Girl du jour - Girl of the day

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GIRL DU JOUR – GIRL OF THE DAY

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USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.
ABSTRACT

*Girl du jour* explores and discusses a select group of women's lives, as well as factors influencing the development of young women's identities. The project offers a personal and intimate insight into the women's lives through the use of documentary/photo-journalism whilst also incorporating the choreographed image.

*Girl du jour* explores the group of young women's lives both theoretically and visually, making reference to the performance of identity, women's issues, body image (including young women and the influence of the fashion industry) and motherhood. The women depicted are exposed in their intimate, public and social lives are depicted in an attempt to recognise the aspirations, concerns and desires felt by these women in their journey for the creation of identity.

Nostalgic imagery from the past are included in the introduction of the creative work in order to establish the initial identities of the young women as girls and their journey into womanhood. The creative work also employs a poetic format inherent with diaries, and to enhance the concept of biographies, handwritten quotes are also included. The theoretical concepts of groups and autobiographies and biographies are referred to in order to establish the grounds for the young women of 1996 into womanhood of 2005.
DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

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Introduction.

*Girl du jour*– *Girl of the day* is a visual and theoretical exploration of a small friendship group of young Australian women. Their concerns, aspirations and fears are documented through an investigation of theories and practices of identity, women’s issues, autobiographies, biographies, narrative and photography. The theoretical explanation of the creative thesis explores the theory of performativity with relation to the design of women’s identities. Some of the issues that may be faced in order to create ideal forms of identity are also discussed. This exegesis is predominantly concerned with identity theory and its correlation with young women. The visual element of the project is an intimate enquiry into the poetics of photo-narrative production utilizing the stylistic devices of documentary photography, intertwined with the choreographed image.

The exploration of self-identity, and as a result of this, the exploration of correlating identities in the same friendship group is the dominating theme within the creative thesis. Theories involving women as self, group dynamics and women’s diaries are explored through visual representation. The creative work addresses the issues of the group of women using stylistic devices inherent with a diary structure and narrative photography. The project explores the personal lives of each woman, offering an insight into themes not necessarily discussed or noted through the usage of the photographic medium.

*Girl du jour* connotes recipes, and women. I have chosen the French term ‘du jour’ as it offers the project an element of improvised thought, which details the ‘recipe’ or ‘outline’ of each of the young women’s lives. ‘Of the day’ also infers the continuous change intrinsic with the evolution of women’s lives, journeys and identities. The project is an exploration of young women living in the performance of everyday life, and how they construct, build and maintain character and identity. *Girl du jour* represents many forms of young woman hood. Motherhood and pregnancy, women’s young women living with disease or mental illness, body image in terms of fashion, physical appearance and self-evaluation, are visually explored. The journey, union and divinity of a young couple on the path of life partnership.
The main themes discussed within this thesis fall under four main areas of Identity, Feminism, Post-feminism and Identity, Women's issues and Autobiographies, Biographies and Diaries. Each segment finds correlation with the notion of the young Australian woman, or “girl”, living within the realms of today’s society, and how they each enact specific performances relevant to the daily living of their lives. The creative project Girl du jour makes reference to a specific group of young, middle class Australian women whom attended the same public high school located in the country town of Albany, Western Australia.

The chapter discussing Identity covers identity theory and the concept of self-exploration and the shaping and expression of ones ongoing identity. The notion of identity as a forever evolving and developing entity of self-characterisation is the dominating theme of this discussion. Performativity of identity is explored in terms of the maintenance and creation of identity. With reference to the creative Girl du jour, the theoretical discussion of identity links the notion of performance of daily life and the individual lives of each of the women and the different forms of identity they portray.

Women’s identities are discussed with relevant connections being drawn between the creative project and the theoretical discussion with specific reference to self-concept and body image. This not only refers to the notion of self-analysis and the desire to obtain an ideal body, but of the roles a woman may take on, and as a result, the multiple ‘selves’ she creates as a part of her forever changing identity. This discussion strongly correlates with the notion of performativity with examples of this explored within the creative project such as the depiction of Tracy as young woman, mother and partner.

The realm of gender and sexuality is explored with reference to the idea that many encompassing factors contribute to the fragmentation of identity, especially gender itself. Gender performance includes both the level of masculinity and femininity exerted through one’s identity performance and more specifically, the traits intrinsic within a woman’s sexuality. Gender is one of the dominating factors contributing to one’s identity and with specific reference to Girl du jour, each female depicted within the piece on many differing levels, enacts a gendered performance.
In terms of the exploration of women or girl as a commodity, Feminine Adolescence and Girl culture is explored in order to effectively map the paths many of the young women’s identities may take on. The notion of femininity and feminine subjectivity in terms of body image and identity strongly links to the creative project due to the understanding that this specific group of women also hold membership to the group loosely known as ‘girl’.

The relevance of group theory to the creative piece stems back to the initial formation of the group of young women depicted throughout Girl du jour. Groups and membership to them aids in the formation and definition of the self and one’s social identity. The concept of women as members of friendship groups is the embodying theme responsible for the motivation and production of the creative work.

The feminist movement, in all its forms, holds relevance to Girl du jour as theoretical discussions of feminism and identity links with the subjectivity of women and consequently, women’s issues. The feminist movement encouraged women to voice and explore their opinions, strengths and desires with confidence. Exhibitionism is explored in terms of modern femininity and the celebration of women’s sexual identity as a sight of power. This correlates strongly with the selection of fashion, self-portraiture and body image orientated portraits displayed throughout Girl du jour.

A dominating theme evident throughout both Girl du jour and the theoretical research, discusses women’s issues and body image. Such discussions involving eating disorders, the desire for ‘thinness’, the influence of women’s magazine and fashion upon women, accepted body image and a women’s ‘ideal’ body image are explored uniquely within both works. Each body of work alternatively theoretically and visually explore a woman’s drive to attain a desirable self-image as a means to fulfilling unhappiness or “lack” they may experience on the quest for a positive body image.

Girl du jour explores multiple possible roles that a woman may take on as a result of adhering to influences of gender roles, societal values and sexuality intrinsic with the forward motion of daily living. The role of motherhood is explored via imagery of two young mothers within the select group of women. Discussions relevant to a woman’s identity with reference to self-concept are visually and theoretically discussed. Specific relationships to physical, emotional and mental adjustments that may occur to a
women's identity are drawn and linked to the visual explorations of character and physical bodily changes inherent with the process of motherhood.

The creative work *Girl du jour* predominantly relies upon the relationship of a diary structure to the exploration of a woman's ability to articulate her own identity through expression of her private voice. Distinctions are drawn between the elements of a diary and autobiographies/biographies as a means of creatively and academically exploring the concept of self. Throughout *Girl du jour* both my own voice as well as many of the young women's voices are heard through the inclusion of handwritten text to infer the thoughts inherent with diary keeping.

The final theoretical chapter within this thesis discusses my practice and the process of developing the creative work into a final collection of images that combine to make *Girl du jour*. Narrative structure and the art of storytelling with reference to the decoding of an image draw relevance to the composition and design of the final product. Theories of the Snapshot Aesthetic and the notion of small moments being caught instantaneously also contribute to the relevance of the creative design of *Girl du jour*. The brief discussion of influential women photographers draws relevance to my own personal inspiration.

The project contributes to the field of photomedia as a body of work, which not only explores the intimate lives of women, but also makes a social commentary upon themes that, are not necessarily outwardly noted and discussed. The project offers a level of contribution to the evolution and change of current representations of middle class Australian women, living in the 'everyday' of today's society.
Identity.

Identity theory.

It is through the ongoing creation and maintenance of identity, that we as humans grow and evolve. Identity is the core to which enables human functioning to occur as it not only enables expression but also acts as a guide for self-exploration. We are forever shaping, refining and investigating the construction and expression of our identities. From a post-structuralist point of view, identity is seen as unfixed and "suggests instead that identities are floating, that meaning is not fixed and universally true at all times for all people" (Bailey and Hall cited in Wells, 2004, p. 287). We can understand identity as a forever shifting and developing form of self-characterisation.

Exploration involves many aspects of both internal and external life. Individual’s aspiring to explore the ‘self’ on a more intentional level will actively acknowledge the contribution of fundamental aspects of everyday life. “It is through our connections with our family, society and culture that we experience ourselves in the world. The self only comes into being in relationship and through the constant encounters with representations around us” in moments of everyday life (Solomon cited in Spence & Solomon, 1995, p. 10). The shaping of one’s self is defined through many channels on many different levels.

In order to create an identity or multiple identities, the individual must use a form of incessant self-evaluation as “self-identity needs to be continually reproduced and reassured...because it fails to secure belief” (Jones, 2003, p.108). “The process of self-identity is a leap into a narrative that employs seeing as a way of knowing” (Jones, 2003, p.108). The exploration of one’s self via the intimate, public and social realms of everyday living, enhances the knowledge and understanding of identity creation.

A method for the evaluation of self is more often than not instigated with a reflection upon our body as a representation of our internal self, our character. This interpretation of self varies dependant upon many factors including, upbringing, personal beliefs, age, sex and culture. We learn and thus infer many outside factors as recognition and response to our own bodies and “aim at building a sense of identity, and identity has a
lot to do with how we perceive our own and other people’s bodies” (Cavallaro, 1998, p. 12).

Foucault speaks of the self in terms of the technologies involved that allow an individual’s interaction between not only the self and “their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being” (Driscoll, 2002, p.40) but with others as well. This interaction allows the individual, “to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality- but always with a pre existing set of discourses on the self” (Driscoll, 2002, p.40). Discourses encompassing body image, self-improvement, fashion and media influences as well as individuality and personality guide the individual’s aspirations for such transformation.

Identity formation coincides strongly with concepts derived from theorist Sigmund Freud. Freud assumed that identity is strongly correlated with sexuality and desire and most importantly the ‘subjects’ unconscious. In Freud’s terms “the aim of psychoanalysis is to explain how unconscious processes are involved in constructing the subject” (Phoca & Wright, 1999, p.15). Freud’s discussions on psychoanalysis influenced theorists such as Lacan who also speak of identity formation. “Lacan reinterprets Freud in light of structuralist and post-structuralist theories, turning psychoanalysis from an essentially humanist philosophy…into a post structuralist one” (Klages, 2001).

Lacan’s theories of identity stem from what he describes as the mirror stage which involves an infant and their first recognition of lack, and in turn how the infant forms an illusion of ‘ego’ “of a unified conscious self identified by the word ‘I’ ” (Klages, 2001). The unconscious is the forefront of Lacan’s identity theory with a strong correlation with language and its structure, especially to the relationships with signifiers. “The elements in the unconscious- wishes, desires, images- all form signifiers (and they are usually expressed in verbal terms)…one signifier is what it is because it’s not something else” (Klages, 2001).

There is the idea that identity is constructed through consciousness and that the mind plays an integral part in this construct. The body is instructed to follow the conscious directions of the mind, which implies that the formation of identity is predominantly conscious. Nietzsche opposes this train of thought and suggests that, “the body is what
compares and creates and that thought and the ego are its instruments” (Diprose, 1994, p.83). Identity is in part inscribed on and within the body physically, emotionally and mentally.

Nietzsche reveals the assumption that “one’s place in the world, one’s desires, habits and potentialities are determined by the concepts which govern the structure of the social world and which sculpt the body accordingly” (Diprose, 1994, p.83). This connection with the previous discussion regarding identity also relates to the notion of an identity’s formation according to ‘outer’ influences. Further connections will be established with reference to women’s issues, including women and fashion.

“Identity theory asserts that social interactions produce individuals’ self-definitions, and these self-definitions guide their subsequent thoughts, interactions, and behaviours.” (Lee, 2005, p.132). It must be noted that social interactions occur on both an intentional and accidental basis with many differing levels of engagement. “Self-definitions are constrained by local relationships and reflect meanings for a limited set of roles...[and] multiple roles lead to multiple identities” (p.132). It is inherent that certain behaviours are triggered by the interaction and in turn, exploration of these identities.

Identity is formed and discovered through the living of each and every moment in an individual’s life. The small happenings and interactions outside of the self in daily life are involved in both the conscious and subconscious fields of thought, in discovering differing levels of identity. The very character that resonates from within an individual onto another is somehow a reflection upon the smallest thoughts, desires and innermost feelings of that person. “Rather than finding ourselves within ourselves we are more likely to find ourselves outside ourselves...in ‘everything’ [which] bears witness to what we are, our friendships and our enmities...in the objects we love” (Diprose, 1994, p.87).
Performativity.

In the construction and development of everyday life, no matter the circumstance, there is and will continue to be a level of performance in the design of one’s identity. In terms of how this performance is carried out depends on the individual, of course, but as a general rule, aids in the understanding and creation of meaning. “‘Performative’ suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning” (Butler, 1999, p. 177), obtained through the conscious use of repetition in order to present a desired trait or form of character. The link between identity and meaning is formed through the acknowledgment of the individual to certain forms of identity that are constructed daily. This suggested performance is essential to the maintenance and creation of identity. Identity is acted out and performed in all stages of life, a performance that is tailored to suit the requirements of each moment.

In order for humans to explore, construct and engage with identity as a means of constructing one’s self, a level of performance and presentation must take place. “Acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means” (Butler, 1999, p. 173). In acting out particular persona’s and ‘ideal’ traits and personalities, a person begins to identify with a particular identity to which they can call their own. As Butler states, one may use acts and gestures that are constructed for the mere purpose of creating a particular identity to suit specific moments and situations.

All forms of character development assume some level of performance. Certain characteristics including but not limited to desire or an individuals gestures infer an internal drive or substance (Butler, 1999) “but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as cause” (Butler, 1999, p. 173). A form of identity as seen through an individual’s ongoing character/characteristics, can be maintained through the repeat performance of certain traits and actions. An individual’s ability to portray a seemingly consistent form self occurs through “the repetition of ‘appropriate’ performances [which] provides models for the practice of subjectivity” (Schirato & Yell, 1996, p. 201).
Performance can also be discussed with reference to identity and the many forms it takes on. Especially in terms of the body and its manipulable boundaries. A ‘boundary’ as such can be placed on the body by a society or culture in an attempt to control on some level the type or extent of a performance. However, there is not saying “where the body ‘begins’ and where it ‘ends’ and thus “there is nothing sacred about the bodies boundaries an that even when these boundaries are destroyed…the destruction can be made to appear a ‘carefully’ staged cultural act” (Cavallaro, 1998, p.13). Performance of identity and character is an element that may contribute to the manipulation of such boundaries.

The performance and exhibition of acting out specific traits in order to form aspects of identity are a small part of the living of everyday life. To consciously act out elements of one’s life, is to willingly participate in contemporary experiences of life, and in this particular case the experiences of women. The most valuable aspect of the performative nature of identity creation, correlate’s strongly with the response to this performance from others. Identity is constructed and analysed on both an internal and external plane. There is always a two way process of mediation involved with identity, this regards both how you see yourself and in turn how others perceive you. As humans, we are constantly tuning and tailoring the performance of everyday life in order to maintain our own desired self-identity.

Women’s identities.

Particular culture’s and societies govern the creation and development of one’s self image and identity. For women, this revolves around establishing self in terms of one’s body. “For the most part, what a woman observes in the mirror is what she uses as a measure of her worth as a human being” (Hesse-Biber, 1996, p.58). In term of psychoanalytic theory, we see the mirror as an important state for self-creation. Lacan speaks of the ‘lack’ a child feels once he/she first realises that it is a separate entity from its mother. There is a desire to return to the state before ‘lack’ was experienced and “demand for the fullness, the completeness, of the other that will stop up the lack” (Klages, 2001). Women’s self-analysis is often influenced strongly by societal factors presented in the media such as beauty, fitness and health, than the inner self. The social aspects of everyday life, strongly influences a woman’s bodily states of desire.
A woman’s desire to obtain such factors presented in the media can be related Lacan’s theory of ‘lack’ due to her inner drive to seek and obtain all that is desired.

Females as a collective, actively define themselves, as stated, by the representation of their own bodies. “Presentation and articulation of self-taste, appearance, behaviour, personality, character, potential and intellect - cohere into an explicitly manipulable girl” (Driscoll, 2002, p.39). This manipulation of self can often result in many self’s, depending upon situations and the roles in which the female takes. “Multiple roles lead to multiple identities [and] each identity resides higher or lower in the prominence hierarchy that is determined by the number and affective value of the persons associated with an identity’s corresponding roles” (Lee, 2005, p.132). The concept of enacting multiple roles strongly correlates with most of the women depicted through out Girl du jour with examples such as Tracy as a young woman, a mother and a partner.

The woman’s body is an object for desire, especially within artistic frames within our culture. It is evident that “the female body has [and continues to function]...as spectacle. Woman offers her body to be surveyed” (Phoca & Wright, 1996, p.76). This is inherent within everyday living and the representation of the female body as ‘spectacle’ is evident amongst all forms of the media. This act of surveying does not only explore the realm of a women’s body for man’s desire, but also as a site for admiration and in turn desire from woman to woman in the endless search and desire for the perfect body, which would supposably reveal happiness and self-acceptance.

In society, there is a need for self-expression for both personal and universal reasons. The more we can understand about each other and ourselves, the more effectively we can operate as a society and a culture. Exploration of identity allows personal growth and understanding that effectively leads to a form of enlightenment. With reference specifically to women’s subjectivities, Butler states that there is nothing new to be
explored and discussed but there is “a good deal about the diverse experiences of women that is being expressed and still needs to be expressed” (Butler cited in Jones, 2003, p.401).

Identity can be explored, created and maintained through an ongoing performance, repetition of acts, traits and characteristics to subsequently suit specific moments. Many influences occurring in daily life can be attributed to one’s desire to construct many levels and forms of identity. The level and intensity of the performance is inextricably linked to the moment, and the desired commitment of the individual to stage each and develop every element of their identity.

Gender.

The category of women is a variable cultural accomplishment, a set of meanings that are taken on or taken up within a cultural field, and that no one is born with a gender – gender is always acquired (Butler, 1999, p. 142).

‘Woman’, ‘women’ or in this case, ‘girl’ cannot be fully defined through the singular category of gender, as it is both tangible and unfixed, just like identity itself. Gender is merely one part in the fragmentation of identity and may only contribute to a particular element of identity. Gender contributes to the concept of performativity, as many traits, acts and characteristics are associated with the term ‘gender’ itself. “Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed” (Butler cited in Jones, 2003, p. 398). Gender as a form of performance is an effective way to explore the level of identity intrinsic with women and their sexuality. “Gender is what is put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure” (Butler cited in Jones, 2003, p.401).

The discussion of gender must extend beyond the realm of male/female, masculine/feminine and explore elements that facilitate this arena. There are many distinctions within the concept of gender and “if one ‘is’ a woman, that is surely not all one is...gender is not always constituted coherently...[It] intersects with racial, class, sexual and regional modalities of discursively produced identities” (Butler cited in Evans, 1995, p.133). Gender encompasses many traits that are learnt and in turn performed with correlation to such factors, and with specific reference to the creative
work ‘Girl du jour’, regional modalities such as the country town of Albany, play a strong role in influencing this gender performance. In terms of the Albany community and young women entering into early motherhood, such gender performances involving parenting are depicted throughout ‘Jess’ and ‘Traci’s’ chapters in the creative work ‘Girl du jour’. This performance of motherhood is strongly affected not only by the size and isolation of the town sight, but the value systems evident in small country towns such as Albany, that sees many young women walk down the child bearing path at a relatively early stage in life.

A feminine identity cannot be accurately explored as a universal construct. Identity can only be explored on an individual basis. However, it must be noted that particular characteristics or elements of certain identities such as the feminine, can be clustered in order to establish stereotypes or commonalities between identities. There is evident tension between gender and the term ‘woman’ “as a theoretical construct which implies gender as universally constitutive of the subject, and the realities of really existing ‘women’ who may or may not share a unified ‘gender identity’ ” (Brooks, 1997, p.24).

The concept of gender in relation with identity need be explored in terms of gender’s manipulable nature. Social scripts for behaviour related to sex and gender exist within all societies (eg. pink for girls, blue for boys), however there is not a general equation for the formation of a singular identity. “Gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylised repetition of acts” (Butler, 1999, p. 179) and through such acts analysis of certain traits, actions and characteristics associated with gender, as a means for creating identity can be explored.

Despite the necessary realization that gender cannot define an individual’s identity alone, it does however contribute certain elements of the construction of identity. In terms of one’s own subjectivity, “the concept of ‘gendered identities’ is useful in implying a recognition of plurality and difference” (Brooks, 1997, p.24), which makes appropriate reflection upon the nature of certain groups, and with specific reference to gender, the ‘feminine’.
Feminine Adolescence and Girl Culture.

For the female adolescent, her bedroom provides a much “richer source of meaning-making for young feminine subjectivity than the street. Studies of girls’ friendships, popular teen magazines, dance, fashion, and music attempted to understand how private spaces operate as sites for the construction of femininity” (Harris, 2004, p.100). Such studies revealed that despite discovering the young female occupied the home more so than young males, they tended to use their intimate, personal environments to explore “dominant and alternative ideologies about being a girl” (Harris, 2004, p.100).

Puberty may seem to encompass a fairly obvious distinction between the character of woman and girl and in turn set the stage for female adolescence, however; “adolescence is not a clear denotation of any age, body, behaviour or identity, because it has always meant the process of developing a self... rather than any definition of that self” (Driscoll, 2002, p. 6). Thus the nature and ground of evaluation interwoven within the two categories of puberty and adolescence, do not describe or allocate age for the growing female, rather a stage for the initial and fundamental level of self-evaluation and in turn the formation of self-identity.

“Something dramatic happens to girls in early adolescence...they lose their resiliency and optimism and become less curious and inclined to take risks. They lose their assertive, energetic and “tomboyish” personalities and become more deferential, self-critical and depressed” (Pipher cited in Harris, 2004, p. 140). Young women entering adult femininity, lose their ‘voice’. “In this process they become vulnerable to low self esteem, psychological disorders, and developmental crisis” (Harris, 2004, p.140).

The visual exploration of girl culture and the intimate documentation of young women’s lives, allows an intimate insight into the many identities a woman or ‘girl’ may decide to portray. “The body has become a primary expression of individual identity for girls in contemporary culture” (Greenfield, 2005). The young woman’s body is a ground for experimentation, a manipulable playground for the creation of newfound identity.

The strongest link between identity and the culture of ‘girl’ is evident in the “relationship between girl’s inner lives and emotional development, and the material world and popular culture” (Greenfield, 2005). The extreme ability of the material
world to influence vulnerable young women is beyond magazines and advertising. Identities of young women extend deep into the realm of desire, and the drive to reach a form of enlightenment, which entails popularity, beauty and happiness.

Lauren Green photographically explores the notion of ‘Girl Culture’ with specific reference to the “exhibitionist nature of modern femininity through moments of vanity and performance in everyday life” (Greenfield, 2005). As a mode for creating and exploring a feminine identity, especially through the photographic medium, vanity plays a huge driving force in the goal for desired elements of identity including the stereotypical form of beauty and successes of everyday life. Femininity is manipulable and open for experimentation, which has seen, the female body “become a palimpsest on which many of our culture’s conflicting messages about femininity are written and rewritten” (Greenfield, 2005).

(Image from Girl Culture, Greenfield, 2005)
Group Theory.

‘Girl du jour’ explores the pathways of a select group of women from an initial friendship group, and the natural fragmentation of these friendships as the women form their own pathways into their futures. The formation of ‘groups’, whether for a specific purpose or the enjoyment of friendship, is an instrumental element in defining the self and social identity. There are numerous reasons for associating one’s self with others, but at the heart of this association there is a need for a connection on some level, to establish commonality. It is evident, as discussed by Marmarosh, Holtz and Schottenbauer (2005, p. 32), that “the experience of being in a cohesive group enables group members to engage in the necessary self-disclosure and the personal exploration” contributing to the needs of an individual as a social being.

The connections made between particular people can be used to compare similarities surrounding their personal beliefs, concerns, and value systems. These comparisons can be imperative when discussing the larger group or groups to which they belong. The similarities, especially amongst “friendship pairs, may be a hallmark for shared values within a larger social group, so an examination of similarity among members of a particular group is a way to determine the values that are important to the larger group” (Crandall, Schiffhauer & Harvey, 1997, p. 133). These connections, however, need to be scrutinized for quality and reliability because in many instances the relationship is for genuine interest and “identification provides a sense of cognitive, emotional, and behaviouiral connection… [but] in others it provides little more than a label” (Deaux cited in Reid, 2004, p. 311).
Feminism, Post feminism and Identity.

The very subject of women is no longer understood in stable or abiding terms. There is a great deal of material that not only questions the viability of "the subject" as the ultimate candidate for representation or, indeed, liberation, but there is very little agreement after all on what it is that constitutes, or ought to constitute, the category of women. (Butler, 1999, p.4)

To explore the subject and subjectivity of women and women's issues deserves discussion regarding the feminist movement, in all its forms. Despite many young women of today displaying a fear or lack of understanding of the movement, it is necessary to discuss the appreciation and development of its successes. In terms of post-feminism there was a "conceptual shift within feminism from debates around equality to a focus on debates around difference" (Brooks, 1997, p.4). The fear or lack of connection with the feminist movement on behalf of young women does not infer a total misunderstanding of the movement. "One measure of feminism's success over the past three decades is that women's gender consciousness- our self-awareness as women- is extremely high" (Hogeland, 1994). This in turn reflects upon a general celebration of women's difference as a form of women's empowerment.

The feminist movement encouraged women to explore their diverse capabilities, strengths and desires in a world that was predominantly controlled and regulated by men. The most beneficial factor that feminism provided (from a young woman's perspective living in the twenty first century) is that the feminist movement encouraged young women to explore their own strength of voice. Much change was seen including as "expansion of the self- an expansion of empathy, interest, intelligence, and responsibility across differences, histories, cultures, ethnicities, sexual identities, othernesses" (Hogeland, 1994).
In the case of this exegesis with correlation with the creative work, “Girl du jour”, I have to disagree with the generalisation of some points raised within feminist texts. This is evident with particular reference to young women and pregnancy.

Intimate relationships become the testing ground for identity, a reality that has enormously damaging consequences for teenage girls in particular (the pressures both toward and on sex and romance, together with the culturally induced destruction of girls’ self esteem at puberty, have everything to do with teenage pregnancy) (Hogeland, 1994).

Teen pregnancy and motherhood explored throughout “Girl du jour” is a celebration of a teenage mother who states herself, that her babies, her children “are the making of me”.

Theorist Faludi suggests that “the media is saturated with images of miserable single women, evil career women and happy mothers who are content to turn their backs on the world of work” (Hollows, 2000, p.191). Despite evidence of this statement holding truth, Hollows infers that the idea of women staying at home to be a mother is a negative portrayal of femininity. In the creative case study that I have conducted, many of the women in the study would have ended up in a negative space without the opportunity to live this stereotype.

At the inception of the feminist movement, previous generations of today celebrated liberation and the ideals expressed by the greater movement. “Younger women claimed to be restricted by what they considered to be prescriptive attitudes on how women should experience their sexual identities” (Phoca & Wright, 1999, p.170). The rise of the post-feminism movement saw the celebration shift to an appreciation of difference and in turn, expression of one’s body and the empowerment of a sexual identity.

Development of a sexual identity holds great importance in the general construction of a woman’s intimate and social identities. There are many degrees and stages that encompass the multifaceted construct of a sexual identity. “Post feminism invites women to explore the complexities inscribed in the construction of the sexual subject” (Phoca & Wright, 1999, p.171), which in turn extends into the development of an ideal sexual persona. The post-feminist movement allowed women to explore their identity with an emphasis upon difference, which in turn retained “a desire for empowerment without telling women how to experience their sexuality” (Phoca & Wright, 1999, p.171). With reference to the series of self-portraits depicted in the introduction, Girl du jour explores the notion of sexuality in terms of body image, and how the female body
is seen as a vehicle for identity that is consistently being analysed in an attempt to improve and in turn create a form of empowerment.

(self-portrait – Girl du jour)

In the modern world of today, young women are experiencing the creation of identity on many levels that cohere with the material world and commodity culture. The theory of exhibitionism explores the female body as a sight for desire as well as a stage for feminine performance. “Modern femininity requires a degree of exhibitionism, or at least a willingness to display oneself as a decorative object” (Greenfield, 2005). This display is a form of empowerment as the female general and sexual identity can be celebrated.

Young women and Feminism.

In terms of feminism and young women living in the current state of Australia’s society and culture, there is less concern for issues surrounding women’s liberation. In saying this, for women in older generations, it is understandable that young women have been a long standing problem for political science in terms of their distance from formal politics...[and] also emerged as a problem for those with progressive agendas who were looking to young women to articulate a commitment to social change (Harris, 2004, p.135).

Unfortunately, in terms of current feminist movements, there is a level of understanding and appreciation upon the young woman’s behalf, but little internal need to commit to formal politics. This may or may not be due to a fear of politics, or again a lack of understanding regarding the feminist movement and it’s motivations. In my opinion, this may be due to less thought and emotion allocated to concerns of traditional feminist movements, as many young women today tend not to compare themselves and their actions to their male counterparts. This may be both a negative or positive act.
As a young woman living in today's society I feel less inclined to argue about equality, and women's liberation because I feel that the early feminist movement reached a point for women as a whole. I do agree however, that there needs to be a level of maintenance. Harris discusses young women and feminism and states that "it was assumed that young women were silent on key feminist issues either because they felt they already had everything, or because they were too deeply troubled to find a feminist voice." (Harris, 2004, p.135). I believe that the answer is simpler, young women have a voice, but are finding other avenues to use it.
Women’s Issues.

Body Image.

The pressures placed upon the young women of today to conform to societal and cultural forms of beauty, is forever evolving. The largest concern that women need to address is the desire of thinness. “Twentieth century capitalism includes the diet, beauty, cosmetic, fitness, and health industries. Along with modern patriarchy, it continues to control women through pressures to be thin.” (Hesse-Biber, 1996, p.26). Young women are faced with imagery that focuses upon the ideal woman’s body, much of which is strongly concerned with physical appearance. The dangers of eating disorders and mental illness will forever be on the increase so long as such imagery is regarded as the norm, and socially accepted form of beauty and womanliness. As depicted in *Girl du jour*, the exploration of thinness and the ideal body image is constantly enhanced by the outer influences of the media. Many young women experience an intense drive to attain their desired body image, to fulfil the sense of lack or unhappiness they experience.

![Self-portraits - Girl du jour](https://example.com/self_portraits_girl_du_jour.jpg)

The cause of many young women’s eating and image disorders refers directly back to what society deems as an ideal female body. Every body will not fit neatly into a single prototype. Suggesting that it should leads many young women to form an ideal self that may not necessarily conform to what is desired or accepted within their own peer groups. The influence upon this concept of the ideal body image occurs in many ways, but “the cultural mirror is more influential than the mirror reflecting peer group attitudes...women overestimate how thin a body their male and female peers desire.” (Hesse-Biber, 1996, p.32)
Influences upon what is to be considered the ‘right’ or ‘perfect’ body image are depicted through imagery delivered through various forms of media, are delivered to viewers everyday, regardless of gender differences. “The vast range of dieting, slimming, exercise, cosmetic and body maintenance products are advertised as a means of ‘preserving’ the body” (Phoca & Wright, 1999, p.74). Advertising purports the mainstream version of an acceptable body image through various products and services, and calls for consumers to take control and adhere to this, more often that not, unattainable result. “Consumer culture markets the concept of self-preservation by offering products which will combat physical deterioration and decay” (Phoca & Wright, 1999, p.74).

Eating disorders, depression and self-esteem with reference to a young woman’s identity can be strongly linked to the absence of a strong feminist movement as discussed by Chernin. Her theories surrounding eating disorders and a women’s identities, with reference to their lack of struggle as women in society because “the battle today is less pitched, less militant, less tangible” (Chernin, 1985, p. 60). Thus the ‘struggle’ is turned backward onto themselves and consequently will be “stricken with a form of survivor guilt” (Chernin, 1985, p. 60).

Magazines that are designed and produced to collectively influence and guide a women’s identity not only offer a point of self-evaluation in terms of accepted versions of femininity, but act as a point of identification with each readers desire to exhibit the ideal body in all its forms. The ideal woman as a whole and complete being is depicted on the glossy pages, whether it is attainable, maintainable or not. “In promoting a cult of femininity, these journals are not merely reflecting the female role in society; they are also supplying one source of definitions of, socialisation into, that role.” (Hesse-Biber, 1996, p.29)

The concept of the women’s magazine as a bible for successful self-development has seen many women explore identity through the use of fashion and thus a societal development and acceptance of beauty. “Fashion provides a range of already sanctioned codes for coherence and recognition to be cited by the girl in pursuit of identity” (Driscoll, 2002, p.245). It is through these representations of accepted ‘beauty’ that an infiltration of ideas and concepts contribute to a female’s idea of an ideal body, and is also a driving point for the fulfilment of the ideal self.
Advertising, the media, women’s magazines are just a few of many influential factors influencing the ideals experienced by young women in their creation of the ultimate body or identity. The emotional bond evident between a woman and the material world correlates strongly with her desire to fulfil a lack experienced both physically and emotionally. “Girl’s emotional and physical development has become inextricably linked to the commercial world... and the costly decoration of the female body have made girls easy targets for the advertising industry” (Greenfield, 2005).

As a means of expression and exploration of popular culture, fashion photography “does not represent the reality of a given time and society... but an ideal image that society has of itself, and in reflection of its preoccupations and anxieties” (Moneera-Laennec cited in Wilson & Moneera-Laennec, 1997, p. 81). There is an understanding between woman and fashion images that not only establishes the ground for self evaluation and comparison, but calls for an interpretation of popular culture, and the position of a cultured understanding of ‘beauty’.

Since the inception of fashion photography and women’s media, the notion of the female model as a beauty icon for women to base their own desires upon has been developed. Initially the development of fashion only inferred a positive response from the male’s gaze.

The idea of a woman as a mechanical (and thus reproducible) realization of man’s desires remained merely implicit in fashion photography, which functioned much more intuitively in conveying an image of what was up-to-date, glamorous and modern.” (Moneera-Laennec cited in Wilson & Moneera-Laennec, 1997, p. 83).

Fashion influences both external and internal desires of many women. The world of gloss influence’s the desire for beauty, thinness and success. The presentation through the media in vehicles such as advertising sees many women desiring presentation that will fulfil both their own gaze upon themselves and in turn the positive gaze of the male.

Fashion is a form of self-expression and infers a certain trait or trait that the individual wished to express as an element of identity. “Clothes frame the body and separate it from others... we still use clothes to show how we perceive our bodies and how we wish to be perceived by others” (Cavallaro, 1998, p.27). We are able to explore identity and “fashion tells us that our bodies can stand out as special and unique at the same time as
it fosters uniformity” (Cavallaro, 1998, p.27). Body image portrayal and a form of conformity to a specific identity occurs through the use of visual expression of fashion. As depicted in the fashion chapter of Girl du jour, the notion of fashion as a form of identity expression is inherent in the everyday living and performance of many young women’s lives.

(Bree and Ewa – *Girl du jour*)

Motherhood.

All women are not mothers; some cannot be, some are too young or too old to be, some choose not to be, and for some who are mothers, that is not necessarily the rallying point of their politicisation. (Butler cited in Evans, 1995, p. 136).

From the moment a woman reaches puberty, she is able to grow and birth a child. The notion of motherhood refers to the development and maintenance of the relationship between mother and child. A woman must learn to become a mother, “roles change in the course of one’s life; the daughter becomes a wife, a mother, and then a mother to her own mother” (Esders, 1996, p. 9). These relationships develop through learning and improvisation. Motherhood is a development of a woman into a mother.

The self-concept of a woman can dramatically change with the birth of her child. The self-concept of a mother can differ greatly from that of a non-mother in terms of womanhood. “Changed responsibilities and relationships mean that when a woman becomes a mother, new definitions are included in her self-concept” (Phillips, 1991, p. 29). This entails the woman handing over her mind, body, emotion and responsibility to the child in order to effectively walk the path of motherhood. In the creation of *Girl du jour* I have explored the drastic changes that occur to a woman’s body that are intrinsic with the nature and process of pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood.
The importance of the mother-child bond stems deep into the development of the child's character. "The relationship with the mother and the role [of the child] provide emotional gratification important to psychological well-being" (Baruch & Barnett, 1983, p. 605). The well being of a child, and with specific reference to the daughter, shapes and defines who she will become as a woman, thus influencing her ability to become a mother.

"Much of the process of becoming a person involves taking on board verbal and unspoken messages about ourselves and interpreting and acting upon them" (Phillips, 1991, p. 39). It is here that a parent must play the most significant role, especially in middle childhood when learning can take place at an optimum level. A child's instinct will be to look up to their parents, and with relation to the mother child bond, the mother plays the most dominant role in terms of helping to shape self-concept. This is particularly evident in the mother daughter bond as "daughters identify with their mothers and do not necessarily want to escape their mothers in the way that boys do under patriarchy" (Phillips, 1991, p. 39).

The ability of a woman to mother a child is a task in itself, but to remove her character of a woman into a mother is life altering. The reasoning behind this transformation strongly correlates with the notion of identity as a female. In terms of parenting and a mothers relation with her child, often "mothers identify more strongly with female infants, seeing them more as extensions of themselves...but she is also less nurtured, since the mother projects upon her own daughter her own ambivalence about being a female" (Hirsch, 1981, p. 206).

A mother offers her child a basis for both learning and comfort. "For children of both sexes, of course, the mother is viewed in both research and clinical literature as the most
important figure in the child’s life” (Baruch & Barnett, 1983, p. 601). The connection evident between mother and child in a large majority of families is that based upon emotion and a deep, inner connection developed through the act of birth. Despite relationships with the father possibly being able to be on the same level, a mother is the nurturing figure of most families.

In terms of documentation and exploration of this learnt bond,

accounts of the mother-daughter bond are the most articulate and detailed expressions of its intimacy and distance, passion and violence, that we can find; they are the most personal and at the same time the most universal (Hirsch, 1981, p. 204).

There is an intrinsic knowledge of the bond once you become aware of the relationship between yourself and your mother. Despite the myriad of differences inherent within each set of mother and child, there is a knowledge and understanding of the bond shared. This however does not always constitute a positive relationship.

The relationship between mother and child, developed over time is a bond that contributes to the shaping of the child’s sense of character and self. A positive and grounded self-esteem is imperative to this process. “Self-concept is the way we see ourselves...[and] it involves a sense of personal continuity through childhood, adulthood and old age” (Phillips, 1991, p. 25). Self-concept is a taught process of understanding of one’s self, and is inferred through relationships with not only our mother and immediate family, but from feedback from the outer world. The response from others intimately and publicly influences the design of one’s identity.

The bond between mother and child is by no means definable in nature. The behaviour between the two varies grandly amongst each family. A notion of what may be universal within this relationship can be defined through Esders assumption that “when face-to-face with one’s mother, it is impossible to cheat” (1996, p. 8).
Autobiographies, Biographies and Diaries.

It is important to refer to the theory of psychoanalysis when discussing the notion of self-identity as most of the levels of understanding of self are drawn from "psychoanalytical theory [which] suggests that images, through offering points of identification, offer fantasy resolutions for subjective angst" (Wells, 2004, p. 288). It is through these points of identification that we as individuals are able to construct our lives, as moments of anxiety are able to be overcome with the power of imagination and correlation with the imagery suggested. This helps with the construction of autobiographies/biographies, as the documentation can be used for both an informative nature, as well as an aid in construction of identity.

Sigmund Freud made claims that there is in fact no such thing as biographical truth. However, much of Freud’s autobiographical writing is contained in disguised form in his psychoanalytic writings, especially those on dreams: ‘his dreams contribute an extraordinary meta-autobiography alongside conscious biographical data’ (Wilson, 2005, p. 155).

It is clear through the representation of particular aspects of psychoanalysis that any form of biography falls into the theories surrounding character and self-identity. Wilson states, “biographers routinely considered the subject’s childhood and family relationships, with an especial focus on character, internal conflicts and hidden motives” (2005, p. 155).

The theory of autobiographies and biographies as a means of understanding the self enables both academic and creative articulation of the self. The subject in question is able to draw upon their own reflections in an attempt to articulate their own life, and how they fit into a specific identity. Through both textual and visual exploration an exploration and perhaps definition of the self can be conducted. Many women discussed in the text ‘Women’s life writings’, explore the notion of extended diary taking and “sought an understanding of [themselves]...in the world of life-writing.” (Coleman, 1997, p. 1). With the favouring of a visual perspective, photographer Nan Goldin explores her life with the intention of exposure and she describes much of her work as; “the diary I let people read” (Goldin, 1994, p.6)
Gillian Armstrong, in her documentary *14s good, 18s better* (1983), explores the lives of a select group of women and their paths throughout daily life. Armstrong’s documentary echoes elements of a women’s diary with an exploration of three young female’s lives and their thoughts, aspirations, fears and plans for the future. The documentary explores elements of contemporary biography teamed with intuitive interview techniques on Armstrong’s behalf. As a viewer, Armstrong’s presence is felt, and highly beneficial to the prompting and guidance of the young females, and in turn a level of understanding toward the decisions and thoughts made upon the girls’ behalf.

In exploring autobiographies as a means of narration, it is important to discuss self and identity. The self-portrait is not only a form of self-expression, but also of self-discovery. Many female artists have utilized this form of art as a means of breaking free from constraints placed on them by society. This was evident in the women’s surrealist movement of the 1930s.

In offering some women their first locus for artistic and social resistance, it became the first modernist movement in which a group of women could explore female subjectivity and give form (however tentatively) to a feminine imaginary (Chadwick, 1998, p. 5).

To reveal oneself to the world in all intimacy is a brave and challenging act. In keeping a diary a woman is able to explore the discomforts, conflicts, aspirations and desires of her life in a form that can be constantly returned to for re-evaluation. The greatest attribute a diary can offer to a woman, is a chance to “engage with the psychic reality of our lives” (Jobling, 1997, p. 8). In combination with the photographic medium to thus create a photo-diary, this project not only explores the everyday meaning of “female activity but transform them aesthetically and expand them ideologically” (Jobling, 1997, p. 8).
Girl du jour – My practice.

Girl du jour – girl of the day is an exploration with the motivation of exposing the intimacy, and beauty of a small group of women’s lives. As a photographer, I am predominantly concerned with the depiction and representation of the human subject. In documenting some of the members of my own friendship group, I was able to not only learn more about the lives of these beautiful women, but also about myself. I am concerned with the real, the everyday and the intimate. I draw inspiration from the small things in everyday moments in life, the things that I treasure and the things that I love.

It is evident that in a post-modern world, which questions traditional notions of truth, documentary photography no longer assumes a role as a bearer of fact. In a post-modern spectrum the “subjective representation acknowledges that there are other processes at work, especially that photography is a process of narration” (Radich, 2001, p. 12). ‘Girl du jour’ is an exploration of women’s lives both intimate and public, and most importantly the emotive stories they have to share.

In order to understand the narrative form, and how effective readings and understanding takes place, it is important to make reference to the practices of looking. “Whenever we look at a photographic image we engage in a series of complex readings” (Clarke, 1997, p. 27). These readings allow us, as individuals, to make sense of the world around us. They involve a level of cohesion that is a reflection made upon the image, interpreted with relation to elements such as our value systems, beliefs, cultural background, and then transposed back again to influence our own understanding and point of view. This process is extremely important when discussing the narrative form with relation to the viewer as a decoder of a message, as the aim of the narrative is to gain some level of engagement and response on the viewer’s behalf.

In order to efficiently explore narrative and the art of storytelling, text should be, on some level incorporated as a contribution to the reading of the photo-narrative. This enables the reader to still engage on a personal level with the narrative whilst incorporating the photographer’s intentions, thoughts and aspirations relevant to the reading of the piece. “Text and image, intricately entangled in a narrative web, work in collaboration” (Hirsch, 1997, p. 4) to tell the story not only of the motivations fuelling the photographer’s desire to record, but of the moments of life presented. Girl du jour
offers an intimate insight into each of the young women's lives from my perspective as photographer, whilst incorporating the women's personal perspective by incorporating hand written quotes along side the photographic representation.

**The Snapshot Aesthetic.**

*Girl du jour* explores many realms of the photographic medium, utilizing many styles. One of the dominant stylistic devices used within the areas of photojournalism and documentary, use a snapshot aesthetic. This style allows myself as photographer to capture my subjects with the intimate nature that many people employ to capture their friends and family. The ‘snapshot’ allows small moments of beauty to be captured, instantaneously, inferring that the performance of each life can be explored as a visual diary, the story of a life.

“A snapshot implies something that is shot or captured instantaneously” (King, 1986, p.1) in a momentary experience of acknowledgment. The intimacy experienced of taking photographs of family and friends is at the forefront of the creative exploration depicted in *Girl du jour*. Documentary photojournalism encompasses the main themes of the work with a strong emphasis upon the usage of the ‘snapshot’. “Almost all snapshots are made with personal and documentary objectives foremost in mind” (King, 1986, p.132) and form the basis of captured memories and the extension of story telling.

Snapshots require the photographer to “intuitively...recognize an order- of rhythm, pattern and movement- that is in equilibrium the moment they click the shutter” (King, 1986, p.150). It is in the instance of capturing the moment in front of the camera, that the photographer cognitively acknowledges the ‘everyday’ presented before them, compassionately freezing the moment as a point of recognition.

Despite the previous belief that a snapshot was an amateurish attempt at utilizing the photographic form, “snapshots have, in the last decade, challenged the fundamental idea and criteria of conscious photographic creation as an art form” (King, 1986, p.132). As a result, photographic exploration has extended this notion and continues to enhance the aesthetic form of the snapshot, which allows for the intimacy of the form to be respected as a legitimate stylistic device.
Influential Women photographers.

Women photographers were described as using the form of photography for diverse and personal reasons that were often motivated to record specific moments, rather than with the intention to captivate (Williams, 1991, p. 26). The notion of commenting on a social issue or concern is of paramount importance in practicing documentary photography, and is extremely relevant in the case of discussing women’s autobiographies/biographies in order to establish a level of education and in return acknowledged understanding on the viewer’s behalf. *Girl du jour* is motivated by personal and intimate feelings associated with photographing a group of friends. The most important factor of my creative work is that the women depicted have followed a friendship through many years, and experiences, and maintain contact even after their paths have strayed from each other’s.

Christina Broom was an early contemporary photographer of the 1900s paving the way for female documentary photography. Her photography “did at times make interesting incursions into topical women’s issues” (Williams, 1991, p. 30). Broom and other leading women documentarists of the time focussed on the everyday lives and feelings of other women, experiencing the war. They focussed not on heroism, but upon strength of character. Women such as Broom have influenced women photographers in exploring compassionate photography focusing on capturing the ‘small moments’.

The work of Ana Casas Broda is evolutionary in its depiction of women’s self-portraits as a means of expressing self-identity. Broda explores the form of delicately placing her own image in amongst that of her life, which continues on around her. Her work explores the notion of the family album and how these happenings help to define character. The process of self is discovered through an evaluation of Broda in relation to the other women in her life. Broda uses text effectively and seamlessly and often includes handwritten segments. As in *Girl du jour* I have also included handwritten quotes to place emphasis upon the biographical nature.
The most influential aspect of *Album*, in relation to the creation of *girl du jour*, is the series of self-portraits of her mother (taken herself) in the reflection of mirrors. Broda’s inclusion of her mother’s photography is inspirational in that it explores family history and her personal influences. Images of others which partial or all of their reflection are also included, taken by Broda herself. This concept also relates greatly to my own work, as I consistently use mirrors for representations of my subjects and myself. I have made a strong connection with Broda’s photographic and design styles, and have also incorporated many self-portraits in the exploration of my own identity. The publication is in Spanish, so it is solely the imagery that I am concerned with and draw inspiration from.

The most important aspect of documentary photography to note is that “documentary photography and photojournalism set out to record our relationship to the world and each other.” (Murray cited in Spence & Solomon, 1995, p. 112). A connection is noted between photographer and the world in front of the camera. This is to say, that what is documented, is on some level, an interpretation, a statement about the world which not only means ‘something’ to the photographer, but for the viewer for which the image is intended. “If the documentary photograph wants us to accept it on the terms in which it is given, then it equally needs to be looked at in relation to the way it was taken” (Clarke, 1997, p. 165).
My Perspective.

Me: Body Image and Identity.

The introduction to *Girl du jour* initially begins with two images of my friendship group taken almost ten years ago. An introduction to the town of Albany is also made, as this is the space and environment that many of the women in this case study grew up in. My introduction explores the idea of body image in terms of self-evaluation of the internal and external body. The mind, the spirit and the physical being. Emotional concepts of physical appearance are made with a series of self-portraits in the reflection of mirrors to represent the extremely personal approach of analysing one’s self on a daily basis.

Women’s Issues.

Self-Portraits – The physical body.

A woman’s physical body is more often than not the driving force behind her actions, character and portrayal of identity. In the introduction and chapter that represents myself, I touch on the notion of body image in terms of ‘thinness’, ‘diet’ and the desire to obtain a body that will fulfil the lack experienced by the reflection of one’s body in the mirror.
Lauren: Depression – Drowning.

The underwater, fashion orientated shoot with Lauren was constructed in order to discuss the concept of teen depression by utilizing the metaphor for drowning. My intentions were to depict the seriousness of a teen mental illness and the affect of it upon a young woman’s identity without getting too heavy or ‘dark’ with the photographic imagery.

Case Studies.

Xanthe: Teen Diabetes.

Xanthe’s study makes reference to a young woman living into today’s society with diabetes. My intention with Xanthe’s chapter was to explore the notion of character, and how factors that could potentially be devastating to a young woman’s identity and sense of self, are overcome and dealt with. Despite what may be considered an obstacle, Xanthe has managed to maintain the strength and vivaciousness that I have always known her to uphold. The juxtaposition of images concerning the clinical nature of diabetes and Xanthe’s social life, are to infer the seamless nature of her character, and her natural and admirable sense of self.
The motherhood encompasses both symbolic and realistic representations of what motherhood entails for a young woman living in today’s society. Jess represents the new mother and the beauty and elegance of the pregnant woman. She also depicts the anticipation of the arrival of her new baby and with the reflection upon identity, the space between new performances of character. The shift between young woman and mother.

Tracy is the extension of the symbolic representation and throughout her chapter I have tried to explore the hectic nature of motherhood, with the inclusion of many events that occur within her every day living. Tracy also fulfils the representation of positive self-evaluation and the creation of new identity through life experiences that form new ideals and desires. Her survival of character is inspirational and she has become an amazing mother and woman through the meeting of her fiancé and the birth of their children.
Rox represents the fairy tale of meeting a life partner, in this case a meeting of fate, and preparing for a life and a future together. Her story is about the meeting of a life partner and the journey encountered along the way. In portraying this I photographed her new environment, on her fiancé's farm, and their engagement party. The chapter explores her plans and aspirations for the future, and the possibilities that may arise for herself and partner Dave, namely having children after their marriage. Rox also represents the young women in society that broaden their horizons through travel, before settling down. Her life experiences and achievements have lead her to where she is today, and have strongly influenced her sense of self. She has reached a point in her life where goal setting is attainable through the relationship she has formed and the young woman she has become.

(Roxy - Girl du jour)
Rosie: Body image.

The studio application applied to Rosie’s shoot allowed me to explore the classic visual representation of the female body and how beauty cannot always fit in to the stereotyped version presented via the media. Despite the realization that many young women aspire to obtain the ‘perfect’ body, Rosie represents a large majority of women who may want this desired body image but are not driven to change their bodies. They are comfortable and happy with the skin they are in. Rosie represents the young woman who is not only confident with her body and identity but unique in representing her raw and natural beauty. Rosie’s voluptuous curves and effervescent nature are inspirational and extremely relevant in the depiction of young women and body image, as she breaks the mould for modern stereotyped conformity to body image.

(Rosie - Girl du jour)
The main objective of the fashion shoot with Ewa and Bree was to explore the notion of identity through the development of the physical body. This entails clothing, make up and body language, but also the internal desire to fulfil the requirements of what is to be a young woman living in today's society. Society of today, especially within the Australian culture of fashion and trends being exposed through women's magazines, pushes a level of conformity of body image and physical appearance.
Conclusion.

The practice of discussing life through the visual representation of photography offers a venue for the construction of narrative. Opinions relevant to self-expression, the formation and performance of identity, social awareness of issues and ideals presented regarding young women's issues, are effectively voiced and discussed. In reference to the creative thesis *Girl du jour*, the exploration of the intimate group of select young Australian women, has allowed myself as a photographer, and a woman, to express such issues. The concerns, aspirations and goals of these women, evident in everyday life are also explored. The investigation of each of the women's private and social environments is at the forefront of this enquiry as each habitat explores a different venue for identity. *Girl du jour* contemplates the stories and lives of the women in an attempt to reveal their performances of everyday life. The issues, concerns and aspirations felt by the group of what it is to be a woman in today's society are visually depicted, and theoretically discussed in an attempt to reveal and interpret the performances associated with young womanhood as a form of recognition.
References.


