“It could just as well be my body”

A posthumanist and phenomenological study of the becomings of an embodied female subject and her experiences of “fitting” and “misfitting” in relation to cosmetic body modifications

Linnéa Viktorsson Blom

Supervisor: Marie-Louise Holm Gender Studies, LiU

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Introduction

“Body modifications are important to me. Like, if you look at our society… If you read blogs or newspapers - wherever you look - there is always a slim, tall, fit girl with long hair, and I do fit into that.” (Quote one)

These are the words of my interviewee Andrea; in conventional ways of categorizing she can be described as a 22 years old white, heterosexual, and middleclass Swedish young woman living with her 27 year old boyfriend Filip and her cat Pixi who is - as Andrea describes - her spoiled princess and baby. She has worked with the elderly at a nursing home, and is presently working as a personal assistant to a young child.

Andrea, like every embodied subject, is constantly negotiating herself within the material and semiotic conditions she finds herself in and positions herself as a subject, and as we can tell from the quote above body modifications are important factors for her in this quest. In this, she is not alone. Especially for young women in the Western part of the world, the process of subjectification is characterized by an ongoing mediation of the cultural views on feminine beauty and so, cosmetic body modifications from make-up, manicures, breast or lip-enhancements, to fake eyelashes, are increasingly considered to constitute effective ways of facilitating the subject’s path to meeting the beauty standards (Garland-Thomson 2002: 12).

Thus, I find it intriguing to explore what a cosmetically modified female body can achieve regarding sociocultural status, and also to look into this issue from an intersectional perspective which entails taking into consideration how categorisations such as gender, ethnicity, sexuality and class constitute various power differentials, normativities and identity formations, which co-produce inclusion/exclusion, majoritising/minoritising etc. (Lykke 2011: 208).

Here the whiteness of Andrea emerges as an especially important factor, in consideration of British Professor of Race and Cultural Studies Sara Ahmed’s assertion that white bodies enjoy unlimited mobility which provides them with cultural status, something which facilitates their access to meeting the beauty standards of the West (Ahmed 2007: 154). Consequently, the beauty norms puts pressure on all bodies in our current Western society to “look good”, “be healthy”, “young”, “fit” and thus to be considered to be “normal”, and cosmetic body modifications is a way of “helping” a body to conform to the cultural standards, as American Women’s studies scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson highlights. (Garland-Thomson 2002: 5, 6). Especially young women are under a lot of pressure to “look good”, and to continue improving their appearance, something which, according to American
sociologist Kathy Davis, can be seen clearly in the sexualization of the female body by especially the media (Davis 1995: 48). On a daily basis we consume an enormous amount of advertisement, television-commercials etc. which target us and encourage us to consume beauty products, work out, and solve our bodily problems, promising us happiness as a result of this (Davis 1995: 20, 48). I too consume this type of advisement, as a young woman I also become affected and take part in the - in many ways - satisfying act of using cosmetic body modifications for the purpose of looking my very best. For example I would not consider going to the university or to work without make-up and styled hair. Thus, all embodied subjects are affected in different ways, but the lengths we are prepared to go in order to look our best vary. I have chosen to interview Andrea who goes to another length than me when it comes to cosmetic body modifications and technologically modifying the body by having cosmetic procedures done, as she modifies her flesh in ways where she is (also) using technologies performed by others on her body that she pays for, as for example lip-enhancements.¹

I want to explore how this young woman experiences and perceives herself, and how she reflects on how others might perceive her. In line with Italian/Australian feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti I will argue that there is a characteristic present in the act of entering into composition with cosmetic body modifications which Braidotti calls the *nomadic desire for change* and the perception of oneself as a process of transformation (Braidotti 2002: 84). It is accordingly the becomings of Andrea, that is to say, the infinite changeability, mobility and transformations of her, in connection with body modifications that is intriguing to me (Braidotti 2002: 70).

In this thesis I ask what are the effects of the cosmetic body modifications for Andrea in relation to the power that can be enjoyed by those who position themselves and are very often positioned as privileged subjects, as we can tell that Andrea does in view of the quote, and in which ways do they simultaneously constrain her? (Braidotti 2002: 21). One might intend to achieve a certain effect by engaging with cosmetic body modifications, but it is impossible to control how others might interpret your body, and therefore, I also want to explore how resistance towards and compliance with positioning by others can manifest itself.

Braidotti claims that the last thirty years of postmodernist and feminist debates has been characterized by the issue of being for, against, or undecided on the issue of the transitional nomadic subject (Braidotti 2002: 5). She asserts that issues of fragmentation, complexity and

¹ By this I mean non-permanent enhancements though the procedure of having for example restylane or juvederm injected into the lips, where the effect wears off after some time.
multiplicity should have become household names in critical theory by now; however according to her, there is still not consensus when it comes to the implications of the loss of unity of the subject (Braidotti 2002: 5, 6). Since the ‘so what?’ question is still open it is, according to her, central to find alternative figurations to express the contradictory subjects we are in the process of becoming. Braidotti points out that a focus on subjectivity strings together issues that are currently scattered across a number of domains, and that it is therefore necessary to focus on subject-formation since it is important in order to understand norms, values as well as social belonging (Braidotti 2013: 42). My thesis can be seen as a contribution to what Braidotti states as a quest to find new alternative figurations - which try to answer the ‘so what?’ questions regarding nomadic subjectivity (Braidotti 2002: 5, 6). In view of this Braidotti stresses the importance of exploring contemporary social and cultural phenomena while taking the point of departure in a nomadic understanding of subjectivity. Accordingly, I will in my analysis of the becomings of Andrea focus on the relation between cosmetic body modifications and the matter of fitting and misfitting. Fitting and misfitting are concepts developed by Garland-Thomson with the purpose of thinking through the lived experience of disability as it is situated in space and time, and it refers to the fact that a “fit” occurs when a functioning body interacts with an environment that sustains that body, and conversely, that a misfit occurs when the environment does not sustain that body (Garland-Thomson 2011: 591, 594).

It is important to point out here that I use these terms in a broad sense in accordance with Garland-Thomson’s definition of disability as a pervasive cultural system that cluster categories as varied as sick, deformed, crazy, ugly, old etc. that is, all of which disadvantage people whose bodies do not conform to cultural standards (2002: 5-6). In turn I use her definition of ablebodiedness, which refers to bodies that do conform to societal standards and thus are designated as beautiful, healthy, normal, fit, and intelligent etc. that is signifiers which provide privilege and cultural capital to those who can claim such statuses. Accordingly, my interviewee passes as ablebodied, but she also tells that she sometimes experiences that she is a misfit and thus a nonconforming body.

As the current Western society is characterized by an extensive use of and reliance on technologies, I consequently find it important, in the quest for alternative figurations, to bring a special focus on cosmetic body modifications in connection with fitting and misfitting, thus exploring the significance of the intra-actions between these cultural and technological
phenomena in the understanding of nomadic subjectivity (Braidotti 2002: 5, 6). I have found that in many of the studies on the becomings of embodied female subjects these intra-actions are not taken into account in an explicit way; instead they are placing focus upon issues such as the importance of images, media, sexuality and discourses. Thus, the analysis in this thesis contributes to this field by exploring this rather unexplored combination of cosmetic body modifications and fitting/misfitting as well as connecting them to the issues already established within the field. Moreover, Braidotti claims that it is important to bring out the creative and affirmative potential, that is, the positive effects of contemporary sociocultural phenomena, as well as being critical towards them and their effects, and with this comes additionally the view of desire as a potentially positive element (Braidotti 2002: 5, 22).

Rather than viewing desire as a negative or melancholic lack Braidotti thus emphasizes desire as an affirmative force that fuels the transformation of the subject (Braidotti 2002: 22, 52). In this positive mode, Braidotti raises questions regarding what kind of political and ethical agency this desiring embodied subject can be attached to. I hope that my thesis can offer possible answers to a few of those questions, or shed light on a few aspects of them, as I, in line with Braidotti, try to stress the important and original contribution that a non-unitary vision of the subject can make to critical theory with regard to the social, cultural and symbolic transformations induced by technological culture (Braidotti 2002: 5).

In line with this, I take Davis statement into account, that contemporary feminist scholarship on beauty for centuries has made a strong case for linking cosmetic body modifications to an analysis of femininity and power, and has consequently mainly focused on the oppression of women by the beauty ideals as well as beauty as a cultural discourse shaped by patriarchal views of women (Davis 1995: 54, 58). It has however, according to her, been less successful in finding appropriate ways of accounting for women’s lived experiences, their agency and the desire women feel towards having for example cosmetic surgery (Davis 1995: 5, 57, 58). I will thus aim to account for the lived experiences of the body by my interviewee Andrea and account for the affirmative and pleasurable aspects connected with having cosmetic body modifications since this issue has been marginalized within feminist theory.

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2 The concept of intra-action is coined by Karen Barad and widely used in specific ways; I myself use it to refer to what Lykke defines as the ‘interplay between non-bounded phenomena which interpenetrate and mutually transform each other’ (Lykke 2010: 51).
Aim and research questions

The aim with my Master’s thesis is then to conduct a study where I explore the becomings of an embodied female subject in connection with cosmetic body modifications and her experiences in relation to this of fitting and misfitting which are related to the dis/ability system. My aim is also to situate her in an intersectional context in addition to her own experiences as accounted by her as multiple social categorizations intra-act in the creation of dis/ability. I have in view of this aim chosen the following as my specific research questions:

- On the basis of Garland-Thomson’s notion of dis/ability, in which sociocultural contexts can cosmetic body modifications be understood as affecting the fit/misfit of Andrea?
- In which ways do the intra-actions of understandings of disability and ablebodiedness, experiences of fitting/misfitting, and cosmetic body modifications affect Andrea’s subject-formation as she narrates it in the interviews?
- In which ways can Andrea be understood as a becoming subject in relation to on the one hand her desire to position herself as a subject and on the other hand her resistance towards the sociocultural expectations of her?

Ethical reflections

Being a feminist as well as a political activist I have been used to being in a social context where having body modifications is often associated with being an objectified victim of a patriarchal culture. It was therefore initially a challenge for me to face up to my own preconceptions of body modifications by making interviews with Andrea and, in line with Braidotti, set out to also explore the positive sides of the sociocultural phenomena of body modifications.

Andrea did actually at one point ask me if I ever felt prejudiced about “girls like her”. Her question came out of curiosity, not anger or spite, but I was unprepared for this kind of confrontation, and I became quite uncertain about what I should answer. Instead of saying to her that I maybe am prejudiced sometimes, I answered that I do not categorise people, which in my milieu is considered to be the way one ought to relate to other people. It is hard to estimate what kind of impact my fleeting answer had at that moment; but in the thesis, however, I will attempt to incorporate my own feelings and reactions to Andrea’s narrations as a way of visualizing myself as a researcher and make myself accountable for my
interpretations. In any case Andrea’s question initiated a deeper reflection my behalf concerning my own ways of judging cosmetic body modifications and people who have them.

The contradictory feelings I had towards Andrea as well as my quest of bringing out positive aspects concerning cosmetic body modifications can, in accordance with Lykke, be described along the lines of disidentification (Lykke 2013: 3). Lykke defines this concept as a subject position that is located in-between identification and counter-identification, and so, this describes my situation very well as I simultaneously is formed by critical feminist understandings of the issue of cosmetic body modifications - especially those concerning modifying the flesh as Andrea does as she for example enhances her lips - and identifying myself as a woman who uses cosmetic body modifications which does not alter the flesh. In a passionately disidentificatory manner I could therefore to some extent identify with Andrea as I too personally like to look my best using various cosmetically modifying products, but on the other hand I experienced that her modifications of the flesh crossed a feminist boundary for me (Lykke 2013: 15).

Manicure for instance is not generally seen as a “hot-button” in feminist contexts, but altering of the flesh as for example lip-enhancements for some reason is. Thus, it interests me to find out what this - from the viewpoint of some feminists - provoking act, can offer the women who engages with it in a positive way. In view of this, with the goal of producing a nuanced image of this issue, I have been guided throughout the thesis process by the disidentificatory question: “How could I as a feminist researcher be in awe of this young woman’s beauty when at the same time I felt that she was a victim of a patriarchal culture?” I believe that this question reveals my own situatedness in this messy entanglement of subjectification, it shows that my own subjectification is at stake in the interview situation and in my engagement with analysing Andrea’s statements, and that it confirms that cultural discourses goes deep inside the body. I am not someone who is protected from cultural standards of beauty, norms or sociocultural discourses simply because I am a feminist researcher; they influence me and run through me and my body as well. I hope that my exploration of this issue can contribute to a nuanced feminist image of cosmetic body modifications, especially the ones that alters the flesh with the use of technologies, since this feminine cultural practice is highly questioned in some contexts. In the day and age that we live in, cosmetic alterations of the flesh becomes all the more widespread, and there is in my view a pressing need to explore the affirmative aspects of these issues as well as problematic and painful aspects, in order to understand the becomings of many embodied female subjects of today, and most importantly, show the agency of these women, which is often questioned
in some feminist contexts.

Consequently, the notion of disidentification is something I will bear in mind throughout the thesis as it will help me establish a position of the text which is multiple and mobile in its location rather than fixed in its standpoints (Lykke 2013: 1, 2).

Furthermore, in conducting the two semi-structured interviews with Andrea, I went with the British sociologist Letherby’s advice of thinking through space and place (Letherby 2003: 108). Letherby claims that conducting the research in the interviewees own space might make the interviewee feel a sense of control, something which can be good or bad depending on the topic of the interview. I myself felt that since Andrea is my only interviewee I wanted her to be as comfortable as possible to increase the chances of her talking freely and leading me as a researcher in fruitful directions, and so I decided together with Andrea that the interviews should be conducted in her home. This choice, argues Letherby, will almost certainly affect the research as it often prompts a temporary closeness something which I too experienced as Andrea and I sat and drank coffee at her kitchen table, talking comfortably almost like old friends (Letherby 2003: 108, 109). Aspects of my identity also affected the interview and the data I have collected as I - like Andrea - is socially categorised as a white woman in my twenties, who uses various cosmetic body modifications and enjoys discussing hair and make-up on a personal basis (Letherby 2003: 109). Thus, as Letherby asserts, the research relationship is jointly constructed, and this has according to her the implication that the researcher does not always have control of their own - or the interviewees - involvement (Letherby 2003: 115). This is something I experienced during the interviews, where I expected to be in control, but Andrea actually brought me out of balance sometimes, for example with her question concerning my personal stance towards “girls like her”, which made the involvement of her as an interviewee tangible for me.

As I conducted a second interview with Andrea, I also provided her with the opportunity of, in line with American sociologist Shulamit Reinharz, ask additional questions and give feedback (Reinharz 1992: 37). In doing so, Andrea expressed strong excitement concerning her accounts of her development from adolescence to grown up with regard to cosmetic body modifications; she understood these accounts as the most important in the interview. I myself placed more emphasis on, what Letherby explains as, what is said between the lines (Letherby 2003: 108, 109). I was thus highlighting for example the becomings of Andrea through her idol Swedish blogger Kenza Zouiten as well as her experiences of herself as she enters into and out of composition with cosmetic body modifications. I experienced it as challenging to explain from the phenomenological research perspective why I found these accounts by her to
be more relevant to my thesis, and here the power of me as a researcher came into view since I ultimately chose the themes discussed in the thesis. Andrea’s involvement in relation to her approval of the quotes chosen was important to me (Letherby 2003: 114). I felt a strong obligation towards her as she is my only interviewee and since my analysis will engage very closely with her as a person as well as show my understanding of her experiences of herself and her body.

I have thus followed Letherby’s ethical guidelines which entail guaranteeing complete anonymity and confidentiality, which according to her should only be broken in the case of the interviewee disclosing details of abuse (Letherby 2003: 108). I therefore provided Andrea with an information sheet (Appendix 2) in which I introduce the topic of the interviews and the thesis to her before performing the interviews. This has also been a way for me to attempt to place myself at a more equal level with her in my role as researcher, trying to explain the issue in an easily accessible manner, thus refraining from the authority that comes with using academic language. In this information sheet I also guarantee complete confidentiality and state that she as an interviewee has the right to approve of the quotes and the translations before they are published in the thesis, as well as view and approve of how they will be used in the thesis.

This is not to say that I take what Andrea says at face value; rather I will view Andrea’s narrations from the point of view of Haraway’s notion of partial perspectives (Haraway 1988: 583). Haraway defines this concept as entailing that the “knower” should aim for a partially objective understanding of reality that is based on situated knowledge and limited location (Haraway 1988: 583, 586). This has, according to her, the implication that the ‘god-trick’, which promises faceless knowledge from an objective knower who has a vision from everywhere and nowhere, is rejected as a practice which would not be ethically sustainable to perform by me (Haraway 1988: 584). Thus, I will view Andrea’s narrations as based on her partial knowledge from the point of view of her specific embodied subjectivity as a person actively engaging with cosmetic body modifications. This means that I will acknowledge that she has a valuable and unique insight in experiences of having body modifications which she articulates in her accounts in the interviews, while at the same time not viewing them as universal or true for everyone. As for myself as a researcher, the employment of the notion of partial perspectives allows me to become accountable and responsible for the knowledge that I produce (Haraway 1988: 579).
Previous research

It has turned out to be challenging to find previous research which concerns the becomings of a female embodied subject in relation to cosmetic body modifications, whiteness and fitting and misfitting from a phenomenological perspective, and so I perceive it as a rather unexplored field. It has however been rather easy to find feminist research concerning the different aspects independently from each other, or in combination with one or the other. The studies that I have found and which are relevant for my thesis are thus very diverse. This is something which I perceive as positive, since it gives me a chance to explore how different aspects of the becomings of embodied female subjects’ which have already been explored intra-act – and therefore bring something new to the field.

The studies I have found which concern a combination of the becomings of female embodiment, embodied experiences, body modifications, and/or dis/ability are set in a Western context, specifically America and the United Kingdom. As my thesis is conducted and situated in Sweden, I have searched for relevant Swedish research concerning the becomings of young women, and body modifications. To have access to former studies conducted in Sweden would facilitate my arguments concerning the sociocultural context that my interviewee Andrea is situated in, and it would also indicate which discourses concerning beauty and ablebodiedness that are prevalent in the Swedish society. In relation to my endeavor to find Swedish research related to my field, I have found that it is generally noticeable that this research has quite a different focus than the American and British counterparts.

I have found that Swedish research concerning embodied female subjects and subject formation to a large extent has focused on issues concerning the fundamentals of subject-formation. These issues focused on in Swedish studies thus involved mapping out - through qualitative as well as quantitative research - how sociocultural norms are interpreted by young people, and exploring which significance intersectional categories such as gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity etc. have in relation to norms and views on gender characteristics. Studies which I can mention in relation to this assertion are e.g. Anette Göthlund’s PhD project entitled Bilder av tonårsflickor: om estetik och identitetsarbete [Images of teenage girls: on esthetics and identity-formation], Carita Bengs Looking good: a study of gendered ideals among young people, and Fanny Ambjörnsson’s I en klass för sig: Genus, klass och sexualitet bland gymnasietjejer [In their own class: Gender, class and sexuality among high-school girls] (Göthlund 1997; Bengs 2000; Ambjörnsson 2003). The two first examples that I
mentioned as Swedish contributions to this field are carried out from a poststructuralist viewpoint while my interest lies in studying the same aspects but from a nomadic point of view. Furthermore, I have found that the context studied in these examples is rather different from mine considering the recent expansion and development of blogs, Twitter, Facebook and other media. I also find that their accounts are a bit out-dated in view of the extreme impact of for example blogs and other mass media which influence the current discourses regarding cosmetic body modifications in the West today.

Fanny Ambjörnsson’s study has been most inspiring for me of the three for my study since she explores the issue of “fitting” and “misfitting” in relation to cosmetic body modifications. I have in view of this found that the American and British studies related to my field have a broader focus and often take for granted that the fundamentals of intra-actions between sociocultural categories and norms have already been mapped out, and to a larger extent focus on how for example images, prosthetics, dis/ability, internet-forums etc. contribute to the becomings of female embodied subjects as well as the significance of power and resistance in relation to these processes. To sum up, I would say that the Swedish studies are based to a larger extent than the Anglo-American on analyses of discourses and an exploration of norms and gender characteristics.

I would therefore, like American professor of educational research Youngblood Jackson, claim that the Swedish research concerning the area of the becomings of embodied female subjects is based on a view that sociocultural categories such as class, gender/sex, or whiteness are possessing coherent essences that to some extent are regarded as predictable and recognizable, thus resulting in a “fixity” of discourses (Youngblood Jackson 2010: 580, 581). This might elucidate why I regard the studies conducted in Sweden as not highly relevant for the design of my study as there is, in my view a sense of fixity that is prominent in all the studies in relation to its approach to subject-formation and the way that the becomings of the subjects are approached. In contrast, the American and British studies, which often rely on Deleuzian theoretical frameworks, take on an approach to becomings of embodied female subjects’ that focuses on matter and which is nomadic and genealogical, and thus gives a more dynamic account of subject-formation. The American and British studies have been more significant for my thesis on the basis of this, and because a few of them are explicitly phenomenological. One researcher whose research concerns this problematic as well as phenomenology is American Professor of Political Science Iris Marion Young.

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3 I will go more into detail with regard of Ambjörnsson’s study later in this section.
Young is one of the most influential researchers who have made phenomenological studies of the social construction of female embodied subjects and female bodily experiences. Her essay *Throwing like a girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Mobility, and Spatiality* (Marion Young 1990: 142) is one example of her work which is relevant for my study. I would like to develop her perspectives further by combining it with Braidotti’s posthumanist perspectives of the becomings of subjects and the desire that in a posthumanist sense is the force that sustains the process of constituting a self. Consequently I hope that my study can contribute further to the field of research that concerns how young women experience themselves and the way they comport their bodies as I take my point of departure in posthumanism and focus on body modifications and dis/ability.

Furthermore, studies that have been of value to me as they concern a nomadic approach to the becomings of embodied female subjects involve firstly the recently conducted research by British sociologist Jessica Ringrose. Her journal article entitled *Beyond Discourse? Using Deleuze and Guattari’s schizoanalysis to explore affective assemblages, heterosexually striated space, and lines of flight online and at school* is central for my thesis as it brings up the issue of resistance in relation to the becoming of a subject (Ringrose 2011). Ringrose’s article centers around her exploration of young people’s (aged 14-15) engagement in a social networking site called ‘Bebo’ (Ringrose 2011: 600). Drawing on interviews and online data collected from these teens she uses Deleuze and Guattari’s schizoanalytic method to map out and consider complex social desire-flows which become apparent in school- and online-assemblages (Ringrose 2011: 598, 600). In investigating how desire and power operate in the relationships between these assemblages as well as how they affect bodies, Ringrose focuses especially on a case study with the white middle-class teen girl called Louise (Ringrose 2011: 600). She shows through her analysis of Louise’s case how discursive norms subjugate as well as how someone who, - like Louise, is discursively positioned as a ‘fat slag’ can fight back, and, as Ringrose assert, restage their identity in complex ways (Ringrose 2011: 598).

Ringrose’s article thus relates to my project as it provides an example of how resistance towards discursive positioning by others might emerge.

My work can thus be seen as contributing further to Ringrose’s analyses as my interviewee positions herself as discursively privileged, while she, at the same time, struggles to resist being “fixed” in a stereotypical position by using humor in complex ways. An important aspect of Ringrose’s article is furthermore that she applies Deleuzian-Guattarian tools to her analysis of discursive subjectification (Ringrose 2011: 599). In doing so she is thoroughly criticizing Butlerian takes on discursive subjectification which, according to
Ringrose, are based upon ‘discursive determinism’ since subjectivisation takes place through the ‘almighty symbolic’ thus failing to account for changes in the symbolic order.\(^4\) By bringing in Deleuze and Guattari’s theories of affect, Ringrose is able to think beyond what she refers to as the impasses of discursive determinism. Since I am using Braidotti’s nomadic take on subjectification to a high extent in my project, I accordingly find Ringrose’s article helpful as it shows how a nomadic take on discursive subjectification can be carried out by showing the unilinear becoming of a female embodied subject. Her article also provides me with tools for criticizing fixed discourses as I too, in my assertion of my interviewee as a nomadic subject, want to account for the fluidity of discourses. Another text which concerns this field of research is British sociologist Rebecca Coleman’s essay *The becoming of bodies: Girls, media effects, and body image*. It is relevant for my thesis as it concerns the relationship between bodies and images, something which is central for my analysis of my interviewee Andrea’s relationship to and intra-connectedness with Swedish blogger Kenza Zouiten (Coleman 2008: 163).

Through an analysis of two research projects which concern the different aspects of the relations between girls’ bodies and media images namely, one that focuses on girls’ experiences of body dissatisfaction and one that concerns the role of culture in girls’ perceptions of feminine ideals in teen magazines - Coleman argues from a Deleuzian point of view of becoming that bodies and images cannot be understood as separate entities, but rather as constituted through their relationality (Coleman 2008: 163).

This shifts the feminist theoretical understanding of bodies, from focusing on what effect images has on bodies to exploring how bodies become through their relations with images, thus raising questions regarding how bodies are experienced through images (Coleman 2008: 163, 164). Coleman’s essay consequently aids me in the endeavor to show the *agency* and *desire* related to having cosmetic body modifications, which I explore in accordance with Davis (Davis 1995: 5, 57). It does so as it broadens the feminist perspective from, as Coleman points out, the central theme of feminist empirical research which mainly considers how women respond to and feel about images which show Western cultural images of female bodies as white, young, thin, attractive, and heterosexual for example, and thus how young women’s bodies are vulnerable to the effects of such images (Coleman 2008: 164). By instead considering how bodies become and are experienced through images, a possibility for a more positive view of images and feminine ideals is opened up, and this allows me to account for

\(^4\) I myself do not consider Butler’s perspective to be irrelevant, but the Deleuze-Guattarian approach adds something different to an analysis, and this is what I am more interested in exploring.
Andrea’s positive outlook on how she experiences her body through Kenza Zouiten. I will, however, take into consideration elements of both critiques of effects of norms and explorations of positive sides of viewing images and feminine ideals throughout the thesis.

As much as Coleman’s explanation of the inseparability of bodies and images – which she calls ‘body-image’ – can be viewed from an empowering perspective in my thesis, it also, in accordance with Coleman, shows that women’s bodies often are both subjects and objects of images, thus indicating the relationality of body-image (Coleman 2008: 164, 175). A third relevant essay based on a Deleuzian point of view is Alecia Youngblood Jackson’s journal article Deleuze and the girl. Her essay explores the subject formation of the senior cheerleader Jessie and the ways in which she expresses her specificity in relation to the molar group of the cheerleaders.

In using ethnographic method as well as drawing on the Deleuzian concept of ‘becoming’, Youngblood Jackson works with the girl as an event and shows how Jessie expresses her singularity through her behavior as well as through how she is dressed and how she behaved during practice. In this way Youngblood Jackson demonstrates the singular and concrete forms that comprise the becoming of Jessie in relation to her struggle against the over-coded category of cheerleader. (Youngblood Jackson 2010: 579). Youngblood Jackson’s article is very much related to my project as she too employs the concept of becoming in the analysis of a young woman who is positioned as a subject belonging to a molar group, and explores the becoming of her. Her interviewee actively resists the subject position of the cheerleader; she claims that she just wants to take part of the sport without being subjected as an over-sexualized stereotype.

Youngblood Jackson’s article constitutes a useful example of how resistance present in the process of becoming can be analysed. However, as my interviewee is a bit more ambivalent in her resistance to being subjected as the ‘ideal girl’, I focus on her desire to position herself as an ideal girl as well as her resistance towards the position. Accordingly, my project can be viewed as further developing Youngblood Jackson’s take on the becoming of a subject positioned within a specific molar group. As I bring in phenomenology and analyse my interviewee’s ambivalent perception of herself along with how she can be viewed

5 The term body-image here does not refer to the phenomenological use of this term but to Coleman’s usage of the term which refers to how bodies and images cannot be seen as separate entities but rather as body-image as bodies can become through images.
6 Braidotti defines the term “molar” as referring to the line of being, fixity and identity (Braidotti 2002: 84). I will discuss this term further on page 22.
as dis/abled depending on the sociocultural context, I will be able to present a complex picture of desire and resistance.

With regard to resistance towards “fixed” discourses and categories concerning identity Israeli cultural researcher Limor Shifman and American media researcher Dafna Lemish’s essay *Virtually Blonde: Blonde Jokes in the Global Age and Postfeminist Discourse* has been useful for my analysis concerning the resistance Andrea demonstrates towards being positioned by others as their essay concerns the issue of the stereotypical image of “the blonde” (Shifman and Lemish 2012: 88).

Blondeness and in particular, the “blonde jokes” which can be found globally is the focus of their essay (Shifman and Lemish 2012: 88). They claim that the blonde jokes regard a stream of humor which in fact poses a scholarly challenge as it does not target an ethnic or racial group but rather, a group of women singled out because of their hair color. They claim that the descriptions of “the blonde” found in the blonde jokes globally portray the blonde as extremely intellectually challenged, promiscuous and stupid (Shifman and Lemish 2012: 89). In my thesis I do not compare my interviewee Andrea with the “dumb blonde”, portrayed in Shifman and Lemish’s essay, but there are aspects of this discourse which in my interpretation affect Andrea’s resistance towards how she believes how others might perceive her. Andrea makes jokes about herself, she voluntarily puts herself in the position of the “stupid blonde”, and this is something I will explore further in the analysis considering the claim of Shifman and Lemish’s that the discourse concerning “the blonde” in fact targets women in general and reduces them to consumerism and beautification (Shifman and Lemish 2012: 90, 91).

In relation to conducting a posthumanist study based on interviews, I have found that the journal article, *A Voice Without Organs: Interviewing in posthumanist research* by Education Studies scholar Lisa Mazzei is relevant to my study since it illustrates how a posthumanist stance enables researchers to materialize different considerations of data in qualitative research using Deleuze and Guattari’s concept, the *Body without Organs* (BwO) (Mazzei 2013). Mazzei’s article is important for my study as it shows how one can conduct a posthumanist analysis of interviews, and because it provides me with concrete tools regarding how one can make a posthumanist analysis of interviews. Her take on the ethical relationship between researcher and interviewee from a posthumanist perspective is also highly relevant for my study as she discusses the simultaneous becoming of the researcher and the

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7 Of course blondeness is also to a high extent racialized as it is specifically associated with being white in many contexts, however, the blonde jokes marks out a specific position within whiteness.
interviewee, and how their relationship influences the interview and the study (Mazzei 2013: 14, 15). I will, however, use the tools Mazzei present selectively as I will not use the BwO in order to include myself as a research subject since I believe that approach would make my analysis too abstract for a phenomenological study and perhaps make me lose focus on my research questions which concern the becomings of my interviewee in connection with cosmetic body modifications and her experiences of fitting and misfitting in relation to this.

Furthermore, with regard to relevant Swedish research relating to the issue of the becomings of embodied female subjects Swedish social anthropologist Fanny Ambjörnsson’s PhD project, which I mentioned in the introduction for this chapter, has been useful. Her doctoral thesis focuses on high school girls and is relevant for my project as it focuses on the becomings of embodied female subjects in connection with an overall intersectional perspective (Ambjörnsson 2003: 16).

Through ethnographic field work Ambjörnsson has studied two groups of girls attending two different high school programs, namely Barn och Fritidsprogrammet [The Children and Leisure program] and Samhällsprogrammet [The Society program]. In giving an insight into girls everyday life, their relations, their enforcing and re-generating of norms related to gender, class, sexuality and ethnicity, Ambjörnsson shows how the young girl is socioculturally constructed (Ambjörnsson 2003: 48, 49). Ambjörnsson is the only Swedish researcher I have found who focuses on fitting and misfitting, although in an implicit way; her research thus gives an insight into what makes someone fit or misfit in terms of cosmetic body modifications from a Swedish perspective.

Ethnicity and in particular whiteness in connection with cosmetic body modifications is moreover an issue which I explore in my thesis, as it is integrated in the overall intersectional perspective, but also in relation to Andrea’s relationship with Swedish blogger Kenza Zouiten. Consequently, Swedish historian Maja Larsson’s essay Om en kvinna som befunnits tillhöra genus masculinum: synen på kön, klass och sexualitet i 1800-talets medicin och kultur [About a woman who was found to belong to the masculine gender: the view of gender, class and sexuality in medicine and culture during the 1800s] explores views on science, culture, and essentialism with regard to gender, class and sexuality on the basis of the history of Bertha Dittlöf who lived in the 19th century - a woman who after her death was medically examined and found to belong to the masculine gender (Larsson 2006: 109).

Larsson’s description of the exotified Non-European woman has accordingly been useful in my analysis of my interviewee Andrea’s intra-connectedness and affiliation with Kenza Zouiten and in particular the exotification of Kenza by Andrea. Another study which has
been relevant for this same purpose is furthermore American historian Joan Jacobs Brumberg book *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls*. Brumberg’s book has thus been of importance for my attempt to map out the meaning and importance of whiteness, and in particular the desire for lightness of the skin of non-white women which I discuss in relation to the section of the analysis which concerns the affects of Kenza (Brumberg 1997: 77). Her book is situated in an American context and draws on diary excerpts and media images from 1830 to the present as it aims to explore what has happened historically to girls’ bodies’ thus providing an effective response to a predicament that most certainly will affect the prospects of young American women (Brumberg 1997: xxxiii).

**Theoretical perspectives**

**Nomadism and the becomings of the subject**

Rosi Braidotti is one of the most influential feminist philosophers of *sexual difference*; a term which she defines as the assertion of the importance of multiplicity that grants symbolic recognition to women’s way of being (Braidotti 2002: 59). According to her, this entails that materiality connects the subject to differences within, but also differences between himself and others, since the embodied female subject is situated in a space between precisely *transcendence*, that is, the outward bound aspect of the subject, and *immanence*, which refers to bodily materialism. Her notion of posthumanism is something I regard as central for my thesis as it, according to her, entails a tracing of a different discursive framework that is looking affirmatively on the subject as relational and framed by ‘embodiment, sexuality, affectivity, empathy and desire as core qualities’ (Braidotti 2013: 26). This notion, in conjunction with Braidotti’s Foucauldian definition of embodiment or bodily materiality as embodied subjectivity, elucidates my understanding of my interviewee Andrea as an embodied subject (Braidotti 2011: 188). She stresses here that in thinking about and representing the body, the term *radical* immanence, which means that one thinks through the body rather than in flight away from it is crucial to her understanding of issues of embodiment (Braidotti 2002: 5). In line with this, I also perceive Andrea as what Braidotti calls a relational subject, that is internally differentiated but still grounded and accountable, that is to say, entangled with the discourses of her sociocultural context (Braidotti 2013: 21, 49).

Consequently, Braidotti claims that she in building her own ‘brand of enfleshed materialism’, meaning her own take on embodied subjectivity, returns to the materialist roots of European philosophy. European philosophy is, according to her, strongly influenced by the French
tradition, which she refers to as the ‘materialism of the flesh’ school, which is stemming from the eighteenth century and continues into Lacan, Foucault, Irigaray and Deleuze (Braidotti 2002: 5, 15). She claims that this Continental tradition produces an alternative vision of the subject that gives priority to issues concerning sexuality, desire and erotic imaginary, and additionally provides tools that are useful in the endeavor to account for changes and transformations that are occurring in post-industrial societies (Braidotti 2002: 5).

In view of this, Braidotti’s own cartography builds on her reading of especially Deleuze and Irigaray. Firstly, Braidotti uses the Deleuzian concept of becoming which she defines as: the actualization, that is to say the effect or realization of a specific action, of the immanent encounter between subjects, entities and forces which affect each other in a creative manner (Braidotti 2002: 68). This notion of becoming is highly important for my thesis since it facilitates my analysis of my interviewee Andrea in relation to her immanent encounter with cosmetic body modifications and the effects and affects this encounter produces. Secondly, Braidotti employs Irigaray’s theory of sexual difference which entails that the feminine is redefined, away from the one-dimensional road of the Same, that is Man, which allowed for Woman, that is to say the European woman, to become the other to this Same, towards becoming the other of the Other (Braidotti 2002: 5, 26, 58). Specifically, Woman is redefined as a complex and multi-layered subject-in-process ‘a post-Woman embodied subject cast in female morphology’ (Braidotti 2002: 11, 12). Braidotti argues that there is a convergence between the nomadology of Deleuze and the sexual difference theory of Irigaray as they focus on a positive re-inventing of the subject, and on the basis of this notion she forms her own take of the nomadic subject (Braidotti 2002: 5). Her notion of the nomadic subject concerns the developing of alternative figurations of the subject, that is, materialistic mappings of embedded and embodied social positions (Braidotti 2011: 4).

I find that this take on nomadic subjectivity by Braidotti is highly useful in my thesis as it focuses on precisely the situatedness as well as embodiedness of the subject that is in the process of becoming. This is of great importance for my thesis since I want to explore Andrea’s narrations of herself as an embodied subject in connection with cosmetic body modifications in relation to the Western cultural views of feminine beauty. Braidotti namely claims that the process of becoming-subject requires sets of cultural mediation, and this makes it important for me to explore the material and semiotic conditions, that is, the institutional sets of rules and regulations as well as the forms of cultural representation that sustain them, which Andrea has to deal with (Braidotti 2002: 21). Braidotti points out here that subjectivity can be understood as a negotiation between desire and power, which she
describes more specifically as at once being willful choice and unconscious drives where power is negative – *potestas* - since it constrains, and simultaneously positive - *potentia* - since it empowers and enables (Braidotti 2002: 21, 22). This notion of power as *both* a constraining an enabling force is vital for my analysis of my interviewee Andrea as it provides me with tools for understanding the ambivalence that is present in her relation to her immanent encounter with cosmetic body modifications as well as regarding her ways of negotiating herself within the constraining Western norms for femininity.

Here two other terms which are central for my analysis of Andrea come into view, namely the Deleuzian concepts of *molar* and *molecular*. Braidotti explains that molarity is potestas in the form of fixity, being and identity, and so, I use this term in relation to how Andrea is positioning herself in connection with what can be described as the molar form of ideal femininity and its constraints as well as possibilities in regard of Andrea’s process of becoming (Braidotti 2002: 84). In turn, the molecular line is defined as that of becoming and nomadic subjectivity, and this term is thus important for my analysis as it leads me to understand the becomings of Andrea as affirmative lines of escape from the constraining fixity of molarity (Braidotti 2002: 84, 84). These two concepts also provide me with tools to analyse Andrea’s resistance towards fixity as she wants to escape constraining stereotypes for example, and become molecular.

Furthermore, Braidotti points out in relation to the cultural mediation of the subject, that desire is the very force behind the agency that she ascribes to the embodied subject, and so, desire constitutes a key concept in my exploration of Andrea’s perception of herself and the becoming of her (Braidotti 2002: 22, 99). Desire is namely the affirmative mode of becoming, that is, an actualization of the subject’s potentia due to its encounter with entities, forces as well as other subject’s that creates new possibilities of empowerment (Braidotti 2002: 68, 99, 135). In using the term ‘desire’ in this sense, I am thus able to account for the shifts in the becoming of Andrea on the basis of how encountering other entities affect her as for example specific cosmetic body modifications such as lip-enhancements, or other embodied subjects’ as Kenza Zouiten. As Andrea in her desire to encounter cosmetic body modifications can be regarded as viewing herself as a process of transformation, I am furthermore allowed to view her as becoming nomadic (Braidotti 2002: 84).

The fact that Andrea is entering into and out of composition with cosmetic body modifications has the implication that I can make an analysis of how she is becoming as a shifting, partial, complex and flowing subject who is in constant transit (Braidotti 2002: 86). Furthermore, desire connotes, according to Braidotti, the subject’s own investment and
entanglement in the network of interrelated social and discursive effects, and so this represents an important reference to the accountability of Andrea in terms of her positioning and understanding of herself and her sociocultural context (Braidotti 2002: 21, 146).

A materialist notion of phenomenology

American translator Donald A. Landers stresses that French phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s work *Phenomenology of Perception* is one of the most influential classic texts in twentieth-century philosophy (A. Landers 2014: xxx, xxxi). Influenced by Hegel, Christian existentialism -and later Sartre and de Beauvoir, phenomenologist Max Scheler’s notion of affective intentionality, as well as Heidegger’s phenomenological philosophy, Merleau-Ponty developed his own streak of phenomenology (Landers 2014: xxxv). Landers asserts that Merleau-Ponty’s streak, which is based on psychological and neurological studies in addition to these classical and contemporary philosophical reflections on perception explores the mind-body connection, that is, dimensions of experience that cannot be separated into mind/body dualism (Landers 2014: xxxi). Consequently, Merleau-Ponty explains that phenomenology is the study of essences, such as that of perception or consciousness, and that phenomenology fulfills the important task of placing these essences back within existence (Merleau-Ponty 2014: 7). Merleau-Ponty claims that this ‘returning to things themselves’ specifically concerns the issue of experience, thus implying that ‘we will find the unity of phenomenology and its true sense [sens] in ourselves’ (Merleau-Ponty 2014: 8, 9). One of the feminist philosophers who have been inspired by Merleau-Ponty is Australian Women’s studies scholar Elizabeth Grosz. As she highlights, the necessary interrelatedness of mind and body is the primary focus of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophical stance. She states that the body as it is lived and experienced and as it shapes one’s experience is what interests Merleau-Ponty (Grosz 1994: 86).

Grosz further explains that the subject is not separated from the world; the mind is embodied, and it is part of an ongoing lived experience where knowledge concerning the body only can be accessed through experience. This take on phenomenology resonates well with my usage of Braidotti’s notion of nomadic subjectivity, which emphasizes what she explains as the ‘radical immanence’ of the body, which involves thinking through the body, rather than in flight away from it (Braidotti 2002: 5). By employing phenomenology I can thus account for the lived experiences of my interviewee Andrea as well as illustrate how Andrea as a subject is embedded within a specific spatiotemporal context in which she experiences herself. This furthermore substantiates my choice of using a few long quotes by
Andrea which I analyse based upon the themes that I distinguish within the quotes, as this method allows me to go deep within Andrea’s lived and embodied experiences of herself.

Andrea is situated within the specific material and semiotic conditions of Western society, and she acts as well as negotiates herself within these conditions which she has to deal with (Braidotti 2002: 21). On the basis of this, phenomenology can help me analyse Andrea’s narrations of her perception of herself in the present moment as well as her general understanding of herself as it pays regard to this situatedness and embeddedness through the understanding of what Grosz describes as, the ‘being-in-the-world’ (Grosz 1994: 87). The body is the being-in-the-world, and it is thus the instrument by which all information and knowledge is received and meaning is generated. Grosz explains that for Merleau-Ponty, the body is not an object; rather it is the very condition through which one is able to have a relation to objects. This notion leads me to view Andrea’s narration of her experiences of herself in the interviews as snapshots; that is to say, recollections of moments when the encounter between subject, entities and forces intra-act and affect as well as exchange parts of each other in an ongoing process (Braidotti 2002: 68). These encounters drive the becoming of the subject, and so, in these snapshots where Andrea accounts for the way she perceives herself as she encounters various other entities and forces it also dependent on space and time.

A phenomenological perspective and approach can thus illuminate how Andrea’s subject formation is affected by the cosmetic body modifications as she narrates it in the interviews, by putting emphasis on how the perception of the world is particular to a specific body in a particular context. Since the body is the condition through which the subject is able to have a relationship to objects, Andrea can contradict herself in the various quotes as she has different experiences of herself depending on the interplay between the context and her experienced corporeality. In relation with the possibility for the subject to come into contact with reachable objects, Ahmed critiques Merleau-Ponty in her essay A phenomenology of whiteness, claiming that classical phenomenology regards motility and revolves around the utterance ‘I can’ (Ahmed 2007: 161). In view of this, Ahmed argues that for non-white bodies the ability to ‘do’ and expand is limited since race is a question of what is within reach, thus making it a phenomenology of ‘being stopped’ for non-white bodies who cannot enjoy the unlimited motility of whiteness (Ahmed 2007: 154, 161). This critique by Ahmed is unquestionably something that I need to bear in mind and also expand to also involve other intersectional categories that in various contexts can experience the phenomenology of ‘being stopped’, as for instance on account of the intra-actions between gender, age, sexuality, dis/ability, religion etc.
In line with this critique by Ahmed, Young also criticises the classical phenomenology by Merleau-Ponty in her essay *Throwing like a girl* by addressing precisely gender and specifically the female body comportment (Young 1990: 141). Young claims that the transcendence, that is to say, the subject’s openness to the world, of the lived body that Merleau-Ponty describes is in pure lived action (Young 1990: 148). This entails, according to her, a continuous intra-action with the capacities of the world, meaning that the subject incessantly acts upon the world. However, Young argues, this is not the case for the feminine bodily existence, which is overlaid with immanence, that is, the materiality of the body. In regard of this, Young criticizes that Merleau-Ponty locates intentionality in motility as the notion of ‘I can’ is not true for women. According to her, the feminine body underestimates and underuses its full capacity which leads to the projection of ‘I cannot’.

Firstly, I want to point out again, in consideration of this understanding of feminine body comportment by Young, that I rely on Braidotti’s notion of ‘radical immanence’ in the thesis when it comes to ways of thinking about and representing the body since it entails thinking *through* the body rather than viewing transcendence as the goal for the subject, which can be interpreted as suggested by Young in her critique (Braidotti 2002: 5). Secondly, I will include an intersectional view-point throughout the thesis as I will bear in mind Ahmed’s notion of being stopped as something which includes various intersectional categories, in which gender is included as an intra-acting category of identity. Thirdly, as I aim to conduct a positive analysis, in line with Braidotti’s quest to find the affirmative and creative potential of cultural phenomena, I will take into consideration the positive aspects of feminine bodily comportment in connection with cosmetic body modifications, thus avoiding what Davis explains as the non-affirmative feminist critique of cultural views of femininity and beauty as oppression (Braidotti 2002: 5; Davis 1995: 51).

Grosz also provides some positive aspects regarding phenomenology which on top of this critique by Ahmed and Young which entails its usefulness for feminist research such as my thesis (Grosz 1994: 94). She claims that Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological framework offers elements that may enrich feminist theory itself in view of the fact that he focuses on the body-subject and puts emphasis on lived perception and experience something which, according to her, resonates to a high extent with feminism’s contribution to knowledge production. Grosz furthermore argues that Merleau-Ponty’s unique position of giving primacy to experience provides crucial insights useful to feminists. His notion of being-in-the-world entails that experience cannot simply be seen as an unproblematic source of truth; it cannot be understood as separated from the social, political, historical and cultural context. This way of
understanding experience thus goes along well with my understanding of Haraway’s notion of partial perspectives, where one is accountable for once experiences and views on account of one’s embodied locatedness in the world (Haraway 1988: 8). Here we can also identify reasons for why it is interesting to interview one single person: Andrea’s narrations of herself are to be problematized on account of her embodiedness as well as in consideration of her situatedness within a social context where various discourses prevailing in society affect her.

This involves, according to Grosz, that experience is always embodied and is thus part of both inscription and subversion of sociopolitical values; something which, to some extent gives confirmation of feminist’s assumptions regarding women’s experiences thus making it intriguing to explore one woman’s experiences of being an embodied and embedded subject in a Western context (Grosz 1994: 95).

**One’s place and space in the world – Dis/ability and the issue of fitting and misfitting**

Margrit Shildrick claims that the field of disability studies is evolving rapidly, and that the new ideas which have emerged on account of this suggests changes in ways of thinking that may have important material effects for people with disabilities (Shildrick 2012: 30). She claims that in recent years the powerful emergence of critical disability studies has added new force to the social model that poses questions regarding for instance embodiment and agency, rather than simply focusing on the nature of disability. Here she points to the increasing deployment of queer theory in contemporary disability studies, claiming that this interfusion derives from the aim of exploring how irregular embodiment can be seen as inherently transgressive (Shildrick 2012: 38).

This more recently developed approach, referred to as crip queer is in line with Robert McRuer’s essay Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence, which focuses on scrutinizing normality, and on how heterosexuality is being positioned as equaling ablebodiedness and critiquing the hegemony that this produces (McRuer 2013: 369, 374). McRuer’s own take on this viewpoint is that it is central to incorporate ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ as a key concept within disability studies since it, according to him, simultaneously produces compulsory ablebodiedness (McRuer 2013: 368). These two systems are intertwined and re-produce each other, but as he points out, there is always a possibility of disruption since they depend on a queer/disabled existence that can never quite be contained (McRuer 2013: 375). Furthermore, in view of this McRuer draws attention to what he refers
to as ‘critically queer’, which he describes as ‘severely disabled possibilities of incorporation of the fields of queer theory and disability studies’ in order to, in a productive manner, deconstruct the current heterosexual/ablebodied norms prevailing in society.

In turn, in his essay *The social model of disability* Tom Shakespeare discusses the issues concerning what is described as the social model of disability, which as I pointed out above was developed prior to the crip queer approach (Shakespeare 2013: 214). Shakespeare describes this model as the leading force behind launching the disability movement, mandating civil rights legislation and barrier removal while using the approach of reducing the terminology of ‘disabled people’ and replacing it with the terminology of ‘people with disabilities’ which signals a mainstream approach (Shakespeare 2013: 217, 220).

The social model has according to Shakespeare brought a focus on issues concerning the medicalization of disability, but at the same time he points out that there are separatist problems concerning this model since it is driven mainly by white, heterosexual men who has suffered various physical impairments as for example spinal injuries. In view of this assertion Shakespeare argues that there is a further need of sophisticated and complex approaches which builds on the insight that disability is not a minority issue but rather a general human experience which not only affects those who are defined as people with disabilities (Shakespeare 2013: 221). In view of this background I find that the social model of disability constitutes a suitable point of departure for my thesis since it regards a critique of norms concerning dis/ability on the basis of a mainstream approach, and since it ought to take into consideration dis/ability in a sense that is broader than the general theoretical generic disabled body. This approach opens up for the understanding that everyone is in some way and/or will in the future be disabled.

Bearing in mind Shakespeare’s assertion that disability is to be viewed as a general human experience, I will also draw on aspects of crip queer theory as it critiques normality, something which works well in accordance which the fact that I will analyse my interviewee Andrea’s narrations on the basis of the terms of *fitting* or *misfitting*. These two terms namely places focus on her sociocultural context and experience of herself in relation to ablebodiedness, something which I will develop further in this chapter.

Consequently, against the background understanding of these two theories I will rely on Rosemarie Garland-Thomson’s notion of dis/ability. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson is one of the leading researchers who have conducted work that focuses on feminist theory and disability studies in the humanities - along with other researchers such as Margrit Shildrick and Vivian Sobchack - and her work focuses to a great extent on integrating dis/ability within
feminist theory (Garland-Thomson 2002: 1). Garland-Thomson who is inspired by crip queer theory has, in line with Shakespeare, been critical of the social model’s focus on identity and rights. She has made a strong case claiming that integrating dis/ability within the intersectional approach of feminist theory would strengthen the feminist understanding of how intersectional systems are intertwined and mutually constitute each other (Garland-Thomson 2002: 4). This would, according to her lead to a clarification concerning how norms that structure the relations that grant power, privilege and status are formed (Garland-Thomson 2002: 4). Garland-Thomson argues furthermore that the comprehension of how dis/ability works as an identity category will enhance how we understand the experience of embodiment as well as our relationships with each other. Bearing this in mind I will employ Garland-Thomson’s notion that this in turn would facilitate an understanding of concepts such as autonomy, physical appearance, the integrity of the body and ideas of progress and perfection in every aspect of Western culture.

Garland-Thomson claims feminist dis/ability theory’s critique thus hinges on a broad understanding of dis/ability as a cultural system that stigmatizes as well as privileges certain kinds of bodily variations (Garland-Thomson 2002: 5). It thus holds the notion that dis/ability, much like for instance femaleness, is not a state of corporeal inferiority, but rather a culturally generated narrative of the body. Garland-Thomson refers, in line with crip queer theory, to this cultural generating of disabled and/or able bodies as being produced through the dis/ability system, which marks bodies. The dis/ability system, which also concerns beauty norms, excludes and devalues bodies that do not conform to the cultural standards of the able body, namely beauty, health, normality etc. and categorizes “deviant” bodies as ugly, sick, deformed, old, mad, debilitated, and, ultimately, disabled (Garland-Thomson 2002: 5, 6). The dis/ability system thus functions to preserve and validate the privileges ascribed to those who can enjoy cultural capital based on such designations as precisely beauty, fitness and health, something which simultaneously grants these persons qualities such as intelligence and competence which also are factors of ablebodiedness produced via the dis/ability system.

Feminist dis/ability theory’s underpinning of the importance of physical appearance, norms and ideas of perfection, which are the basis for the dis/ability system, is therefore important to my thesis. Consequently, as Garland-Thomson points out, this way of considering the dis/ability system, and thereby going beyond the explicit definition of the term “disability”, expands the dis/ability topics to include beauty, health, illness, genetics, prosthetics etc., which are considered to be access issues (Garland-Thomson 2002: 4). This notion of the dis/ability system – and its interconnectedness with beauty norms - as well as its
interwoven with other systems of power, is thus important for my exploration of the becomings of my interviewee Andrea since these aspects are important factors which affect the subject’s access to privileges, sociocultural status and so on.

On the basis of this I will analyze the becoming dis/ablebodied of my interviewee Andrea in relation to how she experiences herself in connection with cosmetic body modifications depending on the context of expectations (Garland-Thomson 2002: 5, 6). I will do so by employing two terms developed by Garland-Thomson, namely the concepts of *fitting* and *misfitting* (Garland-Thomson 2011: 591). These two concepts are important for my thesis as they involve a feminist materialist approach to disability theory. Garland-Thomson explains that the interrelated dynamics of *fitting* and *misfitting* constitute a particular aspect of world-making involved in material-discursive becoming (Garland-Thomson 2011: 291). She argues for that the notion of misfit avoids the theoretical generic disabled body by instead emphasizing that a fit occurs when a particularly shaped body, that is considered to be able, interacts with an environment that sustains that body, and in reverse, a misfit occurs when the environment does not sustain the shape and function of the body that enters it (Garland-Thomson 2011: 591, 594).

It should be pointed out here, that Garland-Thomson in arguing for the materialist concepts of fitting and misfitting relies on a Butlerian framework which highlights performativity as that which enacts agency and subjectivity (Garland-Thomson 2011: 594). I am using another lens by employing Braidotti’s notion of nomadism, which is not compatible with the Butlerian framework since it takes its stance in sexual difference theory, which Butler opposes on the basis of her thorough critique of universality and in particular the category of “women” (Braidotti 2002: 36). However, Butler has recently, as Braidotti points out, expanded her perspective as to give more acknowledgement to the role that fantasies, histories, and unconscious factors play in subject-formation thereby taking in the role that matter plays in the becomings of embodied subjects to a greater extent (Braidotti 2002: 37). Nevertheless, I will use the lens of Braidotti’s notion of nomadism as I employ the concepts of fitting and misfitting which will result in that I connect it to desire. I will do so in the sense that the nomadic subject is driven by the desire to become, and that it simultaneously negotiates itself within the spatial conditions in which it is situated (Braidotti 2002: 21, 22). In view of this nomadic understanding of fitting and misfitting I will, in line with Garland-Thomson, view bodily particularities and the spatial conditions as producing fits and misfits (Garland-Thomson 2002: 604).

Garland-Thomson points out that there are three arguments central to the concepts of
fitting and misfitting (Garland-Thomson 2011: 592). Firstly, the term misfit emphasizes the particularity of varying lived embodiments and avoids theorizing the disabled body, something that can be dematerialized if sociocultural as well as environmental barriers no longer disable it. I find that this first argument fulfills the goal of theorizing complex approaches towards disability which are not merely focused on physical impairments, which Shakespeare requested (Shakespeare 2013: 221). This thus seems like a suiting prism in order to account for my interviewee Andrea’s experiences of herself by employing the concepts of fitting and misfitting in Garland-Thomson’s understanding of dis/ability as a normative system. Secondly, Garland-Thomson argues that the concepts of fitting and misfitting clarify what she refers to as the current feminist conversation about universal vulnerability and dependence (Garland-Thomson 2011: 592).

Garland-Thomson explains that vulnerability in this context refers to the potential for misfitting to which all embodied subjects are subject, and that dependence in turn refers to ethics (Garland-Thomson 2011: 598, 599). Ethics in this context refers to the universal human need for care. Thirdly, Garland-Thomson claims that the concepts of fitting and misfitting is a shifting spatial concept which confers agency to subjects at the risk of social devaluation as it stresses adaptability and resourcefulness (Garland-Thomson 2011: 592). This focus on positive aspects related to fitting and misfitting is something I will draw on in my thesis by viewing my interviewee Andrea’s ways of showing resistance towards constraining norms and expectations as demonstrating the resourcefulness and flexibility of her as a subject. Furthermore, this perspective corresponds well with my aim to explore the becomings of Andrea on the basis of nomadic subjectivity which stresses the changeability and transformative potential of the subject (Braidotti 2002: 84). Consequently, I hope my thesis can contribute further to the development of the concepts of fitting and misfitting since I bring in Braidotti’s take on becoming in relation to sociocultural contexts, body modifications, and dis/ability, thereby including the bodily experience of an embodied subject.

The privileges of whiteness

Lykke explains critical studies of whiteness as an approach that gained ground in the beginning of the 1990s (Lykke 2010: 56). She defines this approach as based on the notion that focus should be shifted from critically analyzing processes of racialization, and thus only take into consideration those who are oppressed, to instead focusing on a critical scrutiny of white normativity (Lykke 2010: 204). Lykke furthermore stresses that critical studies of whiteness focuses on analysing how the unmarked “white” norm is constructed and thus
brings forward analyses of racialized relations of dominance (Lykke 2010: 56). Here Lykke highlights the black USA-based writer Toni Morrison as a case in point and stresses that Morrison has made a strong impact on the development of the field on account of her book *Playing in the Dark* which concerned whiteness as a symbolic categorization (Lykke 2010: 56; Morrison 1992).

Another prominent researcher within the field is Sara Ahmed, who has contributed to the field of critical studies of whiteness through influential works that lies at the intersection between feminist theory, critical race studies, and queer studies (Ahmed 2007: 168). Ahmed’s theorization of what she refers to as the phenomenology of whiteness is a notion I regard as central for my thesis as it concerns how white bodies enjoys unlimited motility (Ahmed 2007: 154). This is central to my thesis as this mobility provides white bodies with cultural status that further facilitates their possibilities of accessing the beauty standards of the West, and given that Andrea is a white embodied female subject, I believe that this is an aspect that should be granted extra focus.

Accordingly, Ahmed argues that whiteness, from the lens of phenomenology, can be viewed as an ongoing and unfinished process which orients bodies in specific directions, affecting what they ‘can do’ as well as how they take up space (Ahmed 2007: 149). She claims, bearing this in mind, that a phenomenology of whiteness can help us in the quest of finding out how whiteness functions as an institutional habit and thus as a background to social action. According to her, whiteness is to be considered not as an ontological given, but rather as something that has become given over time, something that has become ‘worldly’ due to the disappearance of whiteness as a category of experience (Ahmed 2007: 150).

Furthermore, Ahmed claims that phenomenology offers a way of exploring how whiteness is material and lived, an exploration that in turn brings insight into whiteness as an effect of racializations since it affects precisely what bodies can ‘do’. Spaces are oriented ‘around’ whiteness, Ahmed argues, something which impose a ‘likeness’ which makes non-white bodies uncomfortable, visible, and different as they take up space (Ahmed 2007: 157). This is according to her an effect of that whiteness becomes a social and bodily orientation since some bodies will be more at home in a world that is oriented around whiteness (Ahmed 2007: 160). However, there is, as Ahmed points out, possibilities for non-white bodies to ‘move up’ and reside in a body that inhabits whiteness. Class privilege for instance, or having more recourses to draw on which can be converted into capital are factors that can make a body ‘pass as white’ (Ahmed 2007: 158, 159, 160). Consequently, Ahmed’s theorization is relevant in relation to how my interviewee Andrea experiences herself in relation to her idol, Swedish
blogger Kenza Zouiten, who is of Moroccan heritage. I will thus use Ahmed’s notion of whiteness to analyse how non-white bodies can ‘pass as white’, and how they even might become hegemonic during specific circumstances, something which I will develop further in the analysis.

Furthermore, in accordance with Braidotti’s Deleuzian understanding of becoming as something that takes place in the subject’s encounter with forces, entities, other subjects etc. I find that Ahmed provides me with helpful tools which will aid me in my quest to analyse how Andrea becomes through her contact with objects (Braidotti 2002: 68; Ahmed 2007: 152). In Ahmed’s theorization of the subject’s contact with ‘things’ her point of departure is that whiteness is an orientation that puts certain things within reach since what someone comes into contact with is affected by what that body can ‘do’ (Ahmed 2007: 152, 154).

However, despite Ahmed’s focus on whiteness in relation to this theorization concerning what bodies can accomplish, I believe that there is a potential of expanding her framework and include other access issues in line with Garland-Thomson. There is namely a point of convergence between the phenomenology of whiteness and the concepts of fitting and misfitting in my understanding. Ahmed emphasizes that whiteness puts physical objects as well as styles, capacities, aspirations, techniques, and habits within reach since race determines what is available to ‘do’ thing with (Ahmed 2007: 154). Garland-Thomson in turn claims that the intra-actions between body and environment is affected by access issues which includes a large span of factors, such as beauty, health, deformity, madness, fitness, which affect the subject’s access to privileges, sociocultural status etc. (Garland-Thomson 2011: 4).

Consequently, in the analysis I will use Ahmed’s model concerning how a subject’s orientation puts ‘things’ within reach in connection with Garland-Thomson’s claim that the fit or misfit of someone depends on whether or not the environment sustains the body as I analyse how cosmetic body modifications affects Andrea’s orientation towards molarity (Ahmed 2007: 152, 154; Garland-Thomson 2011: 4). In the immanent encounter with specific cosmetic body modifications, the access to ‘things’ such as privileges is thus affected, and in turn the fitness of the subject, but in some circumstances also the misfitting of the subject as I will demonstrate in the analysis.
Technology and body modifications

The feminist scholarship regarding technologies of body modifications is extensive, stretching from pro-technology second wave feminists such as Shulamith Firestone who considered it to be a path towards liberation, to anti-technology feminists such as Gena Corea, Janice Raymond, and Robyn Rowland to name a few, who argued that technologies such as cosmetic surgeries were tools of patriarchy (Sullivan & Murray 2009: 1, 2). Sullivan and Murray asserts that many feminist scholars on the other hand have been attempting to challenge this division of technologies as either good or bad, pointing to researchers such as Anne Balsamo and Donna Haraway who have shown how technologies are a heterogeneous matter varying in histories, effects, and usages (Sullivan & Murray 2009: 2, 3).

In addition, technologies are, within this heterogeneous way of perceiving technologies, also theorized as embedded in contextually specific cultural processes (Sullivan & Murray 2009: 3). This comprehension of the issue of technologies constitutes, according to Sullivan, the background to the recent coining of the term somatechnics. This concept entails an understanding of soma - the body, and techniques - sociocultural apparatuses and ‘hard technologies’ such as prosthetics (Sullivan 2012: 302). Somatechnics thus refers to the inextricability of soma and techniques, implying that technologies is not something that is added to the body, and neither are they tools which the embodied subject employs in order to modify itself, which has the implication that corporealities are always technologised, and technologies are always enfleshed (Sullivan & Murray 2009: 3).

This is the understanding of cosmetic body modifications that I will use in the thesis; I will view them not as something that stands outside Andrea as a subject, but rather as something that is inextricably bound up with her as she enters into and out of composition with them.

Furthermore, in my quest to, in line with Braidotti, bring out the affirmative potential of contemporary sociocultural phenomena - in my case cosmetic body modifications and its positive way of affecting my interviewee Andrea - I have found Kathy Davis’s theorization of cosmetic body modifications to be highly useful (Braidotti 2002: 5, 22). Davis’s theorization of the dilemma of cosmetic surgery is also highly important as it enables me to acknowledge both the issue of my own unease and the dilemma of cosmetic body modifications from a complex perspective (Davis 1995: 5). Davis attempts to map out how cosmetic surgery might be seen as the best course of action for women while, at the same time, problematize the ‘social constraints which make cosmetic surgery an option’ (Davis 1995: 5). Her visualizing
of the dilemma concerning cosmetic body modifications breaks the line of some views in feminist thinking which, as Davis points out, regards cosmetic body modifications as a form of ‘false consciousness’ (Davis 1995: 4). Davis asserts that contemporary feminist scholarship on beauty enables us to a vast extent, to be critical of what she calls the *beauty system*, since it points out the cultural norms of femininity and the specific constraints imposed upon women to alter their appearance (Davis 1995: 4, 5, 57).

In view of this she claims that feminist theory simultaneously often fails to illustrate the *desire* related to having cosmetic surgery. The *agency* of women who alter their bodies within the cultural constraints as well as the degree to which cosmetic surgery can be a source of empowerment are thus also left out. Here it should be noted that Davis focuses specifically on cosmetic surgery, while I will focus on cosmetic body modification in a broader sense since I bring in manicure, lip-enhancements and so on.

In Davis’s explored context I would claim that temporary lip-enhancements for example fall under the same category as cosmetic surgery since it concerns modifying the flesh using modification technologies one pays for, and so I will argue that there is a wide-ranging point of convergence between the two practices. I will therefore use the umbrella term cosmetic body modifications, which in my usage also includes other ‘hard technologies’ such as make-up, which also are part of Andrea’s way of expressing and negotiating herself.

Furthermore, I think that Davis’s theorization can include a broad span of cosmetic body modifications since her work in my view, reveals a general lack within contemporary feminist theory when it comes to showing the agency and desire connected with many forms of cosmetic body modifications. Feminine cultural practices such as temporary cosmetic body modifications in general are namely also highly questioned since they are all rooted in the feminine beauty system, which feminist theories criticize - as we can see in the case of among others Garland-Thomson who takes on a slightly generalizing and ambivalent stance. On the one hand she passionately rejects both cosmetic body modifications and reconstructive surgery, claiming that they are procedures which present “mutilations” as enhancements which improve the well-being of a person, and on the other hand claims that she ‘does not want to oversimplify by suggesting that women or disabled people should not use modern medicine to improve their lives’ (Garland-Thomson 2002: 10, 14). Consequently, Garland-Thomson firmly bases her account of the beauty system and female body comportment on a critique of the sexism prevailing in Western culture; where women are objectified (Garland-Thomson 2002: 6). Her critique is somewhat reasonable, but, as Davis asserts: as much as we need to be critical of cultural discourses which sustain the beauty system, we also need to
avoid undermining women by depicting them as victims of false consciousness (Davis 1995: 159).

Overall I would say that I do agree to a high extent with Davis; however, her notion that women who engage with cosmetic surgery are enabled to transcend, thus becoming something more than ‘mere bodies’, since they act upon the world, is something I want to challenge since Davis’s usage of the term transcendence hints at transcending the body (Davis 1995: 161). In my view, in line with Braidotti, it is important to rely on radical immanence, that is, thinking through the body rather than in flight away from it (Braidotti 2002: 5). This entails according to Braidotti that the female embodied subject, who Humanism regard as ‘body’ is situated in a space between transcendence and immanence, and that this is a space that needs to be kept since it connects the subject to a number of differences, within as well as between the self and others (Braidotti 2002: 59). This materialist notion by Braidotti is what I will use as my point of departure in exploring Andrea’s negotiations of herself in connection with cosmetic body modifications and the agency of her.

**Methodological approaches and analytical tools used in the thesis**

The material of my thesis consists of data collected in the semi-structured in-depth interviews that I have held on two separate occasions with the 22 year old woman Andrea on the topic of how she perceives herself and her sociocultural context in connection with cosmetic body modifications. As I want to study in depth the subject’s perception of herself, I find that a phenomenological approach can be fruitful as it involves exploring precisely how embodied subjects orient themselves in their “lifeworld” (Merleau-Ponty, 2014: 7). I will thus draw on Ahmed, who uses queer phenomenological analyses, as well as Merleau-Ponty, and Grosz, with the aim of accounting for the lived experiences of Andrea. The choice of doing interviews is, in my thesis, part of the phenomenological approach and method as the aim of such an approach is to find out about the lifeworld of embodied subjects. In using a phenomenological approach in the interviews, I am thus able to find out about the lifeworld of Andrea. In combination with this approach, I will use a posthumanist analysis strategy when interpreting the interviews, by employing Braidotti’s notions of molar/molecular, desire, and

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8 It should be noted that the quotes that in the thesis are referred to as quotes number two and five are quotes by Andrea that I originally used in the pilot study that I conducted and which was entitled *Performing the perfect girl subject* (Viktorsson Blom 2013).
becoming. This is a highly important strategy for the goal of my thesis as it makes it possible for me to thoroughly to map out the becomings of Andrea in relation to cosmetic body modifications as well as explore the various affects that the body modifications produce in her. In addition to the posthumanist analytical strategies I will include analytical tools from critical whiteness studies. Ahmed’s phenomenological notion of the orientation of the subject is namely highly useful in combination with analytical tools from critical disability studies, that is, notions of fitting/misfitting, as it reveals the significance of what Garland-Thomson refer to as access issues, such as whiteness, but also beauty, health etc. (Garland-Thomson 2002: 4). In employing these analytical tools from critical whiteness studies and critical disability studies, in combination with the posthumanist analysis strategy of analysing the becomings of Andrea, I am thus able to explore the importance of cosmetic body modifications in relation to access issues such as, beauty, health, youth, and being fit, which are important factors that affects the subject’s access to privileges, sociocultural status etc.

**Procedure in the interviews and interview ethics**

The interviews themselves have been tape-recorded and carried out via a semi-structured approach, which American sociologist Shulamit Reinharz describes in her book *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, as a qualitative data gathering technique (Reinharz 1992: 18). Reinharz claims that this approach to interviewing differs from ethnography as it does not include that the researcher participates in the life of the interviewee for long periods of time, and that it additionally differs from structured interviewing as that kind of research is conducted with minimum or no interaction between the researcher and the interviewee. It also differs from close-ended research which in a quantitative manner aims at testing hypotheses.

Bearing this in mind, I have used the approach of the semi-structured interview as an open-ended research method, which Reinharz describes as exploring peoples understandings and views of reality as well as themselves thus allowing the researcher to generate theory. I have thus used open-ended questions and sometimes more clustering themes of possible topics in my interviews with Andrea.

In line with the semi-structured method, I engaged in conversation with her, while from time to time returning to my questions and/or themes that I wished to hear her narrate. The questions took their point of departure in Andrea’s phenomenal experiences of herself in connection with cosmetic body modifications, but I also posed more wide-ranging questions on the basis of specific themes as for example regarding what she in general considered to define beauty in an embodied female subject to be.
In the first interview I made with Andrea I had more questions as I wanted to get to know her and find out the basics of her narrations of herself in connection with cosmetic body modifications. There are, Reinharz argues, many advantages of having a second, or even more, interviews with the interviewee as the researcher then has the opportunity to ask additional questions and to share the previously obtained information with the interviewee in order to get corrective feedback (Reinharz 1992: 37).

During the second interview I experienced, in line with Reinharz that I did not need the “security” of having prepared questions, and so I relied on themes that I had prepared and hoped that Andrea and I had developed a potential of trust between us and that the fact that we had gotten to know each other would bring the conversation forward (Reinharz 1992: 36). I have thereafter transcribed the interviews and selected quotes which I consider to reflect appealing aspects of Andrea’s narrations of herself in connection with cosmetic body modifications as well as themes relevant for analysis. Here again, of course, appears the ethical issue concerning that I as a researcher affect the “product” since I choose to bring forward quotes that I regard to be important, as well as the fact that I am responsible for the presentation of the data in the analysis, which is characterized by my interpretation of the quotes by Andrea (Letherby 2003: 114).

**The method in the analysis**

The analysis will be structured in such a way that it is divided into three chapters, which in turn concern three major themes. The analytical focus of these three chapters will be determined on the basis of three longer quotes which establish the themes of the chapters. In turn there will be eight subchapters to these three overarching chapters, and these will focus on various aspects that I have identified within the quote belonging to the overarching chapter. In one of these subchapters, an additional shorter quote by Andrea will be included with the aim of contributing to showing the complexity of the theme of that particular overarching chapter.

I will use the quotes by Andrea with the goal of producing an analysis, revision and discussion of the theories that I employ. This approach can be seen as my overall methodological strategy. The quotes which, as I pointed out, are centered around specific themes in the analysis, are chosen in a way that allows me to highlight various aspects related to the becomings of Andrea as an embodied female subject and her experiences of fitting and misfitting in relation to cosmetic body modifications.

In view of this I will use the analytical tools belonging to posthumanist analysis, critical
whiteness studies as well as critical disability studies described above in order to analyse the aspects that I have chosen, with the purpose of illuminating questions related to three levels which can be found within the analysis. These levels regards, what the affirmative aspects of cosmetic body modifications are for Andrea, what the constraining affects of cosmetic body modifications are for Andrea, and, how these affects are connected with Andrea’s experiences of fitting and misfitting. The three different levels are thus intra-connected in ways which are accounted for throughout the analysis through the usage of Andrea’s quotes. By asking questions related to these three levels, such as What is the significance of economical benefits?; In which ways do cosmetic body modifications affect the fit/misfit of Andrea and others; What is the significance of - in conventional ways of categorizing - corporeal advantages?; and, What is the significance of whiteness? I hope to produce a complex picture of the becomings of an embodied female subject as well as show how the processes of the fitting and misfitting of subjects is intertwined with access issues. The questions are used to guide my production of knowledge regarding the becomings of Andrea as an embodied female subject in connection with cosmetic body modifications and her experiences of fitting and misfitting in relation to these practices, and that the knowledge generated ultimately can bring out a complex picture, and contribute to the research field of the becomings of embodied female subjects.

In the analysis I will accordingly use Braidotti’s notion of becoming, with the aim of accounting for the positive and/or negative affects of Andrea’s immanent encounter with cosmetic body modifications. I will also use her notion of the concepts of molarity and molecularity in order to analyse Andrea’s simultaneous desire for and resistance towards, what she considers to be, the molar form of ideal femininity. Braidotti’s notion of desire is thus a crucial analytical tool in the analysis as it enables me to systematically map out the ways in which Andrea is ambivalent towards the affirmative and yet constraining power that comes with being a privileged subject that engages with cosmetic body modifications.

In relation to this I will use Garland-Thomson’s concepts of fitting and misfitting with the purpose of exploring how cosmetic body modifications affect the sociocultural potential privileging of Andrea, as well as her own understanding of the fit/misfit of her in relation to cosmetic body modifications. Here Ahmed’s notion of orientation comes into use as it constitutes an important factor in my endeavor to explore how Andrea uses cosmetic body modifications in order to orient herself towards various access issues that allows socioculturally privileged subjects to enjoy specific forms of status, empowerment etc. Consequently, as I will bring in phenomenology and analyse Andrea’s ambivalent perception
of herself, along with how she can be viewed as fitting or misfitting, depending on the sociocultural context, I hope to be able to present a complex picture of desire and resistance and their interconnectedness. I will thus use the tools presented here in a systematical way within the subchapters as I, from the point of view of Andrea’s quotes, explore questions related to the three levels which I mentioned above.

Analysis

“Hot”-periods and “Ugly” -periods

“It must feel awful to go shopping for clothes and see that the girls in the commercials are tall, skinny, with slim legs, and have perfect hair, perfect skin and you never - no matter how much you try - will be able to look like that. I’ve never had that problem, but I can imagine that it must be hard for those who don’t fit in. I’m pleased with the way I look, for me it’s really more about fixing small things, as for example making sure to have nice colored hair, nice eyebrows, shaping my face with make-up, clothes, and things like that… But people probably also think that I have a good job and good economy, because, those who doesn’t have a good job they probably cannot really afford perfect salon-highlighted hair or matching fashion clothes…

L.- How do you feel about yourself when you have not “fixed” yourself in a while, and how do you see yourself?

A.- Well, at the moment I have washed-out hair and thin lips because the effect of the substance has worn off. So right now I have an “Ugly” period if you can imagine. But now in spring I’ll enhance my lips, color my hair blonde, and get a tan. And then it will be like this high. Then I’ll like… Look the way I want to look. Let’s say that I would color my hair blonde tomorrow, but I still felt pale - with thin lips - then I wouldn’t feel pretty. Then everything wouldn’t matter in a way. Because, if I only fixed my lips and then didn’t do the hair and I still felt pale - then I wouldn’t feel 100 percent. I want to do everything at once because then it will be like “BAM!”

But then again, if I was a millionaire then I probably wouldn’t even have an “Ugly” period, since I’d be able to afford it all the time. But I’m economical. The hairdresser costs 1200, the lips 3000 and the nails 500 and I can’t spend that every month. There has to be a couple of months in between, but then it will be all the more worth it since it still lasts for a long time. Because, if I go from being in the “Ugly” period to being in the “Hot” period - then I’ll feel extra pretty. If I had my “Hot” period all the time perhaps I’d easily want more. But now it’s enough if I do my hair and the lips, and then I’ll get an outgrowth so I have to start over and then I’ll do it all at once.

L.- In reverse, how do you feel when you are in your “Hot” period, and when do you feel that way?

A.- Happier, well, everything is more fun in a way - a better mood. I don’t know how to explain it, it just feels better. Now when I’ll do my lips and I’ll do the whole kit - the first time that I take a shower after that - I’ll shave my legs, I’ll paint my toenails, everything will be top notch. Even though no one will see my toes because it’s winter, but it’s just for me.” (Quote two)
Nomadic subjectivity and embodied subjects

This quote is from my first interview with Andrea. As I listened to her describing her feelings regarding how she perceived herself in relation with cosmetic body modifications as well as her understandings of being “hot” or “ugly” - I could not help but feel a bit aggravated. I struggled with my view of her as a victim of what Garland-Thomson describe as the Western beauty norms, which regards the ideal female body as a goal that can be achieved through self-regulation and consumerism (Garland-Thomson 2002: 10). My anger stemmed from a deeply rooted feminist anger towards the sexist objectification of women, and in line with Garland-Thomson, I considered especially lip-enhancements to be an expression of patriarchal control over women’s bodies (Garland-Thomson 2002: 10, 18). However, what is lost in such feminist analyses, where women are viewed as misguided victims of false consciousness is, according to Davis, an account of women’s active and lived relationship to their bodies (Davis 1995: 57). Thus bearing Davis’s critique in mind, I will attempt to expand my view away from the notions of misguided and victimized women - and dig a bit deeper than I did in my initial reactions as I listened to Andrea’s accounts of herself and her body.

Davis argues that cosmetic body modifications, from a perspective that takes into account women’s own experiences of their bodies, can be seen as helping them avoid suffering, and that it might aid them in their endeavor to “be ordinary” (Davis 1995: 90). She also emphasizes that women who are considered to be beautiful by cultural standards might decide to have their bodies changed, while individuals who have more obvious bodily defects, and thus do not conform to cultural standards, might be unbothered by their appearance (Davis 1995: 91). Davis’s main point in view of this is that women, independently of their reasons for having cosmetic body modifications, paradoxically enough find a way of becoming agents through actively renegotiating their bodies by the means of cosmetic body modifications. The implication of this is, according to her, that women become embodied subjects, rather than “just bodies” (Davis 1995: 161). Even if cosmetic body modifications, as Davis stresses, can be presented as part of a woman’s struggle to actualize herself I estimate, in view of this quote by Andrea, that this process is a bit more complex than acting upon the world thus becoming an embodied subject who transcends the objectified body. Thus, if we consider my claim from Braidotti’s nomadic perspective I would say that ‘radical immanence’ is a more suitable strategy in the endeavor to account for issues of embodiment and ways of representing the body (Braidotti 2002: 5). Radical immanence entails, according to Braidotti that one thinks through the body rather than in flight away from it, and she claims that this perspective as
well as nomadism is a relevant and significant attempt to come to terms with embodiment as a process of transformation intraconnected with issues of power, empowerment, and accountability (Braidotti 2002: 63). Braidotti claims that the thinking subject cannot be separated from the desiring subject - affectivity and intellectuality grow together (Braidotti 2002: 71). Therefore, when Andrea explains her perception and feelings regarding herself as she enters the “Hot” period - she cannot be seen as transcending her body, thus gaining agency. Sullivan and Murray furthermore argues that this way of describing technology as a neutral tool separate from the self, which allegedly can help us realize our full potential if used correctly, is typical of pro-technology feminist work and that it actually is apparent everywhere in contemporary Western culture (Sullivan and Murray 2009: 2).

In line with Sullivan and Murray’s notion of somatechnics Andrea can never be seen as “merely a body” - she is always in transition and her body constantly enters into and out of composition with various hard technologies which contribute to the transformation of her (Sullivan and Murray 2009: 3, 4). Consequently, when Andrea describes how cosmetic body modifications gives her a high, and that when she enters the “Hot” period, she is in a better mood and everything is more fun it is not a flight away from the body - it is very much an embodied experience (Braidotti 2002: 71). This way of interpreting Andrea’s perception of herself additionally contradicts Davis’s suggestion that cosmetic body modifications to a vast extent concerns relief from a suffering and concerns a desire to “look ordinary”, whether it may be an “imagined” problem for someone who is not in need of cosmetic body modifications in others eyes, or if it concerns someone with more visible defects (Davis 1995: 91). Andrea explicates that she only has “small problems to fix” but, as Davis highlights, in regard of the beauty systems message to women, “no one is so beautiful that she cannot become even more beautiful with the help of surgery” (Davis 1995: 18). Andrea thus finds herself as part of a culture which celebrates beauty and where women negotiate themselves within the constraints of a gendered social order which objectifies women (Davis 1995: 5). As Andrea negotiates herself within these spatial conditions she is basically pleased with the way she looks, but she wants to do modifications as they - as I have pointed out earlier - become an actualization of her potentia; they increase the intensity of her becoming (Braidotti 2002: 84). The cosmetic body modifications empower her and allows her to enjoy the cultural capital that is provided to her as a subject as she can claim the status of beautiful, fit, and healthy etc. (Garland-Thomson 2002: 6).

Consequently, in this chapter I have used Braidotti’s theory of nomadic subjects, Davis’s theorization of cosmetic body modifications, Sullivan and Murray’s notion of somatechnics,
as well as Garland-Thomson’s take on beauty norms in order to analyse this quote by Andrea, and discuss her as a becoming subject in relation to cosmetic body modifications. I have at the same time reviewed these theories, especially by pointing to the fact that Andrea’s desire to enter into composition with cosmetic body modifications does not, as Davis suggests, stem from suffering but rather from a desire to enjoy the cultural capital provided to those subjects that can claim the status of beautiful, fit, normal etc.

“Everything will be top notch” - The highs of cosmetic body modifications

Bearing in mind the quote from Andrea, I am able to conclude that she desires to position herself as a privileged subject - with only small problems to fix - in opposite to those who she considers to be less fortunate. As long as she is managing her ‘small’ problems, she can be understood as perceiving herself as becoming, what she considers to be - the ideal girl. In regard of hard technologies such as cosmetic body modifications it should be pointed out that they are part of an inextricable ongoing formation and transformation of the embodied subject (Sullivan and Murray 2009: 3). They are, according to Sullivan and Murray, not simply something that is “mechanically” applied to a body. Thus, Andrea is on a daily basis entering into and out of composition with cosmetic body modifications, and other hard technologies as for example other prosthetics such as computers, eye-lenses (she has bad eyesight), and electric tooth-brushes.

In the immanent encounter with specific cosmetic body modifications as for example manicure and lip-enhancement - which brings her into her desired “Hot” period - Andrea is however affected in a way that facilitates the ongoing becoming of her. There is prestige connected with having these types of cosmetic body modifications which alters the flesh as it signals access to money, something which in line with Garland-Thomson can be viewed as important factors that affect the privileges and sociocultural status that a subject can enjoy (Garland-Thomson 2002: 4).9

Andrea describes that the cosmetic body modifications makes her look the way she wants to look, she feels happier and in a better mood. They can in view of these positive affects be seen as increasing her potentia, thus empowering her as well as improving her capacity to enter further relations and make links with other bodies (Braidotti 2002: 33, 104). Bearing in mind Andrea’s desire for the “Hot” period and her negotiations of herself during the “Ugly” period I am inclined to view her as becoming nomadic, since she desires herself as a process

9 There is additionally a danger to this seemingly privileging and empowering aspect of having cosmetic body modifications, as I shall explain further on in this chapter.
of transformation (Braidotti 2002: 84). Because, as Braidotti points out, becoming is the actualization of the encounter between subjects, entities and forces which mutually affect and exchange each other indefinitely (Braidotti 2002: 68). Thus, the cosmetic body modifications are, as Sullivan and Murray underline, part of a constant formation of the subject, and this can be seen clearly in Andrea’s accounts of her perception of the processes of her body (Sullivan and Murray 2009: 3). Andrea describes that she feels that when she first “fixes” herself, thus entering the “Hot” period, she is content and she explains it as a “high”, and then as the effects slowly wears out she enters her “Ugly” period again, and have to start all over. She also explains that she wants to do it all at once, it is not enough to “just do the hair”, it has to be everything because then she will get the “BAM!” that she desires. The “BAM!” which is the effect of her entering into composition with the cosmetic body modifications that signifies the “Hot” period can, in accordance with Braidotti, be seen as constituting a bodily process that enacts what is good for the subject - it is thus a powerful actualization of Andrea’s potentia (Braidotti 2002: 135).

The desire to enter the “Hot” period drives Andrea, and it is this forward-looking desire to become that, according to Braidotti, facilitates the entire process of becoming-subject (Braidotti 2002: 22). In my view, and in consideration of this desire, I find that what substantiates the positive ways in which Andrea is affected by entering her “Hot” period is, in turn, the desire to position herself within the molarity of “ideal girl”. Andrea of course has her own perception of what makes the “ideal girl”. However, as we can tell from her description of what kinds of girls that are shown in advertisement, I am allowed to conclude that her perception of beauty seems to be very much in line with Davis’s description of the beauty system where generally white female bodies with perfect skin, slim figure, expensive clothing, and “neutral” bodies are depicted as beautiful, in opposition to non-conforming bodies which according to Garland-Thomson, are portrayed as fat, ugly, and disabled (Davis 1995: 61; Garland-Thomson 2002: 12).

From a Swedish point of view this is further substantiated by Ambjörnsson’s notion concerning the way beauty is described by Swedish high-school girls (Ambjörnsson 2003: 51). According to her, the “rules” say that a pretty or “fitting” girl should have long, well managed and thick hair, be young, white, and benefit from class privileges that enable her to buy the “right” clothes (Ambjörnsson 2003: 143, 154, 244). Andrea has, as she points out, all these prerequisites required in order to enjoy the cultural capital provided to those who can claim the statuses of being white, beautiful, healthy, fit, and intelligent (Garland-Thomson 2002: 5, 6). As Ahmed stresses, “things” as for example technologies, or even styles,
capacities, and aspirations becomes something that is “within reach” if a subject orients itself in a certain way (Ahmed 2007: 152, 154). As such, cosmetic body modifications can be seen as available somatechniques that are further extending Andrea’s becoming and facilitating her desired orientation towards molarity, as her corporeal advantages puts these aspirations within reach.

Here financial status again emerges as another crucial point in relation to sociocultural privilege regarding bodies conforming to cultural standards. For Andrea, her economical advantage is affirmative (potentia) since it gives her the opportunity to bring herself closer to being her ideal self, this can be seen as illustrated by her assertion that others probably assume that she has a “good job”, since she can afford to look the best she can. Andrea as a becoming subject is, as Braidotti stresses, bound to cultural mediation - she has to deal with material and semiotic conditions, institutional regulations as well as the forms of cultural representation that sustain them (Braidotti 2002: 21). Braidotti refers to the negotiation between the two poles of power as ‘the notion of subjectivity as power and desire’ (Braidotti 2002: 21). Power can, according to her be understood as both potestas, that is, negative as it constrains, and positive – potentia - as it enables. Andrea is thus found negotiating power and desire as well as her spatial and semiotic conditions, which places her in a Western culture where female bodies are objectified and assessed through the beauty system (Davis 1995: 60). There are additionally legal and material circumstances enabling Andrea’s practices as the modifications she gets are officially permitted, and since there are beauty personnel with the expertise to do them.

Cosmetic body modifications can in view of this be seen as an empowering affect as Andrea comports herself within these spatial conditions, since they increase the intensity of her becoming in a pleasurable way, as well as her potentia. She is, via cosmetic body modifications and her access to money considered to “fit”, in Garland-Thomson’s terms, as she finds herself having a functioning body in an environment that sustains that body (Garland-Thomson 2009: 594).

However, a danger can be recognized in Andrea’s narration of the processes of the “Hot” and “Ugly” periods. As Youngblood Jackson underlines, molarity is a desire and fitting in is a desire, and as we can tell from Andrea’s description of how her financial situation enables her, there are also risks (Youngblood Jackson 2010: 8). Andrea declares that it is probably for the best that she only enters her “Hot” period every third month, otherwise she would probably want more. There appears to be a danger in having unlimited access to financial aids that can facilitate the endeavor to “fit” into the cultural standards of beauty. In my
interpretation there is a risk of going too far. Davis explains this as the problem of the “plastic surgery junkie”, where someone indulges in cosmetic body modifications compulsively (Davis 1995: 19). Consumerism, which Garland-Thomson emphasizes as the driving force behind the beauty system, seems to be able to tempt persons to cosmetically modify their bodies to the point where it is never enough, thus risking to become “misfits” instead as they would, at some point, be considered to be “unnatural” (Garland-Thomson 2002: 10; Garland-Thomson 2011: 4). In regard of Braidotti’s notion of power, it becomes apparent that as much as cosmetic body modifications can be seen as enabling practices and potentia, they can also be negative, and thus potestas since they can constrain the embodied subject through consumerism (Braidotti 2002: 21).

The affects of Kenza

A- “Like Kenza, she is the biggest blogger in Sweden, and she is the richest in Sweden too.”

L- “The richest blogger in Sweden?”

A-“No, she’s like one of the richest persons in Sweden.”

L-”Oh, I see.”

A- “Yes, she is. And everyone looks up to her. She has her own brand of clothing and everyone knows who she is - all the little girls want to look like her. I’m at that stage where I don’t want to look like someone; I don’t want to mimic someone. But I know that everyone looks up to her and everyone wants to look exactly like her. And if you look at the comments on her blog there all like, ‘you’re perfect, you’re perfect, you’re perfect!’ She is also about 1.70 meters high and we have exactly the same weight, we have exactly the same type of body - skinny but with some bum - and we have the same exact breasts…

Let’s say that we (referring to herself and Kenza) are wearing jeans, or that she shows “the outfit of the day” - it could just as well be my body - except for that it is her head. But then again, I have kind of a similar facial structure, so I know that it is the ideal. Young people they want to look like that and when she gets many, many, many thousands of comments saying how gorgeous she is I think to myself ‘lucky me who have exactly the same body, exactly the same breasts, exactly the same stomach, exactly the same from top to bottom’. But then again, it is of course the face. She is half Moroccan and has more olive-colored skin, nice big eyes and nice hair… But the body itself is exactly the same so like I’m happy about that. And she can also eat as much as she wants without gaining weight, I know many friends of mine who does that and then they have to go on diets, I’ve never had to do that and so I’m grateful for that. Like, Kenza has these plumped lips, small nose, nice eyes, she is like…I just think she is crazy hot and like inspiring. And the whole thing with lip-enhancement,

I’m not doing that just to look like her. Because, when I was 12 years old I wanted bigger lips, and at the time I didn’t even know who she was… It’s just like, if she buys new clothes, new jeans - then I know it will look good on me.” (Quote three)
“It could just as well be my body” - Joyful encounters through images

In the photograph above, Andrea’s icon - Swedish blogger Kenza Zouiten - is seen. As Andrea was describing her perception of Kenza and herself to me, I could not deny the fact that they actually do look alike. Up until this point in the interview I had engaged to a high extent in conversation with Andrea - giving of myself - as Letherby describes it, as I was carrying out a participatory model (Letherby 2003: 83). However, I did not comment that much on Andrea’s narration of Kenza. I wanted to listen to Andrea’s account as I felt that she was describing something that I understood as highly important for her, and I did not want to interrupt her. This quote comes from my second interview with Andrea, and when I conducted this interview I had a rather different perception of cosmetic body modifications, than I had when I made the first interview. I felt that my view of the beauty system, which had influenced my previous reactions, was in a way challenged even further at this moment as I understood the importance Andrea’s affects in relation to Kenza has for the becomings of her and her potentia.

Andrea has never met Kenza in real life; she has only seen images of her in her blog, as well as seen her on television, and in newspapers. Yet, without knowing it or even knowing about Andrea’s existence, Kenza’s affects on Andrea in fact enters into composition with her.
Coleman stresses that bodies and images in fact cannot be viewed as separate entities form a Deleuzian perspective, rather they are constituted through their relationality (Coleman 2008: 163). She argues in consideration of this claim that these two entities should not be viewed as body/image but, instead as body-image, since bodies become *through* images (Coleman 2008: 174). This outlook on the relations between bodies and images takes, according to Coleman, into consideration how bodies are understood and experienced through images, and thus also the relationality and transformation present in the processes of becoming (Coleman 2008: 163).

This leads me to view the relation between Andrea and the images of Kenza as part of a complex relationship which facilitates the becoming of Andrea as a process that is intra-connected with Kenza. Andrea tells me that she and Kenza have more or less the same body - they could just switch the head from the pictures and it would be her body. This notion is furthermore substantiated by the fact that Andrea says “let’s say that we are wearing jeans” as a reference to the intra-connectedness of her and Kenza. Coleman underlines that the connections between images and bodies constitute a *body* - the body is the very relation between what is defined as a human body and images (Coleman 2008: 168). The body that is created in the intra-connectedness of Andrea and the images of Kenza is thus, what Andrea experiences as a privileged body. As Andrea experiences herself through the images of Kenza, her becoming can be viewed as *extended* as she gains the positive feeling of experiencing herself as a body that fits (Coleman 2008: 164). The material and semiotic conditions which Andrea is dealing with, that is, Western cultural views on feminine beauty, drives Andrea’s desire for molar femininity. As she is able to experience herself as belonging to this molarity, by the means of her becoming through the images of Kenza, she ultimately gets confirmation that she is positioned as molar.

Here I am again able to distinguish the nomadic potential of Andrea, in view of that Youngblood Jackson claims that molarity in itself is a desire (Youngblood Jackson 2010: 585). Braidotti namely claims that becoming nomadic means that one learns to re-invent oneself, thus, Andrea’s desire to position herself as molar has the implication that she also desires herself as a process of transformation (Braidotti 2002: 84). Accordingly, Andrea explains, based on how she experiences herself through Kenza, that she feels lucky to look that much alike someone who, according to her, is considered to incarnate the ideal girl.

Kenza does not engage with technologies that alter the flesh as for example lip-
enhancements since she, according to Andrea, is “already perfect”. What Andrea, who narrates herself as to be more or less “perfect” as well, can do in order to re-invent herself - thus improving her access to the privileges that comes with molar femininity is to make sure that she, as she pointed out earlier, manages her hair, make-up, and plumps her lips. Andrea points out in the quote that her doing her lips has nothing to do with Kenza but is actually something she has wanted to do since she was a child. In view of this statement we can distinguish what Davis highlights as a sense of excitement of forming one’s body, in relation to the desire of molarity (Davis 1995: 56, 57). In the immanent encounter with cosmetic body modifications the intensity of Andrea’s becoming is thus increased and it has an empowering effect as it confirms her increased potential to belong to the desired molarity (Braidotti 2002: 70, 84).

Furthermore, the accountability of Andrea becomes visible at this point, in view of the fact that Braidotti distinguishes desire as the very term that connotes the subject’s own investment in the network of interrelated social and discursive effects (Braidotti 2002: 143). Andrea’s negotiation of herself within the Western cultural views on femininity beauty is, in accordance with Braidotti, compromised by willful choice and unconscious drives (Braidotti 2002: 22). Fitting in is, as Youngblood Jackson emphasizes, a desire and Andrea can thus be seen as actively choosing to enter into composition with specific cosmetic body modifications as she wants to position herself within molar femininity and as the transformation which these cosmetic body modifications leads to her being empowered (Youngblood Jackson 2010: 585).

Consequently, this depicts what Davis explains as, the agency of women who act within the cultural constraints of their culture and thus perceives cosmetic body modifications as enabling practices (Davis 1995: 5). Braidotti underlines furthermore that one can never be a nomad, one can only go on trying to become a nomad (Braidotti 2002: 86). In view of this claim I find the fact that Andrea can be seen as becoming nomadic in relation with wanting to belong to molarity as significant. Andrea is acting and negotiating herself within the material and semiotic conditions of the Western society, and the rules and regulations of the beauty system is thus something she deals with and this molar line of being and identity and they keep her “fixed” in a way, as a result representing power as restrictive – potestas (Braidotti 2002: 21, 84). At the same time Andrea is becoming molecular through this molar fixity as it simultaneously is potentia, as it empowers and fuels her desire to continue her nomadic becoming, and thus continuous transformation, of her as a subject (Braidotti 2002: 84. Here it

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10 Andrea claims that Kenza does not use technologies that alter the flesh, this has not been confirmed.
is also noticeable that the practices which enter into composition with her, thus empowering and fueling this transformation, is cosmetic body modifications - which also are part of a constraining form of power.

The extension of Andrea’s becoming through the images of Kenza can thus be seen as a powerful actualization of Andrea’s potentia that is accomplished within the constraining material and semiotic conditions she finds herself in. It is also noticeable here, in relation to Ahmed’s notion of orientation, that Kenza as an ideal orients Andrea and that being almost indistinguishable from her has become more or less a “sign post” for Andrea (Ahmed 2007: 152, 154). The intra-connectedness with Kenza can, in line with Braidotti, be seen as embodying an activity that is good for the subject, something that gives Andrea pleasure and enhances her potentials (Braidotti 2002: 134). Andrea’s positive experiences of herself through Kenza produce a joyful encounter, since the positive passions of her connection with Kenza affects her in a way that make up what Braidotti explains as, “spaces of corporeal affects” (Braidotti 2002: 135). In my interpretation, Andrea’s way of increasing her, as Braidotti expresses it - “positive passions”, through her affinity with Kenza, empowers her to endure and continue launching connections as well as growing, and expanding as a nomadic subject (Braidotti 2002: 135). Her bond with Kenza and her desire to meet the requirements of this molar form of ideal femininity, as well as her desire to transform herself through entering into composition with specific cosmetic body modifications, far exceeds the possible negative effects and constraints of Western culture which objectifies her through the beauty system (Braidotti 2002: 21, 100, 135). Overall, I would say that it is intriguing that Andrea does not talk about men and male desire - even though she is in a relationship with Filip - but rather her own desire for another girl who she finds “crazy hot”, and in a complex manner wants to be and at the same time distance herself from. Andrea’s desire for Kenza who embodies, what Andrea considers to be ideal femininity appears, in my interpretation, to be much stronger than her heterosexual relation with Filip.

Furthermore, Coleman claims that there is a need to transgress the linear relationship of media effects where young women’s bodies, according to her, are described as vulnerable to the effects of images (Coleman 2008: 161, 164). Rather than focusing on how women react and respond to Western cultural images of female bodies as young, white, thin, attractive, healthy, heterosexual etc, which some feminist empirical research has done to a high extent according to Coleman, we also need to show how bodies are experienced through images (Coleman 2008: 164). The positive way of interpreting Andrea’s experiences of herself and her body through Kenza in this chapter can thus be seen as fulfilling this notion as well as
showing the agency, excitement, and empowerment that Davis assert as being part of doing cosmetic body modifications (Davis 1995: 5). Davis claims that contemporary feminist scholarship on beauty has focused extensively on how women are made objects and, in line with Coleman, the negative effects of images (Davis 1995: 57, 67). In the case of Andrea we can see how a body’s becoming as extended through images of Kenza as well as how the affiliation and joyful encounter with her increases the potential of Andrea as a nomadic subject that finds herself in an environment that sustains her as well as categorizes her as privileged (Braidotti 2002: 21, 84, 85). However, it should not be overlooked that the strong attractions of and ideals of molar femininity does cause pain and suffering, not only for Andrea, but for other subjects positioned as women: the ones that does not fit in, and thus get stigmatized through the same system. Disadvantage is for instance produced through the becomings of bodies through images as well, as the images which represent “hyperfemininity” stigmatizes those who do not fit, as for example embodied subjects racialized as non-white or those who are categorized as disabled, thus producing them as misfits.

“I almost got scared… of myself in a way” – On failure and anxiety

It is in consideration of this quote by Andrea noticeable how she points out Kenza’s financial status as she introduces her to me. I get the impression as we talk that she is impressed by Kenza, who is a young woman’s success. Kenza is, according to Andrea, not only gorgeous - she is one of the richest persons in Sweden as well - and this appears to be important for her to point out. Andrea thus appears to stress female independence, not through becoming rich through marriage, but rather through achievement. As I have found out, Kenza has a self-made fortune which she has achieved through blogging, and so this indicate that one can become rich by being beautiful something which, in line with Garland-Thomson, can be seen as an access issue which facilitates the subject’s ability to enjoy entitlement and sociocultural status (Garland-Thomson 2002: 4, 5).

The emphasis on the importance of money and economy makes me draw a parallel to what Andrea stated about herself in relation to her having a “good job”. The financial advantage makes her afford positioning herself as a privileged subject even further since she, as Garland-Thomson stresses, through consumerism can strive to live up to the beauty system’s mandated standard of the goal of the ideal female body (Garland-Thomson 2002: 10). This way of gaining status through once financial situation thus also becomes apparent in Andrea’s description of Kenza; it is a form of power.

Consequently, financial status is to be seen as a central aspect of being able to gain cultural
privilege, as it allows one to enjoy the cultural capital provided to those who through consumerism, cosmetic body modifications etc. can achieve a body that is considered to be beautiful, healthy, fit, and thus also intelligent, competent, and fitting (Garland-Thomson 2002: 5, 6). Accordingly, as I have mapped out so far, Andrea’s becoming through images of Kenza and their affinity in regard of molarity, financial status, and thus increased cultural privilege, has positive, enabling, and empowering effects. However, this positive power - that is potentia - also has a downside, something which I will explore on the basis of the following quote from Andrea:

"Some time ago I had just colored my hair blonde, I had done my nails, I had done my lips, and all I wanted was white teeth. Like, white teeth... ‘Why would I want to have yellow teeth when I can have white?’ And so I bought one of those teeth-whitening-things and just bleached, and bleached, and bleached. And I thought to myself, ‘no, I’m not pretty’. So, I didn’t feel pretty at all. I felt fat, I felt ugly -I did feel that way. That episode passed, it only lasted a couple of days, but still... I did think, ‘no, this is not me’. Because then it was like I just wanted more, I wanted more. But I don’t feel like that now, I don’t know what that was. I almost got scared... Of myself in a way.”

(Quote four)

Letherby underlines that researchers might feel strong emotions in the field and that we may want to challenge or interfere with certain assertions by the interviewees (Letherby 2003: 112). In the case of this quote I experienced a mixture of frustration and empathy. Andrea had been talking in such a positive way about Kenza and her experiences of herself that this darker side of the desire for molar femininity and the desire to “fit” within one’s spatial situatedness appeared to be a big contrast. Once again I was reminded of the constraints of power and the material and semiotic conditions which Andrea negotiates herself within, which simultaneously impose rules and regulations on her (Braidotti 2002: 21).

In view of this, I felt like I wanted to tell her this in a way, that the beauty system and the semiotic conditions of Western society does this to subjects, it encourages them to want more and strive to live up to unachievable goals. Garland-Thomson’s critique regarding the pressure of the beauty norms, and the empty promises of the beauty industry is namely something that has influenced me personally a lot, even if my goal in this thesis is to show a complex image of cosmetic body modifications which takes into consideration the affirmative aspects as well as critique. Yet in this situation - as Letherby advises researchers to do - I did not interfere because, as Letherby claims, if we allow the person to continue we may discover an insight to these feelings and views of our interviewee (Letherby 2003: 12).

Consequently, bearing this quote in mind, as much as Andrea can be seen as becoming molecular through molar fixity, as I claimed in the last chapter given that the molarity enables and fuels her in her desire to become, the simultaneous constrictions and constraints of power
as potestas makes itself reminded in this quote (Braidotti 2002: 84, 143).

Braidotti argues that power in the current Western society is a matter of selection, control, entitlement and access (Braidotti 2002: 189). She claims that the body, taking this into consideration, is a center for imagined promises as well as horrific threats. Andrea can thus be seen as enjoying the aspects of power in this sense since she positions herself as a privileged subject on the basis of her financial and corporeal advantages. In the joyful encounter with specific cosmetic body modifications which brings her into her “Hot” period as for example lip-enhancements and getting a tan, Andrea thus fulfills Braidotti’s notion of viewing herself as a center for various promises. In entering the “Hot” period Andrea expects an increase of her potentia, as she pointed out in the quote in relation to “Hot” and “Ugly” periods. She expects to feel happy and empowered, thus experiencing an increase and powerful actualization of her potentia, described by Andrea as the “BAM!” (Braidotti 2002: 104, 135). However, as we can tell from this quote, there are not only positive aspects to being in the “Hot” period and thus being “the best you can”.

Andrea explains that she experienced that there was no actualization of her potentia as an effect of the cosmetic body modifications on this specific occasion. Everything was “perfect” and so she expected the lip-enhancement, manicure, tan, and coloring of the hair to fuel the becoming of her, towards molar femininity, but instead she felt ugly and fat. Her entering the “Hot” period ought to be followed by a sense of fitting, in Garland-Thomson’s sense, for Andrea. There is thus, as Garland-Thomson points out, an inconsistency between body and world as Andrea expects to fit, and her material status as well as the environment she finds herself in produces her as a fit, but yet she experiences herself as a misfit (Garland-Thomson 2011: 593, 604). Braidotti stresses that each gadget or technology that the body enters into composition with represents a promise of enjoyment, but instead often ends up constituting a presence-absence of fulfillment (Braidotti 2002: 188). Andrea’s narration designates, in my interpretation, that this is the kind of emptiness as an effect of consumerism that she experienced in connection with cosmetic body modifications on this specific occasion.

Andrea states that she “wanted more”, and that she told herself that as long as she managed to get white teeth she would be satisfied. Davis emphasizes that assertions such as this to a large extent are a result of market demand and media which bears the promise of an exalted life and happiness as an effect of cosmetic body modifications (Davis 1995: 20, 48). In feeling like a misfit, therefore “wanting more” in order to reestablish her sense of fitting, Andrea thus acts upon the promises of cosmetic body modifications and hopes that “fixing” what seems to be lacking will make cosmetic body modifications an actualization of her
potentia again. At the same time Andrea demonstrates in this quote that she is aware of that the beauty system is powerful and that it can break down a woman’s confidence thus creating strong negative affects, and that she has to manage her affects and desires in order not to be miserable.

In view of that Andrea describes that she, during this episode, got scared of herself since she wanted more, I am thus able to once again distinguish the danger of excess. One prevalent discourse of feminine beauty in the Western culture today is, according to Garland-Thomson, that cosmetic body modifications should give the impression of a neutral appearance, thus producing natural-looking noses, breasts, lips, chins etc. (Garland-Thomson 2002: 12). In my view, based on Andrea’s assertions, achieving this “natural” appearance includes not crossing the line of what can be considered to be natural, as a misfit otherwise would be created, as the environment which celebrates neutrality would not sustain a body that is shaped by an excessive approach to cosmetic body modifications (Garland-Thomson 2011: 593, 594).

Consequently, the presence-absence which Braidotti highlights as the implication of the Western society’s view of the body as a center for imagined promises of enjoyment through the entering into composition, with for instance hard technologies, can ultimately be seen as an example of power as potestas (Braidotti 2002: 188, 189). Braidotti points out in relation to this that vanity as well as paranoia is implications of female objectification under the power, and constraints of current Western society (Braidotti 2002: 60). As a result of this, I find that the possibility of becoming nomadic through molar fixity is a dual issue where that which signifies potentia simultaneously denotes potestas. The subject’s negotiations of the self and nomadic becomings within the material and semiotic conditions that it is situated within are not black and white issues. There is not simply a leaving behind of potestas and cultural constraints thus moving forward towards potentia and nomadism - they are part of the constant transformation of the nomadic subject at all times.

In my view, Andrea as a nomadic subject wants to become and continue actualizing her potentia through her desire to position herself as an ideal girl. However, the practices which enable this affirmative becoming, that is cosmetic body modifications, becomes potestas in a way since it is based upon the constricting Western cultural views on femininity at the same time as it facilitates affirmative encounters and fuels the becoming of the subject (Braidotti 2002: 21). This can be seen as illustrated by Andrea’s affinity and intra-connectedness with Kenza. As Kenza appeals to Andrea’s desire for molarity as she also, simultaneously, contributes to the paranoia and anxiousness Andrea experiences when she feels the constraints Western culture imposes through the beauty system, and she perceives herself as not living up
to the requirements of feminine beauty (Garland-Thomson 2002: 12).

There are thus great contradictions in wanting to escape the limitations of power as negative. They involve the rules and regulations facilitating Andrea as a subject to continue negotiating herself and desire herself as belonging to molarity. Simultaneously it involves being locked and constrained by the potestas related to conforming to cultural standards of beauty, which appeals to Andrea’s desire for molarity, but which also creates paranoia and anxiety (Braidotti 2002: 21, 84). However, Andrea claims in the quote that this negative episode only lasted a couple of days, something which I of course cannot confirm as either true or false. Andrea tries to position herself as a subject in control, in relation to me, and I cannot know how she feels about herself in her everyday life, that is to say, if she for instance feels “ugly” a lot of the time. However, what is important here is not if what Andrea says is “true” or not, but rather how her attempt to position herself as being in control points to an ideal that subject’s should be precisely in control, and that she tries to resist being positioned as self-absorbed and vain.

Consequently, I am able to conclude that the ideal of being in control and the privilege of staying in the molar space, as well as the affirmative power of Andrea’s experiences of herself through Kenza, seem to exceed the constraints of Western culture, which in a consumerist sense points to that the subject can be further improved through the practices of cosmetic body modifications (Braidotti 2002: 100, 135; Davis 1995: 19, 20).

“I just think she’s crazy hot” - Renegotiations of whiteness and hegemony

In consideration of the first quote in this chapter - which regarded Kenza - I find that another central aspect come into view, namely ethnicity, and more specifically - whiteness. Andrea explains in the chapter’s first quote that although Kenza and she have “exactly” the same body Kenza has a few more advantages since she is half Moroccan, and thus has “olive-colored skin, nice eyes and nice hair…” Garland-Thomson asserts that ethnicized and racialized bodies are misfits in relation to the material and semiotic conditions of the Western society, which celebrates what she refers to as “conformed”, white, beautiful, and fit bodies (Garland-Thomson 2002: 6, 12). The dis/ability system and the beauty system indeed work as potestas for embodied subjects categorized as for instance ethnic or disabled, they create strong hierarchies that cause both pain and suffering.

However, as we can tell from the example of Kenza, the issue concerning fitting and misfitting is quite an ambiguous issue. Ringrose stresses that discursive determinism, where the becoming of bodies is thoroughly assessed through the symbolic system, thus fails to
account for changes within the symbolic/discursive order (Ringrose 2011: 599).

Discourses are thus changing at all times, and since the different aspects of sociocultural categories intra-act constantly it is difficult to polarize them in relation to each other. Kenza is non-white but her appearance and beauty can, according to Andrea, be viewed as hegemonic and so, consequently; the description of Kenza as misfitting does not itself fit. Ahmed explains this ambiguity of ethnicity and in particular whiteness as a social and bodily orientation, that leads to some bodies feeling more at home in a world that is oriented around whiteness than others (Ahmed 2007: 160). For Andrea - who is white - being tanned is something to desire, for her it is part of entering the “Hot” period. Kenza on the other hand is not black, but she is not white either, she can be seen as “naturally” tanned as she has olive-colored skin. In view of this, Ahmed claims that whiteness is not an ontological given, but rather something that can be received or become given over time if, if for example a body is viewed as “inhabiting” whiteness it can also pass as white (Ahmed 2007: 150, 158, 160).

Andrea can thus be interpreted as including Kenza within whiteness, with an extra privilege since she “naturally” inhabits the shade of brown that Andrea can only achieve through getting a tan. Thus, in my understanding, Andrea perceives Kenza’s body as hegemonic as it inhabits characteristics such as, plumped lips, and a tanned look, which Andrea herself only achieves through the specific cosmetic body modifications which orients her towards the desired “Hot” period. The fact that Andrea additionally perceives herself as a part of molarity, through her experiences of herself through images of Kenza, furthermore substantiates this claim. Moreover, even if Andrea celebrates Kenza as hegemonic in relation to herself, she can also be seen as exotifying her. The way in which she describes Kenza’s hegemony as consisting of her as having nice hair, plumped lips, and nice big eyes, as an effect of her Moroccan heritage namely makes a paradoxical double image of Kenza emerge, since she simultaneously is being tied to the sexualization of outer European women which Larsson point to (Larsson 2006: 119).

Nevertheless, in view of the fact that Andrea feels the desire to enter into composition with hard technologies such as lip-enhancement, fake tan, and coloring of the hair in order to achieve - what she experiences as Kenza’s status - indicates the changes in discourses which Ringrose emphasizes, since the person residing within hegemony in this case is not a blonde white girl, but rather a non-white girl inhabits desired olive-colored skin and naturally “plumped lips” (Ringrose 2001: 599). As I see it, what facilitates this hegemonic perception of Kenza is also the very fact that her skin is “the right amount of brown”, as Brumberg highlights, light skin is a way of passing as white and it is also a key to middle-class status
(Brumberg 1997: 77). Here, yet again, financial status reappears as an enabling factor in a subject’s becoming. Just as Andrea uses her financial means to afford fueling her nomadic becoming through cosmetic body modifications towards transformation oriented towards molarity, Kenza can be viewed as enabled through her financial status which allows her to pass as white. Because, as Ahmed underlines, whiteness is not reducible to white skin, to enjoy class privilege in particular also means that a non-white subject can pass as white (Ahmed 2007: 159, 160).

“I really want people to know that I have a heart”- Anxiety and humor as a way of resistance

"Last time when we were out at the pub - on my 21 birthday - we were talking to a group of guys, and I sat there making jokes and this guy was like ‘damn, you’re such a great person! I didn’t think you were!’ And I was like ‘damn, how great that he didn’t think I was some kind of bitch’, because I don’t want people to think that. So I can make jokes at my own expense. When I did my lips I phoned my mom and I said ‘quack, quack, quack’ just to joke around with myself a bit. And when I have an allergic reaction I say, ‘if my face turns blue you can phone for help, but if my lips swell up you don’t have to do anything!’ And so I can joke about it. At work I play this little character where I joke about myself, do you know who Jordan is, the one with the boobs?

L- Yes.

A- Yeah, I make jokes about her and say, ’oh, she is my role model!’ and everyone starts laughing because they know she’s not, but I make jokes about it. I don’t try to dismiss the lip-enhancement. It’s just that some people do it and then they don’t stand by their actions. I stand for what I have done. But I still want people… Just because I like to look a certain way or, am in a certain way… Perhaps I’m perceived as thinking to highly of myself. I still want to give of myself. I can say crazy things because I’m not perfect and I want people to know that. I remember that when I used to go to the pub, I used to talk about that I like to go fishing - because that is really something that I want to get across. I wanted to say that so that people would understand that there is more to me than my appearance.”

A- I remember when I was getting my hair done at the salon and there was this girl there who was going to get her nails done. She had high-lighted blonde hair and was talking on the phone going, ‘Yeee, but I was going to do that then and then…!’ (exaggerated) and I thought to myself ‘God, what a person’. She had really devoted herself to that role - I know she had, because otherwise you wouldn’t behave that way. But she was probably insecure and wanted to show everyone at the salon that she was ‘all in’ - that she was going to spend money on her hair, nails. The woman who did my nails at the salon asked me what I did for a living and I replied, ‘oh! I work with the elderly, I love working with old people!’ because I really like to show people that I have a heart. Like, I see these girls who meet the ideal and perhaps they would be really fun to hang out with - because I can hang out with anyone. But when they look like that and behave in a certain way - then it’s not real. Like the one at the salon - she looked like me but she really wanted everyone there to know about her - she really wanted the status. And then we can compare it with when someone calls me, ‘howdy!’ I can still make jokes, because I’m still me even if I fix myself, and I’m happy that I am. And when people see me be in this way they think, ‘oh, she behaves in that way instead, that’s so great!’ (Quote five)
“Damn, how great that he didn’t think I was some kind of bitch” - Resistance towards constraining semiotic conditions

When I heard Andrea explain how glad she was when the man at the bar said that she was a great person even though he did not think she was, I felt aggravated. In my view that man is a sexist as he thinks it is okay to say things like that to a woman, and I found it strange that Andrea took this, from my point of view - offensive comment - as a compliment. At this point I was, in line with Letherby, yet again faced with the decision if I should comment on this or not (Letherby 2003: 112, 113). As I used a semi-structured approach to the interviews I was engaging actively in conversation with Andrea, but here I chose to keep a low profile and hear Andrea explain more, and as I listened to her several reasons for this positive reaction by her emerged.

Davis claims that women often feel the need to validate their choice of engaging with hard technologies, by emphasizing that they are competent decision makers and that for example the lip-enhancement, breast augmentation or other modifications becomes a way to decrease suffering (Davis 1995: 114, 156, 157). Andrea too expresses the need to validate her choice of having lip-enhancement and engaging with various cosmetic body modifications because, as she puts it, she wants people to know that she is more than her appearance, and that she does not consider herself to be perfect. However, as I established earlier, Andrea’s motivation for doing lip-enhancements is not so much about suffering as it is about her feeling the high of looking her best. Thus, Andrea as I see it, simultaneously negotiates herself in relation to molarity - which constrains but also fuels her - and her desire to assert her specificity in relation to molarity, through resisting the rules and regulations of molarity (Braidotti 2002: 75, 84). In regard of this it appears, in my understanding, to be the case that Andrea expresses her affirmative becoming and the non fixity of her as a nomadic subject through humor, as I will demonstrate throughout this chapter.

Andrea never says explicitly what it is that she feels the need to assure that she is not, being a subject who desires molarity and enjoys financial status, as well as cultural privilege in terms of her corporeal advantages, one would, in line with Garland-Thomson, expect that there would mostly be positive effects (Garland-Thomson 2002: 6). However, as we can distinguish from Andrea’s narration of this issue, there are some negative aspects to identify in relation to how socioculturally privileged embodied female subjects, that are engaging with cosmetic body modifications, can be perceived by their surroundings. Youngblood Jackson asserts in consideration of the molar form of cheerleading that the cheerleader is bound by
sexist definitions of femininity, since cheerleaders over-code their bodies with molar constraints (Youngblood Jackson 2010: 583, 584).

I can thus notice that Andrea too, as she codes her body with molar constraints related to a specific type of feminine appearance, is a subject to these types of sexist definitions. Thus, if I view the first example that is brought up by Andrea in the quote, namely that about the man who told her that he “surprisingly enough” regarded her as a “great person”, despite his first impression, I am allowed to distinguish a certain stereotype, namely, “the blonde” or the “bimbo”. Shifman and Lemish claims that the stereotype concerning the blonde is characterized by the fact that it targets a particular group of women, but that it in reality mocks women in general as it reduces women to consumerism and beautification (Shifman & Lemish 2012: 90, 91).

We can thus presume that the man in the bar thought along the lines of this stereotype as he encountered Andrea in the bar, and judging from Andrea’s positive thoughts concerning that he did not perceive her as a bitch, the manifestation of the prejudices regarding this stereotype becomes additionally clear. Shifman and Lemish namely claim that the blonde often is constructed to be bitchy, sexy and even manipulative (Shifman & Lemish 2012: 99). For this reason, as Andrea wants to show that she is “does not think too highly of herself”, and that she “still is herself”, in my interpretation, she partly seeks to resist this type of discursive understanding of the type of femininity she negotiates herself within. Because, Andrea’s expression of herself can be viewed as related to that of the blonde, as hard technologies and consumerism are common denominators within the discursive expression of femininity that is prevalent in the molar form of ideal femininity Andrea desires as well (Shifman & Lemish 2012: 91; Davis 1995: 20).

Braidotti claims that subjectivity is a process characterized by active and reactive interaction with the material and semiotic conditions the subject finds itself in as well as resistance to these conditions (Braidotti 2002: 75). Thus, Andrea’s highlighting of her personality and her way of using her sense of humor to get her personality across can, from Braidotti’s perspective, be seen as her way of reacting to the semiotic conditions she finds herself in. In Andrea’s example of her reaction in relation to the incident with the man at the pub, as well as in her expression of that she used to tell people when she loved to go fishing, I moreover recognize what I perceive as some anxiety regarding her desire to get her personality across. Here I am again able to refer back to the paranoia and anxiousness I described in relation to, what Davis underlines as, the constraints of cultural definitions of feminine beauty (Davis 1995: 157).
In my previous assessment of this issue I brought up the constraints of culture in relation to Andrea’s paradoxical perception of herself as a misfit during her “Hot” period, and thus the pressures of the beauty system on subjects. However, in this quote this issue reveals itself again through the very symbolic conditions related to Western cultural views of the kind of feminine beauty Andrea negotiates herself within (Braidotti 2002: 75, 189). Shifman and Lemish stress that there are a multitude of jokes circulating regarding the stereotype of the blonde, and that these jokes are portraying the blonde as sexy - thus reduced to body - ,bitchy, as well as intellectually challenged (Shifman & Lemish 20012: 92). It is, in view of this, noticeable that Andrea points out that she makes jokes about herself, as we can tell from a second example of what Andrea brings up in the quote. Namely that concerning the jokes she makes about her having the busty bikini model Jordan as her role model, and the way she makes jokes at her own expense in relation to the lip-enhancements. In view of these actions, Andrea in a way actively resists the above mentioned prejudices established by the sociocultural discourse and which concern particular girls who for instance do lip-enhancements (Davis 1995: 20, 55).

In my view, it can be seen as a possible way for Andrea to deconstruct the possibility of others perceiving her as a dumb or bitchy blonde; if Andrea says it first - she has control. By making jokes at her own expense she can be seen as making clear that she is aware of the semiotic conditions within which she negotiates herself, thus prohibiting others from perceiving her as someone who is bitchy, superficial, and looks down at others who for example do not wear fashionable clothes etc. Andrea additionally shows that she is quite clever, being able to see through social “games” and negotiate norms.

This way of trying to maintain control of how one is perceived can, in accordance with Braidotti’s underlining of power in the Western society, be seen as a way of sustaining the pursuit of entitlement as well as access (Braidotti 2002: 189). Accordingly, as Andrea, through the jokes about herself, shows that she is aware of the general semiotic conditions and thus in control, she also puts herself in a position where she can continue to benefit from the aspects of power that she enjoys on account of her corporeal and financial advantages.

However, as I can tell from a third example, that is, that of the blonde girl at the beauty salon who, according to Andrea, was fake and wanted “status”, there is another aspect that I am able to distinguish, on the basis of how one can resist stereotypical or negative positioning of oneself by others. If someone, like Andrea, who engages with cosmetic body modifications such as lip-enhancements, is to distance themselves from stereotypical understandings of the type of femininity they express, which connects those types of hard technologies with for
example the discourse concerning the blonde, they are also required to distance themselves from those who “overdo” the molar form of ideal femininity. Andrea explains that the other girl was “fake”, and so, I am again able to make out that there is a balance which needs to be held where, if someone exaggerates this molar form of femininity too much, they become a misfit (Garland-Thomson 2011: 591).

The balance which this girl, according to Andrea’s narration, is not able to uphold, appears in my interpretation to concern desiring the status of molar femininity but making sure it looks effortless. Otherwise the behavior and appearance can be perceived as an expression of insecurity, a misfit is created since the environment in which Andrea finds herself does not sustain the shape and function of the other girl’s body since she is dismissed on that basis (Garland-Thomson 2011: 594). In line with Braidotti, to have control is to possess power in the Western society, and as Andrea is able to uphold the balance she thus gains entitlement and access. Her way of engaging with hard technologies such as lip-enhancement becomes something which enables her, makes her privileged, and thus makes her fit (Braidotti 2002: 189).

“Oh, she behaves in that way instead, that’s so great!” – Queer moments of escaping constraining norms

Andrea is thus found negotiating power and desire, as well as the spatial and semiotic conditions in which she finds herself, which in turn dictates the cultural views on feminine beauty (Braidotti 2002: 21, 75). Within these conditions she can be seen as resisting stereotypical positioning of herself by others, as active and reactive interaction with the material and semiotic conditions is part of the becoming of a subject. Youngblood Jackson explains that the cheerleader Jessie uses how she dresses, behaves, as well as her movement to express her desire to show resistance towards the essentialized category of “cheerleader” in order to express her specificity (Youngblood Jackson 2010: 580, 583). Andrea does this as well, but in what I consider to be a more complex way, as I will explain further in this chapter. Andrea engages with cosmetic body modifications and in particular hard technologies such as lip-enhancement in order to actualize her potentia and fuel her affirmative becoming, which is oriented towards molar femininity (Braidotti 2002: 66, 100).

However, the way in which she engages with cosmetic body modifications, and the way she desires to position herself as a subject simultaneously gives her a reason to show resistance, in consideration of how she is positioned by others, as we could tell from the examples concerning her use of humor - partly fueled by anxiety - as an active way of
resisting stereotypical positioning. Consequently, Andrea does not want to be locked down in a stereotype. Her pursuit of the processes which brings her into her desired “Hot” period, despite the constraining semiotic conditions can, in accordance with Davis, be seen as indicating the agency that is present in the act of engaging with cosmetic body modifications, which for Andrea enacts something that is generally good for her as a subject (Braidotti 2002: 135; Davis 1995: 5, 57).

This agency and resistance enacted by Andrea on the basis of her pleasurable encounters with cosmetic body modifications can furthermore be seen as an active critique of Garland Thomson, as well as Young’s, perceptions of the sociocultural limitations of feminine body comportment and cosmetic body modifications. Young for example claims that women in sexist societies are physically handicapped (Young 1990: 153). Garland-Thomson, who draws on Young, claims that cosmetic body modifications as a result imposes disability on women’s bodies by restricting their physical agency (Garland-Thomson 2002: 6). According to her, a paradox emerges because women who engage with feminine cultural practices such as stiletto high heels, corseting, and cosmetic body modifications are in fact impaired. With the example of a comparison between the prototypical Barbie-doll, and her opposite - disabled Becky, who comes with a wheelchair - Garland-Thomson illustrates this paradox (Garland-Thomson 2002: 18). She vindicates that Barbie - who is considered to be able-bodied - is restricted in her sequined gowns, and with her crowns and push-up bras, whereas the disabled Becky wears comfortable clothes and is mobile in the way that she is poised for action. Her main point is, in view of this, that Barbie is an ultra-feminized target of sexual appropriation while Becky is liberated from those oppressive scripts - potentially at the cost of losing her identity as a feminine sexual being.

Thus, these stereotypical notions are something which Andrea can be seen as opposing through her positive feelings towards engaging with cosmetic body modifications, as well as her way of actively resisting stereotypical positioning. As Andrea explains in the quote “I can still make jokes, because I’m still me even if I fix myself, and I’m happy that I am”, that is to say, even if Andrea desires the molar form of ideal femininity and engages with cosmetic body modifications she cannot be deprived of being an active subject. Manicure and lip-enhancements are not disabling to Andrea, they are enabling practices, what does disable her is rather Garland-Thomson’s and Young’s dismissal of her agency. Consequently, Andrea can be seen as deconstructing the feminine stereotype presented as a disabling given by Garland-Thomson (Garland-Thomson 2002: 6, 18). Andrea’s way of resisting the constraints of semiotic power can, in line with Ringrose, be seen as disclosing that feminine display is not a
fixed matter (Ringrose 2011: 614). Here Andrea can truly be viewed as a nomadic subject, in accordance with Braidotti, seeing as she refuses to behave in the way that the phallogocentric system expects her to behave (Braidotti 2002: 13).

The moments when Andrea says “howdy” when someone calls, and her way of explaining that she loves working with the elderly - even if they to some extent are driven by an anxiety of being “fixed” within a stereotype - can thus be seen as queer moments when Andrea escapes the material and semiotic conditions which constrains her (Braidotti 2002: 13, 21). She negotiates herself as a becoming subject by being an embodied female subject - a signified body - desiring molarity, at the same time as she actively resists the semiotic constraints, by becoming what the phallogocentric does not want her to become. That is to say, a materially embodied figuration of the subject who uses cosmetic body modifications as an affirmative deconstruction of power as well as a force that drives her towards the desired molarity.

This way of showing resistance is thus, in my view, all the more complex than the more obvious resistance found in Youngblood Jackson’s analysis, given the fact that Andrea stays stratified and simultaneously, in a conscious manner, disrupts the material and discursive expectations of her (Youngblood Jackson 2010: 580, 583). In this way Andrea contributes to a deconstruction of the potestas and fixity of molar identity and affect the affirmative becoming of other subject’s, as her nomadic way of disrupting the flow of expected behavior creates moments of imperceptibility – allowing for a moment of surprise (Braidotti 2002: 104, 119).

This is in any case true for me as a researcher; as I started this process as someone with a highly critical view of hard technologies, in particular lip-enhancements and the underlying reasons for someone to make such choices. Here the simultaneous becoming of researcher and interviewee, which Mazzei points out, and its way of influencing the study becomes apparent (Mazzei 2013: 14, 15). I started out viewing these types of hard technologies as either good or bad as some feminist accounts of the issue has done in the past, as Sullivan and Murray highlights, in their claim that these practices has been seen as either neutral or utterly determined (Sullivan & Murray 2009: 2). In view of this quote by Andrea, the nomadic potential of cosmetic body modifications is pointed to, demonstrating that it is not an issue of a transcendental signifier or simply a tool separate from the subject, it is part of the ongoing formation of the subject and it is, for Andrea, an affirmative element in her desire to become (Sullivan & Murray 2009: 2, 3).
Discussion

In reconnection with my thesis aim I have aspired to explore the becomings of an embodied female subject in connection with cosmetic body modifications and her experiences of fitting/misfitting in relation to having this, as well as situate her in an intersectional context in view of the fact that multiple social categorizations intra-act in the generation of fitting and misfitting subjects. As Braidotti points out, the focus on subjectivity enables researchers to string together issues that are currently scattered across a number of domains, and so my mapping out of the becoming of Andrea in relation to the intra-connectedness of these issues can be seen as bringing into view norms and values, forms of bonding as well as social belonging that are prevalent in Sweden and the West today (Braidotti 2013: 42).

I have furthermore in consideration of this, and in accordance with Braidotti, attempted to stress the affirmative potential of the sociocultural phenomena of cosmetic body modifications with the intention of illuminating it as a potentially positive element in connection with desire (Braidotti 2002: 5). Here I want to point out that it is noticeable how the privileging of persons like Andrea at the same time as they increase her potentiav in fact decreases - to a high extend - other persons potentiav. It might be positive for Andrea as a subject to have her possibilities of motility widened by having cosmetic body modifications, but it also feeds strongly into the dis/ability system and the beauty system which stigmatizes and leads to many forms of suffering and discrimination of other women, men, and persons who do not fit these categories. My analysis has shown that there are very good reasons for persons like Andrea to desire and try to embody, what she considers to be, the ideal girl: it shows one of the ways in which beauty, whiteness, femininity, and economic wealth are produced and sustained. Thus, violence towards others is an issue that comes into view here. Andrea as a subject cannot be seen as “responsible” for this violence, but it is important to call attention to the fact that the dis/ability system and beauty systems generates stigmatizing and limiting effects, that affect those who are the others of these systems.

Consequently, what has emerged in my thesis is a complex picture of the becoming of Andrea as an embodied subject where, as Braidotti asserts, the subject finds itself in active and reactive intra-action with the material and semiotic conditions in which it is situated (Braidotti 2002: 75). Multifaceted negotiations and restrictions as well as contradictions and resistance to the prevailing conditions consequently make up my findings concerning the becoming of Andrea.

Cosmetic body modifications have, as Davis affirms, been what can be described as a
disembodied phenomenon in some feminist scholarships accounts of the issue (Davis 1995: 5, 57). Something which, according to Davis, is due to these feminist approaches’ strong focus on patriarchal oppression and cultural discourse models, which leaves out women’s lived relationship to their bodies and thus their experiences and feelings. Being a feminist as well as a political activist I too have been influenced by these models, and cosmetic body modifications which alters the flesh have evoked discomfort in me. However, I have found it important to expand my view and set out to illustrate the desire and agency of a young woman who alters her flesh for cosmetic reasons since it - as I have argued - is a contemporary sociocultural phenomena which has affirmative as well as constricting potential, and since it affects the fitting and misfitting of the subject (Braidotti 2002: 5).

Accordingly, cosmetic body modifications can be understood as affecting the fit/misfit of Andrea against the background of Braidotti’s notion of power (Braidotti 2002: 189). Braidotti claims that power is to be viewed as a constant negotiation between power as potestas and as potentia and that power in view of this is to be identified as a matter of selection, control, entitlement and access in the current Western society (Braidotti 2002: 21, 189). Therefore, as Garland-Thomson argues, notions concerning beauty, ablebodiedness, and health for instance, becomes access issues which grants the subject’s who fit the requirements of such designations with cultural capital (Garland-Thomson 2002: 5, 6). Bearing this in mind I have throughout the analysis - on the basis of Andrea’s narrations - demonstrated several sociocultural contexts and situations where Andrea’s corporeal advantages, namely her being slim, white, young, as well as her financial status, makes her “fit”, given that the environment sustains her body (Garland-Thomson 2011: 591). In regard of this, I found that in the immanent encounter with especially specific cosmetic body modifications, such as manicure and lip-enhancements Andrea could, in line with Braidotti’s notion of power as control, experience that she was in power of her own association to the access issues which grants sociocultural privilege (Braidotti 2002: 189). These specific cosmetic body modifications which alters the flesh are related to prestige and money, which in turn constitutes crucial factors in Andrea’s endeavor to position herself as a fitting subject that lives up to the Western cultural standards regarding ideal feminine beauty. At the same time Andrea can be seen as being herself subjectivated and submitting to molar femininity, and thus controlled by and materialising as an embodied subject in accordance with the beauty system.

In consideration of this I found that the cosmetic body modifications influence Andrea’s orientation towards - what she considers to be - the molar form of ideal femininity which she desired as they further expanded her access and thus the capacities and aspirations that are
“within reach” for her as a subject (Ahmed 2007: 152, 154). Davis claims that cosmetic body modifications which alter the flesh most usually concern women who feel dissatisfied with their bodies and take matter into their own hands by having plastic surgery with the purpose of acting upon their dissatisfaction (Davis 1995: 163). However, as I have shown in the case of Andrea, cosmetic body modifications which alter the flesh can also in some ways be a matter of indulgence for embodied female subjects who are, in their own experiences, basically pleased with themselves and their appearances.

In my interpretation, cosmetic body modifications holds empowering potential as they increase Andrea’s positive feeling of being a “fit” - something which Andrea refers to as her being in the “Hot” period. Andrea describes the feeling of entering the “Hot” period as a high, and it can be seen as enacting something that becomes a powerful actualization of herpotential (Braidotti 2002: 135, 189). The “Ugly” period in turn constituted a decrease of potential, but it also appeared to be necessary in order for the “Hot” period to be as empowering and affirmative as possible. Andrea namely expressed the necessity of the “Ugly” period as a factor which kept her from tipping the balance between being a fit and being a misfit, which could, in her view, have happened easier if she had access to the technologies related to “Hot” period at all times. In this respect practices of having cosmetic body modifications constitutes potestas as it points to the constricting power that consumerism has over embodied subjects, given that “plastic surgery junkies”, as Davis calls them, overdo their quest to live up to the access issues of Western society (Davis 1995: 19).

The balance that can be distinguished as an ideal in Andrea’s account seems to, in line with Garland-Thomson, concern going for a somewhat moderate “natural/neutral” look, thus altering one’s body in order to fit the cultural standard for Western cultural views of feminine beauty, while at the same time not “showing off” or appear to be “plastic” (Garland-Thomson 2002: 10, 12). Disrupting the balance results in the creation of a misfit, as we could tell from Andrea’s negative reaction towards the - in her view - exaggerating girl at the beauty salon who “wanted the status” of being an ideal girl.

However, the issue concerning the misfitting of embodied subjects is even more complex than solely concerning bodies which, in an explicit way, are not sustained by its environment. Because, as I have demonstrated, in accordance with Braidotti, the downside of consumerism and cosmetic body modifications is that technologies which represents a promise of enjoyment at times leaves the subject with a sense of lack of fulfillment (Braidotti 2002: 188). This negative affect was, in the case of Andrea, manifested in the quote where she entered the “Hot” period thus expecting to feel a high and the desired high did not occur. Andrea thus
experienced herself as a misfit at the one point when she expected herself to feel like, and experience herself as, a fit, regardless of whether or not the environment viewed her as a misfit depending on the context. This, I argue, is an effect of the constraints which Western culture impose through the beauty system and its intra-connectedness with consumerism, where some subjects have almost unlimited access to beautifying technologies, while at the same time the embodied subject experiences that it is unable to meet the expectations of feminine beauty (Garland-Thomson 2002: 12). Here some of the negative and limiting effects of beauty norms and the dis/ability system which I mentioned earlier in this chapter comes into view. Issues regarding for example men’s violence against women and the effects of eating disorders both concern negotiations of power, dominance and control and it affects subjugated subjects, as the pressure to meet the expectations of beauty, or the feeling of failure, can be imposed as a form of control and dominance by a partner, or the person themselves as an effect of the pressure from society.

Furthermore, with regard to the ways in which the intra-actions between fitting/misfitting and cosmetic body modifications affect Andrea’s subject-formation it is, in accordance with Braidotti, apparent that willful choice and unconscious drives composes the subject as it negotiates itself within the material and semiotic conditions in which it is situated (Braidotti 2002: 21, 22). I can thus conclude that Andrea, through her active choice of entering into composition with specific cosmetic body modifications, is becoming nomadic since she desires herself as a process of transformation (Braidotti 2002: 84). This nomadic becoming is however rather ambivalent given that Andrea, in my view, appears to be ambiguous in her attitude towards the changes. Andrea both in a way desires to permanently embody “the ideal girl”, and on the other hand she claims that the change into what she considers to be the ideal gives her intense pleasure, and that she would lose this pleasure if she could do constant modifications and always be in the “Hot” period. Furthermore, she dreads the trap of becoming addicted to constant modifications which would make her want more and more, and risk being regarded as and experiencing misfitting more often.

In relation to the active choice of entering into composition with cosmetic body modifications I am once again able to point to the agency of women who choose to have cosmetic body modifications of the flesh. They act and negotiate themselves within the material and semiotic conditions in which they are situated, and it is their active choice and desire for altering their bodies that makes them accountable - they are thus not just passive victims of oppression (Davis 1995: 56, 57). Consequently, Andrea’s forward-looking desire to enter the “Hot” period drives her, and it is, according to Braidotti, this desire to become that
fuels the entire process of becoming subject (Braidotti 2002: 22). Youngblood Jackson stresses that fitting in is a desire, and my interpretation is, in view of this assertion, that Andrea’s desire for molar femininity substantiates her desire for immanent encounters with specific cosmetic body modifications (Youngblood Jackson 2010: 585). By using her financial and corporeal advantages and make sure that she plumps her lips and shapes her face with make-up for example, she increases her access to the privileges that comes with molar femininity, that is to say, the power Braidotti points out as control, entitlement and status (Braidotti 2002: 189).

In relation to this, I have argued that Kenza Zouiten plays an important role as she contributes to the extended becoming of Andrea in view of the fact that she experiences herself as a privileged body through images of Kenza who - in Andrea’s eyes - embodies the ideal girl (Coleman 2008: 164). Through her affirmative affinity with Kenza, Andrea indeed receive confirmation that she fits and that she meet the requirements for molar femininity which she desires. Here I have also argued that Andrea’s positioning of Kenza as hegemonic in relation to her shows the fluidity of discourses, and I have, in view of this criticised Garland-Thomson’s notion that ethnicized and racialized bodies are misfits in relation to the material and semiotic conditions of the Western society. However, I have also shown that there are certain conditions for the hegemonic positioning of non-white bodies such as Kenza’s. Embodied female subjects whose bodies inhibit “the right amount of brown”- thus “naturally” inhibiting the desired “tanned” look - can be seen as hegemonic in relation to white embodied female subjects who desires the same molar form of ideal femininity. Thus, the lightness of Kenza’s non-white body allows her to pass as white and reside within a hegemonic position, a passing which is further facilitated by her financial status that enables her to orient herself towards molarity.

Furthermore, in line with my observation in the previous section concerning Andrea’s negative experience of being a misfit during her “Hot” period, I have mapped out how cosmetic body modifications both facilitate affirmative encounters - as Andrea’s joyful intra-connectedness with images of Kenza - and simultaneously constitute potestas since it constricts and regulates in accordance with Western cultural views on femininity. A paradoxical image of cosmetic body modifications thus emerges - desire for molar femininity and positive affirmative confirmations of accessing molarity ultimately generates ‘paranoia and anxiousness’ (Braidotti 2002: 60). This is due to the reason that the desire for the molar form of ideal femininity simultaneously imposes constraints which demand that the subject continues to conform in order to continue meeting the standards of the cultural views of
feminine beauty. These conclusions lead me to the significant recognition that Andrea in fact is becoming nomadic in her desire for molarity. The molar line - and thus potestas - of being that comes with desiring molarity and conforming to the rules and regulations of the beauty system keeps Andrea “fixed”; however, at the same time she can be seen as becoming molecular through this molar fixity. Because, molarity at the same time fuels her nomadic desire of herself as a process of transformation, consequently improving her access to sociocultural privileges as well as her ability to make links with other bodies, entities and capacities which can be understood as representing potentia (Braidotti 2002: 84). Another important aspect to acknowledge in relation to this is that cosmetic body modifications, which are part of a constraining form of power, represent the means which empowers and fuels this nomadic becoming through molar fixity.

On the background of this, I find that Andrea’s multifaceted relationship to the desire for molarity and the simultaneous becoming of her further develops Youngblood Jackson’s notion of the cheerleader who is positioned within a specific form of feminine molarity and expresses her difference and becoming through resisting precisely that molarity (Youngblood Jackson 2010: 580). Youngblood Jackson claims that it is much more interesting to explore how the cheerleader Jessie resists molarity than it is to map out how she “fits into” molarity and thus the category of “cheerleader” (Youngblood Jackson 2010: 579). I would say, on the basis of my exploration of Andrea’s narrations of herself in connection with cosmetic body modifications, that affirmative becoming is a complex process which in fact can take place through molar fixity. Andrea’s example demonstrates, in my interpretation, that it is not possible for subject’s to completely transgress the molar line and the constraints of the material and semiotic conditions in which it is situated; as Braidotti points out, the active and reactive intra-action with these conditions is a continuous process (Braidotti 2002: 75). It is, however, possible for the subject to become within these limitations, and even to become in a way that is oriented towards desired molarity.

This is not to say that this affirmative yet paradoxically constraining process of becoming is without resistance towards the material and semiotic conditions (Braidotti 2002: 75). In desiring to position herself as a subject, Andrea can namely also be viewed as becoming through her resistance towards the sociocultural expectations of her. As I have shown in the analysis, Andrea, unlike the cheerleader in Youngblood Jackson’s essay, do not show her resistance merely through explicitly dressing and behaving in a way that is not typical for molar femininity (Youngblood Jackson 2010: 580). Rather, Andrea uses humor in complex ways in order to resist stereotypical positionings of her. Here the complex nature of the
simultaneous limiting and empowering side of molarity becomes noticeable yet again: Andrea desires molarity, but she does not want to be fixed within an identity category. I have in view of this stated that there is an anxious side to Andrea’s resisting of others’ possible positioning of her. Even if she can be considered to be fitting, since her body is sustained by its environment and she has access to sociocultural privileges, she cannot control the way others perceive her (Garland-Thomson 2011: 591, 593). As Youngblood Jackson highlights, in coding your body with molar constraints such as cosmetic body modifications you are always at risk of being judged on the basis of for instance sexist definitions of femininity (Youngblood Jackson 2010: 583, 584). I have, in my interpretation based on quote number five by Andrea, thus identified Andrea’s anxiousness as concerning the possibility of her being positioned as a blonde “bitch” or as someone who “thinks too highly of herself”.

The roots to this type of anxiousness appears to stem from a dynamic described by Davis, who notes that women who engage with cosmetic body modifications that alter the flesh felt a need to justify their choices by insuring that they are well informed, and that it does not change them as persons (Davis 1995: 162, 163). I have claimed that Davis’s notion concerning this refers to Andrea as well, and that Andrea’s way of trying to really get her personality across by demonstrating her sense of humor represents a way of resisting the discursive positioning of her as perchance a “bitch“. She aims at showing that she is clever and demonstrates that she can negotiate norms and see through social “games” by being one step ahead, with a witty comment always at hand. This raises questions regarding if it might be so that Andrea, since she embodies an ideal, can afford to make fun of herself, as it is part of her ideal to be precisely in control.

Furthermore, the rather ambivalent pride in and downplaying of the cosmetic body modifications can again be seen as referring back to not transgressing the balance that appears to be crucial to uphold in order for the embodied female subject who engages with cosmetic body modifications not to tip over the edge and become a misfit.

In relation to individuals affective expressions in relation to cosmetic body modifications, my interpretation is that the “natural/neutral” looks that can be achieved through altering the flesh in order to meet cultural standards concerning Western views on feminine beauty ought to be matched with a similarly downplayed way of enjoying the control, entitlement and access which Braidotti points out as granted for those who benefit from this type of power (Braidotti 2002: 189). Those who are overdoing it - as in the case of the girl at the beauty salon - are at risk of being regarded socially as misfits in that they disrupt this balance, thus being categorized in relation to stereotypes that produce them as more or less caricatures of
embodied female subjects such as “plastic”, “Barbie” or “bimbo” (Davis 1995: 18, 19; Garland-Thomson 2002: 10, 12).

Ringrose asserts that subject’s who are discursively positioned as what can be seen as misfits, namely “fat” or “ugly”, can re-stage their identities through reconfiguring them as desirable (Ringrose 2011: 613). In general, in the contexts she is usually in, Andrea herself is, as I have pointed out, considered to be a fit, but the discursive positioning by others of her in these, and other contexts which she is not so often part of gives her reason to reconfigure the way she is positioned as well, since she knows that her way of engaging with cosmetic body modifications involves a balance between “natural/neutral” and “plastic”/“bimbo”. This also shows that it varies greatly in different contexts what is considered to be a ”natural” look and what is not. This might also show in the different feminist perspectives that I have presented, since in feminist contexts some ways of modifying bodies are considered to “deform” or “mutilate” the body as for example in Garland-Thomson’s study, while in other contexts they may be seen as representing potentia as for example in trans studies and in Davis’ study of women who have cosmetic surgery.

I have claimed that all in all Andrea’s way of showing resistance towards being “fixed” in discursive identity positions - or even against girls who according to Andrea overdo the molar form of ideal femininity - leads me to view her as a nomadic figuration of the embodied female subject. I argue that this is due to the fact that Andrea stays stratified at the same time as she acts in a way that the molar sociocultural context does not expect her to behave. This is in my view a nomadic action which disrupts the constraining aspects regarding Western cultural views on feminine beauty in relation to which Andrea negotiates herself (Braidotti 2002: 21).

I have in connection with this also stated that the case of Andrea and her way of disclosing molar feminine displays confirms Ringrose’s notion that discourses indeed are not fixed matter, and that changes in the symbolic order are possible to accomplish (Ringrose 2011: 599, 614). This in turn has lead me to critique and review especially Garland-Thomson’s notion concerning the culturally imposed disability on women, on the basis of feminine cultural practices such as stiletto heels, cosmetic body modifications that alters the flesh, corseting, and manicure (Garland-Thomson 2002: 6). Andrea can namely be seen as challenging, and to a certain degree deconstructing, this feminine stereotype by her way of resisting these feminine cultural practices as disabling as she claims that they empower her and that she is still herself. Consequently, for Andrea, cosmetic body modifications are enabling practices which improve her potentia, on account of the active choice and agency of
her as a subject. In view of Andrea’s way of desiring to position herself within molarity and simultaneous resistance to “fixity”, which she demonstrates by disrupting the sociocultural expectations of her, I am able to draw the conclusion that she can be seen as a materially embodied figuration of the subject. Andrea namely uses cosmetic body modifications as an affirmative deconstruction of constraining power and at the same time as a force that drives her towards molarity, which she desires.

**Conclusion**

The results presented in my thesis shows that resistance towards constraining material and semiotic conditions is not an either or issue - desire and resistance are intertwined - and in the case of my interviewee Andrea, this is demonstrated through her desire for molar femininity and simultaneous resistance towards fixity of identities. My analysis has shown the affirmative side of the sociocultural phenomena of cosmetic body modifications, along with its intertwinement with power as potestas. However, the enhancement of some persons and social groups’ potentia and hegemony is constraining and stigmatizing other persons and groups due to the effects of the dis/ability and beauty systems.

In exploring Andrea’s narrations of herself in relation to cosmetic body modifications, I have been able to broaden the focus from Davis notion that women have cosmetic body modifications which alters the flesh mainly because they are dissatisfied with their appearances, to also include having cosmetic body modifications as a way of expanding potentia, as in the example with my interviewee Andrea who is pleased with her appearance. The desire for molar forms of ideal femininity can consequently be a strong and affirmative - as well as a constraining - driving force.

In engaging with cosmetic body modifications as for instance, hair dye, spray tan, lip-enhancements, manicure, and make-up, my interviewee Andrea describes that she enters her desired “Hot” period, as opposed to what she explains as the “Ugly” period which she enters as the effects of the cosmetic body modifications wears off. The cosmetic body modifications give Andrea a high - they affect her in a way that facilitates the becoming of her as they empower her, thus increasing her potentia (Braidotti 2002: 33, 104). I have in view of Andrea’s negotiations of herself during the “Hot” period and the “Ugly” period argued that she can be seen as becoming nomadic on account of that she desires herself as a process of transformation (Braidotti 2002: 84). In entering into composition with cosmetic body modifications Andrea gains, in my interpretation, an enhanced sense of being a “fit” given that her corporeal as well as financial advantages allows her to enjoy the cultural capital that
is provided to those who meet the standards of Western cultural views on beauty (Garland-Thomson 2002: 5, 6). In accordance with Youngblood Jackson’s claim that fitting in is a desire, I have furthermore drawn the conclusion that it is not only Andrea’s desire for the “Hot” period that drives her, but ultimately her desire to position herself as partaking in, what she considers to be, the molar form of ideal femininity (Youngblood Jackson 2010: 585). Bearing this in mind I have argued that Andrea is becoming molecular through the molar fixity of wanting to belong to the molarity of the “ideal girl”, as it fuels and empowers the continuous nomadic becoming of her as a subject, thus representing potentia (Braidotti 2002: 84).

Although I have emphasized the affirmative aspects of cosmetic body modifications I have also pointed to the ways in which cosmetic body modifications becomes potestas due to the constraints Western culture imposes on subjects through the beauty system. Andrea experiences confirmation that she lives up to the Western cultural views of feminine beauty through her affinity with her idol Kenza Zouiten - who appeals to Andrea’s desire for molarity. However, in experiencing failure to meet the requirements of feminine beauty Andrea perceives herself as a misfit who is ugly. For Andrea this sparks a feeling of “wanting more” in order to “fix” the feeling of being a misfit: in a quote Andrea explains that she felt like everything would be fine as long as she just whitened her teeth. This, I have argued can be understood as a symptom of the paranoia and anxiousness that comes from power in the West being a matter of entitlement, access and control (Braidotti 2002: 189). Davis’s claim that market demand and media bears the promise of happiness as an effect of cosmetic body modifications can be seen as further substantiating this claim by Braidotti (Davis 1995: 20, 48).

Andrea can thus be seen as a privileged subject on account of her corporeal and financial advantages, but paranoia and anxiousness is born out of the constant pressure connected with the quest of maintaining access to the molarity of ideal femininity and from the fear of not being fulfilled by the cosmetic body modifications - as for example advertisements promises.

There appears to be an idea of danger of excess in connection with cosmetic body modifications which points to a norm that a balance needs to be held in order for the fitting embodied female subject not to become a misfit. Firstly, in relation to the issue of “wanting more” I have found that cosmetic body modifications in Western culture are conventionally expected to give an impression of an effortless and neutral/natural appearance (Garland-Thomson 2002: 12). It becomes important for Andrea not to cross the line by losing control and engaging with cosmetic body modifications to such an extent that she would be
considered to be “plastic”, which would disrupt the balance and create her as a misfit (Garland-Thomson 2002: 10, 12).

Secondly, the danger of excess becomes visible through the question of when a person is “showing off”. Andrea has shown resistance in that she wants to distance herself from girls who - like herself - desires molar feminine beauty, but, according to her, wants the “status” too much, and thus are perceived as entering into an exaggerated feminine “role”. This implies that one can desire the status of molar femininity, but in doing so must make sure that it looks effortless; otherwise one is at risk of becoming a misfit since you can be dismissed on the basis of overdoing the molar form of ideal feminine beauty.

Moreover, Andrea resists possible stereotypical positioning of herself by using humor and by asserting that she is still “herself”, meaning not letting herself be reduced to a “role”, even though she engages with cosmetic body modifications. She tries to escape the constraining material and semiotic conditions in which she is situated as she refuses to be “fixed” in a stereotype by enacting queer moments which disrupts the sociocultural expectations of her, as for example by pointing to that she loves working with the elderly. In view of this, I have drawn the conclusion that Andrea can be regarded as being an active subject in her very desire for the molar form of ideal femininity and the fact that she engages with cosmetic body modifications, some of which alters the flesh. Lip-enhancements and manicure are not simply disabling factors to Andrea, but can also to a high extend be regarded as means which enables her. Accordingly, statements by for instance Garland-Thomson, who asserts that these types of feminine cultural practices impose disability upon the embodied female subject as it limits them, can be seen as being challenged by the case of Andrea (Garland-Thomson 2002: 6, 18). I myself find it more precise to analyse how cosmetic body modifications can be understood as in complex and various ways contributing to a person’s fitting and misfitting, and how these processes are related to the dis/ability and beauty systems.

**Practical usage**

The notion of the intra-connectedness of cosmetic body modifications and the issue of fitting/misfitting in relation to the becoming of embodied female subjects that is demonstrated in my thesis can be helpful in understanding how subjectification works in relation to the beauty system and norms. This can be of use especially in the work with young people as it shows the significance of access issues in relation to belonging to molarity, and how desire for access to molarity influence embodied subjects. It can furthermore aid researchers as well
as public servants in the quest to further map out the agency of girls/women who choose to engage with various cosmetic body modifications that alters the flesh, as well as the desire that is connected with this (Davis 1995: 57).

The understanding concerning the intertwinement of these issues can thus form the basis for educational material concerning a broad span of issues. For instance bullying, men’s violence against women, as well as eating disorders, as all of these issues can be analysed on the basis of my results regarding the intra-connectedness of fitting/misfitting and cosmetic body modifications. Because, they all concern negotiations of power, dominance, control as well as things that subjugated subjects are willing to do, and desire, in order to gain access to sociocultural status, please others, and meet the standards of feminine cultural views on beauty. My thesis can furthermore be of use in the quest of understanding processes of whiteness and racialization in our current Western society. Because, it reveals the desire for whiteness as well as a simultaneous desire of being tanned, something which I have shown in relation with Kenza Zouiten can incorporate racialized bodies into the hegemony thus shifting discourses concerning whiteness.

In developing educational material regarding these issues, my notion of the intra-connectedness of cosmetic body modifications and fitting/misfitting can form a basis not only for understanding the triumph, pleasure and desire connected with having cosmetic body modifications but also for how the body, as Braidotti claims, is a center for imagined promises as well as horrific threats (Braidotti 2002: 189). This can be of use in the treatment and proactive work in relation to the issues I listed above, as it provides an understanding of the satisfactory sides of harmful, negative cultural practices.

Furthermore, the affirmative side of my thesis can bring educational material concerning cosmetic body modifications out of the one-dimensional view concerning feminine beauty, connecting it with crisis, shame and so on, and instead visualize the positive dimension, while at the same time recognizing that the actions are performed within the constraints of culture and that there are potentially negative sides to them as well.

In regard of further studies within this field that I have explored, I would see it as central to for instance look at a broader time span which compares the experiences of young women who engage with cosmetic body modifications which alters the flesh and their experiences as they grow older. That is to say, explore how it affects them in the future in relation to possible complications, perceptions of cosmetic body modifications and so on. This would extend the research concerning the becomings of embodied female subjects in relation to cosmetic body modifications and the issue of fitting and misfitting as it would point to the constant process
of becoming and transformation.

It would additionally be highly relevant to conduct further studies of other aspects of the intersections presented in this thesis. Heterosexuality as well as homosocial female desire would for instance be central to explore as they too would extend this field and expand the issues which affect the becomings of embodied female subject in connection with cosmetic body modifications.
Appendix 1. Translated quotes from interviews - Original language:

Swedish

Quote one - "Kroppsmodifiering är viktigt för mig. Liksom, om man ser på vårt samhälle... När man läser bloggar och tidningar, vad man än ser då är det alltid en smal, lång, slank, vältränad tjej som har långt hår och just i det passar jag in."

Quote two - "Det mäste kännas fruktansvärt att gå för att köpa kläder och så ser man hur tjejerna i reklamen är långa, smala, har slanka ben och har perfekt hår, perfekt hy, och man aldrig - hur mycket man än försöker - kan se ut sådär. Det problemet har jag aldrig haft, men jag kan tänka mig att det kan vara så att det är svårt om man inte kan passa in. Jag själv är nöjd med mitt utseende, för mig handlar det mer om att fixa småsaker, som att till exempel se till att ha fint färgat hår, fina ögonbryn, forma ansiktet med smink, kläder och sådär... Fast jag tror att folk tänker att jag har ett bra jobb och god ekonomi för de som inte har ett bra jobb de har kanske inte direkt råd att ha perfekt frisörslingat hår, jag kan tänka mig liksom att de inte har råd att ha matchande modekläder..."

L- Hur känns det när du inte har "fixat" dig på länge och hur ser du på dig själv då?

A- Alltså just nu har jag urtvättat hår och små läppar för medlet har gått ur och jag är vit. Så just nu har jag som en fulperiod om du tänker dig. Men sen nu inför våren så ska jag fylla läpparna, jag ska färgra härert blont och jag ska sola. Och då blir det som en kick. Då blir det liksom... Att jag ser ut som jag vill se ut. Så om vi säger att jag skulle färgra härert blont imorgen, fast jag känner mig vit med små läppar, då känner jag mig inte liksom fin. Då kvitter det på något sätt. För fyller jag bara läpparna och sen inte fixar härert och fortfarande känner jag mig vit, då känner jag mig inte 100 procent. Så jag vill göra allting på samma gång för då blir det "BAM!".


L- men om vi vänder på det, hur du känner när du har din snyggperiod och när känner du så?"

A- Gladare, alltså då känns det roligare på något sätt - Bättre humör. Jag vet inte hur jag ska förklara, det känns bara bättre. Alltså nu när jag kommer göra läpparna och jag kommer göra hela kittet - första gången efter det som jag duschar - då kommer jag raka benen, jag kommer måla tånaglarna, då blir det verkliggen topp på allt. Även fast ingen kommer se mina tår, för att det är vinter, men det är bara för mig själv.”

Quote three - "A- "Som Kenza, hon är Sveriges största bloggerska och hon är Sveriges rikaste också."

L- "Sveriges rikaste bloggerska?"

A- "Nej, alltså hon är en av Sveriges rikaste personer."

L- "Jaha, okej."

min kropp, förutom huvudet då. Men sen har jag ju ganska lik ansiktsform, så vet jag liksom att det är ideale. Unga de vill se ut sådär och hon får ju flera, flera, flera tusen kommentarer om hur snygg hon är och då tänker jag ’Vilken tur jag har som ändå har exakt samma kropp, exakt samma bröst, exakt samma mage, exakt samma från topp till tå’. Men sen är det ju självlärt ansiktet. Hon är ju halvmarrockan och har mer olivfärgad hud och fina stora ögon och fint hår… Men just själva kroppen har jag exakt samma så det är jag liksom glad över. Och hon kan också äta hur mycket som helst utan att gå upp i vikt, jag vet ju många kompisar som gör det och så går de upp i vikt och får gå på dieter, jag har aldrig behövt det och det är jag liksom tacksam för. Liksom Kenza hon har fylliga läppar, liten näsa, fina ögon, hon är alltså… Jag tycker att hon är sjukt snygg och liksom inspirerande. Och sen det här med att förstora läpparna, det är inte bara för att bli lik henne. För när jag var 12 år ville jag ha större läppar och då visste jag inte ens vem hon var… Det är bara liksom att om hon köper nya kläder, nya jeans; då vet jag att det är snyggt på mig.”

Quote four- ”För ett tag sedan hade jag fixat håret blont, jag hade fixat naglarna, jag hade fixat läpparna och då ville jag bara ha vita tänder. Liksom, vita tänder… ’Varför ha gula tänder när jag kan ha vita?’ och då tänkte jag nu det sätt där tandblekningssak och blekte, blekte, blekte. Och jag tänkte ’Nej, jag är inte snygg’. Alltså, jag kände mig inte snygg någonstans - jag kände mig tjock, jag kände mig ful - jag kände mig så. Den perioden gick över, för det var bara några dagar, men ändå… Jag tänkte ’nej, det här är jag inte’. För då var det bara att jag ville ha mer, jag ville ha mer. Men så känner jag inte nu, jag vet inte vad det var. Jag blev nästan rädd… För mig själv på något sätt.”

Quote five- ”Sist när vi var på krogen och jag fyllde 21 då satt vi och pratade med ett gäng grabbar och jag satt där och skojade och en kille han bara ’Fan vilken skön person du är! Det trodde jag inte!’ och jag tänkte ’fan vad glad jag är att han inte tyckte jag var någon bitch’ för det vill jag inte att folk ska tro. Så jag kan driva med mig själv. När jag hade gjort läpparna så ringde jag upp mamma och så sa jag ’Kvack, kvack, kvack!’ för att skoja lite med mig själv. Och sen om jag får en allergichock, så säger jag ’Om jag blir blå i ansiktet så kan ni ringa på hjälp, men om läpparna svullnar så behöver ni inte göra något!’ Så jag kan ändå skämta om det. Som på jobbet har jag en liten roll där jag skämtar med mig själv, du vet vem Jordan, hon med brösten är?”

L- Ja


Alltså jag ser ju några tjejer som ser ut som ideale och vi kanske skulle ha sjukt kul ihop, för jag skulle kunna vara med vem som helst. Men just när de ser ut så sådär och sen är på ett visst sätt, då är det inte på riktigt. Som hon som var inne på salongen hon satt ju ut som mig, men hon ville ju verkligen att alla där skulle veta hur hon var - Hon verkligen ville ha statusen. Och sen jämför man det med när någon ringde till mig ’Tjo, pling!’ alltså jag kan ju ändå liksom skämta, för jag är fortfarande mig själv även fast jag fixar mig och det är jag glad över att jag är. Och när folk ser att jag gör så och tänker de ’Oh, hon gör så istället, vad kul!’
Appendix 2 - Information provided to interviewee

Original language: Swedish

I dagens samhälle finns det förväntningar på alla att man ska göra sitt bästa för att se bra ut, vara sund, och ta hand om sitt utseende. Unga tjejer är en grupp som blir särskilt utsatt för hårt tryck; vi överöses ständig med till exempel reklam som uppmuntrar och uppmanar oss förbättra vårt utseende ytterligare. För de flesta unga tjejer är utseendet mycket viktigt, många av oss lägger ner mycket tid på att fixa hår och outfits och många av oss tycker att det är kul med till exempel smink. För att se ännu bättre ut eller känna sig mer hälsosam - och kanske till och med mer normal - så kan en till exempel också förstora läppar eller bröst, använda lösgonfransar, färga hår eller göra manikyr. Men hur får dessa kosmetiska kroppsmodifieringar, från smink till läppförstoringar, oss att känna och hur bidrar de till att forma personers identitet? Hur påverkar de hur vi ser oss själva och hur tror/upplever vi att andra uppfattar oss i olika situationer?

Det här är några av de frågor jag hoppas kunna besvara i min uppsats, som kommer att fokusera just på hur kosmetiska kroppsmodifieringar influerar hur en ung tjej upplever sig själv och sin livsvärld. Mot bakgrunden av hur kosmetiska kroppsmodifieringar inverkar på formandet av en identitet så kommer även den här unga tjejens erfarenhet av funktionalitet i olika situationer som till exempel; i möten med andra människor, i jobbsituationer och i relation till samhället i stort att analyseras. Med funktionalitet menar jag om en anses till exempel se bra ut, vara hälsosam, normal, eller inte, med mera. Målet med uppsatsen är alltså att undersöka hur ett kvinnligt subjekt skapas i relation till olika former av kosmetisk kroppsmodifiering som till exempel; smink, manikyr, läppförstoring och så vidare, samt att undersöka hennes upplevelser av funktionalitet kopplat till detta.

Studien är anonym. De inspelade svaren från intervjuerna kommer att översättas till engelska och användas som material i projektet. Därefter kommer inspelningen att förstöras för att garantera konfidentialitet. Informanten har rätt att godkänna citaten och översättningarna innan de publiceras i uppsatsen, samt se och godkänna hur de kommer att användas i uppsatsen.

Linnéa Viktorsson Blom
In today’s society there are expectations for everyone to look their best, be healthy, and take care of their appearance. Particularly, young women are a group that is exposed to much pressure; we are constantly inundated with for example commercials encouraging and urging us to improve our looks further. For most young women, looks are very important, many of us spend a lot of time styling our hair and putting together outfits, and many of us find for example using make-up enjoyable. In order to look even better or feel healthier - or more normal even - one can for example enhance lips or breasts, use hair dye or do manicure. But how do these cosmetic body modifications, from make-up to lip-enhancement, make us feel, and how do they contribute to shaping persons identities? How do they influence how we understand ourselves as well as how we believe/experience that others perceive us in various contexts?

These are some of the questions I hope to answer with my thesis, which will focus on precisely how cosmetic body modifications influence how one young woman perceives herself and her lifeworld. Against the background of how cosmetic body modifications influence subject-formation I will also analyse this young woman’s experiences of dis/ability in various contexts as for example in the encounter with other persons, in work related situations and in relation to society at large. I refer with the use of the concept dis/ability to if one for example is considered to look good, be healthy, normal, or not, and so forth. The aim with the thesis is thus to explore the becoming of a female subject in relation to various kinds of cosmetic body modifications as for example make-up, manicure, lip-enhancement and so on, as well as her experiences of dis/ability in relation to them.

The study is anonymous. The recorded answers from the interviews will be translated from Swedish to English and they will be used as material in the project. The recording will thereafter be destroyed in order to insure confidentiality. The interviewee has the right to approve of the quotes and the translations before they are published in the thesis, as well as view and approve of how they will be used in the thesis.

Linnéa Viktorsson Blom
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**Pilot study**

Viktorsson Blom, Linnéa (2013) *Performing the perfect girl subject*

**Photograph**

Available at: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kenza_Zouiten_2c651_9591.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kenza_Zouiten_2c651_9591.jpg) (accessed 27 March 2014).
Publication Title

“It could just as well be my body”
A posthumanist and phenomenological study of the becomings of an embodied female subject and her experiences of fitting and misfitting in relation to cosmetic body modifications

Author

Linnéa Viktorsson Blom

Abstract

This thesis is a phenomenological study that has been carried out via two semi-structured interviews with an - in conventional ways of categorising - 22 years old white, heterosexual, and middleclass Swedish woman, referred to as “Andrea”. The thesis aims to explore the becomings of Andrea in connection with cosmetic body modifications and her experiences in relation to this of fitting and misfitting, which are related to the dis/ability system. The aim of this thesis has also been to situate her as an embodied female subject in an intersectional context, in addition to her own experiences, as multiple social categorizations intra-act in the creation of dis/ability. The thesis takes its point of departure in Rosi Braidotti’s theorization of nomadic subjectivity and employs her notion of subjectivity as a negotiation between desire and power, with the goal of analysing the affirmative potential of cosmetic body modifications, as well as being critical towards them and their effects. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson’s concepts of fitting/misfitting are used in order to analyse the intra-actions between body and environment as well as how cosmetic body modifications affect the fit and/or misfit of Andrea. Sara Ahmed’s notion of orientation has been employed in relation to this, with the aim of showing how beauty, whiteness, femininity, and economic wealth are produced and sustained. In the thesis it is analysed how Andrea, in complex ways desires molarity at the same time as she actively resists “fixed” positionings of her. Andrea contributes to a deconstruction of the fixity of molar identity as her resistance disrupts the flow of expected behaviors - something which creates moments of imperceptibility. The thesis furthermore argues that Andrea uses cosmetic body modifications as an affirmative deconstruction of power in addition to it being a force that drives her towards the desired molarity.

Keywords
Femininity, nomadic subject, fitting/misfitting, cosmetic body modifications, dis/ability, whiteness, becoming, resistance, beauty