences of the Cartesian view hence go deep into academic theories, the mind/body polarisation underpinning and supporting a number of other oppositional pairs (reason/passion, sense/sensibility, outside/inside, subject/other, self/other). Tourism studies are not an exception in terms of integrating these dichotomies. In fact, academics Irena Ateljevic, Nigel Morgan & Annette Pritchard (2007a) speak of these dichotomies, or polarisations, as typical of tourism enquiry’s dominant prevailing positivist approach and argue for the need to challenge these dichotomies by the reintegration of the elements in pairs so as to reconnect what we study with how we live.

The situation in the social sciences has changed today, with a clear shift from modernity and the earliest Cartesian concept of the body (the naturalistic view), towards postmodern theoritisations of the discursive body. There are today numerous books, journals, and even conferences dedicated to the body in sociology. Sociology is a discipline that is uniquely responsive to social change, and as such, it is no surprise that studies on the body are flourishing, exclaim Simon Williams & Gillian Bendelow (1998), reversing, as such, those earlier tendencies to ignore the body altogether (Stacey, 1997). In the context of

contrasting forces between modernity and postmodernity, the body represents a physical and conceptual space in which the recurring issues and tensions of sociology can be revisited, contends Andre Frank (1991). In modernity, the body is reduced to a knowable, anatomical object, controlled and contained (Morgan & Scott 1993), whereas in postmodernity the body becomes unstable, challenging Cartesian dualism, a discursive body overturning previous theory on the body, and in fact questioning what the body really is (Shilling, 2003). The body may have been something of an absent presence in sociology until the 1990s, however it has occupied a significant place in other traditions of social and popular thought, as illustrated in the naturalistic sciences (Shilling, 2003).

Following is an overview of the different existing approaches to the study of the body. I begin with the biological body emerging from the naturalistic sciences, then move to the discursive body portrayed in the social constructionist approaches, and finish with the critical body emerging in the post-structuralist approach.

### 2.3.2 Body conceptualisations

#### 2.3.2.1 The biological body

Naturalistic views of the body, dating from the eighteenth century, influenced the way people perceived the relationship between the body, self-identity and society. Although these views are diversified, they engage in a coherent analysis of the body which is presented as a pre-social, biological basis

on which the superstructures of the self and society are founded (Shilling, 2003). The capabilities and constraints of the biological body define the individual, and, as such, inequalities in material wealth, legal rights, and political power are not perceived as being socially constructed but, on the contrary, given, or at least legitimised, by the determining power of the biological body (O'Brien, 1989).

The emergence of the biological body can be linked back to the sexless Cartesian body (Laqueur, 1987, 1990). The male body was, in effect, considered the norm, the female body possessing the same features but arranged in a different and inferior way (Duroche, 1990). Duroche explains that, in effect, women were perceived to have the same genitals as men, except theirs were inside the body.

The naturalistic approach builds on these initial theories and continues to shape popular contemporary conceptions of the body with regards to gender difference and the theory of women's social inferiority (Sydie, 1987). Women are portrayed as the weaker sex because their bodies are biologically weaker and are unstable (Jordanova, 1989; Jacobus, Keller & Shuttleworth, 1990). In the case of sex differences, the argument that genes cause the male/female differences is used by sociobiologists to question the validity of feminist demands for change (Buffery and Gray, 1972; Tiger & Fox, 1978; Trivers, 1978; Wilson, 1975). If divisions between sexes are determined by biology, then they are great enough to cause a substantial division of labour even in the most egalitarian societies, affirms Edward Wilson (1975). Therefore, there is no

logical argument with which to resist these differences (Kaplan & Rogers, 1990).

Chris Shilling (2003) gives a good overview of the main features of the naturalistic approach in his book entitled *The Body and Social Theory*. The first feature of the naturalistic approach is that it is reductionist. Not only is the structure of society explained only on the basis of society's individuals, but the individuals themselves are explained only on the basis of their physical or genetic constitution. Their actions, intentions, and potential are all explained on the basis of their biological body. Socio-biologist Lynda Birke (1992) contends that today's biological studies on the body tend to be concerned with only the surface however, going no deeper than the skin, and consequently relaying the physiological materiality of the body to not being studied. However, she underlines at the same time that although it is important to effectively consider the biological body, - looking at what goes on 'inside the body' – the body must not be reduced to just what goes on inside.

The second feature of the naturalistic approach is that, having established the essential features of people's corporeality, these are then sorted into simplistic, often dichotomic, social categories such as male/female, black/white, and upper/middle/working class, where no overlapping is considered, and where the first part of a pair dominates the second part (Birke, 1992, p.2). This philosophical dualism in the understanding of the world, of people, of the body, is true to the Cartesian view described in the previous section, with the limitations this entails.

I argue with Chris Shilling (2003) that naturalistic views undoubtedly overstate the importance of, and draw unwarranted conclusions from, what they hold to be 'natural' in the human body. Nonetheless, if sociology is to engage with the full importance of the body for social systems, it does need to acknowledge the contribution that bodies make to social relations. Contemporary social theory appears to present ideas and theories about the body that are generally based on the premises that the body is a receptor, and not a generator, of social meanings, as will be presented in the next section, however this theory does not take into consideration the contribution that bodies make to social relations (Turner, 1999).

The next section 'The discursive body' groups those views that suggest that the body is shaped and constrained by society.

#### 2.3.2.2 The discursive body

Social constructionist approaches, in contrast to the naturalistic approach, are united in their opposition to the idea that the body can be analysed based on its biological features, and view features of the body, and boundaries between bodies of different groups of individuals, as social products. Bodies are not the foundation of society but the product of society (Turner, 1991). The relationship between the body and society varies within the social constructionist view, different researchers having developed different theories, however, all approaches converge towards the idea that social forces impinge on the body. The differences lie in the analysis of what those forces are and how they affect the body.

Carole Vance (1989) explains that these differences reflect how much of a social product the body is perceived to be. I will present here the two main influences which have informed theories of the body as social receptor, namely Pierre Bourdieu and Erving Goffman, explaining in what way they have influenced my own work on the body.

Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's work has been extremely influential in the social sciences. In the first part of this chapter, his work *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1984) was referred to for his concepts of cultural capital, social class and social identity, in establishing the culture of consumption. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital has since been extended by Chris Shilling (1991, 1992, 2003) to the concept of physical capital. Chris Shilling places the body as beholder of value within society, in the same way that Pierre Bourdieu placed cultural capital as beholder of value, and signifier of social class. Aspects of the body are objectified and different aesthetic features are given specific value within given social fields, and, as such, function as capital.

The various aesthetic qualities of the body define the physical capital, as do particular physical qualities such as fitness, strength, stamina, or toughness. Chris Shilling explains that any of these features can have an exchange value in different fields, hence the importance for individuals to acquire certain bodily attributes. The closer the body approximates the idealised images of beauty, the greater its exchange value, or the more likely one's body will influence one's celebrity status through attracting attention and admiration, thereby facilitating public life. Consequently, individuals will strive to manipulate their physical

appearance, modifying their features to conform to current ideals of beauty or, on the contrary, exaggerating their features to sharpen the contrast between their own looks and those of fashion norms, gaining exchange value here through being original, thereby being interesting because strikingly different (Howson, 2004).

This is especially true of woman, according to Christine Detrez (1998) who affirms that if all social relation is the place of 'exchange' where each 'delivers' himself/herself for evaluation by others, the physical part, as opposed to the language part, is more important for woman than man. Pierre Bourdieu (1998) argues that what's more, with women, it is not only their individual identity which is tied to their physical appearance, as it is for men, but also the identity of the couple or family that is tied to their physical appearance. In effect, in his book entitled *La domination masculine* (Bourdieu, 1998), Pierre Bourdieu makes parallels between the male dominated Kabyle society in Algeria, and Western European society, where he argues that

In much the same way that in the less emancipated societies women were treated as exchange goods for men to accumulate social capital through marriages, today they also bring an important contribution to the production and reproduction of the family's symbolic capital.

(p.135)

Pierre Bourdieu explores how this is done through aesthetics and appearances (cosmetics, clothing, and general body maintenance) which are perceived as representing the symbolic capital of a particular social group. In

this way, women are positioned within the realm of the public eye and their role is that of being attractive to look at. The social world then functions (to different degrees according to the fields) as a market of symbolic goods dominated by the masculine vision, where 'to be', for women, is 'to be seen' and this by the masculine eye or the eye which has been trained by the masculine vision (Bourdieu, 1998). This determines not only the relations of men to women, but the relations of women to themselves (Wolf, 1991; Kaufmann, 1998), as will become evident in my research analysis.

In terms of his discussion of gender and embodiment among the Kabyle society, Pierre Bourdieu highlights the influence of society on male and female embodiment (Bourdieu, 1992). The social construction of gender shapes the ways the body is transformed and perceived. He describes the different postures and bodily behaviour he observed based on gender, and analyses these differences to be symbolically meaningful in terms of reflecting a gendered construction of social identity. He explains for example that "the manly man, who goes straight to his target, without detours, is also a man who refuses twisted and devious looks, words, gestures and blows" (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 70). He describes habitual ways of walking emerge out of gendered and sexualised symbolic economies, reflecting, as such, ideological meanings. In other words, the way one walks communicates something about oneself to the others. The man who walks in a straight way communicates moral and geometric straightness; he conveys honesty.



However, the message conveyed will not be the same for women walking straight, the positive ideological message conveyed by straightness is only available to the male because honesty is linked to masculinity. Masculinity being ideologically linked with the positive value of honesty and honour results in women being placed in a double bind. In effect, women will not appear honest but masculine if they adopt a straight posture. Women will not be seen in a positive light for taking on a masculine posture, therefore they are condemned to the non-straight, bent, dishonest posture. They will be judged on their appearance, posture and their embodiment more generally.

Regarding the use of Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualisation of appearance as signifier of social identity and social class in the tourism field, several studies are to be mentioned. Ian Munt (1994) discusses the lifestyle of educated middle class travellers who seek an alternative way of travelling as a means of enhancing their cultural capital and social class. Chris Rojek & John Urry (1997) research backpacker travel as a cultural condition reflective of a free and relaxed lifestyle whereby the backpacker displays a certain cultural capital. Luke Desforges (1998) explores the notion of consumer identity through the process of 'collecting places', a way in which the traveller relates to other travellers and positions herself through cultural capital. Travel is discussed here as cultural capital, hence a sign of distinction and a means for reaching higher social class. Irena Ateljevic & Stephen Doorne (2001) emphasise heterogeneity among backpacker travellers whose internal transformation of self is analysed through the construction of visual identity grounded in habitus and the dispositions that

evolve around class, gender, age and ethnicity. Martine Abramovici (2002) analyses the Wairarapa wine tourist consumer in New Zealand in terms of social class and cultural capital gained through lifestyle and appearance.

Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualisation of the body as socially constructed will guide my research, in particular his theory on the gendered aspect of embodiment in our society. However, I would like to stress that Pierre Bourdieu's theorisation is uniquely based on society influencing and making the body, in other words the structure forming the agent. This perspective does not include the reality of agency reacting or acting upon the structure. I believe, as will be presented in the next section introducing the post-structural approach, that the agent can choose to either reproduce or resist the structure rather than simply absorb and symbolise it. I will therefore extend Pierre Bourdieu's concepts, taking them into a post-structural view of the world, englobing action and influence from both structure and agency.

The second major influence in discursive theorisation of the body is sociologist Erving Goffman (1959, 1963) who focuses on the body as an integral part of human agency. Erving Goffman's interest lies in the way the body enables people to intervene in, and make a difference to, the flow of daily life. People are embodied but they are not autonomous in their embodiment, that is, peoples' perceptions of bodily appearances and performances provide a sense of the social constraints under which body management occurs.

This approach can be summarised by the following characteristics. The body is viewed as a material property of individuals, individuals having the

ability to control and monitor their own bodies in order to facilitate social interaction (Goffman, 1963). Although the body is not actually produced by social forces as is the case for Pierre Bourdieu, the meanings attributed to the body are not under control of the individual but determined by shared understanding (through vocabulary) of body idiom (Goffman, 1963). In explaining the symbolic meanings attached to specific behaviour of individuals, Erving Goffman takes on a discursive view of the body. In this view, the body plays an important role in mediating the relationship between individuals' identity and their social identity (Goffman, 1963). In other words, the social meanings which are attached to particular bodily behaviour tend to be internalised and, as such, influence the way individuals perceive themselves in terms of their sense of self and feelings of inner worth.

Given the importance of encounters in Italian society where people are judged on appearance and presentation, bodily behaviour during all encounters is of prime importance, as my research will reveal. Erving Goffman's theory - portraying the body as playing an important role in encounters - is extremely appropriate to my research as such, and was used as a guiding line to understanding social positioning of Italian women. To this effect I analysed women's embodiment in their social encounters in public spaces – in particular the beach, theorising the body as a resource managed to construct a particular vision of the self. The self is enacted through the body as both a social construction and a distinctively individual possession. In this sense, the body is

one critical point at which the social meets the individual and from which a self is created (Gimlin, 2002).

The framework developed by Erving Goffman (1959, 1971) to analyse body behaviour in social encounters is the performance framework. This framework reveals individuals as actors playing roles for the benefit of their audience - the other people at the social encounter - and for their own expression of identity. The performances take place on specific stages where the performer and performing groups are each other's audiences, and play different roles front-stage and back-stage. The performers use props to enhance their performance and impress their audience.

Although I am guided by Erving Goffman's theory, I challenge his performance concept in considering that the stage is not permanently defined during a performance - with a clear front and back stage. Rather, I consider that at different moments of the performance the same area can represent either front or back stage. I also challenge Erving Goffman's concept in terms of embodiment. In effect, although the body is analysed and given symbolic value by Erving Goffman in a discursive way, his body is lacking gendered embodiment which is where my research fits in, taking Erving Goffman's theory, as such, into the post-structural world of gendered and embodied realities of the body.

This brings to an end my overview of the discursive body. To conclude on this body conceptualisation, I argue that theorising the body as defined by society is a reality lacking something. I contend in effect that although the body

is defined by society, we also need to consider individuals' sense of choice regarding the system in which they live, their possibility of choosing to reproduce a particular behaviour, or not, through their embodiment. Chris Shilling (1993: 81) expresses this missing theory in the social constructionist approach as follows: "The body is affected by discourse, but we get little sense of the body reacting back and affecting discourse". A further limitation in the conceptualisation of the discursive body lies in the fact that the physicality of the body is conceptualised exclusively as a location on which social structures and cultures imprint themselves, therefore it is difficult to shed light on the concept of actual materiality of the body.

In order to understand how the body can be a source of - as well as a location for, social forms, the body must be conceptualised as both a material and a social phenomenon which is shaped by, but irreducible to, contemporary social relations and structures (Butler, 1993).

To rob the body of its own history and characteristics [...] is to neglect how our embodied being enables us to remake ourselves by remaking the world around us.

(Shilling, 2003, p.182)

Chris Shilling (2003) stresses in effect that, in rejecting the negative aspects of the biological body from the naturalistic approach, social constructionists have, by the same token, also neglected the way our body contributes towards social life in their conceptualisation of the discursive body.

It is this aspect of the biological body which I argue is worth developing alongside the discursive body, taking us in this way towards the ‘critical body’. Both the biological body and the discursive body are structuralist views of the body, that is, views based on either material or discursive formations – structures - of society. The critical body represents a post-structuralist view.

#### 2.3.2.3 The critical body

Post-structuralism, also known as postmodern, deconstructionist, linguistic, or French theory, is largely based on French philosophy (Aitchison, 2003). Cara Aitchison (2003) explains that post-structural research draws on work of Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault in psychoanalytic, linguistic and cultural studies, and on Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray in feminist studies. The different perspectives and approaches have in common the fact that they consider language and communicative practices as central to post-structural critique. Discourse theory and discourse analysis are used to discuss social and cultural processes. Post-structuralism refutes the notion of one single theory to explain social, cultural, and power relations, as it denies the notion of one single truth (Aitchison, 2003). This is the approach which is taken to studying the body with the critical lenses.

Michel Foucault’s work is, in many ways, the most radical and influential approach to bringing the body into scholarship and conceptualising the body as a critical body, albeit a genderless body. An important concept that comes across in Michel Foucault’s work is that the self can be authored by us, the subjects, so

that we can produce ourselves and our lives as works of art (Danaher, Schirato & Webb, 2000). Michel Foucault's earlier work on subjectivity had revealed identity to be natural or inherent, the body not only given meaning by discourse, but wholly constituted by discourse (Turner, 1984). However, his more recent work shows individuals to be autonomous in that they can effectively resist the power of disciplinary forces and institutional discourses, and as such 'cultivate' themselves through 'arts of existence' (Danaher et al., 2000). Michel Foucault describes this art of existence as our way of becoming self-determining agents, providing the grounds for us to challenge and resist structures (Foucault, 1997). So, although Michel Foucault focuses on discourse, he also looks at how discourse is negotiated by agency.

In terms of aesthetics, Michel Foucault does however put limits to the freedom from discourse, arguing that the subject follows discourses for taste and style. The possibilities of subjectivity – who we can be and what kind of relations we can have with ourselves and others – are limited then by power-knowledge, contexts, and discourse (Foucault, 1997). However, given that agency is constructed by power-knowledge, this is also part of subjectivity, individuals differing in how much they exercise their agency, and how much they are aware of it.

Michel Foucault discusses the importance of aesthetics in Western society, affirming that it is something in which everyone participates, something in which we all have a stake. His earlier approach to the body was much used by feminist scholars who argued that the discursive body described by Michel

Foucault was the basis on which individual identities and social inequalities were built (Fuss 1990). The discursive body was in effect used to portray women as victims in society, their inequality being socially constructed by class, gender, etc, and women being trapped in their position. I argue that women have a voice, that they may choose to react to the system hence not being victims of the system, but being empowered by their knowledge of choices within the system. Although this is in line with Michel Foucault's art subjectivity and art of the self conceptualisation, it is important to point out that Michel Foucault does not address the issue of gender, gendered identity, and gendered embodiment. Also, he does not engage with the materiality and sensuality of the body which are important aspects of the critical body.

As discussed in the previous section, the discursive body focuses very much upon the symbolic function of body comportment. In contrast, the critical body goes beyond symbolism in considering that differences in bodily behaviour are *lived* by individuals given that they have a voice, that they make choices, and this has inevitable consequences in the construction of their social identity and lives.

Feminist Iris Young (1990) emphasises embodied subjectivity based on women's typical modes of bodily conduct and their differences with men. She argues that women tend not to put their whole body into things, and tend to have a more passive attitude to action, such as waiting for the ball to reach them rather than throwing themselves at the ball to catch it as men would do. Iris Young describes this behaviour of women as disempowering because through



this behaviour women reduce their physical powers and capacities for achieving control over physical situations. This reflects objectification of women's body in Western society, a sexual objectification (Young, 1990).

I argue, however, that women may paradoxically feel empowered through this behaviour, if they are making a choice. In other words, if they are willingly choosing to carry out small, passive movements, they will be empowered through the knowledge that they are doing so. This is very different to carrying out the same movements without consciousness, in a submissive way. In the same way, women may choose to carry out large movements. Although larger movements leave a woman more exposed, more vulnerable to the looking on, she will feel empowered rather than objectified through her awareness and conscious choice (to go against what is expected of her). The empowerment comes from the women's self-awareness, but also from her knowledge, education, skills, and individual powers. This is known as the agency.

Social theorist Anthony Giddens (1984) explains the mutual dependency of structure and agency as a dialectic between individuals and society whereby each influences the other. Cara Aitchison (2003) describes this as a process in which the individual both shapes, and is shaped by, society. The individual negotiates with the structure through her agency, enabling her to choose whether to comply with what is expected of her by society - thereby reproducing the system, or on the contrary to act differently - thereby resisting the system. In order to negotiate with the structure through their agency, individuals must know the structure for it is the structure which shapes the agency. So, for example, an

Italian woman in New Zealand who is embodying sensuality the way it is acknowledged and appreciated in Italian society, will not receive the same looks and not feel empowered as she would in Italy. Her embodiment will not be interpreted the same way for New Zealand society and cultural ways are not the same as Italian society, and society shapes the individual.

This leads me to the last point I would like to draw attention to, regarding the critical body, which feeds on the concept of the 'look' developed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1968) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1969). In this concept, the claim is that we exist for others and this influences our gendered embodiment. Embodiment is not only about what we feel, but also encompasses social pressure, what is expected of us, and how others want to see us, and will see us. Others can see, hear, touch and smell us, and we perceive ourselves as others will perceive us through their senses (Crossley, 2001). As Jean-Paul Sartre (1969, p. 260) said: "I see myself because somebody sees me".

In studying Italian women's embodiment, the male gaze was revealed as determining an extremely powerful influence on women's bodily language precisely because they are so aware of being looked at, as 'looking at women' is a normal, expected male behaviour in their society. Naomi Wolf (1991) points out that in Western society in general, women are subtly coerced to embody beauty and men are encouraged to both desire and possess beautiful women. This 'beauty myth' Naomi Wolf writes about reveals much on the resulting embodiment it encourages in women. Women feel compelled to constantly monitor their looks, checking their reflection in shop windows or mirrors in

passing, and also constantly measuring their self-worth in terms of how they physically compare to other women.

Alexandra Howson (2005) argues that it is precisely through this complexity that the post-structural approach returns text and speech to the body and views bodies as sites of meaning and meaning as embodied. Where Joyce Davidson & Mick Smith (1999) argue for the need to complement Luce Irigaray's (1985a, 1985b) discursive approach with forms of life and the material body, David McNally (2001) argues for the need to complement the sensory world in ways that locate speech into the context of life. This thesis aims at drawing together materiality of the body and discursive analysis of the body, along with the concept of the agency negotiating with the structure, resulting in the conceptualisation of the 'critical body'. The critical body, representing the post-structural approach, possesses a sensual materiality reflecting the way the body feels, a social identity reflecting the body constructed through society, and embodiment reflecting the way the body negotiates with society, either resisting or reproducing the system, resulting in a sense of self.

Although a post-structural approach can be taken in studying the body as a material body or a discursive body, the difference with the critical body is that both material body and discourse are acknowledged. As well as bringing materiality and discourse together, the critical body discusses the structure and agency dynamics, acknowledging, as such, that individuals both shape and, are shaped by, society.

Alexandra Howson (2005) claims that although feminists in many disciplines do generate pragmatic materialist research – post-structuralist research - on a range of substantive issues concerning embodiment, and more particularly female embodiment, these tend to be located within specific fields (such as health and illness). She explains that the research, as such, tends to present specialist knowledge rather than broader knowledge linked to Western society.

It is interesting however to point out that in practically all social and feminist post-structural theories arguing for the necessity to consider the physical materiality of the body, the material body actually disappears over the theoretical horizon during the process (Birke, 1999; Butler, 1993; Grosz, 1994; Howson, 2005). Post-structural feminist Judith Butler (1993) explains her decision to write her book *Bodies that matter* precisely to consider the materiality of the body, but describes her difficulties in approaching this, the materiality of the body invariably moving her into other domains. “I tried to discipline myself to stay on the subject, but found that I could not fix bodies as simple objects of thought” (Butler, 1993,p. ix).

Judith Butler explains that the difficulty in fixing this subject is essential to understanding the matter at hand. Judith Butler’s (1993) theory about bodies is that they tend to indicate a world beyond themselves, however she argues that this movement beyond their own boundaries, a movement of boundary itself, is actually central to what bodies are. She contends that bodies are complex, that they are linked to society and culture, however cannot be reduced to discursive

social constructions precisely because of the materiality of ‘facts’ about the body in everyday life. If everything is discourse, what happens to the body? “For surely bodies live and die; eat and sleep; feel pain, pleasure; endure illness and violence; and these ‘facts’, one might skeptically proclaim, cannot be dismissed as mere construction” (Butler, 1993, p.xi).

What then is the materiality of the body? Judith Butler (1993, p. 9) describes the notion of matter as “a process of materialisation that stabilises over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter”. She develops a theory revealing the regulatory norms through which sex is materialised, questioning the extent to which sex is a constrained production setting the limits for qualifying what the body is. Sex and gender are not considered to be separate here, both being implicated in the other in a discursive loop. Social perceptions of the materiality of the sexed body cannot be separated from its signification in language, through which the body becomes fixed as matter over time (Hughes & Witz, 1997).

Alexandra Howson (2004) argues that Judith Butler encourages a view of the body completely detached from experiences, and collaterally from material, flesh and blood bodies. Though Judith Butler is striving to discern ways for bodies to matter in philosophical discourse, she reveals indissolubility of materiality and representation, resulting in reducing the material body to discourse (Alcoff, 2000). I argue that the discursive and material body need to come together, as one cannot exist without the other, however, I believe the

materiality of the body must effectively be explored through embodiment, rather than through entangled discourse.

The ways in which the body is embodied - or lived and experienced, is profoundly influenced by social processes and shaped by particular contexts of the individual's life. We do not simply have bodies that we do things with and to, but we *are* bodies, our sense of who we are is inseparable from our own body (Howson, 2004, p. 12). We are our bodies and "everything we are and do assumes an embodied form" (Crossley, 2001, p.140). Although the embodied approach clearly stands in contrast to the Cartesian differentiation of mind and body, sociologist Nick Crossley points out René Descartes' achievement in making a case for the mind/body dualism, and having people agree with him, thereby proving the human body as not simply existing 'in itself', but also 'for itself', as a focus of its own projects, concerns and contemplations.

This ends the section on the critical body, and consequently on body conceptualisations. Through my literature review thus far I have addressed the issue of the absent body in academia until recent years, and body conceptualisations as developed in the fields of sociology, cultural studies and feminist studies. I will now move into the field of tourism studies, introducing the three streams of body studies which have emerged, and showing in which ways my research will enrich and extend the existing tourism research. Before doing so, I will give an overview of gender studies in tourism, my topic of study focusing on gendered embodiment.

### 2.3.3 Tourism and embodiment

The focus of my thesis being Italian women and the gendered construction of their social identity through their embodiment, it is naturally positioned within two main debates in tourism studies: gender, and the body and embodiment. Gender studies in tourism tend to take on a structuralist approach whereby limitations and constraints are discussed for women travellers. Different structures of society are considered around debates of age, ethnic group, social class, or the intersection of various debates. However, the body is not addressed. The body and embodiment studies in tourism focus on either the researcher or the researched. This chapter focuses on the researched, while the researcher's embodiment will be discussed in the next chapter. Existing studies appear to take on a more post-structuralist approach - through new ways of theorising, using new metaphors and embodiment, however, in many cases gender is not addressed.

#### 2.3.3.1 Gender studies

All parts of the tourism experience are grounded in, and influenced by, the social construction of gender and our collective understanding of it (Kinnaird & Hall, 1994). Vivian Kinnaird & Derek Hall (1994) and Margaret Swain (1995), pioneers in gender studies in the tourism field, are the first to call for furthering gender studies in the field, arguing that gender is an evenly represented focus. Vivian Kinnaird & Derek Hall (1994) identify four key areas of gender study in tourism: the gendered producer, the gendered image, the gendered tourist, and gender relations. Thea Sinclair (1997) explains that the main emphasis in early

gender studies in the field regards the gendered producer. Nigel Morgan & Annette Pritchard (1998) work on the gendered image and marketing, followed by Annette Pritchard & Nigel Morgan (2000) and by Annette Pritchard (2001). Studies on gender relations address mainly sex tourism and host/guest issues (Harris, 2002). The areas least developed to date are those concerning the gendered tourist and gender relations among tourists. My research fits into this area as I focus on the gendered construction of identity of Italian women through their tourism and leisure activities, and analyse their position in society in relation to men.

After nearly a decade of research in gender studies, pioneers Derek Hall, Margaret Swain & Vivian Kinnaird (2003) contend that the advances in gender studies are not as influential as was initially hoped. These authors underline the way gender studies in the tourism field focusing on the gendered consumer appear to address mainly limitations and constraints of travel (Davidson, 1994; Slavik & Shaw, 1996; Small, 1999; Zalatan, 1998), and travel and tourism needs (Jordan, 1998), in particular those of business women (Foster & Botterill, 1995; Lutz & Ryan, 1993). The traditional dichotomies of men being in business and women in the home (Aitchison & Jordan, 1998; Johnston, 2001) seem to underlie the communications between tourism producers and the female business traveller (Harris, 2002). Candice Harris (2002) shows that considerably more studies from within the leisure field addressed gender issues than the tourism field (Aitchison, 1996; Aitchison, MacLeod and Shaw, 2000; Carr, 1999; Henderson, 1994; Jackson & Henderson, 1995). She reveals the focus to be



mainly on constraints and limitations in leisure studies, much the same as in tourism. Feminist literature on women's leisure reveals the extent to which women with families may rarely feel they are on holiday, even whilst they are traveling (Deem, 1986; Green, Hebron & Woodward, 1990).

Erica Wilson (2004) explores women and solo travel, focusing on the meaning of travel in women's lives, the constraints they face, and how they negotiate these constraints. Candice Harris & Irena Ateljevic (2003) study women business travelers, aiming to unveil the power relations whereby the male gaze is considered as the neutral gaze in society. Cheryl Cockburn-Wooten, Lorraine Friend & Alison McIntosh (2005) research independent women travelers, addressing the way travel is constructed in society as is the meaning of the travel experiences. They examine the gendered construction of women's travels, arguing that traditional notions of female dependence and associated values are reinstated through their travels, thus limiting their freedom.

Bente Heimtun (2005) examines singlehood and holidaymaking, focusing on middle-aged women traveling alone. Olga Junek & Wayne Binney (2005) examine whether the all-female element is important to women travellers and what benefits they gain from this sort of travel. They are interested in aspects of satisfaction with tour holidays, focusing on senior citizens. Diane Sedgley (2007) also explores the leisure of older women, as does Heather Gibson (2002). Fiona and Heather (Jordan & Gibson 2004) compare the experiences of solo women travellers from the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Their aim is to give voice to those who are often marginalised in the quantitatively oriented tradition of tourism research.

Gender studies to date, regarding the gendered consumer, can be summarised by two main features. They focus mainly on limitations, as pointed out by several researchers, and they do not address the tourist's body. The lacking tourist body were discussed by researchers Soile Veijola & Eeve Jokinen (1994) at the time that gender studies were starting to develop in tourism. These authors had at the time questioned John Urry's (1990) passive tourist who's main activity was gazing (at scenery and tourist sites) as opposed to 'doing'. The authors highlighted the importance of bodily experiences in the tourism field, exclaiming that it was not possible to engage with topics such as sunbathing, dancing, eating, drinking, without creating space for the senses, for the body. Through an imaginary piece of work, simulating discussions among tourism academics, they explored the issue of the body, or lack of, in tourism studies, developing the argument that the body is an important part of who we are and a crucial part of 'doing' tourism. Their call for tourism research to consider the body is particularly relevant for gender studies, embodiment being gendered (Howson, 2005).

#### 2.3.3.2 The body

Although it has taken ten years for the body to emerge as a field of interest in tourism, studies on the body are now flourishing and two key trajectories can

be identified in tourism literature today. The first trajectory concerns the theoretisation of the body of the tourist. This empirical aspect of tourism is captured through three different streams: sensuous tourism, tourism as a stage, and socio-cultural networks. The second trajectory concerns issues surrounding the researcher and her methodological approach. The way researchers' embodiment influences their research, the way they use academic knowledge, their relationship to reality, how they engage with the researched, are issues which will be developed in the next chapter on my research approach.

I have divided theoretisation of the tourist body into three different streams for facility of presentation, but I would like to underline the fact that much overlapping occurs and that certain studies could appear in several or all streams. The first stream, the sensuousness of tourism, tends to regroup those studies focusing on the material body. The second stream, tourism as a stage, tends to regroup those studies focusing on the discursive body. The third stream, socio-cultural networks, tends to regroup those studies focusing on the critical body.

#### *.2.3.3.2.1 Sensuous tourism*

The body is a means through which we, as individuals, are involved in the world at a practical level (Obrador-Pons, 2003). Lived experience, social practice, knowledge and feelings are perceived as always intrinsically corporeal and sensual by researcher Tim Edensor (2000). Adrian Franklin and Mike Crang (2001) and Crouch (1999, 2002) confirm Tim Edensor's view in calling for the

need to examine the embodied dimension of tourism, moving beyond the passive gaze into embodiment of acts, that is, into the ‘doing’ of tourism.

The studies presented here address the materiality of the body through the sensuous and sensual experience of tourism. Although sensuality is often encompassed in tourism at a common sense level, it has strangely been excluded from academic tourism theorising until recent years (Chaney, 2002; Crouch & Desforges, 2003). However, a recent growth in academic interest regarding the sensual and sensuous body addresses the subjective character of tourists’ experiences through their senses. Questions about the “increasing recognition of the plurality of senses that give access to the world” (Crouch, 1999, p. 4), and the fact that tourism “demands new metaphors based more on ‘being, doing, touching and seeing’ rather than just seeing” (Cloke & Perkins, 1998, p. 189) have been recognised.

David Crouch & Luke Desforges (2003) explain their conceptualisation of sensual tourism experiences as ‘knowing-as-doing’, that is, a cognitive understanding of being somewhere associated with a bodily understanding felt through movement in space and encounters with people. According to these authors, bodies move around a site so that the senses may engage with, and construct, the tourist experience.

Researchers Paul Cloke & Harvey Perkins (1998) and Harvey Perkins & David Thorns (2001) study the sensuous ‘doing’ of tourism focusing on extreme tourism. They highlight the importance of the body in adventure tourism as a means of engaging with nature on the one hand and a way of experiencing

adrenalin thrills on the other. These studies challenge the concept of the passive tourist gaze through the concept of active tourism. The body is an important part of the experience where individuals described as ‘throwing’ themselves into the beautiful scenery, as opposed to simply looking at it. The ‘doing’ of adventure tourism is shown to awaken the senses, thus enabling tourists to live an embodied experience.

David Crouch (1999) developed the metaphor of the encounter to address issues of the body in tourism. This metaphor takes the individual as the focus for tourism, concentrating on her body and her ‘doing’ of tourism through her encounters. The author researches tourists’ encounters through geographical lenses. He considers encounters with places and with people, and analyses these as productive of a lay geographical knowledge. He focuses on the way individuals make sense of the world and their relationship to it through their multi-sensual encounters, and the way they feel during these encounters.

Pau Obrador-Pons (2003) explains the limitations of John Urry’s gaze describing it as based on a masculine, middle-class, imperialistic imaginary, and as such, as being dangerously universal. He also argues that the tourist experience is deeply grounded on non-visual forms of corporeal participation as well as visual. Pau Obrador-Pons draws from David Crouch’s (1999) work and concept of multi-sensory tourism in developing the metaphor of the tourist dwelling. This metaphor explains the way tourists interact with the physical environment, the way they are in the world, the way they dwell in the world. The author views everyday life and tourism experiences as integrated through the

tourist's dwelling and, as such, argues against the traditional view of tourism representing the extra-ordinary.

David Crouch & Luke Desforges (2003) describe sensuous tourism as a view of tourism possessing poetic qualities. They contend that the word 'sensuous' encourages images of holidays such as "the laziness of long days on a sunny beach, the pleasure of a sun tautened skin, or sipping back cool drinks" (Crouch & Desforges, 2003, p. 5). This description encourages theorisation of aspects of bodily pleasure, of sensuality and of fun, associated with tourism. These authors underline the importance of considering all aspects of sensuous tourism and not simply the positive ones that come to mind. They describe sensations such as the pains felt in feet which have been walking all day. These pains in turn can represent a nice experience - someone happily walking all day in lovely areas, or an unpleasant experience – someone being dragged around places they are not happy to be in. Hence the importance of considering the body not *per se* but within a context. The context is shaped by people, places, subjectivities and knowledge. The authors contend that sensuous tourism is informative of the wider context of politics, power, and cultural arrangements and processes of the tourist's everyday life. In other words, in deconstructing the 'doing' of tourism and the physical sensations associated with adventure activities - pushing oneself to one's limits - the symbolic value of the sensuous body explains the broader context of society.

Hazel Andrews (2005) focuses on gendered embodiment in her ethnographic study of 'British' charter tourist resorts in Mallorca, exploring the

role of bodily senses in the tourists' constructions of space and social relations. More particularly, she addresses the gendered embodiment of 'sexual positions' displayed in bar crawls. Her analysis reads into this embodiment as a means for understanding gendered construction of identity. She analyses gendered social and cultural reality of the British tourists through their evening behaviour in Spain.

This ends my overview of tourism studies regarding the body as part of the sensuous doing of tourism. The materiality of the body is much discussed, and these studies have informed my own research regarding the materiality of Italian women's body. However, only two studies (the last two presented) address the discursive body as well. This is where my research fits in as I address the material body and the discursive body. These two studies (David Crouch & Desforges and Hazel Andrews) read into the body for understanding society, and I build on their research. My research brings gendered dimension to the sensuous doing of tourism.

#### *.2.3.3.2.2 Tourism as a stage*

The second stream of body studies in tourism is based on Erving Goffman's performance metaphor. These studies are applications of the performance metaphor to the tourism field, where the spaces in which the tourist evolves are considered as stages, and the tourist is analysed in terms of the performance he carries out on these stages. The basic concept behind this metaphor is that the inherently dramatic nature of social life insures that we

invariably play particular roles in social context (Tim Edensor, 2001). These roles are played out front-stage and prepared back-stage. Erving Goffman (1959, p. 72) proclaimed that “All the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn’t are not easy to specify”.

Tim Edensor (1998) offers an extensive account of tourist behaviour at the Taj Mahal in Agra, India, analyzing their performance, which is played out for the other tourists present in same time as them. His research highlights the way bodily trajectories of tourists take shape in and around the Taj Mahal site. In focusing on these trajectories, Tim Edensor notes the different forms of agency and structure involved in the tourist space where the performance is taking place, and raises questions about bodily cultures. He suggests that particular movements are shaped by consumer desires or the structures of tourism production. Tim Edensor’s research informed my research through his discussion on tourist stages, performance and the importance of the looking on of the others at the scene.

Lynda Johnston (2001) explores gender construction and dualisms, illustrating the way homosexuality is perceived in society. She deconstructs two gay parades taking place in New Zealand and Australia, studying the tourists at these events in terms of their motivations and perceptions. Her study engages in the way the bodies paraded are viewed, as she deconstructs the dualist assumptions of self/other, straight/gay and host/guest. She engages with gendered embodiment, discussing the body as a site for enactment of masculine and feminine identities, as well as power relationships. This study stands out



among the performance applications in the tourism field for it discusses gendered relations in society and gendered constructions of identity, of much interest to my gendered analysis of Italian woman in society and the construction of gendered identity in Italian society.

Stephen Doorne & Irena Ateljevic (2005) carried out a study on backpackers in Fiji, analysing their performance and the way in which it symbolises different aspects of Western society. These authors based their work on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, exploring the way the backpackers' performance enables them to gain cultural capital, hence status, among their co-travellers on the one hand, and back home on the other. The body is considered here in a discursive approach, significant in terms of the social systems which construct it through specific values, morality and social law. This study informed my research, in particular the authors' discussion on the symbolic meaning of the body, that is, analysis of the discursive body.

Irena Ateljevic & Stephen Doorne (2005) use the performance metaphor in China to explore dialectics of entrepreneurship and cultural consumption in the backpacker enclave of 'Foreigner's Lane' in Dali, Yunnan Province. The performance metaphor illustrates the context of authentication. Their research focuses on local entrepreneurs and their construction of 'exotic otherness' reflecting demands of backpackers. As such, they analyse the backpacker community to be obsessed with identity. They contend that representation of culture through the performance framework is now an established reality in tourism studies, both in critical examinations of staged authenticity (Adams,

1984; Britton & Clarke, 1987; Crick, 1989; Greenwood, 1978; MacCannell, 1976; Smith, 1978; Turner & Ash, 1975) and in reflexive explorations of the social dynamics through which cultural production takes place (Boissevain, 1996; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1988).

Although my research is also an application of Erving Goffman's performance metaphor and the above studies informed my work, it presents several differences with these studies. The first is that I consider individuals as having the choice to negotiate with the system, that is, they may choose to reject or reproduce the system, as opposed to representing the system – their society. This reflects my critical body approach as opposed to the discursive body approach. The second is that I do not analyse tourists' social and cultural dimensions through their performance in foreign countries as the above studies. I focus on tourists in their own culture and environment. Tourists in an environment which is not their own are not conditioned by their local environment for there are not the same expectations of them as foreigners. In other words, being in a different social environment makes for possible behavioural changes. In my research focusing on Italian women's performance in their home environment, I analyse pressure of society, cultural expectations, and these women's negotiations within their own society, through their performance, hence gaining deeper understanding of Italian society and culture.

#### *.2.3.3.2.3 Socio-cultural networks*

The third stream of body studies in tourism is based on Cara Aitchison's socio-cultural nexus. The basic concept behind the socio-cultural nexus is that individuals both shape, and are shaped by, society. Individuals negotiate with the structure through their agency which enables them to choose whether to comply with what is expected of them by society - thereby reproducing the system, or on the contrary to act differently - thereby resisting the system. The socio-cultural nexus represents a post-structural view of tourism whereby discourse theory and discourse analysis are used to discuss social and cultural processes through tourism. The studies in this section have in common their aim to explain social, cultural, and power relations in society, through the body or body representations.

Fiona Jordan & Scott Fleming (2005) take on a post-structural approach in their study of female imagery in UK men's lifestyle magazines, as illustrated in their paper entitled 'Beachwatch Babes and Summer Scorcherers: Sexualised Discourses of Tourism in UK Men's Lifestyle Magazines'. Their research, drawing on data from a previous study on female imagery in UK women's lifestyle magazines, compares sexualisation of women's body representation in these two popular forms of culture, reading into cultural norms in Great Britain, through their image analysis. Fiona Jordan & Scott Flemming conceptualise the body as a critical body, focusing on gendered embodiment, objectification, social discourse and cultural meanings, through media imagery.

Soile Veijola & Anu Valtonen (2007) illustrate the critical body approach in their study on gendered embodiment in the negotiating of body space in the

confined space of an airplane. They highlight woman's agency in showing the way she negotiates with society. Woman is shown to either react against society's 'normal' understanding of shared space – men using it comfortably and women making themselves small - or go along with it, making herself discrete. This critical piece of work describes women 'surviving' the discomforts of air travel, 'perched' high on seats planned for men. The authors engage with both the discursive and the material body as they analyse society through women's embodiment, and analyse the way the women feel in their bodies, through their sensuous embodied experiences.

Derek Hall (Ateljevic & Hall, 2007) addresses the gendered performance of tour leaders in Albania, and Irena Ateljevic (Ateljevic & Hall, 2007) addresses the performance of masculinity by local villagers in the Dalmatian islands in Croatia showing the way they use the gendered tourist to play a role and gain status in their own society. In both cases, it is the performance of the host which is analysed when coming in contact with the tourists, rather than the tourists themselves. Irena Ateljevic and Derek Hall shed light on gendered identity in Albanian and Dalmatian societies. They present a rich social and cultural understanding of those studied, for they study them in their own environment. As such, those being researched reproduce their natural everyday ways within their society. The results in a deep analysis of local ways.

Annette Pritchard & Nigel Morgan (2007b) examine representations of the (un)dressed female body in travel magazines, analyzing the way these bodies are seen, both materially and symbolically. They take on a critical approach to

exploring fashion and media industries, revealing the extent to which these industries are profound and unsuspected agents of cultural pedagogy. They explore discourses of tourism, place and gender as articulated in a particular lifestyle magazine, revealing a patriarchal, imperialist discourse embedded in conceptions of adventure, conquest, pleasure and the exotic (Rose, 1993). These authors analyse gendered power relationships through the masculinist discourse revealed in female embodiment of fashion. They call for further study on the body as a site where dominant discourses and wider hegemonic socio-cultural relations are resisted, contested or affirmed. This is where my study fits in, revealing the way Italian women resist, contest, or affirm the dominant patriarchal discourse of Italian society, through their embodiment.

This concludes my review of studies on the body in tourism as representative of socio-cultural networks in society. These studies have informed my research through their critical approach to the body. My research brings added value through considering social class and socio-demographics as well as gender as criteria for analyzing society through the body. In terms of gender, my research fills a gap in that the existing studies on women's embodiment focus on image representations of the female body, where my research focuses on 'live' women.

To conclude on body studies more generally, I would like to highlight the fact that existing studies on the body, published in the English language, are rooted mainly in the Anglo-saxon context, and we know little about the Southern Mediterranean culture of the body, which is where my study comes in. The

studies rooted in the Anglo-saxon context reflect both the anglo-saxon way of approaching research and the cultural reference contexts used. Images, for example, reflect both the environment in which the researcher lives, and the audience for whom the analysis is carried out. My research reflects the Mediterranean culture both in the way I carried out my research (as will become apparent in the next chapter) and in the cultural meanings attached to the body in Italian society.

## **2.4 Summary**

In this chapter, I reviewed social science theory of the body revealing three body conceptualisations: the biological body, the discursive body and the critical body. Then I moved to the tourism field, focusing on gender studies and body studies. In terms of situating my research within existing body and embodiment studies in the tourism field, and within the academic debate on the body, my research brings together material and discursive bodies. These are anchored into a socio-cultural context, whereby the embodiment is perceived to reflect the agency of the individual. My research focuses on gendered embodiment and discusses issues around gendered construction of identity and power relations through embodiment. As such, my research reflects the critical body.

By considering gender in my embodiment study and analysis, I bring together gender studies and body studies in the tourism field, where these were shown to generally be separate fields of study. Existing studies on the body and embodiment in the tourism field do not address social class or socio-demographic criteria which is also where my research fits in. And finally,

existing studies were shown to reflect the Anglo-saxon world. In this my research will provide an opening into the Mediterranean culture. I will finish by underlining the extent to which my study builds on previous studies. I wish to highlight the importance of previous studies on the body and on gender in the tourism field for the formulation of my subject of study and for my approach to carrying out my research. The next chapter will present my research approach.

## **3 The Research Approach**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter addresses philosophical issues of embodiment as my research approach. Although the social sciences witnessed a ‘crisis of representation’ (Marcus & Fisher, 1986) as early as the mid 1980s raising philosophical debates about the researcher’s approach and leading to the cultural turn of postmodernity (Chaney, 1994; Foucault & Gordon, 1980; McDowell, 1994), the field of tourism studies has moved rather more slowly in this direction. However, a part of tourism research today *is* responding to these wider debates, revealing a postmodern deconstructing of the cultural politics of research and questioning the dominant processes involved in the so-called ‘making of knowledge’ (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004). New methodological approaches are developing whereby the researcher is becoming a subjective person, as opposed to the traditional, objective ‘non-person’, typical of the dominant tourism discourse. In this light, researchers are perceived to reflect their socially constructed reality in their discourse (Barnes & Duncan, 1992; Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Geertz,



1988), and are challenged, as such, to integrate reflexivity into their methodology.

There is today a growing awareness that conditions embodied in researchers such as gender, class, age, and ethnicity influence and help structure their views and their research (Swain, 2004). Embodiment and reflexivity of the researcher then are the main features of new methodological advances, and they are the governing concepts of my own research. I acknowledge that “it is the agency of the researcher as writer that makes the research” (Holliday, 2002, p. 128). As such, I locate myself in my work, rather than striving for objectivity through the absence of my person as a researcher in my data and its analysis. My findings thereby become situated knowledge (Riessman, 1994).

In terms of the body conceptualisations discussed in the literature review, this chapter is situated within the ‘critical body’. In the first part of the chapter, I introduce the critical paradigm guiding my post-structural research, discussing the paradigm of post-feminism which guides my research approach, as well as the reflexive and embodied aspects of critical research methodology. My positionality will reveal the extent to which ‘being me’ has influenced, affected and enriched this research. In the second part of the chapter, I discuss my methodological choices, in line with the critical turn. These are a combination of qualitative methods which together enable a deep understanding of Italian women’s social identity. I explore social expectations through embodiment, revealing a gendered construction of identity whereby aesthetics hold a place of prime importance. The research design is based on my embodiment both in

being a woman and in living in Italy, and by my reflexivity, being an insider to the social-demographic group under study.

The three research methods used are autoethnography, in-depth interviewing, and document analysis. The auto-ethnographic technique gives a voice to my own experiences and life stories in Italy as research data. I live (and observe) the power play and the seduction game between men and women, the competitive ‘eyeing up’ among women, the male gaze, and the sensual embodiment of women from the ‘new’ middle class. This is facilitated through my participating in their everyday life, including leisure and tourism activities, and in particular tanning at the nearby beaches. The in-depth interviews were carried out in the wealthy residential area of Casalpalocco in the Southern suburbs of Rome, where a mixture of ‘new’ middle class and bourgeoisie live. Casalpalocco being my place of residence, made for easy access to potential interviewees, and natural observing of shared public spaces. My postfeminist approach to interviewing is captured through my conducting not one but several interviews with each respondent. Repetition of interviewing sessions enables a deeper understanding of the subjectivities of the respondents (Moustakas, 1994). The in-depth interviews validate and complete both my personal experiences and my observations. The document analysis technique defines the broader societal context of women from the ‘new’ middle class. Through analyzing press, magazines, television programs, advertising, popular readings and academic material, I reveal the structure of society to be patriarchal, illustrating the pressure of society on Italian women and the power of the media.

In the last part of the chapter, I discuss my analysis framework and my writing strategy. Cara Aitchison's socio-cultural nexus was used to portray the broader context of Italian society (the structure), and the culture (through women's agency). I analyse the way women negotiate with the structure through their agency. Through Erving Goffman's performance metaphor, I reveal the way women feel empowered through their sensual embodiment.

### **3.2 A critical paradigm**

In contrast to the positivist paradigm - generalisations and predictions, and the interpretative paradigm - seeking understanding, the critical paradigm is sensitised to particular issues in society related to power inequality and injustice. Within the critical paradigm, I am providing a sense of moving into third feminism, otherwise known as postfeminism.

#### **3.2.1 Postfeminism**

The critical school of thought takes on the feminist perspective of criticising the dominance of masculinist Western academic approaches (Johnston, 2001). However, in the critical school of thought, the feminist's totalising theories are rejected (Aitchison, 2001), and postfeminism emerges where difference is celebrated (Tong, 1998). Postfeminist research posits that there is not only one voice and reality for each woman, and that there is not only one woman's voices and realities but a diversity of women's voices and realities (Phoca & White, 2000; Tong, 1998). As such, postfeminism enables research to shift from essentialising 'women' as a generic, globalised subject, to

understanding the multiple subjectivities of women through an open approach. Tong (1998) claims that both men and women have much to gain in joining a variety of postfeminists in their recognition of diversity and celebration of multiplicity, rather than excluding marginal people by trying to achieve absolute unity.

One of the main characteristics of postfeminism can be traced back to the works of Simone de Beauvoir (1949) who phrased the essential question of feminist theory: 'Why is woman the second sex?'. That women often became the object rather than the subject of research is one of the fundamental feminist objections of the positivist research paradigm where 'othering' was the norm, according to Cara Aitchison (2001). 'Othering' is defined as placing someone or somewhere as secondary in contrast to the main person or place (Rose, 1993). Postfeminism acknowledges this feminist critique, in allowing woman's voice and reality to come through. Woman is still the other, but, rather than interpreting this condition as something to be transcended, postfeminists work at its advantage (Tong, 1998). In effect, the condition of otherness enables women to stand back and look at the norms, values, and practices of the dominant patriarchy, through critical lenses. Rather than perceiving otherness as oppressing or inferior, postfeminists see it as a way of being, thinking, speaking, allowing for openness, plurality, diversity and difference.

Perceiving the advantages of not being one of society's favoured members is also one of the major themes of deconstructionists who regard the West's predilection for dualistic thinking, speaking and writing as completely

misguiding (Tong, 1998). Postfeminists build on deconstructionists Lacan and Derrida's research in which they reveal the ways in which language excludes the 'feminine'. Jacques Lacan (1982) argues that women are repressed within the symbolic order as they are forced into it unwillingly. Because women refuse to internalise the so-called law of the father, this law must be imposed from the outside, and this is done by giving women the same words men are given, that is, masculine words. Precisely because they are masculine words, these words cannot express what women feel but only what men think (Lacan, 1982).

Based on Jacques Lacan's critical theory, postfeminists Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray contrast feminine and masculine writings. Hélène Cixous is primarily a novelist experimenting with literary style, and Irigaray is primarily a psychoanalyst. Although they are very different, they both highlight the importance of feminine ways in writing. I will expand more on ways of writing later in the chapter, when discussing my writing strategy.

### 3.2.2 Reflexivity and embodiment

Reflexivity and embodiment are an integral part of my research approach and underpin all parts of the research process, from defining the topic of study, to carrying out the research, analyzing my findings and writing up my thesis. It is through my own embodiment that the structure (Italian society) and the agency (women's skills, knowledge, awareness, etc) are revealed as I reflexively carry out my research. Reflexivity and embodiment are complex and intertwined concepts.

Reflexivity is a slippery term and there is much ambiguity and variety in the way it is interpreted (Taylor & White, 2000). It is based on a form of reflection or 'benign introspection' (Woolgar, 1988, p. 22). Steve Woolgar (1988) defines reflexivity as a process of looking inwards and reflecting on how our own life experiences and values may impact our thinking and our research, right from actually defining the topic of study through to the collecting of the data, and the analysis (Shaw & Gould, 2001).

Reflexivity is not a simple self-indulgent practice of using the first person or writing ourselves into the research as has been so often criticised though (Swain, 2007a). Reflexivity is much more than looking inwards. It involves looking outwards as well, towards those that are being researched (Shaw & Gould, 2001). In effect, researchers must also recognise the macro and micro forces which underpin the production of tourism knowledge (Ateljevic et al., 2005). Essentially then, reflexivity is an acknowledgement of the agency of the researchers, the researched, and the surrounding world.

Following the feminist lead of Rose, hooks and Hallaway, researchers Irena Ateljevic et al. (2005) acknowledge the impossibility of divorcing themselves from the context that informs their value-laden analysis and privileges them with their social position of authoring and the associated power to be able to speak. Researchers are gendered, racialised, sexualised, embodied, and are characterised by their own values, emotions, and life philosophy (Howson, 2005). As such, the presence and influence of the researcher is considered a valuable and essential resource beyond her actual experiences

being used as data source. In effect, the researcher permeates the whole study, including the philosophical perspective, the development of the research process, the data collection, and the actual interpretation of the data (Westwood, 2004).

There is a growing awareness of the extent to which the researcher permeates the study in the tourism field as was illustrated by the number of participants in the second international conference on critical tourism, *The Critical Turn in Tourism Studies: Promoting an Academy of Hope?* (Split, Croatia, 2007) who decided to present papers on their reflexive journeys and discuss their positionality in their research. Jennie Small, Irena Ateljevic Candice Harris & Erica Wilson (2007) discussed their reflective thoughts and feelings about their work-life balance. Nazia Ali (2007) discussed the significance of ethnic identity of the researcher and the researched, examining the space of reflexivity between them. Ria Dunkley (2007) presented her experience, both the triumphs and tribulations she went through during her PhD as a result of her original methodological choices. Tomas Pernecky (2007b) took us through his journey of becoming in academia as he made sense of the critical turn. And Sally Everett (2007) reflected on her relationship to the researched during her doctoral fieldwork in Ireland, Scotland and Cornwall.

Reflexivity is described by Irena Ateljevic et al. (2005) as an approach to research which allows researchers to acknowledge themselves as “living, breathing, embodied human beings, who brought their previous experiences and worldviews to their project of inquiries” (Ateljevic et al., 2005, p. 3), writing themselves ‘in’ to their interpretations, using a first person style of narrative. In a

later paper, Candice Harris, Erica Wilson & Irena Ateljevic (2007) argue that while acknowledging a critical shift in thinking through advocating and using reflexive techniques (Hall, 2004; Hollinshead, 2004; Jamal & Everett, 2004; Swain, 2004; Veijola & Jokinen, 1994), tourism discourse offers limited explicit discussion on reflexivity. They underline the lack of ‘guidance’ as to how researchers should actually go about being reflexive. Addressing such gaps, Candice Harris et al. (2007) analyse the existing reflexive work in tourism research, and provide guidelines in what they call ‘the entanglements’ of reflexive research.

Entanglements are defined as “those forces that influence, constrain, and shape the act of producing and reproducing knowledge within academic structures” (Harris et al., 2007, p. 44). These are divided into four main themes regarding reflexivity, namely: the dominant ideologies and legitimacies which guide research outputs, the research accountability environment which decides what is ‘acceptable’ as tourism research, our positionality as embodied researchers, and our intersectionality with the researched. The authors recognise that in order to enter a reflexive, critical dialogue, we must get entangled in the forces and constraints summarised in these four themes. Although this process is not necessarily straightforward, it does open an empowering and richer way of engaging with research. As researchers, we must take into account the research environment, our own person, the researched, our relationship to them, and we our audience.



The importance of acknowledging the researcher, the researched, and the relationship between them, leads us to the second driving force of my research approach, that is, embodiment. ‘Embodiment’ in the dictionary sense means to give something a concrete or discernible form, a tangible body, contends postfeminist Margaret Swain (2004). The term’s use in contemporary scholarship on the body has come to mean individuals’ interactions with their bodies – and, through their bodies, with the world around them (Davis, 1997). This reflects the shift described in the previous chapter whereby a distinct focus on the body is materialising, researchers interrogating philosophical preference of mind over body. Embodiment is understood as the existential conditions of human life (Csordas, 1994), an integrative sensate and cognitive reality that never privileges mind over body or body over mind.

Embodiment theory thus challenges deeply rooted Western constructs about the duality of mind and body, and virtually all life experience as opposite pairs rather than integrative wholes. Cognitive linguistics Chris Sinha & Kristine Jensen de Lopez (2000 in Swain, 2004) warn that embodiment theory may break with only half of the dualistic framework of the Cartesian paradigm. It may successfully challenge the mind-body divide, but “it leaves intact the dualism or opposition between the individual and society... [It] tends to see cognitive mapping in terms of a one-way street from individual (embodied domains) to society (abstract and social domains).” (Swain, 2004, p. 105).

Margaret Swain describes embodiment as a concept which provides ways of thinking about humanity that makes it impossible to commoditise bodies as

objects to be simply bought and sold. Fluidity and temporality are other aspects of embodiment. As Gail Weiss (1999, p. 43) writes, “the very notion of embodiment suggests an experience that is constantly in the making... being constituted and reconstituted from one moment to the next... changing in significance and form”. Embodiment theory “has grown out of philosophy, linguistics, cognitive science, and ecology, influencing all the humanities and social sciences”, affirms Swain (2004, p. 104).

Within tourism studies, one of the richest areas of work on embodiment is found in articulations of feminist theory and tourism studies. This feminist perspective on embodiment in tourism is expanded on in Margaret Swain’s work. “As I comment on other researchers’ work, as well as reflexively on my own, I want to be aware that conditions embodied in myself such as gender, class, age and ethnicity help structure what I understand” (Swain, 2004, p. 103). Veijola & Jokinen (1994) challenge traditional ‘scientific objectivity’ and the absence of the body from the corpus of the sociological studies on tourism. They explain the richness and deeper value which comes from writing tourism into the duration of time and sexed body, actually ‘being there’, and writing from a complete, holistic approach including body, sex, gender, values, and knowledge. This is a far cry from the disembodied authoritative perspective of objective science.

It is difficult to speak of embodiment of the researcher without addressing the issue of the gendered aspect of embodiment in Western society. Dominant conceptualisations of masculinity and femininity are embodied through social

practices (Connell, 1987). Although masculinities and femininities are plural, there being diverse men and diverse women (Howson, 2004), dominant versions of masculinity and femininity reveal how people 'do' gender (Connell, 1987) in our society.

Hegemonic masculinity is the dominant version of masculinity in Western culture, affirms sociologist Alexandra Howson (2004), who describes this in terms of the following characteristics. Firstly, hegemonic masculinity emphasises heterosexuality and subordinates homosexuality. Secondly, hegemonic masculinity is constructed and exists in relation to emphasised femininity. As such, femininity can be defined only in relation to hegemonic masculinity. Thirdly, hegemonic masculinity privileges a particular kind of male body, a muscular body, as opposed to a weaker feminine body. The male body being the reference in Western society in terms of cultural norm (Grosz, 1994), and women being in the position of the weaker other (Aitchison, 2001), research on women will benefit greatly from an embodied approach. This way, the researcher will take on a holistic approach, creating deeper relationships with the researched, and as such, neither 'othering' the researched, nor trying to fit their voices into rationalised masculinist categories. The researchers will strive to understand what the researched really have to say.

Drawing reflexivity and embodiment together, feminist Elizabeth Grosz (1994) refers to the body as the inscriptive surface reflecting the researcher's positionality in terms of race, gender, age, class and sexuality, and choreography of knowledge. Inscriptions on one's body "coagulate corporeal signifiers into

signs, producing all the effects of meaning, representation, depth, within or subintending our social order” (Grosz, 1994, p. 141). As such, the importance of the researcher’s reflexivity and awareness of her own embodiment in carrying out her research is primordial in that through her body and the way she presents herself, she is sending signs out to the researched as to her cultural and social upbringing, her personality, and basically her persona. As described by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. 150), “I am not in front of my body, I am in it, or rather I am it...”. The researcher must be aware of the way in which her experiences, her past, and her present values, affect the researched and the way they will respond to her, as well as the actual setting up and defining of the research project.

Being the embodied researcher carrying out the present study on women in Italy, I propose to now introduce the choreography of my personality and cultural background, explain my relationship to the group of women under study, and situate myself with regards to the dominant ideologies and research accountability in tourism which have lead me to carrying out this research.

### 3.2.3 Positioning myself

I briefly discussed my positionality in the introductory chapter, linking my persona with my research subject. I will now discuss my persona at a deeper level, addressing my position as a woman in Western society, my critical approach to research, and my experience as a researcher during the process of the present thesis.

### 3.2.3.1 A citizen of the world

Brought up with both English and French languages and cultures at home - being born to an English father and a French mother – I spent my childhood in spaces as physically and culturally diverse as Kiribati, Afghanistan, Tunisia, and Morocco. My parents loving adventure and discovery, we traveled the countries in which we lived at length and I developed an ease at adapting to diverse cultural and social settings. Anchored in Rome, Italy, by the age of thirteen, I moved into teenage years and young-adulthood engaging with Italian cultural ways. This part of my life is particularly significant to my thesis as it is during these years that I became fluent in Italian. I also developed cultural intimacy with Italian social ways, resulting in my present insider perspective (Denzin, 1997).

My multi-cultural childhood constitutes the base from which all aspects of my life today have emerged and grown: my personality, my philosophical approach to life, my academic stances and basically who I am as a woman. I will delve a little deeper into the true meaning of my upbringing to better position myself. The cultural world I grew up in was not only composed of the different cultural spaces of the Pacific, Asia, North Africa and Italy, merging with my Franco-English home environment, but being part of an international community through attending English or French speaking schools in each of these places, I was also constantly in touch with children from all over the world. The point about living among families from all over the world is that I was learning about different cultural approaches to living - eating, speaking and playing - at school

and in the streets. At a very young age, I was aware of the existence of different foods, of different languages, and of different ways of playing games, basically of different ways of relating to people and to the world. This mixed cultural space of my school day was part of my equilibrium and inner well-being. It became the foundation for my feeling of belonging to the world as a global citizen.

My cultural background and upbringing sets me in a very different place to someone brought up in one town or country which they call home. As an adult I came to understand that no matter where I lived, I felt I was at home. Although I only analysed this as an adult, I had the understanding of this notion as a child already. When adults would ask me as a child where I felt my home was (in particular relatives from France and England), I would answer by telling them about the town we lived in, about our country of the moment, in a very natural way. In general this answer was not considered satisfactory because of my dual citizenship on the one hand, and my description of belonging to yet a third culture and country on the other hand. My relatives questioned me further, knowing that I changed country every few years, and puzzled by my evident ease at living in different cultures. To me, things seemed straight forward. I felt at home where I lived. In fact, I felt I was partly from that country. I also felt partly French through my mother, the French language and my ties to France (where I went regularly on holiday). In the same way I felt partly English. I was also attached to the tiny atolls of Kiribati, the ex-Gilbert and Ellice Islands, for it is there, in Bikenibeu, that I started my life.

I believe that I have within me a little bit of each place I lived in, and a little bit of all the souls I touched and was touched by. I feel that my home is not somewhere physical but within me. It is a place where I feel completely relaxed and is the place which enables me to communicate with the world, propelling myself into different cultural environments with ease.

Moving away from childhood, teen, and young adult years, takes my chronological account of my cultural background to the important adult years after school: university years, joining the working world, and taking position as a woman in Western society. At the age of nineteen, I moved to Paris, France, where I resided for twelve years, followed by New Zealand for a length of eight years. In both countries, it is through university and research that my intellect was stimulated, and that my postmodern, feminist and critical outlook on research developed. In both these nations I was an insider, knowing and sharing the languages and cultures in which I lived, as well as an outsider, being different to the typical locals with strong local roots.

My steps into womanhood were guided by my experience of being a young girl in Tunis and Rabat (North Africa) – age 6 to 12 – and a teenager in Rome – age 13 to 19. In both these cultural settings, being fair-skinned and blond was considered attractive for the local men, and gendered objectification was part of my street life. Albeit my young age in North Africa, grown men showed interest in me. In Italy also grown men looked on with sexual intent. These facts are important for, subconsciously, they directed me towards intellectual development and an inherent desire to prove women as able as men

were, thus moving away from the objectified woman whose role is simply to be there for the men to desire. I wanted to challenge men, to be acknowledged for my capacities and intellectual reach, and this, for the benefit of all women.

My post-feminist critical approach to research was already in the making in my early years of womanhood as a consequence of living and breathing this gendered differentiation. Also, I did not fully associate with the radical feminist claims which denied femininity, but rather wanted to embrace femininity, a concept I learnt to appreciate through Mediterranean ways. I emancipated as a grown woman in cultural environments which were very different to my childhood experiences, in both French and New Zealand societies. In these two cultural environments, I interwove my values with my choices, creating the choreography of my life through my academic and personal journeys, coming together as one in the depths of womanhood.

#### 3.2.3.2 Entertwining academic and personal journeys

In terms of situating myself within the dominant ideologies and legitimacies guiding my research outputs, I strive to adopt a holistic approach to academia, bringing together my interests, my intellectual capacities, my values and fundamentally, my persona. The critical turn in tourism enables such an approach to be lived and expressed to its fullest. It is through a complete spiritual and intellectual questioning of the self that I detached myself from the ‘expected path’ I was to follow and instead followed my heart into the ‘academy of hope’ (Ateljevic et al., 2007a).



Being a good student at school, and attending French education from the age of 12, I was automatically guided into undertaking a scientific Baccalaureat, this being considered the superior option within this educational system. I then naturally continued at university and graduated with a Masters degree in Information technology. It is of interest to point out that I had always been creative, artistic, passionate about languages, interested in society, and a good communicator, however this had no influence over a clear-cut path to success within French society. At the age of 22, I started a male-dominated career as a research engineer in the field of computer science in Paris. I was proving the female gender to be as intelligent as the male gender was perceived to be.

Being naturally positive in my approach to life and work, I made my job an enjoyable one and managed to bring creativity and communication into the world of logic and computers. This was my internal drive in a world where rationality was the pulling force. Although intellectually stimulating, my job felt contriving, however I did not question the system, feeling privileged to be a part of the scientific world where few women succeeded. Being one among few women in the field gave me a sense of empowerment and resulted in much respect from my work colleagues.

At the age of 30, pregnant with my first child, I took the opportunity to have a long break from work and my Parisian life. I traveled extensively in South-east Asia with my husband and baby, then continued through Australia and ended up in New Zealand. I immediately felt at home in New Zealand and took a liking to this 'laid-back' part of the world, a refreshing and easy lifestyle

after months in Asia and years in Paris. Long-term traveling implying by nature being out of 'the system' thus away from any pressure of 'expected behaviour', it is the ideal moment for re-evaluating what one wants from life, and of particular interest to this chapter, what I wanted from work. My over-whelming desire to express my creativity and use my much held-in imagination flourished in the form of modeling clay. For 2 years, I was part of the potters association in Wellington, New Zealand, where a constant flow of love could be felt. I attributed this wonderful community spirit to the world of arts and thrived in it. However, after a few years and another baby, I started to miss the stimulation of intellectual work. I reflected on my old working environment, what I liked from my present pottery world, my passion for travels, my natural ability for understanding people, and perceived my resulting intellectual goal to be carrying out research on people and their travel experiences. The field of tourism represented a way of pulling together my personal interests and intellectual desires.

A few years down the track, carrying out my masters thesis as part of my Tourism Masters degree at Victoria University of Wellington, I am confronted with similar male gatekeepers to those I had left behind in the computer world. This was revealed through the positivist discourse displayed in most university courses I undertook, and through the positivist slant reflected in published tourism articles. Within this working context, I was quickly made to understand that because I had a young baby at home I would not be taken seriously, being a young mother obviously impeding quality output. I felt trapped in a male world

where feminine values were not appreciated and where I had no support for my research philosophy and holistic approach to work. However, maturity, a deeper spiritual understanding of myself and the world, a drive to listen to my inner voice, and the opportunity to change supervisors half-way through my Masters research project, all contributed to my being able to carry out the interpretative research I wanted to and resist the strong pressure the tourism group was applying for me to modify my research to suit the head of department.

My change of supervisor materialised in Irena Ateljevic, a researcher and mentor who hugely transformed my research experience. I could bring together my love of work, my personal values, and my own embodiment as a woman, mother and student, into my research, taking my study to a deeper level, thus enriching the output. Irena not only understood my research aims, took me seriously and supported me, but also stimulated me through her own academic work, as well as her enthusiastic attitude to work... a living example that if work is carried out in a positive light through love, both the process and the outputs will benefit.

#### 3.2.3.3 Research and the academy of hope

A stimulating, holistic, emotional, open approach to research is what I strive for today, leaving the patriarchal, positivist, unemotional, and detached approach far behind.

This approach to research was the common approach among researchers at the first international conference on critical tourism, *Embodying Tourism Research: Advancing Critical Approaches*, held in Dubrovnik in June/July 2005,

organised by Irena Ateljevic, Annette Pritchard, Nigel Morgan and Candice Harris. The community spirit, as lived during the days of this conference, was strangely close to the community spirit of love I had associated with the world of arts. The spirit with which the conference was organised resulted in a wonderful environment for like-minded researchers to gather as a community. Researchers worked together rather than in competition, creating as such a highly stimulating exchange place for knowledge. The aim of moving research forward as a whole was shared by all. A spirit of love and sharing could be felt as the so-called ‘academy of hope’ – named as such by Irena Ateljevic et al. (2007a) – emerged, becoming a palpable reality, challenging all researchers to “shift to a new level of consciousness, to reach higher moral ground... to shed [their] fear and give hope to each other” (Wangari Maathai, 2005 Nobel Peace Prize lecture cited in Ateljevic et al., 2007a).

The academy of hope enables entanglement of love, life values, respect, and openness with the intellectual world of research. I believe that in order to move tourism studies forward, it is important to be anchored into the academy of hope, to break new ground through carrying out ‘new’ tourism research, to recognise the importance of creativity and subjectivity, and to be involved as a researcher at a personal level.

#### 3.2.3.4 My thesis

Following my masters experience with Irena, I embarked on the stimulating PhD journey, choosing my supervisor rather than a university of convenience, even though it meant carrying out my research as a distant student.

In effect, during this period I had made the decision to move to Rome with my family. It became apparent at this stage of my academic life that not only was it important for me to bring together personal interests and intellectual interests, but that values and life choices also needed to be integrated into my work, this creating a general well-being and inner richness. For this reason, I followed whom I considered to be the right mentor for me, Irena Ateljevic, and embarked on a subject I knew I would be living with for the next few years, both at a private and research level.

Although my heart and intellect naturally and constantly propel me towards a critical and open approach to academia - as described above - I would like to stress the unexpected difficulty I sometimes had in materialising this approach. My barriers were not constituted by outside elements but were within myself. It was simply more of a challenge than I thought it would be to leave all the positivist teachings, vocabulary and justifications behind. It was as though I felt the male gatekeepers were within me. My positivist background was so deeply rooted in me that sometimes I felt compelled to present my work in a particular manner, justifying my choices in a positivist way.

I found myself hesitating to be more creative and to allow myself to bring new ideas into my thesis. I had to really push myself, telling myself it was OK to take on a different approach, to venture into more experimental ways of writing. Taking the step to effectively apply the 'open' research I embrace so fully in its concept was not easy. The process of changing one's views and ways through experience, thereby transforming and metamorphosing one's inner self, is known

in academia as the process of becoming (Grosz, 1999). Elizabeth Grosz (1999) discussed the importance of evolving, as researchers, in our cultural and intellectual practices in order to move research forward. She describes this process as opening the door to the future.

The challenge I felt in changing my ways emphasises the breadth of the patriarchal discourse in academia and in society and shows how deeply engraved this discourse is in our minds. Even when choosing to go against it, or rather to go in a different direction, parts of the patriarchal discourse kept infiltrating my critical discourse at unexpected moments, creating particular blockages. I needed to identify both the blockages and the particular parts of the positivist discourse when this happened, and work on these in order to continue developing my thesis with the critical open approach to research I have chosen.

In terms my relationship with the researched, my insider perspective derives from being a woman, in my early forties, married with two young children at home, and belonging to the educated middle class social group, in other words, possessing the same socio-demographic and socio-cultural characteristics as the women I am studying. I also live in the neighborhood of Casalpaolocco where my interviewees live, and as such, physically go to the same local cafes, food shops, sport centers, and aesthetic salons. This deepens my understanding of my interviewees' descriptions, feelings, and emotions linked to their everyday life. The fact that I possess not only the Italian language, but the Roman slang, expressions and ways, brings me closer to those I am in contact with.

My ‘foreign’ experiences on the other hand, foreign to Italy, resulting in cosmopolitan lenses (Swain, 2005), enable a better understanding of the Italian context, for I can ‘see’ the context. As an outsider, I am very aware of the way men look at women in Italy, of the language of the body, of the way men and women relate to each other, and more particularly of interest to this study, of the pressure of society on women. Being a citizen of the world and possessing ‘different’ values, enables a deeper reflection on the gendered construction of women, through my own embodiment and perceptions as a ‘local cosmopolitan’ (Swain, 2005).

### **3.3 Research methods**

Underpinning my research process at every level is my own embodiment. Not only are my field methods carried out through my embodiment, but the account of my research methods itself is embodied. This is an essential part of my research and can be considered my overall methodology. The second fundamental feature of my overall methodology is my insider perspective. As revealed in my positionality, I am a woman, I belong to the same socio-demographic and socio-cultural groups as the women I study, and understand their language culture.

The research methods chosen for this research reflect my postfeminist motivation for women’s voices to be heard. Through an open approach, I have tried to convey the thoughts and words revealed to me. Being a woman, or more particularly, listening and communicating as a woman, played an important role in my portrayal of the respondents’ voices. I will now introduce the three

research methods I used to capture these voices: autoethnography, in-depth interviewing, and document analysis.

### 3.3.1 An Autoethnographic approach

Postfeminist researchers value and recognise autoethnography for it achieves precisely what they are aiming for in new research, that is, texts that are increasingly personal, emotional and complex (Cixous, 1991; Swain, 2005). I feel that the use of personal stories brings a new dimension to research, making it more ‘palpable’, real, and deep. I experienced this first hand in Dubrovnik, at the conference on critical tourism studies mentioned earlier. Margaret Swain (2005), key-note speaker at this conference, gave an inspiring opening talk about the critical turn in tourism studies, capturing structural changes over time by telling her personal experiences as a researcher and woman. Through her stories, she revealed, at a deep personal level, the way she evolved as a researcher to embrace the critical turn. This did not replace theory but enhanced it, resulting in a powerful message, precisely through the personal aspect of her talk, and more particularly through the pertinent links she emphasised between her own experience and the world of academic tourism.

The concept of autoethnography “synthesises both a postmodern ethnography, in which the realist conventions and objective observer position of standard ethnography have been called into question, and a postmodern autobiography, in which the notion of the coherent, individual self has been similarly called into question” (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 2). Expressed differently, autoethnography could be described as a form of self-awareness.



David Hayano (1979) describes this as a two step introspection, consisting in firstly recognising one's own culture, and secondly recognising one's own experiences within it, in other words, textualising one's own culture, and writing as an insider. It is this which distinguishes autoethnography from ethnography, the reporting of ones' personal experiences and introspections being considered the research data (Patton, 2002).

Although inspired by the autobiographical approach to writing and research in this sense (recognition and use of one's own experiences), autoethnography is different in its aim which is the understanding of certain aspects of the culture in which one belongs (as opposed to the understanding of the self) (Bochner & Ellis, 2002; Dorst, 1987; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Hayano 1979; Mikhailovskiy, 1996; Reed-Danahay, 1997). So, although autoethnography is essentially referred to as study of oneself, far from limiting the study to the self, this method enriches understanding of the experiences of others within the same culture (Shaw & Gould, 2001).

The idea that researchers can or should research themselves, or their own culture, is not uncontroversial, and is open to critical scrutiny and skepticism from research traditionalists, argues Botterill (2003). These are troubled by questions of reliability and validity in autoethnography, arguing that it is not possible to be on the 'inside' and achieve any 'distance' from the forms of thought one is researching (Shaw & Gould, 2001). Eric Mykhalovskiy (1996) and Andrew Sparkes (2002) describe their struggles and defense against accusations of self indulgence when using the autoethnographic approach. The

view they share with others is that mainstream academics embrace convention through ethnography because they wish to deny the self in writing so as to avoid possible negative judgments by the readers of their publishings (Kreiger, 1996).

One of the guiding metaphors within ethnographic studies is that of the ethnographer as a ‘child’, an ‘apprentice’, a ‘stranger’, and when conducting research within familiar surroundings, it may prove difficult to achieve this ‘anthropological strangeness’. However, as Ian Shaw & Nick Gould (2001, p. 103) argue, “the marginal native metaphor sits uncomfortably alongside the imperative that the ethnographer should develop deep familiarity with the setting and its members”. Understanding the setting through observing regularities, collecting and analyzing descriptive data, and gradually gaining insights into the interpretations of reality as seen by the group members under study (Agar, 1980), is only possible if the researcher places much dependence upon informants or insiders. This blurs the ostensible boundary between inside and outside, between stranger and native, between familiar and unfamiliar dichotomies (Shaw & Gould, 2001). So, it would appear that the validity and reliability do not depend on the ethnographer being an outsider to the setting, but on the contrary, on the researcher being able to turn her gaze on the familiar, thus enabling defamiliarisation of the topic of study (Davies, 1999).

Defamiliarisation of a particular subject of study can be revealed through a full autoethnographic account – that is, the complete telling of one’s story – or through a selection of autoethnographic accounts – that is, telling one’s experiences and stories which are deemed useful for illustrating a particular

point or argument. It is the latter which I have adopted in this research, intertwining my own experiences - which I wrote as a series of observations and feelings whenever I felt my experience could be of interest to the study - with the findings from the other methods, as part of the research discussion when useful.

A part of my personal experiences consists in living alongside others and observing those around me, observational study being very effective for shedding light on behaviour in society (Tull & Hawkins, 1987; Weiers, 1984; Zikmund, 1997). This helped in understanding woman's position in Italian society, the importance of aesthetics, and the need for tanning. I found my personal experiences very valuable in terms of deepening the understanding of what I was observing through what I was experiencing, and what I was experiencing through what I was observing. For example, my initial stance on tanning not being important to inner well-being in society was the back-drop to my initial observations and questioning about tanning as something I was not too sure about, something I considered a waste of time. With time passing, and my appreciation of feeling better about myself in Italian society when tanned, I started to observe the other women in a different light and began to better understand the depth of their need for tan. Further, my observations of others helped me understand what I was living and feeling personally when tanning.

In qualitative research, observation refers to “systematic noting and recording of events, behaviours and artifacts in the social setting chosen for the study” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995 in Decrop, 1999, p. 348). What I observed

was not limited to verbal behaviour, but encompassed nonverbal behaviour, relationship communication, and global elements, as advised by Decrop (1999). Considering the qualitative nature of this thesis, the observation technique is very important in that it reflects behaviour of the population of interest in the natural setting of the society in which they live, as opposed to the women whom I interviewed in my home setting, as described in the next section. The scenes I observed over my research period all took place in public spaces, so as to not lose the natural aspect of the behaviour. I observed street and café scenes, shopping scenes, fitness centers and changing room scenes, and particularly performative spaces of beach scenes.

Donald Tull & Del Hawkins (1987) explain that there are 5 dimensions to the observational technique. The first dimension reflects whether the situation is natural or contrived. Whether I was strolling along the streets, sitting at a café, wandering around a shop, getting changed at a fitness center or tanning at the beach, I was always operating in a natural situation. Nothing, in effect, would encourage people to act differently to their natural way, the respondents viewing the situation as being natural in every way. The second dimension reflects whether the situation is open or disguised. The respondents were not aware of the participant observation which was being carried out. This was an important aspect of my observations as respondents would have perhaps acted differently had they known they were being observed. The third dimension reflects whether the observation is structured or unstructured. In a structured observation, the researcher knows exactly which aspects of the situation he will be observing or

recording, all other behaviours are to be ignored. This is not the case in the present research where unstructured openness was necessary in order to gain a deeper understanding of Italian society. All behaviour was recorded and no planning was possible. The fourth dimension reflects whether the observation is direct or indirect. The present research was clearly direct as the respondents were observed on site, as opposed to researching their past behaviour for example. The fifth and last dimension reflects whether the observation is human or mechanical. My observation was human in that it was unpalpable societal behaviour I was focusing on, as opposed to quantifiable, measurable characteristics.

My own experiences enriched my understanding of the respondents as they described different aspects of their lives. Through my autoethnographic approach, I was able to use the happenings and exchanges I had in Rome, to deepen my understanding of the gendered construction of identity in Italy, and to reveal the extent to which Italy is patriarchal. Clearly, my personal values and my stance as a woman in Western society, feeling independent, equal in rights to men, and empowered, influenced my auto-ethnographic experiences and the I perceived gendered identity in Italy. My lived experiences shed light on women's position in society and power relations in Italian society. Possessing Italian language and culture resulted in a 'natural' aspect to my personal experiences. In other words, being able to interpret speech, queues and body language of those I was interacting with, my experiences became an integral part of everyday life among the researched.

During my three year period of immersion in Rome, I experienced how different it is to be a woman in Italy in comparison to New Zealand (where I lived before Italy). Through the leisure scene - both in the city and at the beach - I felt the importance of beauty and youth in Italian society, and the obsession for suntan among Italian women as a necessary condition to social acceptance and social identity. Social acceptance being felt partly through feeling the 'male gaze' in society, signifying that one is beautiful. The pressure of social expectation on women in terms of beauty was rivaled only by social expectation in terms of playing the right role with reference to men

### 3.3.2 In-depth interviews

Research interviews are generally divided into two types, the structured and the unstructured. According to this division, mine would be defined as unstructured interviews. I find this division unsatisfactory however, agreeing with Collins (1998) that even the most unstructured interview is structured in a number of sometimes subtle ways. The way the interview is initiated necessarily determines the nature of the interview and the role the interviewer takes, in other words a form of structure. As the interview progresses a communication dynamic develops, the storyline emerging, becoming increasingly complex (Swain, 2005), especially in cases such as the present study, where several interview sessions are planned with each respondent. Like Ian Shaw & Nick Gould (2001), I feel the term in-depth interviewing is most adapted to unstructured interviewing. Through my interviewing, I aimed to achieve a rich contextualised account of my interviewees' social identity. I captured their

agency, shedding light on their choices through understanding their awareness of Italian structures and power relations with the men.

Although I did not use closed response questions, and I allowed my interviewees to digress from the originally planned topics (considering everything to be potentially relevant to an exploration of social identity), I was following a goal, to broach specific topics, the aim being the pursuit of depth. I used my questions like prompts, more a reminder to myself of the topics to cover than actual wording used. In many cases, I followed James Spradley's (1979) advice of asking long questions in order to guide my interviewees in the direction of the conversation. I also used probing and laddering techniques.

Probing is used to delve further into a specific discussion or to stimulate discussion about a specific topic which may not otherwise be covered (Decrop, 1999). Laddering is a form of probing which enables the interviewee to reveal innermost, underlying feelings behind a given issue, thus getting to the hidden reasons behind particular feelings (Decrop, 1999).

On first approach, I found my interviewees in difficulty to find words to explain something as natural and habitual as their going to the beach and tanning for example. I found this to be much the same for most themes which were developed during the interviews and all had a micro-sociological slant to them. However, with much time and trust-building energy, my interviewees opened up and demonstrated that banality of everyday life is not a banal theme of study but rather represents quite the opposite, a social process of prime importance (Javeau, 2003). As they opened up, my interviewees also started to question my

views, opinions and background, the interview sessions thus becoming more an exchange than a one-way process. This resulted in deeper relationships between us whereby I slowly became a friend as well as an interviewer. Some of the subjects broached raised issues for me in the sense that they were covered more in depth than I had expected. This meant that I had to adapt my attitude towards my interviewees becoming a very 'open' listener. I felt very at ease with this because of the Italian cultural ways and the ease with which personal subjects are discussed in comparison to New Zealand society for example. This cultural aspect of Italians, coupled with my critical open approach, resulted in the forming of deep relationships.

Deconstructing the Italian 'new' middle class woman's everyday life (including leisure) through these interview sessions, richly complemented my autoethnographic analysis. Moreover, and important to the study, the leisure and tourism activities of shopping, going to the gym, beautifying and tanning provided a lens into Italian society and how social identity is created.

#### 3.3.2.1 The interviewees

As explained in the introduction, I interviewed women from a residential suburb of Southern Rome, Casalpalocco, representative of the wealthy residential areas in and around Rome. I interviewed a small group of women, the aim being to have a deep exchange with each woman, as opposed to interviewing a large number at a more superficial level. In effect, each woman had 4 to 6 interviewing sessions of a two-hour average length, and this enabled



trust-building, deep communication, and a complete ‘opening-up’ from the interviewees, each session building on the precedent (Lahire, 2002).

The women I interviewed were in their forties, professionally active, married, with children, and from within the new petite bourgeoisie. The age range was chosen because it represents an understudied demographic group in Italian society and also in tourism studies. As revealed in the literature review, the majority of tourism studies on women focus on solo women in their thirties, or on older retired women traveling as a group. My chosen social group then is representative of the most understudied group of women in terms of age, but also in terms of having young children living at home. Finally, this group is also under-represented in terms of being Italian, most studies published in the English language focusing on anglo-saxon communities rather Southern, Mediterranean communities.

The ‘forties’ represents today an average age in terms of having young children at home whilst still having parents around, and, as such, it enabled a certain understanding of generational relationships in Italy, this being very important as the family has been claimed one of the main building blocks of Italian society (Barzini, 1963; Bravo, Pelaja, Persarola & Scaraffia, 2001; Jones, 2003; Piazza, 2001; Richards, 1994; Sarogni, 2004; Severgnini, 2005; Werblowsky & Chelo, 2005). The women were chosen from within the heterosexual community in order to better analyse the balance between men and women in this social group - in terms of work, leisure, home, family life, and social expectations - the aim being to reveal the social construction of gender,

women's position in society and the power relations. I also strived to understand my interviewees' thoughts and feelings on aesthetics and the importance it has in their lives. The topics I explored over the sessions then covered upbringing, values, fundamental beliefs, balance between work, domestic chores, and leisure time, perception of society, perception of the role and position of women within this society, and feelings and thoughts on aesthetics and tanning. During the sessions, I focused on different micro-contexts: home, work-place, and public areas.

The interviewee sample was a non-probability sample known as a 'purposive sample', that is, a sample purposefully chosen for shared characteristics relevant to the study (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990; Zikmund, 1997). These characteristics were informed by the socio-demographics and socio-cultural features of my social group as defined earlier. The participants were identified and recruited through the snowball technique. Snowball sampling involves identifying a member of the population of interest and asking them if they know people with the same characteristics (Clark, Riley, Wilkie & Wood, 1998). This was facilitated by my being an insider and living in the same residential area. Given the importance of networking in Italy, this technique was essential. In effect, trust is more easily built up between two people if a third introduces them, the natural attitude when not knowing people in Italy being one of defiance.

Although a number of interview sessions were planned with each respondent, as I became acquainted with them and our relationship grew, I ended

up spending much more time than initially planned with them. Given the depth of discussion and our being women, we naturally developed a more personal relationship (as described earlier) as the interviewing sessions unrolled and my respondents opened up. As a consequence, my research was much enriched and after 8 respondents, ‘theoretical’ saturation in discussion patterns was reached, this indicating that the size of the sample was reasonable (Decrop, 1999). In effect, the decision to stop data collection in qualitative techniques is guided by concurrent analyses reflecting saturation.

#### 3.3.2.2 The cultural context

I would like to stress the cultural difference with any prior interviewing I have carried out in research to date, which took place in the anglo-saxon world. In Italy, anything can happen, but everything takes time. In order to obtain my first interview, I firstly approached my interviewees about the possibility of interviewing them, at which they all replied on a very positive note. I then called or saw them again so as to arrange an actual date and time for the interviewing to start. This revealed itself to be a lengthy exercise, with much time engaged in general conversation until I felt there was an opening for discussing our future appointment. It often took several meetings before the interviewing commenced. Confirming and re-confirming each appointment was an important part of our communication. I did confirm each appointment by phone and this usually involved talking in general about different topics before broaching interviewing.

I organised the first interview to take place in a café so as to create a neutral environment where my interviewees would feel relaxed rather than

trapped in a private setting. I felt that the intimacy of the environment must not move too fast, although I did know that ultimately it was in my home, thus in complete privacy that these women would open up and really talk about their thoughts and feelings on the different topics I would approach. The process of setting up the interviews and getting started was very reflective of the way Italians 'go about things'. There is much discussion and trust-building involved in any relationship, and it is important not to 'burn' the stages. In order to establish trust, lengthy communication takes place and is not considered to be a waste of time. It is the trust-building, through understanding and respecting the slow rhythm of local ways, which made the 'opening up' of my interviewees possible. Also, understanding the extent to which Italians are afraid of being judged in a negative way, directed me towards organising future meetings in the privacy of my own home, my interviewees feeling free in such a situation to take their masks off and reveal their inner selves, away from the 'outside world'.

The interviewing was guided by my embodiment as a woman from the Western consumer world, aware of the lack of 'real' communication time often perceived by women. It was also guided by my embodiment as a woman from the Italian environment, knowing how women react to empathy and to feeling understood. When my interviewees discussed a particular topic with interest and passion, I prompted them to go further into their ideas with a question-style interviewing, simply asking 'why' they felt the way they did. If Italian women feel no empathy and do not feel understood, they will fear being judged and will put on an act so as not to reveal themselves.

The importance of creating the right impression on people through putting on an act is omnipresent in a society where one is judged on appearance and behaviour. As such, I realised very quickly that my initial plan of carrying out memory work with my interviewees as well as the interviewing sessions was not adapted to Italian women. In effect, memory work – brought to tourism and the study of women by Jennie Small (1999) – consists of focus groups (group discussions on particular topics) working on memory. My plan was to use memory sessions for discussing the beach scene, hoping to capture the essence of tanning and the social meaning of going to the beach, in this way. However, it soon became clear to me that group discussions in Italy implied respondents saying the right thing to impress the other members of the group as opposed to what they really think, so I decided to have a few more one-to-one interviews addressing the ‘beach’ topic. In this way, I took advantage of the already built-up trust between the interviewees and myself.

#### 3.3.2.3 The process of trust-building

Although I went through the formal ethics application, as required by Auckland University of Technology, and obtained ethics approval according to protocol, it was my method of trust-building – visiting the women to be interviewed several times before starting, which was the main feature in establishing a rapport with my interviewees.

On my ‘first interview’ appointments at the café, a number of topics were discussed before I felt it appropriate to actually start the interviewing sessions.

With each respondent I briefly recapitulated the interviewing process and presented the topic I wanted to broach on that day. I then needed to get a feel for my respondents' feelings and understand whether I could start interviewing at that point, or whether it would be rushing the process and more time was necessary together before being able to start. More often than not, we met a couple more times, discussing a diversity of topics, sometimes touching on themes I had planned to develop at a later stage. Much flexibility was needed on my behalf, as to how and when the topics I had planned would actually be approached and delved into.

In Italian, the amount of discussion necessary to say something is notably lengthier than in English. In fact, the English language may appear rather direct and rude to Italians who are brought up to take the time to circle around a subject, slowly homing in towards the subject, until finally reaching the fundamental point. It was important to help these women feel at ease, by not rushing them, by listening actively, and by reading the queues through their embodiment - body language - and their use of the language, the subtleties of Italian helping me understand when I could venture into a particular topic and how far I could go. Allowing the researched to have agency means they can challenge us as researchers, querying (or triggering thoughts on) our academic mindsets (Ateljevic et al., 2005).

According to Candice Harris (2002), cooperation between the researcher and the researched reduces researcher bias and encourages women's voices. The fact that these women were my age helped the cooperation between us because,

having known teenage girls from the same socio-cultural group when living in Rome as a teenager, I knew what behaviour would have been expected of them as young girls, and, as such, what pressures they had felt and what role they were taught to play in society as young adults. Possessing the knowledge of the type of past they had lived enabled a better understanding of the women they had become today.

### 3.3.3 Document analysis

Document analysis was used to capture the societal ‘structure’. My findings from the document analysis created the backdrop - the social and cultural context of Italian society as a whole – which facilitated the understanding of my interviewees’ voices. Although the ‘new’ middle class represents only a part of Italian society, and women within that group with the particular socio-demographic characteristics described earlier represent only a part of the ‘new’ middle class, it is essential to understand the general societal context in Italy in order to fully capture the social identity of this particular socio-demographic group.

I absorbed the media’s discourse through newspapers, television programs, publicity, and fashion magazines. The media revealed itself to be a strong message vehicle regarding the importance of beauty in Italian society, and woman’s place through the objectification and sexualisation of her representation. I explored the national statistics discourse through the ISTAT publishings (the national statistics institute). I studied popular readings on Italian

society as well as academic sociological publishings on Italian society to capture the discourse of the material realities of everyday life as well as gender balance.

The popular readings on Italy appear to be written mainly by journalists. These were very interesting because they presented many anecdotes, being for the most part a mix of ethnographic and autoethnographic studies on Italian society. Some books were written by foreigners living in Italy, others by Italians analyzing their own society, striving to explain the difference with their European counterparts. Possessing local culture - or *verhesten*, was necessary here, not only for understanding the subtleties of the language, but for humour, colloquial reference to cultural happenings, and general understatements.

At this point, it is important to underline the fact that Italy is a very 'divided' country. Certain features of society will appear to be stronger in one region than another, certain differences will be felt between the northern half of the country and the southern half (Barzini, 1963; Jones, 2001; Richards, 1994). However, the statistics I present are the result of studies carried out for Italy as a whole. Similarly, the sociological studies I introduce refer to Italy as a whole. Although Italians are aware of their local differences and do not like to be assimilated with the 'others' from different regions of Italy, researchers do acknowledge Italy as one nation with certain characteristics portrayed as typical of this nation in contrast to other nations.

It is Italy as a nation that I describe through my document analysis. Through all the discourses examined, the Italian lifestyle emerged revealing how women in Italy live, their relations to men, to aesthetics, to work, and their role



in politics, the working environment and the home environment. These structural realities also reflected certain aspects of the way men perceive women and the way women perceive men. The material realities of life at home, life at work, and leisure were unveiled.

### **3.4 Analysis framework and writing strategy**

My personal experiences, observations and interviews were transcribed, then contemplated at length resulting in my being completely immersed in the data. The data was then broken down, conceptualised and put back together in new ways (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), taking into account concepts from the literature review as well as my research aims. The data was pulled together through my own embodiment and understanding of society, reflecting, as such, my critical approach. The resulting analysis of data is shaped by my reflexive understanding of the ‘new’ middle class’s social identity and women’s social position. I present my findings, inspired by the post-feminist approach to writing, departing, as such, from traditional forms of reporting, and moving into a more creative dimension.

#### **3.4.1 The socio-cultural nexus**

The socio-cultural nexus focuses on social and cultural relations, and more particularly the inter-relationship between the social and the cultural. This framework was developed by Cara Aitchison (2003), resulting from her interest in leisure and gender. She draws on social, cultural and gender theory in her

conceptualisation of the nexus. Cara Aitchison (2005) describes the nexus as the mutually informing relationship between access to structures and cultures of power and access to leisure. The main concept behind the framework is the importance of understanding the networks of culture as well as structure for a full understanding of society. Cara Aitchison explains the way social expectations, othering, and the gaze, for example, will influence the way women perceive what the structure provides in terms of their legal rights. The concept highlights the way individuals can negotiate with the structure and the cultural pressure through the power of agency, revealing the complex balance of everyday life – including leisure and tourism, to be a combination of social discourse, social pressure, and personal choices within that reality.

Cara Aitchison's framework was the tool that helped me sort my data on Italian women, enabling me to reveal social structure on the one hand, the cultural reality of the women's lives, and how they either reproduced or resisted the system. The socio-cultural nexus was used to depict the complexity of woman's role, looking at the inter-relationships between the social and cultural, reflecting, as such, not only the way society affects individuals, but the way individuals in turn affect society through their choices. Structure and agency are explored, reflective of the post-structural approach to my research. I used the socio-cultural framework to reveal the structure of Italian society and the pressure on women. Combined with embodiment theory, I used the nexus to reveal the cultural importance of beauty. Combined with the performance

metaphor, I used the nexus to capture power relations and reveal how women feel empowered in patriarchy through their embodiment.

My analysis of Italian social structure emerged from advertisement messages, statistics documents, popular readings, sociological, cultural and feminist readings, and images, as analysed in my document analysis. It reflects a heterosexual society, based on masculine and patriarchal values.

In terms of capturing the sensual embodiment of Italian women, my observations at shopping scenes, fitness centers, beautifying in the changing rooms, and parading beauty in the streets, all informed my understanding, as did the interview sessions. The women at the interviews spoke at length of aesthetics, of their worries at not appearing beautiful enough, at their pleasure at dressing nicely and caring for their bodies, at the joy of swaying their hips. This, combined with my perception of their embodiment at the interviews - the way they moved and the effort they had put into looking good, enabled a full understanding of the importance of beauty and sensuality. The scenes observed reinforced my perception of sensual embodiment as an important cultural aspect of Italian women, in particular those from the 'new' middle class. Capturing sensual embodiment through leisure activities, enabled exploring a particular facet of leisure, and as such, contributes to literature on shopping, going to the gym, beautifying, and parading, in Western society.

In terms of capturing both structure and the power of agency - the way society affects women's embodiment and the way women's embodiment affects society, dramaturgy was used through the performance metaphor. The basic

concept behind Erving Goffman's metaphor (presented in the literature review) is that individuals play roles when they meet other individuals in order to affirm who they are. This is done on a stage, the front-stage, and the back-stage is where the performers collect themselves before playing. Although my performance framework is inspired by Erving Goffman's theory, as explained in the introductory chapter, I challenge his concept at two levels. I consider that there is not a single stage but many stages, and that there are not permanent front or back stages but rather areas which can be in turn front or back-stage depending on which aspect of the performance I am focusing on. My stages are composed of different areas of the beach. I explore the performance of tanning at the beach, contributing, as such, to tourism literature on tanning, in Western society.

#### 3.4.2 Writing strategy

In line with my analysis, I present my findings in three chapters.

Chapters Four and Five are presented in much the same way, intertwining findings from all three research methodologies, as analysed through the socio-cultural nexus. They will reveal Italian structural forces, the pressure of society, and the power of agency on the one hand, and the importance of femininity and beauty for expressing social identity on the other hand. In both chapters, I will refer to the interviewees through fictional names so as to respect their privacy. Following is a brief introduction of the interviewees:

Maria is 41 years of age. She is married with two children, a boy and a girl, aged 6 and 9. She works as an air-hostess and is presently on parental leave.

Paola is 43 years old, divorced with a 14 year old daughter. She works in sales management.

Elena is 46, is married, and has 3 boys, aged 7, 9, 12. She has a senior managerial position in sales.

Gisella is 43 years old, married with 2 girls aged 6 and 8. She is a lawyer.

Daniela is 43, married, and has a boy aged 8 and a girl aged 12. She works in an international organisation as a researcher in oceanography.

Roberta is 44 years old, married, with a 7 year old son and an 11 year old daughter. She works part time as a translator.

Betta is 46, married, has a 9 year old son, and two daughters aged 14 and 17. She is a teacher.

And Stefania, 44, is married, has two sons aged 9 and 11, and is a software project leader in a major computer company.

It is important to underline that all these women are university educated, as this is a significant particularity of this social group (Bourdieu, 1984).

In the sixth chapter, I present my findings through the voice of one imaginary woman, named Silvia, whose thoughts and internal dialogues represent the voices of the women I interviewed. The sixth chapter focuses on the tanning performance. I tell the story of Silvia's day at the beach, following her through her every move. Through this essential story relating what goes on in my fictional character's mind, I challenge the traditional way of presenting findings, striving to break away from the contrived reporting of precise quotes and rationalism. I take on a creative, feminist writing strategy enabling the

portraying of women's voices through their feelings of fear, jealousy, joy, power, and helplessness, embodying, as such, womanly ways, following Hélène Cixous' (1980) strategy.

Talking about Silvia as a novel character, with emotions and uncertainties, the desire to attract looks, a need for empowerment, and a feminine enjoyment of sensuality, enables me to present my data in a deep and meaningful way. By presenting it in this way, I portray the women's voices true to their feminine ways. This is the closest way to relating what I received during my active listening whilst I captured their inner states. Their emotional feelings were told to me not only through their words but through their full embodiment.

Striving to express women's feelings is a significant feature of postfeminism. My aim in using a different writing style is to be more personal, unveiling women's intimacy through my own feminine understanding of what was shared with me. I move away from the impersonal style of translating women's words into rational reasoning. In doing so, I acknowledge my being a woman as an important part of my research, and I use it to my advantage. Writing about Silvia like a character from a novel means I can use language with more freedom to express my findings.

As Hélène Cixous (1980) affirms, when a woman writes, she writes with white ink, in contrast to black ink used by the symbolic order defined by men for men whereby thoughts are carefully contained in a sharply defined and rigidly imposed structure. White ink, on the other hand, enables words to flow freely and go where the writer wishes them to go. "Her writing can only keep going,

without ever inscribing or discerning contours... Her language does not contain, it carries; it does not hold back, it makes possible” (Cixious, 1981, p. 259,260).

### **3.5 Summary**

In this chapter, I have discussed my critical approach to research and laid the philosophical foundations of my thesis. I first discussed the postfeminism paradigm, followed by reflexivity and embodiment. I positioned myself as a citizen of the world; revealed my holistic approach to research; explained the extent to which my academic and personal journeys were intertwined; and explored my relation to the topic of study, revealing in which way my personal experiences as a woman affected my research. My reflexivity and embodiment were shown to be the over-riding methodology of my whole research process.

I presented my research methods, discussing their constructive outcome. I referred to critical research carried out in the tourism field which inspired me and informed my own research. I discussed the differences, and necessary cultural awareness, of working in a Mediterranean context, as opposed to the Anglo-saxon context. I showed in which way I had to adapt my interviewing approach and modify my initial choice of methodological techniques in order to take into account local cultural ways and make space for deeper relationships with the researched. I discussed issues related to Italian culture in terms of both gathering and interpreting data.

Lastly, I presented my analysis framework, explaining how I used different conceptualisations and metaphors to capture different aspects of Italian women’s everyday lives, leisure spaces, and tourism spaces. I discussed how the socio-

cultural nexus would enable capturing social structure, cultural norms, and the power of agency. I showed how my framework would help analyse women's role in Italian society (in particular women from the 'new' middle class), their social identity, power relations, and how they negotiate in a patriarchal society.

The next three chapters will reveal my research findings. These are the outcome of the research techniques presented here, of my immersing myself in local culture, and of the availability of the women I interviewed. The analysis was carried out based on the frameworks presented here, and written based on Cisioux's postfeminist views on writing strategies.



## **4 Being a woman in Italy: the socio-cultural context**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Deconstructing the socio-cultural reality of Italian women's everyday life revealed a world dominated by men, a patriarchal world where masculine values are accepted as the 'neutral' ways in society. Both men and women appear to perceive the other members of society through the lenses of the male gaze, and given Italian society's postmodern consumer-oriented drive for aesthetics and appearances, this results in a reality where, for women, 'to be' is 'to be seen'. This chapter brings together findings from my interviewing sessions, my auto-ethnographic experiences, my observations and the document analysis. I unveil social and cultural realities and discuss power relations inherent to these realities.

Throughout my discussion, I will focus on Italian society's pressure on women – the effect of the structure on the agency – and on the way women's own voices and choices, in turn, shape the structure through their negotiating – the effect of the agency on the structure. I will reveal the way social identity is gendered in Italy and shaped by both social and cultural relations, highlighting

the way the interrelationship between structure and culture serves to consolidate and maintain gender inequity in society.

This will set the context for understanding women's leisure and tourism experiences – and in particular tanning at the beach, these being affected by the structure in which they live. It is fundamental to understand what it means to be a woman in Italy in order to begin to understand how women approach leisure and tourism and how they hope to benefit from their participation. This chapter will stress the link between tourism and society through revealing the important role of tanning for social identity. As discussed in the previous chapter, the framework guiding my discussion is Cara Aitchison's (2003) socio-cultural nexus.

I will open this chapter on structural factors of Italian society through statistics on women's representation in politics. I will then move to the media, the workplace and childcare. The gendered aspect of the Italian political world will be unveiled as will the masculinist environment of work, and the strong pressure exerted on women to take sole responsibility of the family and home. I will expand the understanding of woman's social position by analyzing cultural expectations of her, both from her immediate surrounding (including her extended family and in-laws) and, more broadly, from society. The pressure on Italian women to appear beautiful is overwhelming therefore a full chapter will be dedicated to beauty.

## **4.2 Politics and media: a man's world**

#### 4.2.1 Where are the women?

In order to contextualise the social and cultural conditions of Italian women, I will begin with some statistics on women and politics. With a few exceptions, the Italian parliament is today a famously male domain, as Italian anthropologist Di Cristofaro Longo (1993) had already underlined in 1993. Only ten percent of parliamentarians are women, for a fifty-two percent electorate, this being the lowest percentage in the European Union (ISTAT, 2004).

The gendered aspect of Italian politics is underlined in the Shadow Report, an alternative report to the Italian government's official report describing the Italian situation 10 years on from the United Nations conference on women held in Pekin in 1995, and presented in New York by Italian feminist organisations in October 2004 (Marsili, 2005). This report places Italy 73<sup>rd</sup> out of the 183 states surveyed around the world, in terms of female representation in political institutions, a position which clearly disadvantages Italian women vis-à-vis their European neighbours. The objectives defined in Pekin have not been reached and although the official (ISTAT, 2004) view is that more and more women are asserting themselves in social and cultural fields, according to the Shadow Report, this is taking place in the context of poor material conditions for women as a result of government policies.

In other words, the official Italian documents (as presented by the Italian government) focus solely on the structural elements of legislation in Italy today and make no reference to the socio-cultural contexts which constrain women's lives. Given that Italy is a country where reality is not in line with legislation –

the law not being enforced (Di Cristofaro Longo, 1993), it appears clearly that women are living situations of inequity even when legislation speaks differently. This inequity is framed quite neatly through the social-cultural nexus underlining the gap between the social (the structural elements of society) and the cultural (what is culturally done or not, what is expected of people, what is enforced or not) in society.

#### 4.2.2 Female embodiment in the media

As well as through the actual running of the country, the inequity of the political situation flows down to the representation of women in the media, in particular television, a powerful medium to reach the Italian public - in 2003, 94.7 % of Italians over the age of 3 were categorised as watching television daily (ISTAT, 2005), the average viewing being 4 hours, highest viewing in Europe (Nationmaster, 2007). The presenting of political issues or decisions taken for the country is quasi-systematically carried out by male speakers on television. In a recent survey quantifying the time dedicated to male and female governmental ministers on television for example (elaborated by the Italian national statistics organisation ISTAT), it was revealed that for every four hours of masculine talk, seven minutes were spent interviewing women ministers (Passerini Hopkinson, 2002). Given the difference between men and women in approaching an issue – from perceiving to analyzing, taking consequent decisions and communicating about it (Baron-Cohen, 2003) - these statistics reflect a biased reality where women's voices are not spoken (hence not heard), resulting in a society where the male voice represents the 'neutral' voice.

Having spent a number of years in France then in New Zealand since leaving Italy in 1982, I had lost touch with the Italian television scene until my return to Rome in 2003. I felt very uncomfortable rediscovering Italian television as a mature woman on returning to Rome for my research. I found it to be very different from French, New Zealand and former Italian television programs with regards to the representation of women. I was shocked by the sexualised image women displayed, their role reduced to introducing the men and being there to look beautiful and be admired by the telespectators for their physical virtues. The men, on the other hand, hold the important role of speaking and are not objectified and sexualised in their representation.

British journalist Tobias Jones (2003) confirms my dissertations in his ethnographic study of Italy, stating that it is hard to think of any female role models in Italy other than those confined to the role of television confectionary. “Do women still exist?” asks writer Bruno Milaneschi, “and if they do, what do they do?” His article, published in *La Repubblica delle donne* (Milaneschi, 2004, p. 218) is a provocative questioning of women in Italy, based on an interpretation of woman’s role in society as portrayed by television. To make his point, the writer first describes a typical television day from 4pm onwards, focusing on women’s appearance and role in programs and publicity. One program at a time, one slot at a time, he deconstructs the objectification of women and speaks of the underlying sexual connotations behind the body-language and dress-code. He poses the following questions, which could almost be described as an outcry:

Where are those women who were fighting for their rights, who wanted to have equal job opportunities, equal opportunities in life, and equal respect to the men in this society? Where are the women who are not embarrassed of their bodies, but are proud of them and refuse to hand them over as objects to be changed and modified, commodified? Where are these women and what are they doing against the rising merchandising of the female body? If you do exist, don't forget that many men are waiting for you. (Milaneschi, 2004, p. 218).

The extent to which women are absent from politics and hence from the power structures, and clearly represented as such through the media, is illustrated by Fatema Mernissi's (2005) outsider's gaze on women in Italy. This writer from Morocco - visiting Italy in 2005 - was interviewed on Italian politics and women in power and quite neatly summed up her feelings as a woman (p. 25):

Whilst you continue to represent the arab woman as submissive and veiled, at home (Morocco) as I entered a café near the Rabat university for an appointment with a colleague, I discovered that the whole clientele, mainly male, was watching Al Arabioa, the new rival of Al Jazeera, because Mai Al Khalifa had appeared on the screen. She is not a singer nor a belly-dancer, but an intellectual who writes books and is one of the first women to have obtained an official position at the Ministry of Culture in Bahrein. And like her, in other nations of the Gulf region, other women have taken on important political roles... In your country, in Italy, have you ever had a Minister of Economy who is a woman?

### **4.3 Employment and childcare**

#### **4.3.1 The pressure of society**

Together with the statistics on female political representation in Italy, employment figures also reveal the extent of gender inequity in the country and again the statistics place Italy below the European average. Only 48% of women are employed in Italy according to ISTAT (2003), a low figure which compares with the European average of just over 60% (and a UK figure of 64%). According to ISTAT, 20% of working women in Italy give up their jobs when the first child is born. Given that many of those will not return to work, the figure of 20% is high. Many do not reintegrate their job because of the strong pressure of society on mothers to perform a motherly role. Italian sociologist Marina Piazza's (2003) research on women in their thirties reveals, in effect, that women who do not want to give up their jobs and become dependent wives when they have a child confess to feeling a strong pressure in this direction from either their extended families (mainly their parents or in-laws) and husbands, or their employers and colleagues. All of my interviewees spoke of such pressure.

My interviewee Paola spoke at length of the difficulty she had in dealing with her husband's negative reaction to her decision to return to work after her maternity leave. He declared that they did not need any extra money and that he wanted her to stay home and care for her family and household. Paola stressed the importance of her career for her personal well-being, however, after much discussion, she agreed to working part-time if she could negotiate this with her

employer. This decision was frowned upon by her mother-in-law who, possessing a spare key to their flat, took to letting herself in every morning in order to organise the house and do the shopping she felt her daughter-in-law should have been doing in lieu of working. She justified her visits to her daughter-in-law saying that in this way no time would be wasted when she came home from work at 1pm and she could start preparing her husband's meal immediately.

Given that she was home at lunch-time, Paola's husband did expect a cooked lunch from her. Having seen his mother cook lunch everyday for his father when he was a child, then for himself when he started to work and was still living at home, he naturally expected a continuation of this tradition from his wife now that she was home at lunchtime. His friends and colleagues with wives at home reinforced his expectations for their wives cooked for them too, this being the norm. The pressure from both her mother-in-law and her husband was too hard for my interviewee to cope with. The mother-in-law was slowly (but surely) changing things in her home, moving furniture around, buying flowers, rearranging her kitchen, basically taking possession of the place. Paola felt that her home was not her home anymore, that her menus were being planned for her, and that her role was being cut out for her. She had lost the intimacy of her own home and couple life. She felt trapped in a life she did not want.

After 3 months of her mother-in-law's invasive ways, stressed and exhausted by the way her married life was turning out, feeling judged negatively



by her husband's family, Paola finally resigned from her job. In doing so, she took on the 'traditional wife' role, thereby reproducing the patriarchal world in which she grew up and in which she lived as a woman today. The social pressure for her to do this was so strong that she felt she had no choice. She had lost the feeling of being a free citizen in society able to make choices. She complied to reproducing the system in which she grew up, becoming, as such, a patriarchal woman against her will.

The pressure on women to stop working also comes from the workplace as illustrated by my interviewee Elena's story. Elena described the way her male colleagues started making regular comments about her still working when she had children to care for. These comments reached their climax when she received phone calls from school about one of her children being ill and tried to consolidate home and work environments. Elena had a senior managerial position in her company and was expected to work long hours. The afternoon meetings were usually scheduled to start at 7pm, or to take place around an evening meal at the restaurant. When Elena mentioned her difficulty in combining these late meetings with her family life and asked if the meetings could be scheduled earlier (suggesting a 5 or 6 pm start), she was told quite clearly that in order to work, she needed to be flexible and available, the alternative being to stay home and look after her children.

This masculinist voice reflects the extent of the male environment of the workplace, the lack of flexibility and lack of human understanding regarding different needs in the workplace – described in literature as the sexuality of

organisations (Aitchison, 2003). Employment is conceived through masculinist structures, values, and needs, women having to adapt to these practices set-up *by* men and *for* men, behaving like men in order to be entitled to stay. Elena began to feel the meetings were being held systematically in the evening to put pressure on her as a mother in this male world. She felt as though her colleagues were waiting for a home issue to interfere with work to remind her where she should be. In these circumstances, it was out of the question for her to take any time off for her children and she felt obliged to take on a permanent nanny.

Elena is still working full-time although she has changed companies. However, she finds herself in a very similar employment reality with regards to her being both a mother and a senior manager. She describes the pressure to be identical to what she had known in her previous company, but affirms she has learnt to live with it. When asked if she thinks the work environment could change, she confesses to feeling lonely as a woman in the workplace and explains that as long as this was the case it would be hard for any change to take place. In same time, she admits to feeling proud of having ‘made it’ into senior management as a woman in Italy. Perhaps this feeling is at the root of finding it hard to change the system. Rather than feeling like an equal citizen with equal rights, Elena feels grateful to be there, thereby accepting conditions which are not ideal for her and which do not correspond to her needs as a woman. Through her tacit agreement to the masculinist conditions and environment imposed, this woman is contributing to reproducing patriarchal and masculinist values, rather than resisting them through feminine values and different ways.

Describing similar masculinist pressure for her to leave her workplace, my interviewee Stefania reveals the way she fought for many years to obtain part-time work so as to be able to pick her children up from school and spend time with them. She felt strongly about not wanting to give her job up, but, as a mother, felt she needed time with her children too. Stefania was finally successful in achieving a part-time work situation two years ago, however she reveals a reality where she is kept aside from any of the interesting projects at work and is carrying out tasks she feels are well below her potential. She affirms feeling this is done purposefully to coax her to withdraw from the workforce.

Stefania describes the way she felt very strong family pressure prior to her part-time status and explains that now that the family pressure has reduced, it is the company that is putting pressure on her. Working part-time is still rather new in this country, argues my interviewee who says that it is perceived as a sign that ‘you have a family and should therefore be at home caring for the family’.

Marina Piazza’s (2003) research shows that it is not just family and colleagues who put pressure on working mothers but also the government and society as a whole. Society expects women to look after their homes, husbands and children, and as such, within marriages or partnerships, the duty remains on the women to make the sacrifices of their careers. So, although social structure gives women equal rights through legislation, the cultural reality in which women live creates a barrier to their achieving equal job opportunities to men.

This is confirmed in a recent research article published by the Italian social and economic research entity EURES (Ricerche Economiche e Sociali EURES,

2005) on the quality of life of Italian women in the province of Rome, where it is argued that no significant difference has been noted between non-working women and working women in terms of the time they spend in domestic work. The figures indicate an average of 15.5 weekly hours dedicated to children for non-working mothers as opposed to 14 for working mothers, and an average of 13.9 weekly hours to domestic chores for non-working women, as opposed to 12.9 for working women. When women find time short for accomplishing all household chores, EURES affirms that, more often than not, extra help is found in paid staff rather than in other family members, in particular their husbands.

Social historians Anna Bravo et al., (2001) give a very thorough overview of the feminist movements which have taken place in Italy over the years, explaining the way Italian legislation has evolved in favour of women. In fact, Italian law incorporates some of the most generous terms anywhere for maternity leave – 5 months fully-paid leave, followed by an optional seven months paid at 30% of full salary (P.R. INPS Istituto Nazionale Previdenza Sociale, Rome, 2006, personal communication), however, as in so many areas of Italian life, the obstacle to the securing of citizens' rights is the application and enforcement of the law (Di Cristofaro Longo, 1993). Bravo et al. (2001) confirm however that the law is effectively not enforced, and as such, that women do not have equal rights in everyday life. Gioia Di Cristofaro Longo (1993) explains that the practice is widespread in small firms and workshops to hire women only on condition they do not get pregnant for example.

Women are held aside from important and senior managerial positions, be it in private companies, public structures or political institutions. The cultural pressures on women create a gap between their actual life conditions and what has been put in place for them in social structures.

For those women who opt for a career (resisting against all pressure) and manage to move up the hierarchy ladder to senior management, life is not easy as they are usually alone among men, making strategic decisions, and participating in managerial planning, in a masculinist environment with a team of men. Elena explains that the only way to survive is to be 'a man' among the men, being aggressive and fighting for her rights and her position. However, the many jokes and comments on women's physical attributes are hard for her to cope with as they make her feel diminished as a woman. When she speaks up about this, the reaction is laughter, and nothing appears to change.

Elena also tells me the way men from other companies visiting her company – who don't know her - systematically ask her for coffee assuming that she is at the meeting for administrative purposes (as opposed to managerial or strategic) and to look after the men by making the coffee and serving it. Her grievance comes not from being mistaken for someone with a different position, but from systematically being associated to an inferior position simply because she is a woman, and from the automatic expectation the men have of her duty as a woman to make coffee for them. Elena's perception is that after rectifying the situation and explaining who she is, the men's behaviour either does not much change or she gets ignored during the remainder of the meeting, the underlying

message being that as a woman she has nothing to say in a technical or strategic discussion.

Living a similar patriarchal and masculinist working environment, Roberta stresses the difficulty in being a woman in Italy, for she does not feel that she is recognised for her work capabilities (actual or potential). She describes this as a typical situation for any woman working at a certain level. She also speaks of the ‘forced’ staying at home of many of her friends through both social pressure and sexuality of organisations, generating as such frustrated and unfulfilled women.

The result is a cultural situation whereby young women in their thirties are finding themselves at a very difficult crossroad having to choose between family and work (Piazza, 2003). A path combining the two is difficult to manage and the young women are aware of this before they even embark on their first working experience and before even desiring a family. They realise, as they observe the workplace, that once babies are on the scene, they have little freedom to decide what they feel is best for themselves.

#### 4.3.2 The lack of childcare facilities

In addition to the pressure from families and companies, women wishing to work also have to face the difficult task of actually organising childcare, which is not easy. Traditionally, it is the grand-mother (or any other available female family member) who has stepped in to look after young children should the need arrive if the mother has returned to work. In today’s Italy, however, families have shrunk and working mothers now have fewer members with whom to leave their children.

My interviewee Maria used to drop her children off at her mother's place every morning on her way to work. When her mother died, she saw no other option than taking parental leave in order to look after her children herself because she had no other family member available to care for them. Her children are now of school-age, but the issue of caring for the children every afternoon after school remains and Maria is still on parental leave. A baby-sitter is not considered an option because Maria cannot trust one. In fact, only one out of the 8 women I interviewed actually has a baby-sitter for after-school or evening help. The others do not trust non-family members and resolve to taking their children with them on evening outings and occasionally leaving them with a family member.

The alternative to baby-sitters is to use caretaking facilities provided by the Italian government, however here too there is no trust. Gisella spoke at length of the problem with the government's policy in terms of caretaking facilities, clarifying, as such, the reason why nobody trusts the care-taking system here. The caretaking system (as offered by Italian government) is not keeping up with the changes in family structure, and therefore working is not a viable and easy option for women. There are too few nurseries and childcare facilities in Italy today and no money to run them properly (De Gregorio, 2004).

On March 8<sup>th</sup> 2004, women's day, the front page of the *Il Messagero* newspaper printed a front-page promise from Ciampi, the head of state, to give more support to women with regards to maternity leave and child support policies, thus underlining the seriousness of the issue of working mothers

(Lombardi, 2004). The article explains the way state help and financing have been directed mainly at pensioners to date, and is in need of redirecting towards childcare services. Ciampi affirms that there are too few mothers, and too few children in Italy, and that this represents a dying society. The child-care services are openly criticised in this article and their malfunctioning used as an argument to justify the difficulty for mothers to combine work and children and their consequent choice not to have children.

In 2004, the Arcidonna association (a feminist organisation) published official figures which indicated a shortfall of 6000 nurseries in Rome, 8000 in Bologna, and similar numbers for most Italian cities (De Gregorio, 2004); they argued that the social services are not progressing (in numbers or in quality) and, as a result of this, Italian society is witnessing the return of women to their homes (De Gregorio, 2004).

The general difficulty of combining work and children may explain that the fecundity of Italian women is the lowest in Europe. According to the Lyndall Passerini Hopkinson (2002), Italian women produce on average 1.3 children, a figure lower even than industrialised countries such as Austria, Denmark, Germany, Hong Kong, Greece, Luxembourg and Spain (all with 1.5). In Passerini Hopkinson's (2002) study, France and the UK average 1.8 and the United States 1.9, comparing with the fecundity of African women, 6 to 8 children.

#### **4.4 The mother figure: expectations and duties**



The previous sections showed that the barriers to the greater engagement of women in politics and work are not related solely to the structural conditions of childcare and legislation but, more profoundly, to the social expectations of women. In this section, I will explore what it means to be a woman in Italy and how the patriarchal and masculinist views affect femininity and motherhood. The extent to which laws preventing discrimination are not enforced puts a strong strain on women's cultural reality and social expectations. I will unveil expectations of women in terms of providing for their grown-up children's material needs, managing their sons' adult lives, looking after their husbands, caring for their home, and often giving up their careers to do so.

#### 4.4.1 The mother role

Becoming a mother is a major decision in Italy where everything is done for children (Barzini, 1963; Piazza, 2001, 2003). As the protagonists of Italian life, children's smallest wishes are satisfied. Although both parents are involved in satisfying the wishes of their children and bettering their lives, the father is more involved financially while the mother is involved emotionally and in the everyday running of their lives. In fact, the people I met in Rome – whether for personal or research reasons - systematically refer to their mothers in lieu of their parents when in fact they are referring to both parents. They will for example speak of their mother's ways when explaining how they were brought up, or their mothers' home when referring to their parents' home, their mothers' gifts when referring to their parents' gifts, and so forth. The mother figure

dominates discussions, coming across as more important than the father figure, or at any rate, as holding a place of major importance in the children's lives.

Although no academic literature (either international or Italian) makes reference to the extent to which mothers do everything for their grown children in Italy, my ethnographic analysis illustrates the depth of this statement. Interestingly, this is portrayed through the arts however, whether in films, music, novels or paintings. The socio-cultural nexus is evidenced here through the social structure showing parents as bringing up their children together and cultural reality revealing mothers to be under great pressure to carry alone the responsibility of the happiness of their children. The pressure on mothers to provide for their grown children is just as important as it was when their children were young.

It is not uncommon for a mother to cook dinner for her son and wife when they so wish, or to make home-made dishes to be frozen and used throughout the week as a help with the grand-children's meals. It is quite natural for mothers to organise the division of their present home into separate areas, or floors, so as to be able to offer their grown-up son or daughter this independent part of their own home. In this way, they are saving their children time, energy, and finances. My research also evidenced this as a means for the mothers to keep their children nearby, making it easier for them to look after them and help them manage their lives.

An alternative to dividing up their own home is to buy an apartment (or house) for their children. This is often done whilst the children are still young as

an investment which is then handed over to the children once they are grown-up. By the age of forty, in Italy, it is practically unheard of not to own a home, and in most cases the home has either been offered by the parents, or a large portion of it has been paid for by the parents. Similarly, finding a job in society for grown-up children is often a family affair, the children benefiting from the links and ties made by their parents or extended family. When the children have finished university studies and are ready to work, the parents start to talk to all their colleagues, friends and relatives until they find a position for their son or daughter. This is usually the father's role.

#### 4.4.2 The mother and son relationship

The most stable relationship of all in Italy remains between mother and son (Richards, 1994). My research revealed sons to be spoiled by their mothers, being protected and pampered in ways which daughters were not. The women I interviewed with both a son and daughter at home explained that they did not treat their children differently based on their sex, however during the sessions spent together, the stories I heard told of a different reality. For example, the son sleeps with his mother in the parent's bed because "*he really needs his mum and this is not comparable to the daughter*". Or, the son does not lay the table and help at home because "*he gets tired and needs to relax*".

Elena recounted that when she was growing up, her mother, her sister and herself would clean the house on Saturday all day whilst her father and brothers watched television. She addressed the unfairness of this up-bringing. However, as grown-ups, both she and her sister appear to treat the family men in the same

way as their mother did. Any extended-family get-togethers are systematically organised by the two daughters, who prepare everything beforehand, do all the cooking and clean up afterwards, whilst the brothers do nothing. When I asked why the brothers were not expected to invite the family over for a get-together, both sisters - I met the sister of my interviewee on two occasions at my interviewee's home - became very defensive, underlining the fact that the younger brother was only 33 and lived with his mother (meaning their parents) and that although the older brother was 38, he lived alone (in the apartment below his mother's), did not like cooking and had nobody to cook for him.

Not being married for a man appears to automatically imply that there is no expectation of an invitation from him. *"He has no-one to look after him, so how could he receive anyone for a meal at his home?"* It also appears that in the case of a man not being married, it is very common for the mother to still cook for her son on a daily basis, whatever his age. Elena's brother, for example, who lives in the apartment below his mother's, turns up on his mother's doorstep for dinner every evening on getting home from work. His mother also cleans his apartment whilst he is at work and does his laundry. His sisters describe this as inevitable, implying that a man can clearly not look after a house and that they would not expect him to do so. In defending their brothers in this way Elena and her sister are reproducing patriarchal views of men and women's role in society.

A friend from Naples, south of Rome, often talks about the way her younger brother, aged 37, asks too much of her mother, and she confesses that this bothers her. Her mother is getting older and showing clear signs of fatigue,

but seems not to be able to say no to her son's demands. He brings all his laundry to his mother every Sunday when he turns up for lunch and comes back on Tuesday evening to pick up the washed and ironed clothes. My friend has spoken to her mother about this issue, or what she considers to be an issue, but her mother simply shrugs her shoulders saying "... *he has so much affection for me*", to which my friend explains that she too has affection for her but this does not mean she has to bring her dirty clothes with her when she visits. The mother is not interested in pursuing the conversation any further and my friend's attempt in changing the way her brother is considered in the family has not succeeded.

My friend tells me her mother started showing her how to cook and use the washing-machine when she was a teenager, and that from the age of 18 she was asked to do her share of domestic duties in the house. She finds this quite natural but does not accept the difference in treatment with her brother. She says that it is the same with all her friends, and that this is part of what makes Italy and Italians. The fact that when the men finally do leave their mother's side (or services) they are ready to rely 100% on their wives makes it very hard for Italian women to change the ways of things, argues my friend. This woman has tried to resist the system in confronting her mother, however her patriarchal education is so deeply impressed within her that she cannot help but treat her husband in the same way her mother treats her own husband and son – doing everything for him.

#### 4.4.3 Resisting the mother role?

Given the pressure felt by Italian women regarding their role as mothers, the question I raise is whether Italian women want to change the way of things. The comments I heard, discussions I had and observations I made, during my research period, would tend to indicate that although women do complain about the weight of the pressure from their families (and from society more generally), they do not appear to want things to change. In effect, patriarchal reasoning was a constant part of women's discourse regarding this issue.

I will relate a story reflective of women's discourse. A friend of mine, in her mid forties and belonging to the educated middle class, has two sons and often expresses the difficulty in looking after her household. She complains in particular about how difficult she finds her life when she is ill. Her reasoning is based on the difference she perceives between what can be asked of boys and girls and reflects the way she brings her sons up as future patriarchal men. She argues that if she had had two daughters rather than two sons, she could ask them to hang the clothes out to dry and help with shopping and meals when she was ill, however, she has sons so this is not possible. Her sons are twelve and fifteen years old.

Each one of my interviewees has a similar story to tell reflecting the difference in upbringing, education and expectations of girls and women in contrast to boys and men, both in their own up-bringing and in their children's up-bringing. Although they complain about the way they were brought up differently as girls, or about the way their mothers or mother-in-laws have different expectations of them compared to the men, they are unconsciously

reproducing the same patriarchal differences through the way they differentiate their own sons and daughters. This is done at a subconscious level, because they argue they are treating their children in the same way. Women live under very strong pressure regarding their role as women, and I contend it is much easier for them to comply than to react.

The pressure is particularly harsh coming from the mother-in-laws as these are protecting and defending their sons and demand total dedication from their daughter-in-laws. Maria experiences such pressure every summer during the family get-together at her in-laws' holiday home. The full extended family, on her husband's side, spend the month of July in Tuscany in the family home every year. And during that month, every day, from about 2 pm, the mother-in-law starts to 'nag' the younger generation of women telling them "*they should all be out of their nice dresses, wearing an apron and doing domestic chores in the house so that they can soon start preparing the evening meal for the men*". There are big discussions about what these women should and should not be wearing. A track-suit is OK, an apron is ideal, anything elegant is unsuitable. Maria's mother-in-law expects all the women to be in the kitchen for hours in order to produce a respectful evening feast for the husbands. She is at her happiest when the young girls come and help their mums in the kitchen too. Her attitude causes much stress for the younger women who do not necessarily envisage their holiday in this way, however, it appears that in the end, although they do less hours than the mother-in-law would like, they do oblige and cook every day whilst the men relax.

There is clearly a difficulty in going against the whole system - resisting patriarchy, linked to the deeply embedded patriarchal education women have received all through their childhood, as well as the ongoing social expectations of them. The apparent subconscious complying of the women against their will is not, however, the full explanation to their cultural ways. As I came to know Italian women better, talking long hours with both friends and interviewees, I came to a different conclusion and explanation. The deep motivation for not resisting their role is that the women feel fulfilled in this role because they are needed. They are truly needed by their men and their children who do not know how to carry out the huge amount of work they do. They like being the ones who enable their children to live their everyday life more easily. They like being the ones who cook for their husbands and nurture them. They feel safe in this role for they have a reason to be there. They are fundamentally irreplaceable and necessary to the smooth running of families and society more broadly.

#### 4.4.4 Mothering through the years

Sociological research carried out on women in their 50s and 60s across Italy reveals how tired they are to still be cooking for all the family, including the grown-up children, most women mentioning their sons in particular (Piazza 2001). A woman in her mid 60s I met at a yoga seminar just north of Rome explained that her son did not live at home - contrary to many - however she described the way he regularly called her round 9:30 or 10 pm saying that he hadn't seen the time pass, he hadn't had dinner yet and he would be arriving in half an hour's time. She says she's tired in the evenings but she starts to cook her



son a proper meal even though she and her husband have already eaten. I tell her she's very generous with her son and she answers "*he's my son, he needs me and yes, he does tire me out but how can I not forgive him?*" She speaks of forgiveness because her son knows that she usually goes to bed between 9:30 and 10 pm but still expects her to get up and cook for him because he feels like one of her home-cooked meals. The woman explains that few men leave home until they marry, and that her son is independent and lives alone although he is not married and has no-one to look after him. Her son is 40 years old. Gathering facts and statistics on Italians, Lyndall Passerini Hopkinson (2002) confirms that unmarried men often live with their mothers. The figures show that in Italy 70% of the 8 million 18-34 year-olds live with their parents, and that after the age of 30 two thirds of them are male.

At the same yoga seminar, a discussion took place at one of the meal-times, as follows. A thirty year old architect who lives in the flat above her parents and works in her father's studio in the historical center of Rome, complains about her mother wanting to be forewarned if she is not coming for lunch. She says this makes her feel compelled to have lunch with her mother every day. The yoga teacher, a woman in her fifties, explains that being the mother of grown-up children herself, she understands the architect's mother wanting to know this so that she does not cook extra lunch for nothing. She asks the younger woman how often she likes to go to her mother's for lunch, and it appears that the average is between 3 and 4 times a week. The discussion becomes quite an animated one involving all 10 people at the table. The mother

generation says it's not fair to expect them to cook and then not to have the courtesy to tell them when it is not necessary. The younger generation says they feel trapped in obligations to their parents.

At this point, the yoga teacher tells us her story. She has three sons, two of them are currently studying in London. Her husband being a diplomat, he was really keen for the sons to study in English. The third son, who finished his studies two years ago, came back to live with them with his girlfriend, both in their mid thirties. She explains that after a year of them doing absolutely no domestic chores and turning up for every meal, and given that they were a couple, she suggested they move into a place of their own, which they did. However, they still turn up for lunch-time meals, but she explains that this is fine for her as she knows her son loves her cooking. She did point out that cooking for two extra people every day just in case they come is hard work, and she thinks it right that they should call if they decide not to come. Her son and girlfriend are also at this yoga seminar and at our table and they smile. Her son says "*Mum cooks well*", she smiles gratefully and that ends the animated discussion. It appears that she easily forgives her son for displaying the exact same behaviour she was questioning in the young architect, however, the architect is a woman...

#### 4.4.5 Performing masculinity

Given the impact of having children for women in Italian society, it is the woman who is taking the decision to delay having children, and having done so, to limit the family (ISTAT, 2005; Richards, 1994). Not that the 'new Italian

woman' has exchanged femininity for feminism, but she has exchanged the desire to be '*mamma*' (mum) for a more holistic desire to be a woman fulfilled in all parts of her existence. However, the 'new man' has scarcely arrived in Italy, the strength of the mother-son relationship having greatly prejudiced the successful fulfillment of subsequent relationships as men exchange one 'mother' for another when they marry. Italian men still largely regard it beneath their dignity to wash up, change nappies, do the shopping, help with the housework, or try their hand in the kitchen.

The extent to which the 'new man' has not arrived is illustrated by the call of the head of state Ciampi, in the *Il Messaggero* dated 8 March 2004, inviting men to start "giving a helping hand" at home (Cocace, 2004). Women are the main protagonists of domestic chores. In Casalpalocco, this is clear from the loud-speaker announcement which can be heard twice a week from a little domestic-repairs-van which drives down all the streets. The announcement starts with an enthusiastic call to all the '*Donne*' (women) of the neighbourhood, bringing the good news that the "*handymen have arrived and are here to repair your ovens, fix your fridges, sharpen your knives*", and so goes a big list of kitchen and general domestic services these men can undertake. The fact that they publicly call out only to the women is a clear revelation of how women are perceived in society as the gatekeepers to the kitchen in the house, and more generally to all household chores.

Whilst all household chores are woman's domain, technical operations in the house (such as plumbing and electrics) is man's domain. If a woman is

accompanied by a man - a relative, friend, or colleague - and a technician is called upon to solve a problem, the custom is for the technician to address the man, not the woman. I experienced this firsthand when settling into my new home in Rome, in January 2003. The electrics being a little random in the house, I called an electrician whom I received on four consecutive visits. My husband was absent during the first three visits, however he happened to be present during the fourth and last visit and the electrician automatically addressed him. Having followed the operation to date, I was better informed to answer and naturally intervened, however I appeared to be unheard by the electrician. This happened every time a question was asked, and eventually a pattern took shape whereby the electrician questioned my husband, I answered – to my husband, not the electrician – and my husband then proceeded to repeat the information for the benefit of the electrician. This is a clear illustration of the roles men and women traditionally have in the house and of the ‘new man’ not having arrived yet.

Also illustrating this fact is the following personal experience which took place at a doctor’s in June 2005. Having a bad case of tendonitis in the knee, and driving being painful for me at the time, my husband drove me to the recommended specialist. We were in the waiting room when the doctor beckoned for me to come. Seeing my husband, he asked him whether he would like to come in as well, and we agreed to this. Then followed a scenario whereby the doctor spoke to my husband explaining what the problem was as he prodded me. He told my husband this problem was typical of women in their forties and

continued to talk about women's health to my husband. My husband and I were rather amused. Both our repeated attempts to redirect the conversation between the doctor and myself lead nowhere. In much the same way as with the electrician, we ended up having a triangular conversation. At one point he even said to my husband "*When I put pressure on this point, it will hurt*" and when I showed signs that it did hurt, he looked at my husband in a satisfied way, "*See?*".

Similar scenarios have been related to me by many a surprised foreign woman living in Rome. When Italian women are asked about this attitude and whether it is also part of their own lives, they explain that it is. Some do not mind, or rather do not question the behaviour, because it "*has always been this way*". Because they expect this behaviour, I have observed that the women subconsciously step back leaving the space for the men to communicate, indicating through their body language that as women, they are there to be looked after by the men. They are in this way naturally reproducing this patriarchal feature of Italian society and the difference between men and women remains.

Other women feel angry and frustrated by this attitude and they keep trying to convince different technicians that they understand the topic being discussed, that they are the ones dealing with the particular issue at hand. These women are resisting this patriarchal feature of society as they try to change the way they are perceived. They are striving to show that they are capable of sorting things out as much as men and that depending on the situation one or the

other will be most adapted at sorting the problem, independently from their sex. The women wanting to create this change in society are coming up against the importance for men of performing masculinity. In effect, two issues are at stake in the technical interrelationships. The women are sensitive to the first which is that they are perceived as women to not be able to sort out technical problems. The second issue however concerns men and their masculinity which they demonstrate to the people with them through their attitude to technical issues.

The men must, in effect, show their competence in the technical domain in order to gain respect in society, as I witnessed both through personal experiences and observed experiences. As I became more familiar with the attitude of men in presence of another man, I came to understand the real meaning of their attitude. The display of their competence is not for the benefit of the women present, but for the men. The technician displays his own masculinity by explaining the technical problem to the other man, and at the same time he shows respect for his interlocutor's masculinity by addressing him rather than the woman. These findings converge with the concept of Mediterranean masculinity as described in the research carried out by Irena Ateljevic (Ateljevic & Hall, 2007) on Croatia. Masculinity in Croatia is described to be about men 'performing' for other men, showing them to what extent they are competent and know how to deal with the problem at hand.

The pressure of society on men is for them to accomplish acts that prove their virility and this is done in part by proving their value as a man to the other men. My research underlines the fact that if a man were to speak to a woman in

preference to the man accompanying her, he would not only come across as not performing strong masculinity, but he would also be implying that the other man is an incompetent, or at any rate, a man undeserving of the respect of other men, hence lacking masculinity.

Then men also have a role to perform and are under strong social pressure to do so. The interrelationship between men and women is complex, each pursuing their social performance in search of social recognition, and fearing negative judgment. As I came to understand Italian society at a deeper level, the intertwining roles of men and women revealed a reality which took me away from my initial impression of women being dominated by men.

#### **4.5 Making the system work**

Italian society is a patriarchal society, however, women are not necessarily dominated. On the contrary, they are the ones who choose to keep up particular characteristics of the patriarchal system. Women do this when it suits them, when it makes their everyday life easier and that they consider the benefit they gain outweighs their desire to change the way things are. Through making such choices, the women are making the system work for them. I will share some anecdotes which reveal the way women consciously choose to comply with the patriarchal system through their embodiment as daughters -asking their mothers to perform motherhood as defined in the patriarchal system – for them because it suits them.

My research highlights the extent to which women in their forties, among the ‘new’ middle class, who are mothers themselves, want their mothers to remain the head of the family and organise their own lives for them. They want their mothers to keep the responsibility of finding and buying property for them (or giving them the money towards a place of their own), cooking for them, looking after their own children. Basically, the daughters are asking their mothers to continue caring for them, but also to help them manage and care for their own family. The following stories are illustrative of the expectations they have of their mothers, and of the pressure they apply to receive the required duties.

At a social gathering, a thirty-year old woman was describing her difficulty in buying an apartment of a reasonable size, in a good state and in the area she had chosen. The two other women, in their forties, who were already well established in terms of owning a house, were surprised at the difficulty this young woman was experiencing, and asked if her mother was not helping. On hearing that the parents were only giving her 50 000 euro they were shocked and asked her why she thought her parents were being so “*mean and selfish*”.

Along the same lines, my interviewee Betta was telling me how unlucky she was because her mother only cooked for her children once a week. She would have liked her mother to cook all the meals for her children so that during the week she did not need to plan and think of her children’s meals and would gain time in this way. She had many discussions with her mother about this and tried to make her mother understand what pressure she was putting her daughter



under by not helping with the cooking. Betta told me she was so unlucky that her mother would not be a little more active and compliant with her. Betta also wanted her mother to cook her and her family lunch on Sundays because she was exhausted from her week and needed to relax on Sundays (Sunday meals are traditionally rather substantial in Italy). She told me she had effectively managed to install the Sunday lunch at her mother's as a family tradition and was delighted about this.

My interviewee Elena showed me the dishes of lasagna her mother had dropped off on the Sunday for the week to come, and explained that she wouldn't cope without her help. Some of my interviewees complained that they did not receive this kind of treatment from their mother because the latter appeared to have a life of her own, involving traveling, cultural outings and socialising. As such, they were not making themselves available as caretakers during the week and *"did not even help with the cooking"*.

The interviewees all described how different grand-parents were during their childhood, their one occupation and aim in life being looking after the family. Roberta spoke of the unfairness of this situation, explaining that her mother benefited from freedom of time when she was a young mother through her own mother looking after the grand-children every day. Now that it should be her mother's turn to be looking after her grand-children, so that she, Roberta, could have free time and go back to full-time working, her mother only had the children twice a week. *"Can you imagine"*, exclaimed Roberta, *"I'm being robbed of my own time... How am supposed to work with my mum behaving in*

*this way?”* She explains that it is not that her mother is working - she is now 73 and retired - it is simply that she constantly goes on holidays with her father, and that when she is not away, she seems to have too many social moments during the day, thinking only about herself and having fun.

As we met for consecutive interviews, more of Roberta’s relationship with her mother came up and I came to realise that the mother brought cooked meals to her home every week for the children and often looked after the children on the week-end. Roberta’s parents appeared to put a lot of time, love, and energy into their grand-children. I met the mother who opened up to me and spoke of her daughter’s insistence in her having the children everyday. As her confidence built and she felt I would understand her because I was not typically Italian, she spoke of the fact that she had been a mother already and now wished to be a grand-mother, not a mother again. She also explained how wonderful it was for her to do all this traveling and socialising now and to finally have time for her hobbies.

According to my interviewees, grand-mothers’ hobbies are the main problem here, however a few also mentioned the fact that grand-mothers are finding today’s children too difficult to care for. These interviewees described their children as perhaps more demanding than they were themselves when they were little. One interviewee in particular, Stefania, spoke of the changing times and the fact that children are very active today and more outspoken. In fact, she thinks her mother finds her boys particularly difficult and boisterous.

Stefania described the significant change in her relationship with her mother during the time her mother was caring for her boys after school. Her mother was complaining increasingly about how tiring her boys were. Stefania explained the way her mother started to avoid seeing her on the weekends and, little by little, cut all contact with her daughter and family, other than the compulsory caring for the children between 1pm and 8pm every day during the week. Stefania then realised that she had no other option than obtaining part-time work. She did not consider paid child-care to be an option, explaining that of course she could trust no-one but family to look after her children. When asked if she thought that a professional care-taking service could be alright, she answered that there was no such service to the standard she wanted for her children. The only feasible option, she continued, would be to have a live-in help to look after the home and the children, however, she did not want to have someone living in her home.

Elena, spoke in much the same terms although she, like many in the ‘new’ middle class and the haute bourgeoisie, did chose to have a live-in help, and explained this to be the only possible way forward. Daniela, on the other hand, found a solution by getting both grand-mothers to move into apartments in the same street as her, and the grandmothers take it in turn picking the children up from school at 1pm and spending the afternoon with them.

I will conclude on this section about women making the system work for them by emphasising the importance of their behaviour and embodiment as daughters in terms of perpetuating the patriarchal system. Their husbands and

children hear their demands and hear their reasoning when talking about their own mothers. These women are not asking their husbands to help by cooking or caring for the children. They are addressing another woman instead, and a motherly figure. The message conveyed to their husbands and to their own children is clear in terms of men and women's roles in the kitchen and home in general. By putting pressure on their own mothers to carry out the traditional mother role in the family, they are reproducing patriarchal values whereby it is the mother who carries out all domestic chores and caretaking.

#### **4.6 The will to change**

Although women do sometimes choose to reproduce patriarchy (as revealed above), they also play strategies of resistance. I will introduce the three major grounds of resistance as unveiled through my research. Women from within the socio-demographic group I am studying appear to resist interfering mother-in-laws (regarding the way they run their families), interfering parents (regarding the women's life choices), and prejudices (regarding women's incapacity to deal with anything technical). As in the previous section I will relate stories relevant to women resisting patriarchal ways or to the reaction of others to this resistance, for this tells us just as much about society and woman's place. I have chosen one story to relate for each form of resistance, these stories being representative of many similar stories I came across during my research.

A French woman with whom I came into contact – Claire - expressed her difficulty in marrying into an Italian family and getting on with her mother-in-law. Claire's mother-in-law started to bring her cooked meals for her children at

the start of every week. She did this to help Claire however, this was not Claire's idea and she did not wish to feed her children the food her mother-in-law brought as she felt she was losing her right to deciding what to feed her children on the one hand, and she enjoyed cooking and liked to use organic food as well. She explained all this to her mother-in-law in what she felt was a diplomatic and friendly way. However, this was interpreted by the mother-in-law as a declaration of war from her daughter-in-law. The tension started to become unlivable with and the issue became a topic of discussion among all the extended family. Claire decided to invite all the extended family over to calm things down by exposing her upbringing and her life values, hoping to persuade her in-laws that she was not at war but simply needed space to be a mother the way she intended to be, to cook her own meals, and to look after her children herself. She made a point of underlining the importance of family to her, and in particular grand-parents, whom she felt have a great influence on children. This still did not go down well, and her husband prayed her to go along with his mother's wishes and to accept the cooked meals. This cultural difference in the role of grand-parents became a heavy issue in the family and an ongoing tenseness came to be for years, the tenseness equally lived on both the daughter-in-law's side, feeling invaded, and the mother-in-law's side, feeling rejected.

The following story illustrates the extent of the pressure felt from parents and the way women try to resist. The story will show that it is not just parents putting pressure on the women but also their friends mentioning their parents. This creates a sort of general pressure on women in moments where they are

aspiring to change something in their life – such as where they live – representative of a society with strong traditions and a conservative approach to life. The story is about a young woman wishing to follow her dreams and move to the United States of America at the end of her university degree. This woman – a friend from Bologna now in her early forties – told her parents about her decision to move to the United States when she was 26 and had just graduated as an architect at Bologna university in the north of Italy. Her father, who was very well-known at the university, had pulled all the right strings to get her a high position at the university. He had decided this was the right way for her to start a brilliant career and had not consulted her prior to organising the job for her. He knew that without his help - networking and contacting the right people - she would never have such a great first position. So when she announced her decision to leave Bologna, this was received with total shock and a period of intense discussion started. My friend's father found it impossible to believe his daughter would rather travel and find her own job. *"But", he said, "you will never find a job like this one on your own..., even in 10 years time ... I am setting up your career for you, your life..."*.

What was difficult for my friend wanting to fly on her own wings was not, however, her parents' reaction - which she was expecting - but all her friends' comments. They tried to persuade her to take her father's offer and did not want to know how she felt or what she wanted from life. Her friends were her own age, but *"they were so used to the parents doing everything for them that they could not break free from this model and be true to themselves; they were not*

*free to be young and adventurous, to live their own lives, and make their own choices”.*

When this woman was established in the United States of America 10 years later – a happily married architect - her parents were still trying to talk her into coming back to her home town with new job opportunities. Given the importance of networking in Italy, finding a job for someone through ‘who you know’ is not to be taken lightly. Children are looked after as adults by those of their relatives who have the right connections and can therefore obtain the right jobs. It appears clearly that although children may get employed, get married, move out into homes of their own, they are not expected to become a separate unit, and as such, the majority of the children do not want to become a separate unit.

Resisting the same form of pressure, two Italian families living abroad had to combat their parents’ insistence on their returning to Italy on a weekly basis. In effect, every Sunday, they receive a phone call of lamentations about the difficulty for the parents in not having their children near them. The mother and father of the daughter, in both cases, tried to make them feel guilty by saying they knew of nobody else who had to live as they did with their own daughter far from home. They told them their health was not good and would benefit from the children returning closer to them. They even went as far as offering a free holiday house by the beach if they came back (as well as the apartment already waiting for them near the parents’ house).

The women had to combat this pressure, justifying their choices, explaining that they still loved their parents even though they did not live in Italy. To their British friends, the parents' behaviour appeared as selfish and ego-centered. The fact that it is rare for Italians to not be close to their parents is of course an unsaid part of the pressure. The women know that they should be looking after their parents, but they have decided here to resist and try to change this very traditional society where no difference is accepted. Even some of their friends from Italy spoke to them on the phone about how far away they were, and mentioned their poor parents, as did the sisters.

The third form of resistance I encountered in Italian women was resisting the prejudice on women's low capacity to understand anything remotely technical. Daniela told me of a frustrating time when she called a plumber, who, having worked out the problem, would not explain it to her but wanted to phone her husband (who was not in) to talk the problem over with him. She decided to tell him that she had a degree in physics and had no problem understanding technical problems with the plumbing. However, rather than the understanding look she was hoping for accompanied by a change in attitude, she received a surprised look, the plumber not being sure why she told him she had a degree in physics, and continuing with the same attitude, wanting to speak to her husband. Daniela feels there is not much hope for changing this attitude but she keeps trying.

In much the same way, Roberta tried to convince the electrician who came to set up an alarm system in her home that he could tell her how to use the alarm



once it was installed rather than waiting for her husband who was due to arrive. He agreed, but what made Roberta feel a little frustrated was that he told her she should manage to understand because it was not too complicated. Roberta expressed her doubts about the possibility of being considered differently in society.

I will conclude this discussion on women resisting patriarchy by speaking of the similar outcome all these forms of resistance produced. All the stories about women resisting certain ways of mother-in-laws, parents or society more generally and the way women are perceived show an outcome which could be described as 'No change'. In other words, in none of the cases I came across did the women feel they had actually changed the image they had or the role they were expected to play in the eyes of others. They either received total incomprehension from their interlocutor or anger. They felt they were simply being treated like women who were either a little strange or rather misbehaving. Nobody actually acknowledged that things could effectively be seen differently or carried out differently. In this, the women I engaged with felt that society would be very hard to change and that as women they were "*stuck*" in a particular role which they could not change.

#### **4.7 Summary**

A picture of a strongly patriarchal society is what my research reveals in this chapter where women are shown to be dominated in discourse. Women were shown to be under-represented in politics and high managerial positions; objectified and sexualised in the media; working in masculinist environments,

and with overwhelming role as mothers. When trying to resist the system, women were shown to find no support, consequently feeling trapped with no way out of patriarchal ways.

Although Italian women appear, as such, as the dominated citizens in a male world, reality is rather more ambiguous. Women were shown to be the ones choosing to reproduce certain aspects of patriarchy, and striving to keep their own mothers in patriarchal motherly roles. Although complaining about the weight of social pressure on their role in the household and with their families, women were shown to be protective of their role, not wanting to give it up. They enjoy the feeling of feeling needed.

The patriarchal power imbalance between women and men will be further addressed in the next chapter. Women will be shown to gain empowerment through their beauty and sensuality, affecting social power relations as such.

## **5 Femininity and empowerment**

### **5.1 Introduction**

My research found an overwhelming pressure on Italian women to appear beautiful. This is an important part of the patriarchal social context described in the previous chapter whereby masculine values and ways are considered as the neutral values and ways, and as such, the male gaze is the neutral gaze in society. In patriarchy, beauty holds a place of prestige and is a gendered concept. Men will be admired and respected if they have a beautiful woman at their arm for she represents a ‘good catch’. As such, women’s bodies are objectified and sexualised in society as is clearly shown through the media.

In this chapter, I discuss femininity in Italy. I will explain the way beauty is taught to girls from a very young age, and the way society embeds these girls with the importance of their own beauty and general appearance. In the same way, I will show the way boys are taught about the importance of girls being beautiful and how to compliment them. Having established the gendered beginnings of the patriarchal outlook on beauty, I will focus on objectification of the female body in society, discussing in particular the media and the male gaze. The resulting evidence, that women are judged on their appearance, is shown to

create an anxiety among women about their looks and the impression they will create in specific social settings, in particular within the socio-demographic group I am studying. This explains the time and energy women dedicate to looking good.

My research will evidence a direct link between beauty (or looking good) and sensuality. I will discuss the importance of sensual embodiment for women in order to appear beautiful, therefore feminine, and explore the way it is an integral part of Italian lifestyle, affecting, as such, social identity. Sensuality will be revealed through women's performance in different leisure settings in which she is caring for her body. I will start with the shopping setting where women are preparing for specific looks through trying clothes out in fitting rooms, then move to fitness changing rooms where women are beautifying their body through massaging, creaming up, and applying make-up, and then move to the street scene where women are showing their body by parading along the main drag in town.

Finally, I will show the way sensual embodiment makes women feel empowered in society and I discuss this empowerment and the way sensuality helps women obtain what they want, thus challenging the concept of women being dominated, for the power game is reversed here.

## **5.2 Objectification**

### 5.2.1 Learning about the importance of beauty

This section refers to the individualisation of the body in Western society and reflexivity about what the body is (Borel, 1992). I will relate the extent to which this takes place in Italian society and the depth of its reach, starting with a personal experience regarding my daughters and their perception of the importance of beauty in Italy in comparison to their experience of another Western society, New Zealand, reflecting the more anglo-saxon approach to beauty and womanhood.

Being fair-skinned and blond – contrary to the norm in Rome - my daughters receive many compliments on their ‘beautiful hair’, and are generally told how beautiful they are. I get stopped in the street by women querying whether my daughters have natural hair, and on hearing the affirmative, they first compliment me as the mother-figure, then proceed to compliment the girls. It is of interest to underline the fact that my daughters remarked on how differently people spoke to them in New Zealand when we went back to New Zealand on holiday in 2005, after 2 years in Rome. They were 10 and 7 years old at the time. On many occasions during our holiday they were addressed by adults, as they are in Rome, however this was not to compliment their physical virtues.

In the tourism center in Rotorua for example, whilst waiting for the operator to find accommodation for the night (a lengthy operation, the town being booked out during the ongoing music festival there at the time), my daughters were asked by the operator what they thought of the different options

she came up with. She also described her job to them whilst on hold with the different hotels she was contacting for us, and asked them if they thought they would like to work in tourism one day. She asked them how many languages they spoke noticing that they addressed my husband in French and myself in English. Later on, at the hotel, they were greeted by the staff and asked where they were from. This sort of communication continued through-out our holiday. After a while, my daughters commented on the fact that adults were interested in what they thought in New Zealand. My eldest continued “*they ask us what we think of things and where we come from... instead of telling us we are beautiful...*”. Given their upbringing, they appreciated their exchanges with people in New Zealand. They had never commented on the difference when in Italy, simply accepting the compliments. However, they became aware of this difference as they rediscovered the cultural ways of New Zealand with regards to girls and women.

In Italy, the importance of beauty for a woman is transmitted from the youngest age, when little girls are always complimented on how pretty they are or how well they are dressed. Although these are positive comments which make little girls happy, they do imply that what the girls feel, what they know, and what they think, are all less important than how they look. The priority then, when meeting a girl, is to give her feed-back on her looks. A very different approach is reflected when meeting a boy, the priority being to give feed-back on the activity he is carrying out, or a sport he likes to play, or his knowledge on a particular subject. In the same way as girls learn the importance of being

beautiful, boys learn the importance of their thoughts and accomplishments. Boys are also taught to make compliments to girls and to appreciate their beauty. And this beauty is appreciated, defined, or worked at, for the little girl, according to the values defined by the male gaze, taught to both girls and boys as the only gaze in society.

### 5.2.2 Social pressure to appear beautiful

With this up-bringing, children come to expect their mothers to dress up not only for special occasions but also for simple errands, putting pressure on their mothers to exist through ‘the look’ (as discussed in Chapter Two regarding consumer society and the *flâneur*). People in the West are increasingly aware of being looked at by others (Grosz, 1995; Tester, 1995), and this influences gendered embodiment. Where this has been discussed to put pressure on women more than men in Western society in general, this pressure is particularly felt by the women in Italy for it filters through their own children’s gaze on them. They are reminded by their children about their existence being in great part through the looking on in society.

Two of my interviewees mentioned their daughters’ negative comments on different occasions when they were preparing to go on an errand without changing into more elegant clothes, and both explained the way they had to change their outfits in the end. Being similar stories, I will recount one, Gisella’s, as representative of both. Gisella decided to go the local supermarket to pick up some missing food items for lunch one Saturday. Given that she and her husband were gardening, they were both wearing old jogging outfits. Her

eight year old daughter was shocked at the prospect of her mother leaving the house in such a state, worrying about what people would think of her mother, and terrified at the idea that her mother may even run into someone she knew.

Gisella told me she knew her daughter was right because that is precisely how Italian society works, people effectively judging you on your appearance, even at the supermarket. Having traveled extensively, she is aware of the different aspects of society which are unique to her home country, and she told me that she was against this aspect of Italian society and did not think it healthy or fulfilling. At this point, I was interested in the way she had managed to explain her point of view to her daughter, or rather in how her daughter had reacted. When I asked her, she laughed and said *“I couldn’t explain my point of view to her... impossible... you should have seen her face when I started to..... I just got changed, it was no big deal anyway”*.

Regarding the power of social pressure on women to appear beautiful, my interviewee Paola tells me how happy she was the day her thirteen year-old daughter commented on the way auntie was not very good-looking because her hair was not done, her nails not cared for and she didn’t wear make-up. The depth of the pressure is transmitted through Paola feeling proud that her daughter is judging others on appearance. She revealed, in effect, feeling that she had done her duty as a mother, because her daughter had understood the importance of body grooming, and she knew therefore that her daughter would be alright in society.



My interviewee Daniela described the way her twelve year old daughter asked her if she could make an effort on the days she came to pick her up from school because all the other mums looked so beautiful. Daniela thought this was a cute comment because it reflected her daughter's "*taste for style*". Like Gisella, she obliged because she knew this was important for her daughter.

Daniela also affirmed that she was aware she should make more of an effort in society regarding the way she dressed, but expressed the difficulty in doing so as she was really not interested in clothes. Daniela explained that this had always been a problem for her, her style not reflecting the fashion-conscious ways of the 'new' middle class in which she bathed. For these reasons, she knows she appears less beautiful to her daughter. The latter reinforces the patriarchal outlook on women reflected in society, living the reality of her mother being judged by others for her looks and wanting her mother to be up to it.

Given the importance of looks for women and the fact that they are judged by their looks in society, I searched for articles or books referring to the way women must dress to go out and the importance of fashion for women's well-being and acceptance in society, particularly women from within the social group of the 'new' middle class, where the pressure is known to be stronger, as discussed through Bourdieu's theory. Although studies do exist on the world of fashion, they tend to be marketing studies (Morace, 2004) focusing purely on the aesthetic value of fashion rather than on the women themselves. Fashion representation is analysed for aesthetic reasons linked to the fashion industry

rather than for unveiling any symbolic value attributed to the women's representation, be it the objectification of the women through their semi-erotic poses, or the passivity of the women through their poses representing their sexual willingness for men. Women's representation in fashion magazines have been described by tourism researchers Annette Pritchard & Nigel Morgan (2007b, p. 159) as "grounded in wider gendered power relationships, so that both women and nature are burdened with men's meaning and interpreted through masculinist discourse". Annette Pritchard & Nigel Morgan deconstruct fashion photography in travel lifestyle magazines, revealing women to be represented as passive and sexually available in the context of tourism marketing literature.

### 5.2.3 The male gaze

Anna Bravo, Italian historian researcher from Torino, describes the feminine body as a public space, more objectified than ever before (Giuffrida, 2005). In her talk on gender studies for the Italian feminist organisation *Paese delle Donne*, she speaks of the issue of the male gaze perpetrated as the neutral gaze in Italian society, where women themselves look at their own gender through the male gaze.

One of the most powerful cultural mediums to perpetuate the male gaze in Italy is television, through which woman's role appears as clearly submissive and objectified for men's eyes. The concept of 'velina', an active part of most Italian television programs, speaks for itself. A velina is a girl who appears on television as a mixture of a soubrette and chorus girl. Aspiring candidates must be aged between 18 and 26, be attractive and willing to dress very lightly. In his

ethnographic account of Italy, journalist Tobias Jones (2003) describes how in 2002, 10000 girls applied for the *Striscia la notizia*, the most popular Italian program of political satire, where two beautiful girls cavort around whilst the others, mainly men, talk politics. Eighty percent of the candidates were university students.

In another popular program, the girls are not cavorting around, but are inside glass rectangles, these rectangles being the legs of the table around which the participants of the program are discussing. Whilst the discussion takes place, the camera zooms in on the two women. These women are dressed in bikinis and are looking at the camera in a very inviting way, their pose sexually appealing. This objectification and sexualisation of the two women's bodies are the main visual for the whole program. There are sometimes women involved in the discussions taking place around the table, but the vast majority of guests are men.

The issue related to Italian women and the image they confer on television was presented as part of the Shadow Report discussed earlier. The feminist organisations who participated in the writing of this document wrote of the demeaning effect of woman's image as portrayed on television. Zardo (2004), who specialises in Italian culture at French universities, describes women on Italian television as semi-nude young 'mermaids' with interchangeable faces but identical bodies, all moving in the same sensual and sexualised way, with nothing to say. He admires media proprietor Silvio Berlusconi (founder and main shareholder of Fininvest, Italian media and finance company including

three national television channels) for having understood that this ‘mermaid’ represented national desire and for introducing her in every program, whatever the content. Italian journalist Beppe Severgnini, writing about the lightly dressed young women accompanying virtually any talk on television, suggests that Italian stamps and coins should have pictures of this new icon, “Miss Semi-nude” (2005, p. 96).

Tobias Jones (2003) describes the success of ‘Miss Semi-nude’ through Italian passion for beauty, revealing the extent to which Italian culture is more a visual culture than a literary culture. He speaks mainly of television, fashion and body grooming. Francesco Morace (2004), author of *Estetiche Italiane, Italian Ways* in the marketing field, describes the ‘Italian way’ as elegant, fashionable, and withholding a strong influence on all other nations. Fashion in Italy, he explains, is a way of life, it is seen to represent the creativity and ingenuity of Italians, is embedded in their roots and their philosophy of life, and is a result of history, art and culture in this country. Italy does produce 37% of the European Union’s fashion wear, 62% of European fashion exports to the United States of America, and is positioned as third exporter of fashion worldwide, after China and Hong Kong (Institut Francais de la Mode IFM, 2003). It is perhaps significant that this nation produces the world’s most esteemed fashion retailers, be they for the high-street or the cat-walk (Versace, Armani, Valentino, Max Mara, Benetton, Diesel, Dolce & Gabbana for example).

#### 5.2.4 Judged on appearance

Italian passion for beauty goes well beyond fashion however, into the depths of morality according to Beppe Severgnini (2005) who deconstructed ‘what goes on inside Italian minds’ through social life and behaviour. There is, he explains, in Italian language an interesting confusion between what represents good or ‘goodness’ and what represents beauty. Only in this language is there such an expression as “*bella figura*”. This literally translates into “*beautiful face/figure*”. The meaning of the expression however is “*good impression*”. So creating a good impression on others is equated to looking beautiful to others. To this effect, the English expression “never judge a book by its cover” does not translate in Italian because here you *do* judge a book by its cover, people by their titles, professionals by their offices, secretaries by their styles, and lampshades by their designers (Severgnini, 2005).

Both men and women appear to perceive the other members of society through the lenses of the male gaze, and given Italian society’s postmodern consumer-oriented drive for aesthetics and appearances, this results in a reality where, for women, ‘to be’ is ‘to be seen’.

My interviewees’ elaborations about the importance in wearing the right clothing illustrate the reality of judging others and being judged on the basis of the ‘cover’ or ‘presentation’ of the self. Elena, for example, tells of the necessity of wearing stockings with her work outfits in June although the average temperature is between 25 and 30 degrees by then. After telling me how uncomfortably hot she feels with the tights on, she describes the way her ‘not-yet-tanned-enough’ legs would make her outfits look wrong, and make her look

ridiculous. She holds a senior managerial position in a male world and knows she is judged on looks; “*what would the men think of me if I wore my skirt and jacket with untanned legs?*”. She has a naturally dark skin, being of Mediterranean complexion, but this is not the same as being tanned. Unfortunately, she explains, she doesn’t have time for sun-beds so she counts her days in the early summer until she has ‘worked up’ a decent tan enabling her to go to work with bare legs.

A similar light is shed on the importance of looks and the problems it entails in everyday life in Maria’s story. She says meeting her husband at his workplace for lunch has become a nightmare for her. She starts worrying about the lunch a few days beforehand, thinking of what she will be wearing and how she can look her best. Her description of the preparation for an informal, private lunch appointment with her husband reminds me very much of the preparation for a wedding or a special event party in the anglo-saxon culture. The difficulty perceived by this woman is linked to the location of the lunch, which contrary to my initial understanding, was not actually at her husband’s workplace but simply in the area where he works, hence the slight risk of perhaps meeting a work colleague, as opposed to the certainty of meeting the colleagues as I had initially perceived. Hence, getting worked up is all linked to the slight possibility of meeting someone in a public place, street or restaurant, who would judge her negatively through her attire.

Maria is an airhostess, which means working in a uniform, which in turn means not possessing a typical working-woman’s-wardrobe. This is where her

problem starts for she feels she would need this kind of wardrobe for mingling among city workers at lunchtime. This woman is extremely elegant and spends much time and money on her looks, both in beauty salons and in her own home, however she dwells on this difference in outfits at length and reveals the uncomfortable feeling which can arise from such a difference in looks. The problem arising is related to the judging which will take place and will concern her status as a wife. It will be understood, through her lack of possessing the 'right' outfits, that she is a '*casalinga*', or housewife. Among working women, this is perceived as an inferior status - the working women feel they are fighting for their place in society through working like the men and regard those women who do not work as a threat to their ever reaching equity. This feeling is particularly strong for those women working in the higher ranks of hierarchy. So the judgment made by others based on how one dresses goes a long way. It does not stop at whether one is following the latest fashion trends and is well-groomed, presenting well, but rather reflects a critical gaze onto one's life and the extent to which one is complying with patriarchy or resisting it.

Stefania also recounts the difficulty in wearing the right clothing, but in her case, the issue is going out in the evening for social meals with her husband's colleagues. She knows she must make him look good in front of his colleagues, creating a good impression – a '*bella figura*'. Her husband always asks her to wear a short skirt on these occasions and a deep cleavage as he feels she looks her best this way showing high body value.

Roberta, on the other hand, appears to pay very little attention to what she wears, and as such, portrays herself as a foreigner in her own country. She offers the information that contrary to many she is not directed by her husband as to what she need wear or not, and appears proud to part with this information. However, after the third session together, she started to relax more and open up, revealing that her husband does direct what she wears when they go out. I was surprised because this woman comes across as feminist and intellectual, and is often involved in ideological talks about Italian politics and woman's position, so I queried this fact.

Roberta's husband, who also dresses in the same way as her - with little attention to fashion - was brought up in a society where he knows he and his wife will be judged on the way she dresses and presents herself. So, although they cannot be described as mainstream and do not follow the fashion dress-code, there are nevertheless clear-cut rules and regulations on what she may wear or not on social gatherings. It is important that she appear feminine and attractive even though they position themselves as 'against the system', against mainstream society in Italy, including the consumerist fashion aspect and the patriarchal reality of society. This illustrates the depth of the male gaze, female objectification, and patriarchal values with which both men and women were brought up, resulting today in patriarchal men and patriarchal women who reproduce the structure.

On a personal level, I 'lived' the importance of beauty, feeling the extent to which I received different looks and responses (from both men and women)



when dressed in a feminine sensual way as opposed to more a 'laid-back' dress-code. It is interesting to highlight the fact that after a number of years of carrying extra weight gained through motherhood, it is in Rome that I felt compelled to diet and lose weight. Although my overt reason is health, I cannot deny that my motivation also comes from my embodiment as a woman living in a country like Italy where it feels good to look good because it is reflected in the eyes of society, as is the contrary. This external appraisal creates an awareness of one's physique and femininity. This comes in contrast to living in anglo-saxon country such as New Zealand where one does not feel judged on size or dress-code, hence one is not so aware of one's physical attributes and femininity. Clearly, this influence of Italian society on my attitude to my body and beautification happened at an unconscious level. I notice these changes at a more conscious level myself when observing other foreign women change in their appearance as they spend time in Italy.

Also indicative of the reality of being judged on appearance is the following story about two Italian women who lived in England for a number of years - starting up their families there - and are now back in Rome after respectively ten and twelve years abroad. Their reactions in rediscovering a social arena whereby they felt judged on their appearance (something they had completely forgotten about Italian culture) show the extent of this reality. On arriving in Rome, these women and their families chose to live in the green suburban area of Casalpalocco as this area reminded them somewhat of their past residential areas in England (for its greenness and the international

community). However, where they felt valued and happy in England as full-time mothers, they felt off-balance in their new abode. At first, they dressed the way they had in England when going to the park with their toddlers and young children. Day-time activities with young children are not considered a time to dress elegantly in England, affirm the two mothers.

In Casalpalocco, on the other hand, mothers with babies, toddlers and young children are immaculate, says one of the women. The other explains that the women here appear to dress ‘very elegantly’ even to go and buy a loaf of bread at the local bakers. *“When I say very elegantly, I mean really dressed up... the way you would for a very special evening out in England.”* “And”, continues the other, *“they have all lost their baby kilos before the baby is a few months old, .. it is rather daunting and makes us feel overweight, as well as being judged negatively for our low-key dress style... basically giving us the feeling of not fitting in”*. Because these women are Italian, they had expected to slip back into the society they thought they knew. The truth is that they had not realised how much they had changed and taken on different values through living in an anglo-saxon environment, values not including parading beauty when taking the children out to play. They had forgotten the way one is judged on appearance in their country, and the importance of looks for women at all times.

Beauty is in effect important in every sphere of Italian life. Beppe Severgnini (2005) speaks of the importance of beauty in customer service for example where, he argues, most people in Italy would rather be helped by a beautiful woman than by someone capable of answering their questions. In other

words, customers are willing to sacrifice the information they could be getting to help them with their purchase, for the joy of seeing beauty. He goes as far as to affirm that cell-phone companies select their sales employees solely on the criteria of beauty - as opposed to technical ability - because that is what the public wants.

My research revealed the strongest characteristic of the beautiful body, for a woman, to be the sensuality. Sensual embodiment is enacted through wearing beautiful clothes and the right make-up and hair-do, and carrying these attributes with sensuality. The next section will explore the importance of sensuality in Italian society and the way it is an integral part of being a woman – of femininity.

### **5.3 Sensuality**

Sensuality is an important part of each and every moment of the day in Italy. I will strive to portray the extent to which this characteristic is an integral part of being Italian – in particular for the women - before focusing on the sensual performance of parading one's body for all to see. I have identified key spaces which I will describe to show the importance of sensual embodiment and the way it influences all moments of social life. The characteristic consumer society activity of shopping will be the first sensual space I will introduce (a space shared by leisure and everyday life in the city), followed by fitness center changing rooms (a leisure space for the city dwellers), and by street life (a space where city dwellers congregate) where the main activity is parading one's body for all to see.

### 5.3.1 Shopping: a sensual experience

The buying experience in Italy is a physical experience where time is taken to look, touch, feel, smell, and listen and discuss, in order to perceive a product. People like to look inside a lamp, around it, underneath it, and caress the base deciding whether they like it or not. When purchasing a table, measurements are taken but most of the time and energy goes into getting a physical feel for the table, running one's hand along the entire length and back. Any object on sale will in fact be touched by the customer whilst listening to the vendor's long explanation about its innumerable qualities.

When purchasing a clothing article, feeling and touching with ones hands is a prelude to bringing the material up to one's cheek to decide how soft it really is. I would say that using one's senses is probably the most important part of checking whether a garment is right and fits well. Also, clothes shopping is carried out under the gaze of the other women in the shop who proceed to give their advice and may comment on which garment looks better. In the center of Rome where space is hard to come by and expensive, many boutiques have a shared changing room and it is not uncommon for the other women trying something on in same time to say what they think of the effect created by what one is trying. This is done in a genuine friendly way, everybody understanding the importance of looking good, as is illustrated by the following personal story.

My eleven year old daughter needed a dress and thought she would like something a little more feminine than her usual style. She and I spent the afternoon in the center of Rome in a well-known shopping street – the Via del

Corso – where we enjoyed shopping in women's boutiques, as opposed to children's' shops given the physical stature of my daughter (taller than average). Whenever she tried a dress on in a shared changing room we ended up having big discussions with the other women in the shop or in the shared fitting room about how she looked and what she should try on.

In one particular boutique where we spent longer - having found a dress that was the right style, the right colour, and generally a perfect fit – we engaged into a discussion which illustrates the complicity among women about getting it right. Whereas in public spaces, women become competitors and look each other over with a competing attitude, in this boutique, my daughter was openly told by the two women in the changing room with us that she looked really good in the dress. However, they were worried that perhaps it made her look older and more sensual than she wanted. They asked her to move around the room in her dress as they looked on. They then commented on how sexy she looked and spoke of the way her body moved perfectly in the dress which fell beautifully, but they asked her if she realised this made her appear older than they thought she was. One of the women then turned to me and asked me how old my daughter was. Although these two women did not know each other, they appeared as two best friends helping a third one to get ready for a big event, giving deep thought to everything they said and really caring about the outcome. They told my daughter that perhaps, given her age, she would create a more provocative and sensual sensation than she wanted with this dress. They were curious to know what the

occasion for the dress was, and we all four spent some time discussing different kinds of events and what was appropriate or not.

After much general discussion, the focus came back to my daughter. The women complimented me as the mother figure and again enforced their opinion for my benefit. We all agreed that the dress was not the right dress for now, but that in a few years time it would be perfect. The sensuality of the whole experience - the movement, the touching, the talking about effects created – was the main part of the experience and was what brought the women together. The shared and subconscious knowledge of the importance of the sensual effect created by the way clothes are worn and the way one moves in them is at the base of the complicity among women in searching for a new outfit.

I will conclude about the shopping scene in affirming that being a woman - with the constant pressure this entails in terms of appearing beautiful in society - means being competitive with other women in public, but complice and close in private - in the back scenes. This also applies to back scenes such as beauty salons and hairdressers where the women come to change their looks. Everybody knows how difficult it can be to change looks, to get it right, to look one's best, to highlight one's physical attributes in the right way, and help is offered from one sensual being to another. The help offered and sharing of opinions also reflects womanly ways - feelings are shared – and indicates that although competition on looks is an undeniable part of social life, women are a community, and, as such, they look out for each other and give each other support. As such, Italy is a nation representing a real challenge for e-commerce,

a nation where shopping is carried out through one's senses and through contact with others, without which the fun, sharing, enjoyment, and life is drained.

### 5.3.2 Taking care of one's body

I leave the shopping scene now and move to fitness centers and more particularly to the women's changing room: one big room, shared by all, with open showers and close quarters. Women come into the changing room after swimming or following a class at the gym, and here, after showering, they get ready (beautified) for re-entering the outside world, the public arena. A spot is chosen on the benches lining the walls and here the large bag with the shower necessities (hair products, a towel, a toweling dressing-gown, special shower shoes, body and face creams, hair-dryer, and make-up set) is put down, a marking of the territory which will be needed after the shower for creaming up, massaging and getting dressed.

Showering is a slow process. The hair is washed, massaged and treated at length and a lot of talking and exchanging information on product qualities goes on. Body soap is also used, and the swimming gear is rinsed (for those coming from the pool). After the shower, back at the bench (in the chosen spot) the body is dried in a thorough way, the towel for the hair and the toweling dressing-gown for the body, feet still in the shower shoes. Then the towels are hung up on the hook above the bag and the anti-cellulite cream is applied with much sensuality. This is the case for each and every naked body to be seen, mainly on the thighs, buttocks, breasts and tummies. This anti-cellulite massaging of the body lasts about a quarter of an hour and is undertaken regardless of age or size. The same

pattern is then followed by all, which is to put on underwear and shoes and move to the hair-drying area in front of the large wall mirror.

The scene at this point is mainly high heels, beautiful matching underwear and bras - highlighted by the solarium-tanned bodies – and shaking of hair from side to side as the hair-dryer blows through it. Hair products will be added part way through for regulating volume, shine, and softness, and all this is done with much sensuality. The women are constantly checking their reflection in the mirror, shaking their head slowly to create the best effect with their hair. They are checking on the hair but are also taking the opportunity to check out their body (tan, cellulite, toning of muscles).

This is followed by a make-up session. Here too time is taken to check out the general effect of the make-up at different intervals during the application. Finally the dressing of the body takes place, and before leaving again, a stop at the mirror to check out the final look. Important to this whole experience is the looking on of the other women in the changing room. Everybody is checking out everybody else's bodies, creaming up, make-up and clothing. There is both a sharing of womanly ways - as described in the shopping fitness rooms - and a competitive looking on, as the other women eye up their competitors who are also preparing for the outside world. Each woman is performing for the other women in the changing room, showing off her body and attributes, as well as her fashion and style. Despite the reality of there being no men in the changing room the lenses through which the women observe each other are those of the male gaze.



### 5.3.3 Parading one's body for all to see

The last scene I will present, representative of the importance of sensual embodiment in Italian lifestyle, is one that takes place in the streets, usually on the main street of a village, town, city quarter, or beach front. It is the stroll where one shows oneself to the world and observes the world, named the '*struscio*'. The best translation for '*struscio*' would be 'parading' although this word does not carry with it the sensual connotation of the Italian '*struscio*'. Talking and gossip are an essential part of these strolls where one learns everything about everybody whilst the eye searches and scrutinises every detail around.

The competition is high among the women who are walking to be seen. They are showing the results of their shopping outings, the care and time they have invested in their bodies, the toning up and tanning they have accomplished. Fashion is at its highest here, as is the tanning competition, in this sensual walk. The walk is a slow one where every movement can be given charm, character, but above all sensuality. Through this slow, sensual walk, women are showing their femininity. They are showing their beauty, their sensuality and their know-how as women. This is the rewarding moment for all the time put into their bodies, especially if they receive positive looks from their audience, the others who are parading. The complicity of the women in the back scenes, as described in the shopping setting, has no place here. Men are present and the women are competing for the men's gaze, and through this, for respect from the other women.

My research also revealed masculinity to be lived through the women parading sensuality. A man with a beautiful woman at his arm will be respected by other men and praised for displaying strong masculinity. Although Naomi Wolf (1991) did discuss the fact that women are encouraged to be beautiful and men are encouraged to desire and possess beautiful women in Western society (as revealed in my literature review), the situation in Italy reflects more than this general difference in embodiment between men and women in the Western world. The reality that men are judged on the beauty of the women with them goes a step further. Pierre Bourdieu (1998) had expressed the fact that women's appearance is representative of the couple's (or family's) social status, however, here too, the Italian situation is not covered. It is more than the man's social status which is at stake through the appearance of 'his' woman, it is his virility, his manlyhood. The other men will tell him how well he has done and complement him on his 'catch', thereby giving him positive feedback on his virility and his physical capacities as a man. In a patriarchal society such as this one, virility and masculinity are crucial. Alongside the social pressure on appearance felt by the women and the objectification of their bodies, there is the pressure on masculine display of manhood felt by the men.

Contrary to other areas of social life such as politics and the workplace, described in the previous chapter, women have power over men through their femininity. My research revealed the importance of looks, beauty, and sensual embodiment for women in Italian society, both in terms of feeling good about

themselves and in terms of obtaining what they want in a society where they are otherwise dominated by men.

#### **5.4 Empowerment**

The sensual embodiment of Italian women represents a real paradox in patriarchy. Although it seems that women in Italy have no choice in society but to be objectified for the benefit of men, their sensual performance reflects more than their reproducing what is expected of them through this reality of masculine values and the male gaze. I contend that it reflects the fact that women like being gazed upon. In effect, although being gazed upon and objectified is a diminishing consequence of patriarchy for women - taking them to the depth of a reality where their looks count more than anything else - my research paradoxically revealed that being gazed upon is empowering for the objectified women.

They feel empowered through the choice of their clothes, the way they move their body, the way they sway their hips, because they see a response to their sensual embodiment all around them. Thus the agents provoke the 'being looked at', appearing not only to comply to the values of patriarchy, but to enjoy them, shining through the gaze they receive. I identified two main reasons behind the women enjoying the gaze and the empowerment thus derived.

##### **5.4.1 Power over men**

The first is that the women enjoy the power they detain over men through their looks. They live in a country where it is not easy as a woman to gain access

to politics, where senior management is a man's world, where they are expected to carry out all the chores at home and take on sole responsibility for the children, and where both structural and cultural conditions make combining family and work very difficult for them. The men naturally have power through this patriarchal social set-up, having the right to decisions concerning themselves but also the women. As such, men do not appear to want to change. Although this reality may appear bleak, women not enjoying an equal existence in society, the truth is that these women obtain what they want through their looks. Through their sensual embodiment, they gain power and the patriarchal power imbalance between men and women is reversed.

The women know that they can ask anything of men if they have the right looks, the right looks being sensual ways more than specific bodily characteristics. Although the women still work hard at obtaining what they consider to be the right look through focusing on particular body features - striving to better and beautify these in line with the ideal body shown in the media - and often trying to lose weight, I observed sensuality of movement to be the main characteristic the men respond to. This means that detaining power over men is not linked to actual body features or size, but more to the women's embodiment, to their sensuality and femininity. The clothing, make-up, hairstyle are signs that the woman cares about her looks. They are the backdrop which will underline her sensuality, in other words, the props for enabling a better performance. It is the woman's ways that will give her the power.

Moreover, the fact that a woman presenting herself in a sensual and feminine way will appear as socially successful to other women means that she will also obtain what she wants from women if she has the right looks. Having the right looks is perceived as having reached a particular status in society hence the more positive response from women as well as men.

#### 5.4.2 Feeling womanly

The second reason women enjoy the gaze is that they feel empowered in their womanhood through it. It makes them ‘feel good’ inside, as women, in their femininity. When they spend time on their looks, they feel good about themselves, and the gaze is a confirmation of the way they feel. Being an outside confirmation – outside to themselves – it has an empowering effect and boosts their self-confidence and the way they feel about themselves. Given the importance of looks, this feeling of empowerment is deep, which explains why women are so responsive to the gaze. My own embodiment tells the same story as those I hear and observe: if I pamper myself, dress in a feminine way, apply make-up and feel good about myself, I naturally move in a more sensual way and feel more womanly. The response I get through men looking on makes me feel empowered in that it throws back the image of femininity and womanly sensuality I am feeling. The men’s response indicates to me that I am feminine in my ways, and this, in Italy, means I am a woman.

Confirming my dissertations on Italian women feeling good through the gaze, two Italian women I knew in New Zealand described their difficulty in feeling womanly in Wellington where the women are not gazed upon. They

expressed their bewilderment at how a woman could manage to feel womanly without the gazing upon from the men in society. They affirmed missing feeling sexy and attractive in the New Zealand society where they felt ignored as women however much effort they put into looking and feeling beautiful. Although they knew this was a cultural difference with their own country, they couldn't help but feel their womanhood was at stake, and this made them feel depressed.

## **5.5 Summary**

The extent to which women's social identity is linked to femininity and beauty was shown in this chapter. I have revealed sensuality to be a performance women carry out to gain both status and power in society, as well as empowerment through feeling more womanly. This comes as a contrasting conclusion to the initial description of objectification and sexualisation of the female body in Italian patriarchal society.

Although women are objectified and from a young age - beauty being taught as a girl's preoccupation, women obtain what they want as a result of the respect they gain for their beauty and sensual embodiment. This clearly alters the image of women being dominated by men. In effect, understanding the power they obtain through their looks sets women with a strategic weapon which enables them to change the way of things. This does not necessarily mean they want to change things but it gives them the confidence of knowing they are masters of themselves.

In this chapter, it also became apparent that through the preoccupation of beauty women bond together in society and form a tight community where help is given and complicity can be felt. Although in the presence of men the women were shown to become competitive and all solidarity lost, they know that they are all moving together in the same direction. They are aware of the importance of looks and know that all women need support in achieving the right look.

The beach scene, which is the subject of the next chapter, fits into the importance of achieving the right look for it enables bettering one's tan. The tan will be revealed to be just as important as sensuality in terms of gaining beauty status in society. This is how tourism links in so tightly to everyday life in Italy, the tan being essential to everyday well-being. The beach I explored is the beach close to Rome, as described in Chapter One. This is where women from the city of Rome are being tourists for the day, to better their tan, hence their look in the city.

## **6 Performing ‘The tanning’**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I draw on Erving Goffman’s conceptualisations, extended and adapted as described in my research methodology, to deconstruct Italian women’s tanning. Using the performance metaphor, I capture cultural practices at the local Roman beaches where Romans are being tourists for the day. I focus on women from the ‘new’ middle class who tend to go to paying beach resorts rather than the free beaches, and for whom the main activity at the beach is tanning.

Tanning is an activity which is imbricated in the everyday life of Italians. I contend that it carries with it quotidian habits, and has the potential, as such, to unveil social identity and gendered constructions of social positioning. Tim Edensor (2001) argues that the repetition of daily, weekly or annual routines constitutes a realm of common-sense and habitual performance, thereby offering an understanding of the link between culture and identity. In this light, the repetition of tanning regularly during the summer season, and every summer, confers to this activity the potential for exploring Italian cultural norms. It also



confers the potential for gaining insight into the ‘mentality’ of the Italian international traveller.

I will show the way the performance carried out at the beach reflects the gendered embodiment discussed in the previous chapter with regards to beauty and sensuality, and reveals society’s patriarchal perception of women’s role, as described in Chapter Four. Italian women’s empowerment through their embodiment also filters through the tanning performance, the women enjoying the male gaze and feeling feminine through receiving it. In this chapter, I will discuss the materiality of the body. This aspect was in effect shown to be lacking in tourism research in my literature review. It is also an important part of the critical body. The body is not only symbol of social discourse here, but is also lived in. Through our body, we define who we are, everything we are and do assuming an embodied form. The embodied ‘doing’ of tanning revealed tanning to be a sensuous activity, with an erotic sensuality. The women use their bodies to negotiate structures and get empowered. They play a seduction game at the beach, sending out messages through their lush physical enjoyment and total ease in positioning their body and shifting their bikini.

In a similar way to Steven Doorne & Irena Ateljevic (2005), my discussion will focus on three elements which form the basis for analyzing performance. Firstly, I will present the physical setting and aspects of the stage, describing how different areas become front and back stages and how these change throughout my analysis. Secondly, I will present the casting of the characters and deconstruct their performance in the three acts of ‘The Tanning’: ‘Making

an entrance', 'Creaming up', and 'Shifting positions'. And lastly, I will discuss the critical body which has transpierced through the performance, disserting on the materiality of the body and linking this into Italian culture at a broader level.

## **6.2 The backdrop and setting the stage**

The dramaturgical context of the tanning performance has been provided for by the previous chapter, placing the nature of tanning into the context of aesthetics in Italian society. In a cultural context where individuals are judged on their appearances - and a tanned appearance is symbolic of a certain status in terms of beauty - the tanning activity at the beaches near Rome takes on a significant role for gaining status in society. The use of the performance metaphor provides the theoretical lens through which the cultural importance of aesthetics is captured and analysed in terms of its social positioning of women in society, tanning being embodied in a gendered way. Performance becomes, as such, the metaphor which enables me to capture the agency of Italian women.

The stage on which the dramaturgical representation 'The Tanning' takes place is composed of the beach resorts on the coast near Rome, an area called Ostia. Within this social group in Rome, it is important to choose a resort in which to carry out the tanning performance. The resorts have different daily entrance prices depending on the facilities required: basic facilities (beach, toilets, refreshment areas), basic facilities plus a '*lettino*' or 'sun-bed' (the literal translation is a 'little bed'), the previous plus a parasol, the previous plus the use of a personal cabin (small wooden changing room). There are a limited number of cabins available for the day as most cabins are hired out for the season,

costing anything between 2000 and 4000 euros for the summer (June to September) depending on the resort. Each resort attracts a different clientele, depending on its orientation: young and party style (with beach volley courts, several bars, disco in the evening), more family oriented (with swimming pools and play areas), or more sophisticated (quiet atmosphere and expensive eating areas). The different resorts represent different social status depending on the cost of the cabin, and it is common in Rome to be asked which beach resort one goes to.

The main motivation for going to the beach is tanning, not having a swim. This is illustrated by the lay-out of the cabins and sun-beds at the beach. At the front of the beach, close to the sea, are several rows of parasols and sun-beds running parallel to the water's edge. Then start rows of cabins perpendicular to the water's edge. Each cabin has a parasol and two sun-beds in front of it for the personal use of the cabin owner. From the sun-beds by the cabins at the start of each row, one can see the sea, however as one moves up the row towards the back of the beach area, the sea becomes less and less visible from the sun-beds, until one cannot see the sea at all. This is not an issue as the main concern when spending a day at the beach is to better one's tan, lying on the sun-bed. Some respondents explain that sometimes they do not even walk down to the sea, but simply spend the day between their sun-beds, their cabin, and the bar or restaurant.

As well as being a private changing area, the cabin is also a place for keeping all the accessories necessary for the tanning performance: bikinis to

change into during the day, 'pareos' (or wrap-arounds) to go with the bikinis, and sun-tanning lotions. The more expensive cabins also have private showers, in which case shower products and body creams are also kept in the cabin, along with a hair-dryer , make-up and perfume so as to achieve the 'city look' when leaving the beach rather than the sandy, wet 'beach look'. The average temperature during the open resort season is 30 degrees, with a minimum of 25 at the start of the season and the end of the season, and often as hot as 35 degrees at the peak of the summer. The heat is a very humid heat, averaging 80% humidity, and this factor ups the perceived temperature a few degrees. Underlining the intensity of the Roman summer heat is essential to understanding the importance of looks when in this sort of heat the hair-dryer is perceived as an essential item for 'getting ready' for the city on leaving the beach.

As underlined in the previous chapter, tanning is a major feature of the beautiful body in Italy. People work hard at getting their tan and even when the maximum tan colour is reached, tanning sessions are still considered important because they are necessary for keeping up the 'tanned' status. If the summer look is not actively maintained throughout the season, it will fade away resulting not only in the loss of the tanned status but in this loss being emphasised by the extremely tanned people around who have worked well. The most difficult part of tanning remains the start of the season when people have to regain their summer look.

The element of competition is very real both at the beach and back in the city in strapless dresses (or other light clothing accompanying this season) which the respondents feel are designed to show off their suntan. For this reason, many women choose to prepare for the summer by going to the solarium before the start of the 'bikini and strapless dress' challenge. It is much easier to 'make an entrance' at the beach with a tanned body, explain my participants, the tan representing a form of clothing (or cover-up) without which one feels 'naked' and vulnerable to the 'looking on' of the audience. Before the beach season starts, publicity for tanning products is apparent in all media, reminding everyone of the importance of looking good through a tanned body. One particular advertisement speaks of the body as 'a temple', the text reading as follows: "*Your body is your temple. The body is a sign, an ideal of beauty, you must feel attractive to yourself before being able to feel attractive to others, the cult of tanning has one idol only: yourself. For this unique rite celebration, you need a grand talisman*" and here follows the name of the product (*La Repubblica Salute*, 2005, p. 11). This advertisement is particularly representative of tanning publicity in Italy. Another relevant advertisement (on publicity panels) reads: "*The heat invades the body, the brain relaxes, the lotion smells good, I drift into a second state and want to be disturbed no more*".

In order to show off their tan, the women spend hours shopping for the right bikini. My participants affirmed that they owned anything between five and fifteen bikinis for the summer, that they always bought several new ones at the start of the season, and that they changed bikinis several times during a day at

the beach. I was shown particular bikinis that let the sun go through, resulting in the complete body tan much desired by the women. Although the overt reason I was given for changing bikinis during the course of the day was the discomfort created by wet bikinis, I contend there is more to changing bikinis than the simple comfort aspect. The changing of bikinis can only take place if one owns a personal changing cabin in the resort, therefore a different bikini is perceived as a sign of belonging, signaling to the audience a regular beach-goer – possessing, as such, the cultural capital characteristic of that specific resort. A change of bikini is also a new opportunity for showing off one's tan, one's physical attributes (physical capital), and one's taste or style. The tan is paraded and shown to the audience (all the other people at the beach actively taking in the scene around them such as a feminine body with an attractive bikini moving towards the bar scene for a drink).

The stage is composed of many different areas at - or around - the beach: the parking area where the characters arrive, organise their 'beach gear', check their props, and leave their car to indulge in a day's tanning at the beach; the top of the beach where the characters make their entrance, check out who is at the beach, observe and get observed; the middle beach area where the characters are actively working on their tan whilst taking in the scene around them; the sea or water line where the characters are parading their bodies; and the bar or refreshment area where the characters are also parading whilst getting refreshments. At different moments of 'The Tanning' performance, any of these areas will become front-stage or back-stage. The parking area for example is the

front-stage where one is showing oneself for the first time after the car ride from the city, but it is also the back-stage where one prepares to make one's entrance onto the beach. The top of the beach is front-stage, the characters making their entrance and becoming part of 'The Tanning' performance at that point, the audience judging their appearance – the body, the tan, the props – but it is also the back-stage area where the characters make a few final adjustments to their pareos, hair, bikinis, and observe the situation so as to ensure a good performance when they arrive in the main part of the beach where bodies are tanning already; the main beach area or center of the beach, is front-stage, the actors here performing sensuality and femininity whilst creaming up and shifting tanning positions, but it is also back-stage when the actors are preparing to move to the water's edge or to the bar; the water's edge and bar are front-stage for the performance taking place there, sensuality in movement, but are also back-stage when the actors prepare to come back to their tanning spot in the main beach area.

In the scheme of the bigger picture of the actors' life productions (or performances), the whole beach area represents the back-stage. This is where the characters tan and beautify their bodies, actively working on their looks, so as to appear more beautiful, more tanned, in their mundane outings, the city clearly being the front-stage here. At the beach, the characters are not with their friends and colleagues, and from that point of view, they feel free to be themselves whilst they prepare for their performance that evening, or later in the week, in front of their friends and colleagues. This will be the moment where they will be

appreciated for their tan, shown off in their strapless summer dress for example, on stage in town whilst playing their ongoing social role within their particular social group. The importance of appearing beautiful and tanned to friends and work colleagues in the city makes the beach an ideal back-stage where the actors can be tourists for the day, working on their tan, without having to go away on holiday. This is the wonderful attraction of the nearby beaches of Ostia for the city dwellers of Rome.

I will finish this section underlining again the importance of a good tan as a signifier of social status to other members of Italian society. ‘The Tanning’ performance is crucial for our characters’ social identity and consequent acceptance by others, thereby bettering their life in the city among their friends, peers and colleagues. The next section will reveal the characters’ play, deconstructing the main acts of ‘The Tanning’ as such.

### **6.3 The casting of characters**

The dramaturgical context of the Roman beach resorts, the complexity of the front and back stage areas, and the importance of appearing tanned in Italian society, all suggest that tanning at the beach is not the simple and natural happening it appears to be where characters simply relax in the sun. Tanning in these resorts is written into the cultural process of Italian society and, as such, is anchored into a sophisticated set of behavioural rules defining ‘who can do what and how’. The performance of tanning at the beach forming part of a larger ‘life’ production of self, I argue that the particular roles enacted at the beach are an integral part of the construction of the ‘new’ middle class social identity in Italy.



As affirmed by Pierre Bourdieu (1984), cultural capital will be gained with experience so that an individual who has a good *connaissance* of the beach will be better placed to carry out a good performance. This individual will possess the knowledge that every positioning of the body, re-arranging of the bikini and lingering of the gaze, has a particular meaning. The regular beach performer will know what kind of behaviour to carry out, when to re-enact known behaviours, and when to modify learnt strategies so as to adapt to the present audience.

I will reveal ‘The Tanning’ by relating what I identified as the three main acts of the performance, namely ‘Making an entrance’, ‘Creaming up’ and ‘Shifting positions’. These acts will see our characters move through all the different stage areas described above, as front and back stages. Rather than quoting my interviewees, describing my observations, referring to document analysis and speaking of my own embodiment, I have taken on a post-structural approach to writing my findings here. I challenge the traditional way of presenting findings, striving to break away from the contrived reporting of precise quotes, by taking on a creative, feminist writing strategy to portray the women’s voices through their feelings of fear, jealousy, joy, power, and helplessness, embodying, as such, womanly ways. As described in Chapter Three, I bring all my findings together into the voice of one fictional character whom I have named Silvia.

This woman’s thoughts and internal dialogues represent all the voices of Italian women from within the ‘new’ middle class, being tourists for the day at a beach resort in Ostia. Through Silvia’s voice and my novel approach, I explore

issues of femininity, disclosing the intimacy revealed in my numerous discussions with women at the Roman resorts and with my interviewees. I reveal the emotions within these women, highlighting the importance of ‘The Tanning’ performance for the ‘new’ middle class in constructing their social identity and affirming their status as such.

Silvia is a woman in her early forties who is being a tourist for the day in a beach resort in Ostia. She has come with her son and is desperate to better her tan. It is the start of the summer season, and although she has been going to the solarium to prepare for this moment she is a pale version of the rich tan colour she becomes at the peak of the season. I will follow Silvia as she drives into the parking, adjusts her props, makes her entrance, moves to her chosen sun-bed, creams up, lies down and drifts into a second state on her sun-warmed towel. As she lies in a state of total relaxation - or so it seems - I will stay with her, following her into the intricate world of tanning as she shifts positions, goes down to the waters edge and then moves up to the refreshment area.

#### 6.3.1 Act One: Making an entrance

Silvia arrives at the beach resort, by car, at 10am dressed in ‘beach fashion’ (bikini, beach dress, and beach sandals), with her big colourful beach-bag (containing beach towels for herself and her son, sun-tan lotions, bikinis and pareos, and a book), and her little summer hand-bag (bought specially for the occasion). She parks her car, checks her reflection in the rear-mirror and steps out of her private air-conditioned space into the torrid summer heat of what is now the front-stage. As she stands, she rearranges her light transparent beach

dress over her bikini (checking that it falls nicely over her body), and lets her eyes wander down to her new beach sandals, a tone darker than the dress, like her new bikini. She feels pleased with herself knowing that in this dress she looks darker than she really is, this shade of pink giving her skin a warm glow. Her hair is styled to look a little wild and natural, she is wearing make-up, and her beach bag is a stylish mix of pinks and oranges, chosen in similar tones to her outfit. She prepares for being looked at, for making her entrance at the beach, aware that her appearance and embodiment will affect the way the onlookers will judge her. As she locks her car she is feeling relaxed – this is back-stage now – however, her mind is already thinking ahead, wondering who will be at the beach, how tanned the other women will be, how slim and how toned.

Silvia feels the pressure of performance, wanting to impress as she makes her entrance onto the front-stage, the beach. She adjusts her beach dress one last time, checks all her props inside her beach bag hoping she has not forgotten anything before slinging it over her shoulder, puts her car keys into her lime handbag, and re-arranges her hair and sunglasses. At the top of the beach Silvia stops to observe the beach scene, to ‘take in’ the bodies displayed on the beach, and to choose her spot.

This year Silvia has changed resorts and thinks she will try a season without a cabin before deciding whether she wants to become a member of this resort. This gives her the freedom to choose her spot on the beach (not having the regular sun-bed), but she misses the ease with which she used to walk

straight to her cabin and designed sun-bed last season. She is feeling a little vulnerable in this different context.

Trying not to show her hesitation, she walks towards her chosen spot from the top of the beach. As she moves, she is taking in the women's appearances on the beach, their bikinis, their tans and the different body shapes. She is checking this out with a competitive eye, aware that she is not very tanned and a few kilos heavier than last summer. Why did she not stop eating these last few weeks? And what was wrong with her that she hadn't managed to fit in a few extra sessions at the solarium. She knew she always looked thinner with a good tan. The other women were all so tanned. Didn't they have a job during the week? How did they find the time to get so tanned? Silvia is regretting having to move towards the front of the beach which is where the free sun-beds are. The sun-beds by the cabins are so much more discreet and she is not ready to be looked at yet. She keeps on walking.

The looking is a two-way activity at the beach and as our new entrant Silvia 'checks out' the actors already on stage (her audience), the actors on stage are equally 'checking out' Silvia, (an extension to their present audience). New characters walking onto the beach stage are sending visual signals to their audience through their costumes and props – bikinis, beach-dress, tunic or outfit, beach sandals, sunglasses, bags - reflecting a particular style. They are also sending signals through their embodiment - the way they walk, the way they talk, the way they move, as they make their way to their sun-bed.

As she moves among tanned bodies, Silvia's stress levels are rising and her mind is racing. She should have been dieting all winter... She would have been perfect by now. But then her gaze lingers on a group of pale women, possibly foreigners. How they dare to show themselves like that she can't imagine. She is moving more slowly now, feeling happier. Her tan is at a much more advanced stage than theirs. And her working-out at the gym is starting to show in her thighs and buttocks. She has managed to go to the gym twice a week all winter, and has also had anti-cellulite massages since Easter and it is paying off. Her body feels toned. By the time she reaches her sun-bed Silvia is feeling good and is ready to bare her body and show her new bikini. She talks to her son absent-mindedly to busy herself as she sets her belongings up round the sun-bed and parasol, claiming her territory.

The beach is rich with bodies. Silvia observes most people to be lying down, looking relaxed, their on-looking eyes half-closed, appearing to dreamily float over the beach scenery in an aimless and sleepy fashion. However, she knows these eyes are working hard gathering information. She, along with all the others, is being checked out by each individual at the beach. According to Jean-Claude Kaufmann (1998), the beach is the public area most structured by looks. The beach has been described, in fact, as an advanced laboratory for experimenting both 'being looked at' and 'looking at' (Corbin, 1988). Erving Goffman (1973) had highlighted the importance of 'looking' at the beach already 30 years ago, describing the way his hero was imagining the different ways in which 'the beach' was watching him as he walked along. Erving

Goffman spoke of the way the character was trying to create carriage and attitudes within himself in order to be seen the way he dreamt of being seen by those already at the beach.

The audience's appreciation is received by the actors as a reflection of their social identity. Italian society being a society where people judge others by their looks and general presentation, individuals' desire to create a good impression on others is very developed and, as a result, people are extremely conscious of their bodies at the beach. They see themselves as others would see them, evaluating their physical attributes. The women at the beach wish to impress their audience in much the same way they do in all public spaces. However, contrary to previous scenes described (shopping, fitness centers, strolling in the city) where women are either getting changed in the presence of women or parading their dressed bodies in the presence of men, the women at the beach are both in the presence of men and undressed.

The presence of men creates a different atmosphere to the changing rooms. As the women reveal their 'bikini bodies', they are positioning themselves among the women at the beach, through the male gaze. The men look on with an appreciative eye and the women with a competitive eye. The audience takes in different elements of the female characters at the beach such as their age, tan, body features, muscle tone, bikini, and bodily performance. Different elements have specific market value, as revealed in Shilling's concept of embodied physical capital visited in Chapter Two. My research revealed voluptuous, rounded, full shapes in women to be what attract the eye and have high market

value for the men looking on, whereas slim, slender female bodies have high market value for the women looking on. It is interesting to point out that these findings are very similar to Fiona Jordan and Scott Fleming's (2005) research on the way women are represented in men's leisure magazines (voluptuous and rounded shapes) as opposed to women's magazines (less shapes, slimmer) in the United Kingdom.

Silvia's body is slightly more shapely than she would like it to be, however, this appeals to the men at the beach. She notices as she sits on her sun-bed getting her sun-tan lotions out, that certain gazes linger on her body and she accepts these as compliments, feeling very feminine as a result. Silvia is ready to cream her body up, wanting to increase her sun-tan and hydrate her skin, knowing the importance of caring for skin in the summer harshness.

#### 6.3.2 Act Two: Creaming up

Silvia is settled in her chosen spot, her towel on the sun-bed, her coloured bag on the sand under the parasol, her lime handbag slung over the sun-bed head-piece, her sandals tucked under the sun-bed, and her sun-tan lotion on the sun-bed ready to be applied. So the 'Creaming up' begins. This is no fast performance. Silvia carries it out in a slow, sensual, evocative way, from head to toe, covering every cell of her skin. She does this in a very open, uninhibited, and sensual manner. Her body slowly starts to sparkle and glisten in the sun as her slow massaging hand makes its way round. Her arms go up, her body twists, her legs open, her bikini shifts (pulled up between the buttocks), and her hand works the sun-tan lotion in.

As Silvia performs the creaming up of her already tanned body, the looking on is intense at the beach. Silvia, along with all the other women creaming up at the beach, is performing for the men at the beach. She is revealing her way of massaging, her sensuality, her femininity, whilst bringing the focus to particular parts of her embodied capital. Silvia knows exactly how the men perceive her body, the male gaze being the neutral gaze. She knows where her capital lies and how to emphasise it.

The male gaze is not only evidenced in publicity on aesthetics, but is also a referral point in commonly made jokes and stories told in society. Silvia, along with all Italian women is used to hearing these stories referring to women's bodies and to the looking on of men. She expects men to look at her as a normal part of everyday life in society, and more particularly at the beach where femininity is expressed through the creaming up.

As such, when Silvia creams up, she is aware of the sensuality she is displaying and takes pride in doing so. In fact, when observing this performance, it becomes quickly clear that Silvia is enjoying her embodied experience and that she is also carrying it out for her own benefit. Self-belief is a critical part of the construction of Silvia's social identity and of her inner well-being. Silvia is creating her own reality, or impression of reality, in such a way that she may 'find' herself within this performance. She is creating her life through her actions, creating who she is, creating her social reality, and her well-being. She is following her life choices and has actively decided to come to the beach, to this particular beach resort, and is affirming as much to herself as to others, who



she really is, through being here. This description of Silvia's motivations, choices and embodiment expresses the conceptualisation of the critical body introduced in the literature review whereby the individual is not only responding to society (and pressure) but is also making choices, in turn affecting society through her embodiment.

The way Silvia creams her body up reflects the care she takes in looking after her body, the cream possessing hydrating qualities as well as sun protection. Her way of creaming up also reflects a certain socio-cultural level where sensuality is appreciated and knowing how to massage one's own body or somebody else's is perceived as 'know-how'. It expresses confidence in the self to be able to cream one's body up so thoroughly, as though alone, but so aware of not being alone. This sensual attitude empowers Silvia, making her feel more 'womanly' within herself, living her femininity to its fullest.

When the 'Creaming up' act is finished, the tanning activity may begin. This is represented in the 'Shifting positions' act as tanning involves much shifting of the body and bikini in order to be effective. It is important to understand that tanning is considered an activity in its own right in Italy. At beaches and swimming pools, it is common to hear mothers, such as Silvia, talking to their children in a frustrated tone, telling them that they do not want to be disturbed (talked to) because they are tanning. Characters such as Silvia complain about the difficulty they have all summer trying to get a good tan because their children keep wandering off and they end up having to follow them around instead of working on their tan. As a result, they remain far too

long in the standing position. This is clearly a catastrophe for tanning because shoulders are vulnerable to burning and also, when standing, the lower back and back of the legs cannot tan properly.

The next section, or act, reveals the tricks and regulations of tanning on the beaches, exploring the positions Silvia chooses for tanning - based on what she can and cannot do in each position.

### 6.3.3 Act Three: Shifting positions

There are three main positions which Silvia will shift between during her day at the beach. The lying down position, involving lying on one's front, back, or side, is the best position for thorough tanning of all parts of the body. The standing up position without movement involves a new set of rules and is more adapted to showing off one's tan than actually tanning. And the standing with movement, in other words walking or running, involves again new rules and regulations, in terms of what can be done or not. In all positions, the hair must be pulled back tightly off the neck and shoulders. This avoids displaying a white back of neck and shoulders when wearing an outfit which needs the hair to be worn up as part of the look.

Silvia lies on her front, and begins to relax as she feels pleasure, the heat of the sun sinking into her skin. The lying down position engages Silvia to pull up the bottom part of her bikini in order to tan the buttocks. This ensures that when parading along the beach at a later time, if her bikini shifts a little, there will be no white (non-tanned) skin showing on her buttocks. The 'lying on the front' position also involves the unlatching of the top part of the bikini so as not

to have a white mark in the middle of the back if the bikini shifts a little later during the day. It also involves the spreading apart of the legs in order to tan the inside of the thighs. This is a part of the body which does not tan as much as the rest of the body in more natural 'doing' positions such as moving around, going for a swim, or walking to the bar. Being a regular beach-goer, Silvia knows to spread her legs apart. She is all set for tanning in this position now and feels relaxed, very comfortable lying down being less observed than when she was walking towards her sun-bed. This is a good position for her to enjoy this first day at the beach. She feels the sun warming her back and legs. Silvia loves the feel of summer.

After a while Silvia starts feeling too hot lying on her front and decides to turn over onto her back. In this position she will also spread her legs apart to help tan the inner part of her thighs. Lying on her back engages Silvia to detach the straps of the top part of her bikini so as not to have white marks when wearing a dress or light top in the city. Silvia lies in this position for a while forgetting her audience, forgetting her environment and simply soaking in the heat of the sun. Her eyes are shut and she is drifting in between wake and sleep. She has remembered to lift her sunglasses off her face to avoid being pale around the eyes. She imagines her body getting darker as she lies there and feels good inside. She is thinking about her Saturday evening invitation and what she will wear to emphasise her tan. But then, in a distant world, she hears her son talking.... He is saying something about going to play by the water's edge.

This is not good news to Silvia as it means interrupting her tanning session to go and keep an eye on her son. She has not had time yet to lie on her side pulling her legs up in a sort of foetus position. She must find time to fit this position into her tanning today as she does not want to have white marks where buttocks and thighs come together. These marks show when one walks every time a leg is stretched forward. It is very noticeable when walking along the beach unless one works at it. Silvia is thinking about this, dwelling on the fact that it won't show just yet as she is not tanned enough on the back of her legs for a difference to be noticed, but as the season advances and her tan takes on its darker glow, she will be grateful for her whole body to reveal the same tanning level, hence the importance of fitting in the 'foetus' position. Silvia also knows that standing by her son at the water's edge for a long period of time is not great for her shoulders which will be more exposed than the rest of her body. This is really not ideal given that legs always take longer than shoulders to get tanned and she feels they are particularly white at the moment.

Silvia would love to stay lying down for a while longer but she hears her son's voice again. He is complaining and fidgeting, standing beside her. It will become easier for her tanning once she and her son have become regulars in this resort as her son will make friends with the other regular resort children. She is anxious for this to happen as she needs space and time for her tanning and does not like being disturbed by her son. Silvia does her bikini straps up, sits up, pulls her sunglasses down, and prepares to stand.

The beach becomes a more complex stage when the lying down position is abandoned for the standing up position. In effect, this change of position triggers a different scenario for the actors. Tanned buttocks being considered more attractive than white buttocks, the women possessing a good tan can remain with the bikini bottom in the ‘pulled-up-over-the-buttocks’ position. If this is the case, those actors gain higher physical embodied capital. The tanned buttocks signify one is a regular beach-goer or connoisseur, and as such, are more deserving of respect from the onlookers, or the audience. On the other hand, white buttocks require a rearranging of the bikini into the ‘normal’ position at this point in order not to devalue the current market value.

Silvia pulls her bikini back into its normal position as she is not yet tanned enough. Later in the season, she will leave her bikini in the pulled up position. As she does this, she is scanning the beach to check who else has arrived, how young, how tanned, and how toned the other women are. She is also checking whether her audience is paying attention to her or whether she can relax as she walks down to the water. There are clearly a lot more people now and Silvia knows that this means there are necessarily eyes wandering and looks lingering. She pulls her tummy in, stands straight and gets ready to follow her son down to the water’s edge.

Movement brings on yet more modifications to the script. When walking down to the water line or along the beach, only the young, slim, toned, tanned buttocks may remain unveiled. They are then paraded for all to see. This is a sign of beauty and beach success for the parading character. For a very small

number, it is also possible to play beach racket, running and jumping up into the air to hit the ball in a very sporty manner, showing off the firmness of the buttocks, which remain the focal point. Contrary to Young's paper 'Throwing like a girl' discussed in Chapter Two regarding the body, women do not hold back from big movements in this form of embodiment at the beach. On the contrary they are there to show themselves. The women playing ball, in particular, who are striving for the highest beach body status, use big movements hence challenging the typical gendered embodiment in society where women are expected to make small, discrete movements to protect themselves from on-lookers. At this point of the performance, the body is highly sexualised as this embodiment sends out signals that the character is there to be looked at. The men who are looking on are doing so with a sexually interested slant. The women looking on have respect for the character they are watching, for their gaze is trained to see as the dominant masculine gaze, and, as such, what they see is high market value, beauty worthy of respect and higher body status.

Silvia looks at a couple playing beach racket and is impressed by the young woman's body. Her gaze lingers a little, then she remembers her son and walks on towards the sea searching for his familiar mop of hair. Silvia's son is in the water but she will not have a swim. It is a little early in the season for Silvia and she also prefers being in company to go for a swim. Soon she will be meeting her sister for tanning at the beach as they usually do in July. She will swim then. After what seems like a little too long, Silvia and her son finally walk back to their beach spot. Silvia changes her son's swimsuit so he won't feel cold

or uncomfortable. It is nearly lunch-time and Silvia is searching for her pink pareo. She is preparing to wander over to the café/bar for a plate of pasta with her son. She finds her pareo and puts it on wearing it low on the hips, just below her bikini. She finds her beach sandals under her sun-bed, takes her little lime bag and rearranges her hair. The main beach area is, at this moment, back-stage for Silvia who is preparing for the bar scene. Silvia is conscious of her appearance as she gets ready for the change of scene from beach to bar.

At the bar scene, it is usual for women to wear their bikinis in the ‘normal’ position, and their pareo tied just below the bikini on the hips. Whether the women are tanned or not, their pareo should be matching their bikini. It is in this part of the performance that the characters check on each others bikinis and pareos. The importance of the choice of all props is fundamental at this point. The bikini, pareo, beach sandals, sunglasses, and bag will be appreciated for the fashion and style they portray. These props also play a role in emphasising the women’s body shapes, her tan, and her sensual ways. The swaying of the hips accompanying the slow walk in the bar area is more suggestive with a wrap-around tied at the right place and slightly transparent. The sunglasses emphasise the hair as it is swished from one side to the other. The beach sandals show off the painted toe-nails. The bikini and wrap-around colour emphasises the tan. And the final touch is given by the gendered embodiment and interpretation of the slow sensual walking.

When Silvia feels ready, she starts walking over to the refreshment area with her son. She is looking at all the others at the beach through her dark

sunglasses whilst some of her audience also look at her making her way up the beach. Silvia happily receives the appraising gazes she feels directed towards her. She is walking slowly, the movement in her hips accentuated by the pareo. When she gets to the bar she mingles with all the others there trying to catch the barman's eye to make her order. She seems to be surrounded by tanned bodies, a gentle reminder that no matter what age, size or shape you are, the tan is the most important feature of femininity at the beach.

Contrary to the beaches in Australia where only the young slim women wear bikinis, absolutely everybody wears a bikini in Ostia and more generally in all of Italy. There is no age or size for wearing a bikini, the aim being the same for all.... to get a tan. A woman with a tan is worthy of respect and will not feel embarrassed to show her body in a bikini, on the contrary, she will feel proud. This is the driving force behind a day at the beach.

#### **6.4 The critical body and materiality**

The tanning activity among the 'new' middle class revealed Italian women to perform very sensually in creaming up, arranging and re-arranging their bikini, shifting positions and parading on the beach. Italian society's embedded male gaze and underlying values transpierced through the importance of the props – made to highlight the women's beauty – and through women's sensual embodiment - representing femininity. Women's attention to, and awareness of, their body reflects the pressure of society, the power of the media, the prevalent male gaze, and what is expected of them as women. This is representative of Western consumer society and the importance of the body, as discussed in my



literature review (see Black, 2004; Borel, 1992; Bourdieu, 1998; Detrez, 1998; Howson, 2004; Hughes, 2002; Shilling, 2003; Wolf, 1991).

The extent of sensuality in performing at the beach surfaced in every act, reflecting this very unique characteristic of Italian society and more particularly of Italian women. The extent of the sensuality displayed reflects the fact that my research is a view into Mediterranean culture, which, as revealed in my literature review, is not studied in anglo-saxon research, and reflects a very different reality with regards to sensual embodiment and femininity. In Italy, it is such a known and accepted notion of femininity for women to be sensual that anything which detracts from sensuality has a negative connotation to it. The sensuality displayed by the women is not simply carried out to convey an appealing appearance however, but is also reflective of the importance of the sensuous 'doing' of tourism, as discussed in literature on the body in the tourism field (see Andrews, 2005; Cloke & Perkins, 1998; Crouch, 1997; Crouch & Desforges, 2003; Obrador-Pons, 2003; Perkins & Thorns, 2001).

The materiality of the women's body, their physical sensations, and their particular state of mind whilst living this sensuous experience, revealed the gendered aspect of sensuousness. Exploring the materiality of the body from a gendered perspective is an important part of my research, the literature review revealing the extent to which this aspect is lacking in body studies in the tourism field (see Ateljevic & Hall, 2007; Jordan & Fleming, 2005; Pritchard & Morgan, 2007b; Veijola & Jokinen, 2007). Exploring the materiality of women's bodies was also shown to be lacking in sociological, cultural and feminist studies in

terms of the critical conceptualisation of the body. The literature review showed much discourse about materiality (see Birke 1999, Butler 1993, Grosz 1994) but not much about the bodies *actually* feeling, about the *actual* materiality reflecting the body as being very much alive (see Alcoff, 2000; Crossley, 2001, Howson, 2005).

In Italy, girls are brought up to sensuous ways and to being aware of their bodies sensuous experience. This is done through showing girls, at a very young age, the importance of creams, the importance of looking after one's body, of caring for one's hair. This is taught to the girls through their senses directly rather than through discourse. They are not being told to look after their body, but are simply made to feel the pleasure and fun in doing so, the message that this is an important part of being a woman being implicit. Physical acts such as putting cream on (whether it is a moisturising cream, anti-cellulite cream, sun-tan lotion, or after-sun lotion), imply sensations. The joy of doing it (or having it done) complements the understanding of the benefits of the cream (discourse). When touching the silky skin afterwards, women feel more womanly.

In terms of bodily sensations described by my interviewees, the warmth of the sun was much discussed and the tingling sensation this produced in their body. The women spoke of the physical well-being resulting from relaxing in the sun, the physical pleasure they felt. Some described their pleasure as the sensation of being touched, of the sun stroking their body. All described the wonderful feeling of their whole body relaxing through receiving the heat and of their brain functioning in slow mode as a consequence of this. This slow

functioning is a sensation the women appeared very keen to feel at the beach. We are far from John Urry's (1990, 2002) passive tourists living their experiences through the gaze, and are well into the realm of sensuous tourism where the focus is on bodily sensations (Crouch, 1999).

At the beach, the particularity of the sensuous doing is that it is experienced among an audience. Silvia was shown to be very at ease with her body and to have no inhibitions as to the necessary positions to take in order to massage the cream in thoroughly, and then in order to take the sun in a complete way. Silvia appeared to enjoy the male gaze she felt on her at different moments of the tanning performance. In fact, she appeared to be actively provoking the gaze through her slow and open movements when lying down. This was also the case when wearing her pareo low on her hips and accentuating her hip movement in walking. This provoking of the look had already been identified in the previous chapter on femininity, its role being to make the women feel more womanly. However, it goes a step further at the beach. Given the particular situation whereby the women are not clothed, and given that they expect to be looked at as women in their society, the fact that they display open sensual movements - their hands lingering on certain parts of their bodies when applying the cream, their bikinis pulled up between the buttocks, and their legs spread apart - an erotic slant to their provoking the looking-on of the men transpires.

Through actively provoking the gaze, the women are illustrating the fact that they are self-determining agents (Foucault, 1997) as discussed in the conceptualisation of the critical body, negotiating with the patriarchal structure

of Italian society. The women's awareness of their effect on the men provides the grounds for them to challenge the structure, to use it to suit their means. The possibilities of subjectivity are limited by power-knowledge, as well as by contexts and discourse, as discussed in my literature review (see Foucault, 1997; Aitchison, 2003). This comes in contrast to the passive attitude of the objectified woman, as described by Iris Young (1990), who is disempowered through the lack of control and awareness regarding a given situation. Silvia's sensual embodiment described in this chapter reflects the critical body conceptualisation where post-structuralism returns text and speech to body, and views bodies as sites of meaning, and meaning as embodied (see Howson, 2005).

A woman's aim in any public situation in Italy (including the beach) is to attract looks. A man's role is to offer looks (including at the beach). The seduction game is so naturally part of this society that without giving it any thought, women automatically want to be looked at to be reassured they are a women, and men automatically look at women to feel they are men. This reflects Erving Goffman's (1963) theory, discussed in the literature review on the discursive body, that the fact that social meanings are attached to particular body behaviours (it is positive for a woman to be looked at and for a man to look on) influences the way individuals perceive themselves and the way they behave.

The fact that the men look on whilst the women cream up sensually takes the seduction aspect of Italian society to a sensuous level whereby both men and women are enjoying their gendered embodiment through the women's performance. The tanning performance enables, as such, men and women to live

their masculinity and femininity at its fullest, reinforcing in this way the patriarchal outlook of society whereby women are objectified for the benefit of men. Through the materiality of the body, social discourse is reflected, women's agency is reflected, and the critical body takes form. There are studies in the tourism research (discussed in the literature review) which discuss agency, structure and a critical conception of the body (Ateljevic & Hall, 2007; Jordan & Fleming, 2005; Pritchard & Morgan, 2007b; Veijola & Jokinen, 2007), however the present analysis of Italian women from Rome at the beaches near Rome offers a particularity with regards to the existing studies. The fact that structure, agency, and materiality are studied through the women's embodiment in their home environment means no change in behaviour on their part, but rather a natural behaviour which usually takes place in their cultural environment. This provides for a rich ground for looking into structure and agency, and understanding power relations. The sensuality is interpreted as the women wish it to be interpreted, for they are among their own people. This is how they gain power, through knowing their public and knowing the effect they will have on their public. The fact that Italians are sensual, love sensuous experiences, and are passionate about life, is shared with all those present at the beach.

In terms of extending gender studies in the tourism field, the analysis and discussion on women's gendered embodiment at the beach has brought the body into gender studies, where it has been absent. Pioneers in gender studies in the tourism field, Derek Hall, Margaret Swain & Vivian Kinnaird (2003), contend that the advances in gender studies in recent years have not been as influential as

was initially hoped. In effect, the literature review showed the focus to be mainly on limitations and constraints of travel (Davidson, 1994; Slavik & Shaw, 1996; Small, 1999; Zalatan, 1998), and travel and tourism needs (Jordan, 1998; Foster & Botterill, 1995; Lutz & Ryan, 1993), with not much focus on the body.

The fact that the women enjoy the sexualisation of their body through the tanning performance is not visible or obvious to the non-trained eye. This is reflected through Northern European women's shock at the fact that Italian women can accept and comply to such objectification. For these foreign women living in Rome, Italian women's sensual and sexualised embodiment at the beach is a constant topic of conversation. However, when Italian women are questioned about their sensuality and about the perception foreign women have of them, they look amused and exclaim that they perceive a less sensual embodiment to be sad, to be lacking life, to be lacking passion. This is what the tanning performance has portrayed most of all about Italians and their embodiment. They are passionate, they enjoy life, they listen to their senses and derive pleasure from this.

The women I encountered who had lived abroad at different moments in their lives spoke of the loneliness of being a woman elsewhere. They affirmed that when they went out into the streets and that not a single man turned to look at them, they felt ugly, they felt they were not even women anymore, and for this reason they felt lonely in society. They spoke with passion about the joy of feeling a male gaze lingering on their body. They spoke with passion of how wonderful it was to feel alive through, and in, their body. This feeling is felt by

the women through interactions in society, through exchanges, through looks and lingering gazes. The joy of swaying one's hips as one walks was described by one woman with such conviction that it was hard to imagine not doing so. She finished by exclaiming: "*Do you believe that a woman who cannot feel these sensations can still be called a woman?*".

## **6.5 Summary**

The Roman beach scene revealed the focal point of tanning to be the buttocks. Each pair of buttocks, depending on their tan, muscle tone and age were shown to be attributed a different set of rules, guiding the women's performance at the beach. The maximum beauty status was shown to be obtained by the women who could move around the beach with their bikini in the pulled-up-over-the-buttocks position thereby revealing their buttocks.

Through analyzing Italian women from within the 'new' middle class at the beach, Italy was portrayed as a country where people live each moment of the day with passion and life. The women performing sensuality, femininity, and eroticism through tanning, are enjoying the sensuousness of the sun, the sand, the looks, and the whole situation. It is not new that worshipping the sun is articulated round a corporeal movement based on bodily pleasure and pleasurable sensations as such (Kaufmann, 1998). However, in Italy, the sun and beach scene takes individuals further into the depths of pleasure, revealing the power of seduction and the awakening of desire.

This illustrates the critical conceptualisation of the body whereby the gendered sensuousness taking place at the beach reflects women's body to be

‘lived’. The critical dimension of the body is reflected through the women’s choice in complying with being objectified and their choice in taking their embodiment to a level where the male gaze is actively provoked. By lending their sensual embodiment a sexual slant, they drive their performance into the depths of seduction.

Feeling repressed in discourse (as shown in Chapter Four) but empowered through their femininity (as shown in Chapter Five), Italian women from within the ‘new’ middle class choose to propel their feeling of empowerment into the next dimension by playing with the way their femininity affects society, or rather the men in society. This chapter, as such, has shown the power of the critical body - where individuals are acknowledged to affect society through their embodiment – hence delivering a post-structural picture of tourism and society, individuals being shown to negotiate with the system.



## **7 Conclusion**

Through a holistic and broad view of tourism and leisure, this thesis has explored the sensual embodiment of Italian women from the city. The main aim was to capture Italian social structure and cultural reality, positioning the field of tourism studies as a means for analyzing people's quotidian cultural habits. Social cultural theories of the body and aesthetics were brought into the tourism studies discourse thereby placing my thesis in the most recent theoretical debates engaging with these theories. My research shed light on the importance of aesthetics in Italy and the social pressure felt by women to appear beautiful. Embracing the critical approach, this thesis used the body as a window into Italian society, revealing the gendered construction of social identity in patriarchy and the power relations between men and women, from the women's perspective.

This chapter will summarise the theoretical foundations to my research, the philosophical approach and methodological stance adopted, the analysis framework used, and my findings. The ways in which I have moved research forward in the field of tourism studies with regards to issues of gender, the body

and embodiment, will be discussed. The criticality of my methodological approach will also be discussed, as will the specific cultural context of the Mediterranean. Finally, the criticality of my interpretation of the data, and the sensitive issues of patriarchy and power relations, will be discussed.

### **7.1 Preparing my research: theoretical foundations**

My theoretical foundations were introduced in Chapter Two through the literature review. First, the well documented culture of consumption was established, revealing the importance of the body as indicator of social identity in Western society. The unprecedented individualisation of the body in Western society and the heightened degree of reflexivity about what the body is, were shown to result in a paradox whereby, although the body is less used for utilitarian purposes than ever before, it has never been referred to so much. In contrast to being simply the carrier of one's biological existence, the body is now used as a means for defining one's social identity through fashion and aesthetics. In order to achieve social identity, people transform their body, inspired by the ideal body displayed in the media. The body was shown to be perceived as an external sign of success, and this was shown to affect women to a greater degree than men, the body being particularly central to notions of femininity. Social pressure on women to appear beautiful in Western society was discussed as one of the key points of the culture of consumption.

The different conceptualisations of the body, as theorised in the social sciences, were grouped under three main themes: the biological body, the

discursive body, and the critical body. My research was positioned within the critical body which takes into account both the way society impinges on the body (the discursive body) and the way the body affects society (the biological body). An important part of the theory on the critical body is the fact that the materiality of the body - the sensuousness of the “doing”, is considered an integral part of an individual’s lived experience. Also, the body is considered to be a means for individuals to resist and negotiate structural realities. My discussion showed that individuals could either reproduce or resist the structure (society) through their agency (self-awareness, skills, and knowledge), and that this was reflected in their embodiment.

This part of the literature review contributes to the theorisation of gender and embodiment in the tourism field. In effect, bringing conceptualisations from the social sciences (in particular sociology, cultural studies and feminist studies) into tourism, broadens the debate on various theorisations and understandings of what the body is. It informs the existing literature on the body and embodiment in the tourism field through the identification of different conceptual bodies, and through the discussion on gendered embodiment. Linking into concepts from the social sciences for discussing concepts in the tourism field shows the extent to which tourism is considered to be a multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary field. It also highlights the fact that tourism (and leisure) can be perceived as a means for analyzing the tourist’s broader social context.

In the third part of the literature review existing gender and body studies are discussed, within the field of tourism studies. Studies on the gendered

consumer show the dominant preoccupation with constraints and limitations of travel for women, with limited focus on the role of the body. On the other hand, studies on body and embodiment can be divided into three streams, those addressing the sensuous doing of tourism, those considering travel as a performance, and those based on the socio-cultural networks of the tourist. The materiality of the body is much discussed in the first stream of studies and informs my research on Italian women's sensuous and sensual embodiment. The discursive aspect of the body is much discussed in the second stream of studies and informs my analysis of Italian women's embodiment as representative of patriarchal discourse. The critical body is addressed in the third stream of studies where the socio-cultural networks were discussed. These studies inform my research through their post-structural approach to discussing agency. My research has aimed to extend existing studies through taking into account the interplay of class, age, family status, and gender, in discussing society. Also, in terms of gender, my research fills a gap through focusing on women in their everyday lives, as opposed to women in a foreign environment or representations of women in media imagery.

Therefore, in terms of extending research in the tourism field (both in gender and body studies), the key points resulting from the literature review are that my research:

- Brings together material and discursive body, where existing research tends to focus on one or the other;

- Addresses the power of agency, through women's embodiment in their local setting, in contrast to studies on women's embodiment as represented in imagery;
- Considers the body in its gendered existence, thereby bringing together the two domains of gender and body studies, which have been discussed for the most part as separate issues;
- Addresses social class and socio-demographics as part of the defining criteria for studying gendered embodiment.

In terms of the research context, the overview of existing tourism studies revealed research in the Mediterranean region to be rare in the English language. The context and environment in which research written in English tends to be carried out is reflective of Anglo-saxon values and ways. The strength of this thesis lies in the Italian approach taken to carrying out the research and interpreting the findings. Having access to Italian academic material, publications and press, gives a Mediterranean perspective to my research. Although written in English, it engages with Italian culture and society from an Italian perspective, hence shedding light on a particular Mediterranean empirical context, through focusing on Italy as a subject of study and through my research approach, analyzing local documentation.

## **7.2 'Doing' my research: methodological choices and learnings**

My methodological choices were introduced in Chapter Three addressing my research approach. In order to explain these choices, the three main points of

the critical philosophical foundations of my thesis were first introduced: postfeminism, reflexivity, and embodiment.

The postfeminist paradigm was discussed showing how it informed my research approach, and why it was adopted. Postfeminism shifts research from essentialising 'women' as a generic, globalised subject, to understanding the multiple subjectivities of women. This informed my approach in contextualising Italian women's voices. I considered their cultural context in carrying out my data collection. This is an essential feature of my research as it is what gives depth and meaning to Italian women's voices. Where radical feminism would consider certain embodiments of femininity in Italy as demeaning, postfeminism enables understanding where the embodiment comes from, what it means, and why it is done, within the specific Italian context (for example, the Italian love of aesthetics and passionate way of living entailing different interpretations to women's sensual embodiment in Italy than in the United Kingdom). In the same way, women from within the educated middle class in Italy, were studied in their broader social context of being women in Italian society. Postfeminism enables capturing women's voices, moving away from the positivist uncontextualised approach.

Also, postfeminism highlights the fact that woman's reality cannot be studied as a sub-section of man's reality, rejecting, as such, the positivist othering of women which placed women as secondary in contrast to men. It posits that woman's voice cannot be described through masculine ways because these words cannot express what women feel but only what men think. This

informed my choice of analysis framework and writing strategy, where my aim was to express women's thoughts and ways in a womanly way (through use of feelings). Postfeminism informed my interpretation and analysis of the data through taking into account my own embodiment as a woman.

The concept of reflexivity was then discussed, and I positioned myself within my research, explaining in which way my roots and cultural background affected my view of society, and more particularly of women's place in Western society. I discussed the way being a citizen of the world informed my outsider perspective, helping me 'see' the Italian social and cultural context. In the same way, I discussed the way growing up in Italy informed my insider perspective, helping me understand Italian women, the role of aesthetics and sensual embodiment in Italy. In positioning myself, I explored and revealed my connection to the topic of study, highlighting the way my life experiences affect my research on women.

Lastly, my embodiment was discussed and shown to underpin my research process at every level. Not only are my field methods carried out through my embodiment, but the account of my research methods itself is embodied. I showed in which way embodying gender in Italian society during my research affected my understanding of patriarchal values with regards to women. In doing so, I revealed my feelings as a woman, deconstructing my own embodiment which was shown to be an essential part of my research, an overall methodology.

After discussing the philosophical foundations of my research, I introduced the three research methods used to capture the voices of Italian

women: autoethnography, in-depth interviewing, and document analysis. The value of personal stories, the richness of multiple interviews, and the importance of *vehesten* for accessing information on Italian society, were explained. I revealed the challenge of ‘doing’ research in a Mediterranean cultural context, having been formed to ‘doing’ research in an anglo-saxon context.

In order to carry out research in an Italian context, I had to engage with different ways to those learnt and embodied in the anglo-saxon context, and more particularly New Zealand academia in which I started out my research journey in the tourism field. I had to step out of my ‘distant’ way of questioning and be more ‘forward’ to reach people. I also had to approach issues, questions, and discussions at a slower rhythm and appreciate the fact that taking the time is, in Italy, a way of building trust and relations through which work can then be carried out. Through re-adjusting to the slower ways of Mediterranean societies, I came to realise that what had initially appeared to me as a more professional and efficient way of interviewing – quicker, shorter, more direct, and less discussion – was a superficial way of working in the Italian context.

I experienced a new reality in which I ended up delving much deeper into the different topics and issues broached, through taking my time. I learnt to take my interviewing plans with me whilst leaving my expectations behind, thereby arriving at my sessions with an open mind. This change in approach illustrates the importance of the insider perspective whereby an understanding of different cultural ways enables touching the researched through their own ways, thereby opening a channel of communication. The resulting relationship between the



researcher and the researched reflects an important aspect of doing critical research.

Learning to 'do' research differently is a journey in itself. It reflects adapting to local ways through a re-questioning of the self and an openness about the best way of 'doing' something. Learning from another culture entails a shift in one's convictions and position. The way I changed over time was embodied in my feelings and reactions to particular cultural behaviours. Details which initially triggered feelings of impatience in me started to become part of my 'normal' everyday life and I did not notice them anymore. This is about more than becoming open to different ways, it is about growing through these different ways.

The shift in my 'being' and in my research approach, known as the process of becoming (Grosz, 1999), reflects the openness of critical research. At the start of my research, I felt I knew the Italian nation and its people well. I also felt I had a fruitful and organised way of working. However, my research experience reflected a different reality which, initially, I found to be frustrating. I felt every little step taken required too much time. I wanted to move on from the numerous pre-interviewing discussions and start the actual interviewing.

In much the same way, I felt frustrated by the slowness in bookshops when I enquired about a particular book or author. It took time to be noticed, time to be served, time to look the book up, and time to give me an answer to my request. The whole process was constantly interrupted by phone calls, by discussions with other staff members, by discussions with other customers. In

the working environment and cultural set-up I knew, this was not a constructive process and even felt like lack of respect at times.

However, with time and patience I learnt that once I was known in a book shop, anything would be done for me and the staff exceeded their duty. In the same way, once my interviewees got to know me and trust me, they opened up in a profound way, giving me much more than what could be expected of an interview session. I also gave more to my interviewees through our taking our time. I started to enjoy these 'new' ways for their depth and richness. The enjoyment resulting from taking the time to 'do' things, taking the time for life, has become a part of my daily existence.

In terms of being a woman, although initially I did understand Italian women and their experiences, the information I gathered took on richer and deeper meaning as the months went by. Living the same power relations as the women I mingled with and spoke to, I came to appreciate the way they felt empowered through their sensual embodiment. I rediscovered the power of femininity and sensuality in terms of my own womanhood. Also, feeling the domination of men over women through discourse in Italy, I understood women's need to gain power through sensual embodiment. I saw myself change over the years, merging certain new characteristics of femininity with my values, and embodying this in my style and my way of 'being'.

### **7.3 Analyzing, interpreting and writing up: frameworks and strategies**

The analysis framework and writing strategy were introduced in the last section of Chapter Three as part of my research approach. The different conceptualisations and metaphors used to capture, analyse and interpret Italian women's everyday lives, leisure spaces, and tourism spaces, were explained. The strategy chosen to write this interpretation was introduced, underlining the way creative ways of representing women's voices was used to reveal their inner selves in a womanly way.

Firstly, the socio-cultural nexus was discussed, as the key analysis framework for my research. The socio-cultural nexus, developed by Cara Aitchison, focuses on social and cultural relations, and more particularly on the inter-relationship between the social and the cultural. The nexus was discussed in terms of it enabling to capture social structure, cultural norms, and the power of the agency. I showed how the framework would guide me in analyzing women's role in Italian society, their social identity, existing power relations, and the way they negotiate with patriarchal ways.

Secondly, the performance framework was introduced, based on Erving Goffman's (1959) work, which was used to deconstruct the tourism activity of tanning at the beaches of Ostia, near Rome. The basic concept behind Erving Goffman's metaphor was explained in terms of individuals playing roles, on a 'stage', when they meet other individuals in order to affirm who they are. However, his front and back stage concept was challenged in terms of its fluidity, depending on the actor's state of mind and whom she considers to be

her audience at a given moment. The stage area was revealed to be a more complex area as such, enabling taking the performance to a deeper level (as one scene can be looked at in different ways depending on the focus). I explained how the performance framework would guide me in capturing Italian society (structure, importance of beauty, objectification of women) and Italian women's response (through their active choices) in their embodiment at the beach.

Thirdly my writing strategy was introduced, revealing the way I would present my findings in three chapters. The first two chapters (chapters Four and Five), presenting Italian patriarchal structures and women's place in society (through cultural expectations of them and their choices to reproduce or react to the expected) were written with a similar strategy. The findings from all three data collection methods (autoethnography, in-depth interviews, and document analysis) were brought together and presented as one. When referring to the interviewees thoughts and feelings, fictional names were discussed as the ethical approach to be used so as to respect privacy. A socio-demographic description of my interviewees was drawn in the form of a list. Each woman was introduced with her fictional name, giving her age, marital status, age and sex of her children, and her profession. All the interviewees were described as possessing university degrees, this being a significant particularity of the educated middle class possessing cultural capital, as defined by Pierre Bourdieu (1984).

For the writing of the last chapter (Chapter Six), presenting the analysis of the tanning performance at the beach and the power of sensual embodiment, a different writing strategy was chosen. The stories of all my interviewees were

brought together into one fictional character whom I named Silvia. The writing of this chapter was described as the telling of the essential story of Silvia performing at the beach. This writing strategy was discussed as a creative, feminist approach to portraying women's voices, with the main aim being to shed light on feelings, addressing issues of fear, stress, jealousy, joy, and empowerment.

Creating Silvia as a fictional character, with emotions and uncertainties, with the desire to attract looks, a need for empowerment, and a feminine enjoyment of sensuality, enabled me to present my data in a deep and meaningful way. In effect, in referring to their emotions and feelings, I portrayed the way my interviewees engage with their feminine ways, thereby relating their intimate beings as women in society. This was explained as the best way of bringing into tourism research the data I collected during my active listening at interviews, in terms of capturing the essence of 'womanness'. Capturing this essence was possible through the interviewees embodiment, not just their words, and through my own embodiment in receiving and sharing their intimacy, and this is what I try to portray in Silvia's story. The setting for her story, the audience she feels watching her, and the pressure she feels in performing, were captured through my interviewees feelings in describing the beach and through much observation at the beach.

Striving to express women's feelings was discussed as a significant feature of postfeminism. Through adopting this writing strategy, I move away from the impersonal style of translating words into rational reasoning. In doing so, I

acknowledge my being a woman as an important part of my research, and I use it to my advantage. Writing about Silvia as a fictional character enabled me to use language with more freedom to express my findings, following postfeminist writer Hélène Cixous (1980). Hélène Cixous affirms that when a woman writes, she writes with white ink, enabling words to flow freely and go where she wishes them to. She contrasts this to black ink used by the symbolic order and defined by men for men, whereby thoughts are carefully contained in a sharply defined and rigidly imposed structure.

This concludes on my approach and methods used for analyzing, interpreting, and presenting the data. The following section summarises the last three chapters of my thesis (chapters Four, Five and Six) thereby revealing the outcome of the frameworks, metaphors and strategies described.

#### **7.4 From the field: key findings**

Chapter Four, depicting structural factors and cultural expectations on women, has demonstrated Italian society to be a strongly patriarchal society. Structural reality was shown to reflect a society where men take the decisions for the nation at a political level. Men also make the main strategic choices economically. They influence the nation through dominating all talk programs in the media. Finally, they are the main protagonists of social life, defining the ‘neutral gaze’ in society, the stories told by all, and the jokes Italians are brought up with. Women, on the other hand, were shown to be nearly non-existent in politics and senior management, to work in a very male-dominated work ethics and environment, and to appear on television for their physical attributes rather

than their thoughts. Women are expected to look after their homes, their husbands and their children, and feel strong family and social pressure to do so.

Although women were shown to sometimes resist certain aspects of this cultural pressure, my research revealed that the resisting appeared to create no apparent change in the expectations of them as women. Also, women were shown to extensively reproduce patriarchy, both in their own behaviour (looking after their households and families), and in the behaviour they expect from their mothers (wanting them to continue in their mother roles) and from their children (gendered expectations at home).

This chapter has contributed to critical tourism research in furthering our understanding of the gendered construction of social identity and in addressing the power relations between men and women in patriarchy, highlighting inequity and the reality of cultural pressure. Through analyzing society and culture, my thesis has shed light on the reproduction of the structure, which takes place through women's agency. Patriarchal values were revealed as not being enforced only by the men in society, but also by the women, as such. Women were, in effect, shown to reinforce patriarchal expectations of men over women rather than reduce them. The stories told in this chapter lead to two key points regarding patriarchal women.

The first is that, although women find social pressure regarding their roles as wives and mothers too tiring to live with, they were shown to be protective of their roles. Women have power in the households through their total control and management of its functioning. Given that they are dominated in discourse and

in the running of the country, keeping the reins of the home arena is a means for them to hold an important place in society. The second is that, although women appear to like the idea of changing social expectations and the way they are treated with regards to their choice in being working mothers, it is easier for them to follow patriarchal expectations than to fight for their career. Their role is clear-cut in the household but not in the workplace. They know what to do at home. They know their roles as mothers. They feel appreciated and empowered through what they do, as the men do not hide the fact that they have no idea how to carry out domestic responsibilities.

*Fighting* for a change of mentality in the workplace, *fighting* for a different form of respect at work, *fighting* for a different existence in the home, *fighting* for a different form of respect from their families, are all perceived as very difficult goals in the traditional society Italy was shown to be. The pressure felt both in the workplace and from families is shown to be very strong. Women who try to impose new ways, a new balance within extended families, a different vision of the family, are shown to eventually succumb to pressure. The acts carried out by certain family members to counter them, the rising of stress levels, life becoming an ongoing battle, all become too difficult for the women to bear and negative response and stress poison their existence. This chapter revealed the fact that when having to choose between traditional mother and more modern wife, the husband always gave his support to his mother. Certain stories depict women holding their ground, however, in the end, it becomes a matter of choice between staying with their husband as the traditional wife or leaving



altogether. This thesis unveiled the fact that there is very little possible negotiation within the family.

In much the same way, women who want to change the way of things in the workplace, are shown to have no support and to feel very isolated in their needs. More often than not, they are laughed at by the men at work when they ask them to stop certain behaviours which make them feel diminished as women (the telling of jokes systematically referring to women's physical attributes, the looking on of men in the group at passing women, the systematic asking for coffee from the women at work despite their possessing identical job positions). The alternative reaction is a puzzled look, followed by the exact same comments or behaviour the next day. When the women ask for a change of schedule in order to have a less disrupted private life (such as changing the late evening meetings for earlier afternoon ones), they are told they can choose to stay home and look after the children if that is their priority. Given that there are so few women in higher management, the women with higher job positions feel pleased to have made it in a male world and are therefore too grateful to be there to want to change the way of things. In terms of power relations, clearly when feeling grateful, one is in a position of acceptance rather than that of challenging the system.

Chapter Five revealed the extent to which aesthetics is an important part of being a woman in Italy, and brought tourism and leisure together as a way of working on one's looks. This chapter reveals the way women turn to shopping, the gym, and beautifying for achieving social status through beauty. Chapter

Five completed the discussion on structural forces and cultural expectations commenced in the previous chapter, addressing femininity, beauty and sensuality. This chapter explained how femininity and beauty are an important part of the patriarchal society in terms of women's role in her social positioning. In much the same way as women are shown to be under pressure for looking after their household and family, this chapter revealed women to be under pressure to appear beautiful. Beauty is shown to be defined by the male gaze and signified through sensual embodiment.

Women were shown to be objectified in society and through the media. The expectation of women's role 'to be looked at', and of men's 'to look at' is shown to create strong pressure on women as they know they will be judged on appearance. Objectification and sexualisation of the female body starts from a young age, beauty being taught as a girl's preoccupation. Girls are complimented on their looks whilst boys are complimented on their activities, thoughts or projects. Boys are also taught to compliment girls on their looks. This results in an adult society whereby women worry about their looks and about what they should wear as they strive for attention, compliments, and success. Attracting looks through beauty and sensuality is, in effect, shown to be felt as a way to success in terms of social status and positioning. Through gaining this form of status, women perceive to be gaining power in society.

Women are shown to gain power with men because through their looks they manage to obtain what they want. They are shown to gain power with women because through their looks, they gain respect. Respect is shown from

the women because they too are striving for the beauty status and know how difficult it can be. They respect those who put time into their looks and perform sensuality in an appealing way. As such, a beautiful woman will obtain what she wants from women too. She has power through beauty. This chapter showed women feeling empowered through their looks, a paradox in a world where women are objectified, having to please the male gaze. In other words, patriarchal values are used by women for reaching many of their goals.

My research also discussed the empowerment women feel through their sensual embodiment in simply feeling more womanly. Women are shown to enjoy the male gaze they receive in response to their sensual embodiment. They describe the way it makes them 'feel good' inside, as women. They describe enjoying feeling feminine. Spending time on their looks makes them feel good about themselves (feeling beautiful), and the gaze is received as a confirmation of this. Given the importance of looks in Italian society, this boosts women's self-confidence and self-esteem, thereby nurturing a sense of empowerment. The men's response indicates confirmation of their womanhood through their feminine ways.

As well as feeling empowered through their femininity, Chapter Five revealed women to share a sense of 'belonging' through their femininity. Through their preoccupation with beauty, women create a special bonding among themselves, in the form of a tight community. The sense of community transpires through women's common awareness of the importance of beauty, through the help they give each other to gain beauty, and through the complicity

they share in doing so. So, although in the presence of men women are shown to be very competitive, my research revealed that in the absence of men, the shared knowledge unites them. Women are aware of the extent to which all women need support in achieving the right look. Given the strength of the social pressure they endure on this theme, their support to each other is very natural and systematic. The support is shown to be part of the shopping scene for example where women openly comment on what others are trying on. The same is observed for the trying out of new hairstyles, and a general sharing of beauty tips is observed to be a part of social relationships among women.

This chapter contributes to the understanding of the critical issue of objectification in patriarchy, unveiling the power of the male gaze, and the pressure of society. It also contributes to the understanding of the critical issue of power relations in patriarchy, revealing how the power imbalance typical of patriarchal society (as described in Chapter Four) can shift through women's awareness of the effect they produce on men. The awareness of their sensual embodiment empowers women. The empowerment they gain through their beauty, femininity and sensuality, does not necessarily mean they want to change things but it gives them confidence through the feeling of mastering and celebrating the sensuality of their womanhood on the one hand, and through the power they have over men on the other hand. Finally, this chapter contributes to literature on beautifying, shopping, going to the gym, and parading one's body, which are used as windows into the understanding of gendered construction of social identity and power relations. Through bringing leisure and tourism

activities together, this chapter has revealed the extent to which these activities can provide a better understanding of Italian women's life.

In a similar way, Chapter Six showed the tourism activity of tanning in the light of enabling a broader understanding of society. Spending a day at the beach was deconstructed through Silvia's character (as described earlier on), and tanning was shown to be a part of the bigger picture of women striving for beauty and status in society. A tanned look represents a more beautiful physique, hence women's desire to better their tan. My research showed there is not much awareness about health issues concerning the sun in Italy where everybody's aim is to appear the most tanned possible. This chapter revealed the tan to be just as important as sensuality in terms of gaining beauty status in society. This is how tourism links in so tightly to everyday life in Italy. Italian women from Rome were shown to take advantage of the possibility of spending a day at the nearby beaches (whilst they were not elsewhere on holiday), using the tourism activity of tanning at the beach to better their look in the city.

In terms of beauty status resulting from a tan, at the beach, the tanning performance revealed the focal point to be the buttocks. Each pair of buttocks, depending on their tan, muscle tone and age are shown to be attributed a different set of rules, guiding the women's performance at the beach. The maximum beauty status is obtained by the women who can move around the beach with their bikini in the pulled-up-over-the-buttocks position revealing tanned and firm buttocks. Women whose buttocks are less tanned and firm gain status by standing up in their tanning spot but do not walk around. Those whose

buttocks do not correspond to the tanned beauty criteria at all expose their buttocks only whilst lying down.

Through following Silvia in her every move at the beach, my research reveals the way Silvia's embodiment reflects both the patriarchal structure of the society in which she lives and her own choices, thoughts and feelings. The chapter describes and deconstructs Silvia's performance as she makes an entrance at the beach, as she chooses her spot and creams up, as she shifts tanning positions, as she walks down to the waters edge, and as she wanders over to the café scene. Silvia is shown to be very attentive to her audience, checking out her competition at all times. Her fears and doubts about her appearance are discussed as are her enjoyment of feeling the sun on her body. Tanning is shown to be a sensuous experience, Silvia enjoying physical sensations emanating from the heat of the sun, the sensuality of creaming up, the hot sand underfoot, and also the pleasure of being gazed upon. Silvia was described to actively provoke the male gaze through her slow and sensual movements in massaging the cream into her body, in shifting positions and in her swaying hip movement when walking.

My thesis reveals that, in Italy, a woman's aim in any public situation (including the beach) is to attract the gaze (from both men and women). A man's role, on the other hand, is to offer the gaze. The seduction game is, as such, so naturally part of society that without giving it any thought, women automatically want to be looked at to be reassured they are women, and men automatically look at women to feel they are men. The fact that the men look on whilst the

women cream up sensually is analysed to take seduction to a sensuous level whereby both men and women are enjoying their gendered embodiment through the women's performance. The tanning performance plays an important role in enabling, as such, men and women to live their masculinity and femininity to its fullest, reinforcing in this way the patriarchal outlook of society whereby women are objectified for the benefit of men.

However, women's empowerment and power through their choice to actively provoke the male gaze (as opposed to passively being objectified) reflects the critical body, the agency affecting society as well as society influencing the agency. This chapter reveals the way Italian women negotiate with patriarchy through sensual embodiment, as such. Through the concept of the critical body, this chapter analyses patriarchal discourse regarding objectification of women on the one hand (as reflected by Silvia's fears) and women's way of gaining power through their choice to embody sensuality and their awareness of the way this affects the men (reflected in Silvia's pleasure).

The fact that the women enjoy the sexualisation of their body through the tanning performance also underlines the fact that Italians are passionate, they enjoy life, they listen to their senses and derive pleasure from them. Reflecting on gendered sensuousness and on women's 'lived' embodiment illustrates the material dimension of the body, as defined in the conceptualisation of the critical body.

This chapter contributes to the literature on tanning in the field of tourism studies. It enriches literature on the under-studied region of the Mediterranean

and its Southern mentality, through the exposure of Italian society. And, in the same way as the fourth and fifth chapters, it deepens our understanding of Italian society and of women's position in society. Dominated in discourse (see Chapter Four) but empowered through their femininity (see Chapter Five), Italian women from the new middle class are shown to propel their feeling of power into the next dimension by playing with the way their sensuality affects the men (as shown in Chapter Six).

These three chapters revealing my findings on Italian society, and more particularly on women's place in society, contribute to critical research through deepening our understanding of power relations in patriarchy and broadening our understanding of the way women negotiate within a patriarchal structure. Tourism and leisure studies are shown to be connected to social cultural theories of the body, and are shown to be a powerful means for analyzing people's cultural habits, thereby revealing important aspects of the society in which they live. Tourism and leisure activities were explored to understand the gendered construction of identity, the inter-relationship between men and women, power imbalance and inequity, and women's place in society.

## **7.5 Advancing research: where to from here**

I believe this thesis to be in line with Annette Pritchard, Nigel Morgan, Irena Ateljevic & Candice Harris's (2007a) recent edition of a collection of essays on tourism and gender, which Margaret Swain (2007b) has described as



being at the forefront of a re-energised focus on gender, emanating from the critical turn, and shaking up the field of tourism studies. Margaret Swain underlines the challenge these authors undertake in addressing the critical importance of gender equity in our daily world. I contend my thesis addresses the critical importance of gender equity showing, through exploring Italian society, that gender does indeed matter, and that power relations need to be explored.

This thesis exposes the extent to which gender, sensuality and embodiment play a role in tourism, and links their significance into everyday life and gender inequity and inequality in society. It reveals the complex process of negotiating and gaining power from the women's perspective, in Italian society. Although Italian society was shown to be deeply patriarchal in its essence, I believe the power imbalance discussed in the Italian context can be extended to the rest of the Western world, including societies which are not so clearly patriarchal in their structures. This is a call to address the issue of gender inequity and power imbalance, through leisure and tourism studies, in other Western nations. In national statistics, Italy leads the way in the Western world in terms of gender inequity in political and managerial positions, as discussed in my thesis, however, women everywhere in the world are severely disadvantaged compared to men across all social criteria and classifications (Pritchard et al., 2007b).

The worldwide statistics Annette Pritchard et al. (2007b) provide depict a rather bleak gender picture. Two-thirds of illiterate adults are women, two-thirds of unpaid adult workers are women, and among the paid workers women earn

less for identical job positions. According to the same source, for every ten executive men in the world there is only one woman, only 15% of the world's parliamentary seats are held by women, and only 12 of the 191 United Nations member countries are lead by women.

Despite statistics reflecting such strong discrimination against women, gender studies “consistently fail to excite the imagination of the media” contend Annette Pritchard et al. (2007b, p 2). These authors affirm that “while contemporary popular discourses dismiss gender and feminism as passé, patriarchy and sexism continue to limit human possibilities around the globe”. Similarly to Annette Pritchard et. al (2007b), my thesis aims at advancing feminist and gender tourism studies with a focus on embodiment, bringing together feminist, gender and body studies within the tourism field.

Through exploring the way sensuality pervades the leisure and tourism experiences of Italian women from the new middle class, I use the body to explore femininity and masculinity, objectification, and empowerment. Italians love beauty and, as much as beautifying can be argued to be an act of slavery for women in certain cultures, in Italy it was shown to be empowering. My postfeminist approach enabled identifying this and exploring empowerment through sensuality, where a more radical feminist approach would declare beautification to be always disempowering for women, independently from the context in which they live. Postfeminism acknowledges difference and heterogeneity, taking into account the cultural context of the researched.

Advancing tourism research on gender and embodiment in other Mediterranean nations would shed light on other societies reflecting a patriarchal culture, thereby enriching our general understanding of patriarchy and power relations. Patriarchy would be explored through the different social environments of each nation studied, revealing as such different cultural realities of patriarchy. Although certain similarities would be identified, based on patriarchal structures, the gendered construction of identity and power relations would differ according to the specificities of each nation.

Advancing tourism research in other European nations, in particular the more northern nations with a strongly contrasting culture to the Mediterranean, would enrich our critical understanding of women's position in the Western world more globally, reflecting the extent to which gender inequity and inequality both exist and differ across cultures. Studying different cultural realities would highlight the way critical issues of beauty and objectification of women are context-related. It would reveal differences in power relations, as revealed through the body, in different nations. This reflects the post-structural postfeminist approach to research whereby one argument is not considered to apply to all contexts. Rather, through focusing on contrasting nations, the hybridity of concepts such as gender, social identity, and beauty, will be revealed. The different interpretations and realities around these concepts will provide insight into the different cultural settings specific to each nation.

In terms of researching particular social groups, my research shows limitations, addressing only women from Bourdieu's new middle class, with the

characteristics of being in their forties, married, with children, and possessing a profession. Looking at the interplay of different sub-cultures in Italy would complete my findings, underlining the heterogeneity of the different social groups. Focusing on individuals from diverse social classes, socio-economic backgrounds, or sexualities, would extend the present findings. Given the strongly patriarchal features of Italian society, it would be enriching to focus on two particular groups of people. Firstly it would be enriching to expand by focusing on men (from within the same social group as the women in this study), exploring their gaze from their point of view, their opinions, thoughts, feelings, and their social identity. Secondly, it would be very interesting to focus on homosexual women, exploring the way their reality of Italian society differs, and the way they negotiate with patriarchy, live gender equity and power relations.

I believe that using tourism as a window into deconstructing society, patriarchy, and gender relations, takes the tourism field into a powerful direction through creating awareness on these sensitive issues. Given our society's consumer context, the rise in importance of the body, and the importance in considering experiences to be embodied, I also believe that the body is the conceptual plane through which critical issues are to be explored. Given the discussion on theoretical conceptualisations of the body in my thesis, I argue that the critical body is the richest and most complete concept of the body through which to explore sensitive issues. It enables deconstructing the structure, the agency and the way the structure is negotiated, through embodiment.

The critical view of the body is part of a post-structural approach to research. As shown in my research approach, post-structural frameworks, metaphors and theories are the most adapted to doing critical research. This means the findings do not represent only interpretative research, rather they are interpretative findings which are contextualised - placed into structural relations. This gives a deeper and more powerful meaning to the research findings. I believe this is the approach to furthering research addressing sensitive critical issues such as gender equity.

In terms of my research outcome, post-research discussions with my interviewees created a higher level of awareness of the intricate relations taking place in patriarchy, among these women. Given the sensitivity of the topic and how strongly linked to the interviewees' daily existence and social identity it is, the discussions took place through cultural awareness, reflecting the critical approach to relationships with the researched. Through our discussions, the women reflected upon patriarchy in their society and became aware of patterns in power relations and of their own empowerment, raising their self-esteem through their self-awareness.

Although Italian women do not open up easily in front of other people (as indicated in my research approach), discussing findings resulting from my research in Rome represented a subject of discussion which was common to all the women, and which they were eager to discuss together in informal gatherings. The women appeared to feel complice, no doubt partly due to their knowledge that it is the collective of all their interviews put together (along with

my other research sources) which resulted in the discussions we were having. Bonding through discussing patriarchy resulted in deep exchanges and the enriching of their own understanding of their society and their social identity as women.

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