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"Wearing me place on me face": Scousebrows, placemaking and everyday creativity

Abstract:

This paper emerges from a multidisciplinary research project called 'Brews and Brows: Shaping Stories from Eyebrows to Scousebrows' that entailed gathering stories about eyebrow grooming from women and men from the city of Liverpool, UK, and creating a new taxonomy of the eyebrow where none currently exists. The point of departure for this paper is to challenge the negative commentary on the Scousebrow in the press and social media by engaging people in discussions surrounding the personal significance of eyebrow shaping and styling. In challenging this denigration, this paper uses data from in-depth interviews with eyebrow artists and clients and ethnographic interviews at a four-day event held in Liverpool. This paper argues that the everyday (little c) creative practice of eyebrow grooming is not only an important part of crafting identity, particularly for Scouse women, but also an example of bottom-up placemaking in the city of Liverpool.

Key words: creativity; eyebrows; Liverpool; placemaking; Scousebrow

Introduction

This paper emerges from a multidisciplinary research project called 'Brews and Brows: Shaping Stories from Eyebrows to Scousebrows' that entailed gathering stories and creating a new taxonomy of the eyebrow where none currently exists. The project is interested in how taste functions in the ways Liverpool women and men pluck, sculpt, and position their eyebrows to enact a carefully crafted aestheticized working-class self. The point of departure for this paper is to challenge the denigration of the Scousebrow in the press and social media by presenting data surrounding the personal significance of eyebrow shaping and styling. As an example of this denigration in popular press, White (2012) writing for *The Telegraph,* describes the Scousebrow, characterized by dark thick brows, as "the most terrifying beauty trend to hit the high street since the vajazzle[1]"", while Jones (2010) writing in the *Daily Mail* refers to the Scousebrow as "monster arches".

The Scousebrow was brought to public attention through British scripted-reality television series, based in Liverpool, UK, *Desperate Scousewives* (2011-2012), broadcast on channel E4

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[1] Adorn the pubic area (of a woman) with crystals, glitter, or other decoration.

and, in particular, star of the show and "darling of Liverpool", Jodie Lunstram (see Channel Four Television Corporation, 2018). After the airtime received on the E4 television show, the Scousebrow quickly infiltrated into broader society (in both Liverpool and beyond). Indeed, tabloids were quick to point out that royal Kate Middleton donned a Scousebrow, leading Jones (2011) to state that, while Scousebrows are favored by WAGs[2] and reality stars "such bold brows do not befit the otherwise impeccable Kate". Clearly, there is an association here between the Scousebrow, working class women of Liverpool, and celebrity culture. Arguably, this is part of the middle-class right-wing media coverage, or as Beal (2007: xiii) would say "demonization", of the city of Liverpool and its people.

While recent writing in local newspaper *The Liverpool Echo* has queried whether the Scousebrow is in danger of extinction (see O'Brien, 2017), videos uploaded to YouTube with tutorials for how to achieve the look (see KoreanBilly, 2018), and *The Telegraph* publishing 'Scouse Brow: a beginner's guide' (see White, 2018), suggest the trend is still very much alive. The overarching aim of this paper is to present a dialogue on the nature of eyebrow sculpting, self-fashioning and identity for both women and men in Liverpool. Whilst eyebrows may appear a trivial - almost comical, focus of study - research (predominantly in the discipline of Psychology), has found that eyebrows play an important role in emotional expression, including happiness, sadness, anger, fear, disgust and surprise (see Ekman, 1999), and nonverbal communication such as sign language (Baker-Shenk, 1985), as well as being an important component in facial aesthetics. As such, we argue for their need to be taken seriously in academic debate.

This paper uses data from in-depth interviews with eyebrow artists and clients and informal ethnographic interviews at a four-day event held 25th-28th of April 2018 at the Foundation for Art and Creative Technology (FACT), Liverpool. With this paper, we argue that the everyday (little c) creative practice of eyebrow grooming is not only an important part of crafting identity, particularly for Scouse women, it is also an example of bottom-up placemaking in the city of Liverpool. This paper will proceed as follows. First, we contextualize the discussion by providing an overview of Liverpool and Scousers. We then offer a brief review of literature on hair and identity. Following this, we present the theoretical framing for the paper of Butler's (1988; 1990) notion of performativity. We then detail the methodology and methods used in this study. We present the findings of the research in three key thematic areas: placemaking;

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[2] An acronym used to refer to Wives and Girlfriends of high-profile sportsperson

standing out/fitting in; and everyday creativity. We conclude by signposting future areas for academic attention around the topic of eyebrows.

Liverpool and Scousers

Liverpool is a city in the North West of England. Liverpool's status as a port city has attracted a diverse population, which, historically, was drawn from a wide range of peoples, cultures, and religions, particularly from Ireland and Wales. The global economic restructuring of the 1970s and 1980s led to population loss and poverty in Liverpool (see Boland, 2008). Resulting from this, Liverpool became almost synonymous with urban social problems in both news media and television dramas (Jones and Wilks-Heeg, 2004). Literature has documented Liverpool's association as a working class political city, a city of economic and social deprivation with high rates of unemployment, a city of crime (including gun and knife crime), youth gangs, hooliganism and drugs (see Boland, 2008; Kenyon and Rookwood, 2010).

Whilst Liverpool is a city that continues to face difficult challenges with bad publicity and negative place imagery (Boland, 2008), some scholars have celebrated positive associations of the city. For instance, noting that there are discourses of creativity that infiltrate Liverpool, Grunenberg and Knifton (2007) herald Liverpool, on the title of their book, the 'Centre of the Creative Universe'. Liverpool is famous for the music of the Beatles and the popularity of the city's football teams (Kierans and Haeney, 2010), as well as the people of Liverpool themselves. Natives of the city of Liverpool are referred to as Liverpudlians, and colloquially as 'Scousers'; a reference to 'scouse', a form of stew popular in the city. The word "Scouse" has also become synonymous with the Liverpool accent and dialect. Arguably, there are certain characteristics of a 'Scouser' that make them distinctly recognizable outside of the city, including accent, personality and appearance (the latter predominantly of Scouse women). For instance, Jayne and Ferenčuhová (2013) note that, in Liverpool, it is popular for women, in preparing for a weekly 'big night out' on Friday and Saturday, to wear comfortable clothes and walk around the city with curlers in their hair. Meanwhile, Wilkinson (2016) has celebrated the spray tans and false nails that she considers to be characteristic of many Scouse young women. Other scholars have noted that people from Liverpool are famous for their "language, humour and identity" (Pooley, 2006:171) and "backchat and jokes" (Murden, 2006:423), with Boland (2008, p. 358) pointing out that the most positive "cultural knowledge" of Scousers is their friendliness and comedic qualities.

Meanwhile, others have noted the sense of difference that those born and / or living in the city uphold (i.e. through the mentality of 'we are not English we are Scouse'). For instance, Grey and Grant (2007:1) reflect how, for some, Liverpool "is not England at all, but almost a city state in its own right, distinct from the rest of the country in language…customs and attitudes". In unpacking what constitutes the Scouse identity, Boland (2010) lays emphasis on place, phonology and race. In doing so, he develops the underused concept of sonic geography to examine the extent to which sound affects the construction of a local identity. The author argues that a more comprehensive conceptualization of 'Scouser' must move beyond the territorial definition, to include a vocal consideration, as accent/dialect is the major social and cultural signifier of a Scouser. Of importance, is Boland's (2010) conclusion that sound is central to the construction of identity. He comments that those who hold the suitable dialect are considered to belong, whereas those with a vocal considered 'out of place' are sonically excluded. Whilst voice has been considered a key element of (dis)belonging and place identity, there has been a lack of consideration of the role of microgestures, such as eyebrows, in performing identity. With this paper, we consider how Liverpool men and women shape and sculpt their eyebrows and the relationship between eyebrow grooming and the construction of local (Scouse) identity.

Hair and identity

In this section we discuss hair broadly, before discussing eyebrows specifically, due to a dearth of literature on eyebrows. Hair, be it on your head, face or body, is recognized as one of the most malleable aspects of self-presentation (Hirschman, 2002). More than this, it has been argued that hair serves as an important cultural artefact, because it is both public (visible to everyone) and personal (biologically linked to the body) (Synott, 1987). Hair is a signifier of beauty and is a feature of many female protagonists (one only has to look at Disney characters such as Ariel in *The Little Mermaid*[3]). Further, children's fairy tales have also led to the positioning of hair as a rite of passage – take, for instance, Rapunzel[4] who, through letting down her long hair, enables the prince to climb up to the tower she is in, and they fall in love.

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[3] The Little Mermaid is a 1989 American animated musical fantasy film produced by Walt Disney Feature Animation and released by Walt Disney Pictures.
[4] Rapunzel is a German fairy tale in the collection assembled by the Brothers Grimm, and first published in 1812 as part of Children's and Household Tales

Moreover, hair has been presented as a source of power, for instance, it was told that biblical character Samson[5] would lose his superhuman strength if his hair was cut.

Though the above stories are, arguably, mythical or fantastical, academic literature has supported some of these claims. For instance, Rook (1985) argues that hair has special, almost magic, transformative powers, recognizing that styling practices enable people to exercise control over their self-images. Academic literature has supported the notion that changes in hairstyle can be a rite of passage and that hairstyles can be used to effect or signal a change in the inner self (see McAlexander and Schouten, 1989). Further, Weitz (2001) argues that hair can be seen as a tool of power. The author explores how women seek power through both resisting and accommodating mainstream norms for female hair, including certain hairstyles and dyeing practices. Manning (2010) supports this, arguing that women use their hair to establish both a group identity and as a form of everyday resistance from social norms established by dominant culture. Not only this, but hair is a social signifier: it may define the self on a religious, political, economic, social and sexual spectrum (Synnott, 1987).

Whilst some literature has focused on the positive associations of well styled facial hair, a separate body of literature has considered both the psychological and behavioral burden of living with unwanted facial hair, particularly for women (Lipton et al. 2006). For instance, Western culture's obsession with hairlessness (Sullivan and Bolen, 2015), and of body hair removal (Toerien and Wilkinson, 2003; Toerien, Wilkinson and Choi, 2005). Separate to this literature about purposeful hair removal is a body of literature about alopecia and hair loss, including of cancer patienthood (e.g. Welsh and Guy, 2009; Wiggins, Moore-Millar, Thomson, 2014; Williams and Solbraekke, 2018; Tucker, 2009). Hair loss, which has been recognized as a distinctive facial appearance changing condition (Welsh and Guy, 2009) can have a negative impact on self-esteem, body image and confidence (Tucker, 2009), and everyday functioning (Hunt and McHale, 2004). Trüeb and Won-Soo (2014) report that some people with alopecia will develop a dislike and repugnance for their own looks and appearance, as well as a mourning for their 'normal appearance' (Papadopolous and Bor, 1999). Together, this demonstrates a scholarly fascination in both the presence *and* absence of hair.

Eyebrows have grown in significance in consumer culture, particularly in the last five years. Arguably, this could correlate to the invention and proliferations of selfies, and the resultant

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[5] Samson was the last of the judges of the ancient Israelites mentioned in the Book of Judges in the Hebrew Bible (chapters 13 to 16)

re-making of the body, through a preoccupation with the face (see Tiidenberg and Gómez Cruz, 2015). As Synnott (1987, p. 391) tells, "eyebrows have their fashions too". Fashion magazine Vogue (2018) has recently documented how eyebrows have changed over time, from the 1920s when super thin brows were popular, to the present trend of full, thick brows. However, whilst popular press and social media has shared a fascination in brows, academic debate on eyebrows has not caught up. This is surprising since eyebrows may be the most expressive feature of the human face (Linstrom, Silverman and Susman, 2000). Literature on eyebrows has focused on topics including face recognition (Sadr, Jarudi and Sinha, 2003); emotional expression (Ekman, 1999); mate selection (Bruce et al. 1993), and the relationship between eyebrows and grandiose narcissism (the tendency to be egotistical, self-focused and vain) (Giacomin and Rule, 2018). While older writing has positioned hair as a social symbol (e.g. Hallpike, 1969; Synott, 1987), we argue that eyebrows also hold same cultural and social significance. While eyebrows may provide the eyes some protection against rain and perspiration, the function of eyebrows is more visual in nature (Sadr, Jarudi and Sinha, 2003); they play an important role as a micro-gesture, as brow hair is mobile enough to produce a range of facial signals.

Performativity of identity

This paper uses the theoretical framing of performativity of identity from Butler (1988; 1990) Writing on gender, Butler (2011) argues that being a (wo)man is not internal; that is, gender is not innate or natural, but we are assigned a gender at birth based on visible external sex organs. Therefore, gender is not a natural 'given'. Rather, gender is continually produced and reproduced, performed and reconstructed; it is a social construction. Butler (1988:527) states gender "is real only to the extent that it is performed", suggesting it is a performance built on each action and reaction of an individual. In this sense, gender is not fixed like plaster, but is plastic and evolves based on an individual, their actions, and behaviors (Roberts, 1997). The ways in which people act, walk, speak, and talk consolidate an impression of being a man or being a woman (Butler, 2011). The body becomes its gender through such bodily gestures, movements and enactments, which are renewed, revised, and consolidated over time (Butler, 1988), which provide universal recognizable performances of gender and other characteristic or trait affiliation (Mauss, 1936/1950).

Butler (1990) argues there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender, but identity is constituted performatively by such constructions. Like many contemporary social scientists, we adopt the same stance that identity can be performed. Following Butler (1990:33) we argue

that identity, like gender, is culturally constructed through the "repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts... that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being". These acts are not singular; rather they are reiterative (Butler, 1993). As these acts are continually repeated, there is space for transgressions and "slippage" (Butler, 1993:122). Performativity theory recognizes that gender transformations are possible due to the likelihood of a failure to repeat certain acts, or deformities in performances. Gender then, can be seen as an "assignment", which is never carried out precisely according to expectation, and consequently one never quite inhabits the gender ideal (s)he is compelled to approximate (Butler, 1993:231). This performative conceptualization of gender is a useful means of moving away from an understanding of identity as prescribed, fixed and static, to a reconceptualization of identity as "a constituted *social temporality*" (Butler, 1990:141, emphasis in original).

Having contextualized the study with a discussion of Liverpool and Scousers and provided an overview of literature on hair and identity and theoretical framing of performativity of identity, we now turn to present the methodology and methods used in this study.

Methodology and methods

In this project, we adopted a qualitative methodology. We conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with eyebrow artists and clients and undertook participant observation and informal ethnographic interviews at a 'Brews n Brows' event held by the project team[6] 25th-28th April 2018, at FACT in Liverpool. We opted for a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. We used purposive sampling to recruit brow artists working in Liverpool, and then used a snowballing technique to recruit other brow artists and clients. Before discussing the methods used in this study, it is important to offer a brief note on positionality.

The authors of this paper comprise two non-Scousers (initials removed for anonymity) and one 'Scouser' (initials removed for anonymity), though the first author positions herself as an honoury Scouser[7] after being labelled as such by participants in a previous research study undertaken when she lived in Liverpool (see removed for anonymity for a discussion of the first author's repositioned identity). All three authors engage in different eyebrow grooming practices as part of their everyday lives (and not in an attempt to embed ourselves as researchers). For all three researchers, the reason for engaging in eyebrow grooming is to

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[6] The project was led by Niamh Thornton, University of Liverpool, also involving other researchers: Dr Liz Greene Liverpool John Moores University; Professor Caroline Wilkinson, Liverpool John Moores University; Sarah Shrimpton, Liverpool John Moores University

[7] An accolade given to those who are not born in Liverpool but who have been welcomed and accepted there.

enhance our physical appearance. Author 1 engages in threading and tinting, Author 2 has her eyebrows microbladed on due to having alopecia (loss of hair), and Author 3 has 'HD brows', a process which uses various hair removal techniques (threading, waxing, tweezing and trimming) along with tinting and brow mapping to create a brow shape suited to your face.

In-depth interviews

Qualitative semi-structured interviewing is an established and respected method for social and geographical research (Mason, 2002). Considering in-depth interviews as personal and intimate encounters (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006), we used them as a window to the stories of participants (Rabionet, 2011). In particular, interviews were useful for eliciting information regarding the attitudes, acuities, and perceptions towards eyebrows and the Scousebrow. We asked questions surrounding the value and significance of participants' eyebrow sculpting and overall aesthetic look, what it means to the participants, and how they self-identify using their brows.

We conducted 20 interviews, seven with eyebrow artists and 13 with clients. All eyebrow artists were female, reflective of how this is predominantly a female occupation, and all worked in Liverpool city-centre based salons. Nine clients were female and four were male – we did not ask participants to specify where they lived in the city. All four male participants we spoke to engaged in eyebrow grooming. It should be noted that this is likely not representative of men in the city of Liverpool, rather it is reflective of our method of recruitment (e.g. snowball sampling – participants may think we would only be interested in interviewing people who engage in grooming). Further, regarding convenience sampling of people attending the 'Brews n Brows event' – arguably, those attending an event about eyebrows may be more likely to engage in eyebrow grooming. Eyebrows artists were aged between 20-39 and clients ranged from 16-67. Whilst the majority of participants were White, there were two Asian participants (one client and one brow artist). We conducted interviews in work places or local cafes, as these locations were familiar to participants and places they told us they felt comfortable, thus putting them at ease (see Longhurst, 2003). Interviews typically lasted between 30 minutes and one hour. The interviews loosely followed a proposed interview schedule, whilst allowing participants to bring to the fore issues that were important to them. Following Longhurst (2003), we asked questions in a friendly conversational tone, promoting a two-way exchange, as opposed to a stringent question and answer structure.

Participant observation

We conducted participant observation over the period of four days at an event organized by the project team called Brews and Brows, held 25th-28th April 2018 at FACT in Liverpool. The event offered an opportunity for Liverpool women and men to have their eyebrows scanned in 3D, have their photograph taken by a fashion photographer, and to tell stories of their eyebrows in a confessional 'big brother diary room' type video booth. Throughout the event, we documented the informal ethnographic interviews we held with participants attending the event through written anecdotes in personal research diaries.

Data analysis

We undertook thematic analysis of the interviews. After reading through the data set multiple times, we separated the data into smaller, significant parts. Essentially, this required us to sort the data thematically. We labelled each of these smaller parts with a code. We then compared each new segment of data with the previous codes that had emerged. This ensured that similar data were labelled with the same code. We dismissed any preconceived data categories and loosened the initial focus of the study in an effort to "generate as many codes as possible" (Emerson et al., 1995:152). We enjoyed the approach of coding by hand. MacLure (2008:174) likewise speaks of the pleasure derived from manual analysis, particularly "poring over the data, annotating, describing, linking, bringing theory to bear, recalling what others have written, and seeing things from different angles". We wrote memos about parts of the text which intrigued us, or that we considered particularly important. Crucially, this enabled us to ask questions about what had emerged through the data. Resultantly, we changed and made linkages between some codes, dropped and added others. Following from this, we undertook a process of abstracting, whereby we condensed the codes into deeper conceptual constructs. We continued this until all coded sections were saturated.

Believing that much of what is heard is lost in transcription, the verbatim words of participants have been included. We have tried, as best as possible, to capture the accents (predominantly Scouse) of the participants. We have presented these in a spelling form that gives the reader an idea of the pronunciation in order to retain closeness with the original spoken words. This adheres to what Blauner (1987:48) describes as the "preservationist" approach, whereby we are reproducing the sounds as they appear on the recording, thereby staying faithful to participants. In the findings presented below pseudonyms are used for all participants.

Findings

Placemaking

Often derided as evidence of poor or absence of taste by the popular press and social media, emerging from our data, the Scousebrow can be seen as a highly resonant marker of place identity:

> Cos everyone's getting it done at the same time it's kind of like, the trend's in Liverpool not the trend everywhere else.

> (Sadie,17, client, interview)

> I do think it's like a really big thing in Liverpool [eyebrows] like everyone's always commenting on eyebrows, whether they're horrible or they're nice everyone's always like making comments. I feel like that's the first thing people notice about your face in Liverpool, your eyebrows.

> (Jenny, aged 23, client, interview)

Other participants, too, noted the importance of eyebrows within the city, claiming that Liverpool was "famous for its brows" and that no other city could make such a claim. Data emerging from our study supports the argument presented by Grabham (2009, p. 63) in his discussion of "corporal flagging", in that just as a nation (and we extend this to a city), is imagined and produced through everyday rhetoric and maps and flags, it is also constructed on the skin, and through bodies.

More than this, our data suggest that brow grooming, particularly for Liverpool women, can be seen as a strategy of placemaking. While a number of definitions of placemaking exist, we use the definition of creative placemaking put forward by Markusen and Gadwa (2010) that individuals, including those from public and community sectors, strategically shape the associations with the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. The essence of brow grooming as a form of place-making is captured wonderfully by one participant, Marie:

> "Of course you can tell I'm from Liverpool by me brows…It's like, I'm wearing me place on me face"

> (Marie, 36, client, ethnographic interview)

Marie's statement relates to Martín-Barbero's (2002:626) argument that local identity can transform itself into a "marketable representation of difference". This idea of brow grooming as a form of placemaking is also suggested by Sarah:

> My clientele from London to Liverpool, it's completely different. Liverpool, the brows are big and they do like that more like full look, and then when I go more London way, it's like a softer, very natural look…In Liverpool they have their own style.

> (Sarah, 39, brow artist, interview)

Other participants, too, told how their eyebrows were signifiers of the city they lived in, and that donning their Scousebrows were an effort to communicate this: "when I do me brows I do it to look Scouse, because of proud that I'm a Scouser (Terry-Anne, 20, client, ethnographic interview). Thus, while Jones and Wilks-Heeg (2004) argue that placemaking in Liverpool has been a top down activity, we argue that the eyebrow grooming is a 'bottom-up' form of placemaking in Liverpool.

Interestingly, when many participants described their eyebrows, or the eyebrows of others, they used humor, comedy and imaginative similes to do so. This can be seen as a further example of placemaking, since comedy and humor are symbolic of the people of Liverpool (see Platt, 2011).

> I feel like eyebrows are a big thing in Liverpool, and I feel like even just before I was on the bus coming here and err there was some girl outside waiting for the bus and there were all these school boys on the bus and they turned around and went "she looks like she's got two Kit Kat Chunkies on her face", cos her eyebrows were – they were quite big like, she had really overdone them

> (Jenny, 23, client, interview)

> Scousebrows…it looks like a Sharpie marker…it's darker than your actual hair and a lot more thicker

> (Sadie, 17, client, interview)

Other equally humorous descriptions of eyebrows used by participants included "I feel like I've got two caterpillars on me head" (Jenny, 23, client, interview) and "they're like slugs" (Jake, 30, client, interview), while one male participant who undertook "basic eyebrow grooming" in the form of tweezing, described himself as "a gardener keeping the weeds at bay"

(Ben, 31, client, interview). This use of comedy is characteristic of Scousers, who are often commended for their humor and 'quick-fire repartee' (Russell, 2004:15). As such, it is interesting that not only eyebrows themselves have come to be associated with the Scouse stereotype, but also the language used around eyebrows which arguably support the "language, humour and identity" (Pooley, 2006:171) and "backchat and jokes" (Murden, 2006:423) of Scousers. Interestingly, Butler (1997:121) asks: "could the uttering of the word constitute a slight, an injury, indeed, an offense, if the word did not carry the sedimented history of its own suppression?" Butler (1997:39; 13) continues that the "force" of the speech act is "related to the body" and the extent of the "wounding power" of certain words is dependent on who interprets them. It is significant here, then, that these descriptions came from Scouse bodies; yet we question whether such descriptions may be considered insulting if they had come from 'outside' sources (for instance, the media).

Standing out/fitting in

Through our data, participants we interviewed discussed a trade-off between 'standing out' and 'fitting in'. For instance, while descriptions of the Scousebrow by interviewees promoted it as something conspicuous, for instance "really big thick eyebrows…drawn on and really thick and heavy" (so stands out) (Jenny, 23, client, interview), there was a clear feeling that it paradoxically enabled Scouse women to 'fit in'. Take the below excerpts:

> Sadie: Most people wear makeup and stuff [on their eyebrows], I fill my eyebrows in…all the normal stuff, most people groom their eyebrows or go to a salon they don't normally just leave them. So I think to fit in with everyone else, cos most people in my college always get their eyebrows done…
>
> Anonymous: Do you feel a certain pressure to keep up?
>
> Sadie: Yeah, if you don't it kind of makes you look a bit, not weird, but a bit unpopular.
>
> (Sadie, 17, client, interview)

> When you go on a night out you want to make yourself look different than you do every single day, cos you look a little bit different and you look a bit like most other people …one thing I don't do everyday is me eyebrows, so I'll just put them on, just so I feel like I've made more of an effort for the night out.
>
> (Jess, 23, client, interview)

12

It is clear from Sadie that her effort to style her eyebrows is part of an aim to fit in and is fulfilled through doing, what she terms, "all the normal stuff" as part of her eyebrow grooming routine. Interestingly, Sadie continued "like I don't feel want to follow the trends but sometimes you kind of have to if you're in like a group of people". The paradoxical tension between fitting in is expressed by Jess who states, once she has styled her eyebrows, she feels more confident "cos you look a little bit different and you look a bit like most other people". Jess discusses eyebrow grooming as an example of what Cumming's (no date, p. 24) may term "light body modification" (in contrast to heavier body modification with permanent properties, such as tattooing, see Fisher, 2002 and gender transitioning, see Bishop, 2016), to differentiate her 'night out' appearance from her everyday appearance, but, interestingly, not to differentiate herself from the crowd. Thus, whilst some participants allowed this light body modification to become a part of their daily routines, others reserved it for special occasions. Here identity can be seen as an embodied act /event, in the same way as discussed by other scholars (Budgeon, 2003; Hanson, 2007), in that there is recognition of the boundaries of embodiment, accompanied by the experience of the body as unsatisfactory and in need of modification, albeit only on certain occasions for some participants. Thus, just as Williams and Solbraekke (2018) argue in the case of wigs, we argue that eyebrow grooming tools are props for self-(re)invention and can be appropriated stereotypically. Here we can see the performance of identity, as explored by Butler (1988), through bodily enactments which are renewed, revised, and consolidated over time, and here we add space.

From our data, there was also evidence that the daily practices of eyebrow grooming are constructed by routine conformism and a desire to be members of a neo-tribal collectivity (of the kind discussed by Maffesoli, 1996). For some participants eyebrow grooming enabled them to feel authentic members of the wider Scouse community, affording a feeling of belonging. Take the following illustrative quotations:

> If I haven't done my brows, so if you see me when I first wake up, you could think I was from anywhere in the UK. But once I've penciled my brows in and styled them, there's no mistaking that I'm from Liverpool [laughs]…My brows are the same as other women in Liverpool, and I love that – we're like a tribe
>
> (Nadia, 55, client, ethnographic interview)

> You're not a Scouse bird if you don't have thick, dark brows, simple as that.
>
> (Ellie, 20, brow artist, interview)

Here, we see that eyebrow grooming enables the women to establish their identities within the city and to contribute to placemaking, as discussed above in this paper, when they choose to do so (see also Platt's, 2017 discussion of women knitting in Liverpool). Arguably, this enablement to feel 'in place', when they so desire, is owing to the "cultural embeddedness" (see Goldberg et al. 2016, p. 1190) promoted by the microgesture. Interestingly, none of the women or men interviewed, even those donning thick dark brows, claimed that they wanted to attract attention through the way they groomed their eyebrows. As such, this is illustrative of inconspicuous grooming, and has parallels to the inconspicuous dressing explored in van der Laan and Velthuis's (2016) study of how young Dutch men dress similar to their companions, and how this is a source of comfort. Further, there is a sentiment here of "not hiding, not shouting, just me" (see Clarke and Smith's 2015, p. 4 discussion of how gay men negotiate their visual identities and also Hutson, 2010). This 'betweenness' might suggest, following Nelson (1999:348), that human subjects, located in time and space, "do identities" in more complicated ways than Butler's (1990; 1993) notion of performativity allows.

However, perhaps to the contrary, there was also evidence from the data collected that women, at least to some extent, avoided being *fully* co-opted into the 'known' narratives of Liverpool (that is the stigmata associated with Liverpool women and a particular identity – "blonde, spray tanned, big brows", Elizabeth, 35, client, interview). As such, whilst these women want to fit in, they still want to retain some semblance of individuality (see Miles, Cliff and Burr's 1998 discussion of consumption and the construction of young people's identities). We found that women in our study used eyebrow grooming to construct coherent and authentic identities, expressing who they are:

> I'm a Scouser through and through, I have the tan and the hair to prove it [laughs]. I've lived here all me life. But big brows just aren't for me, they don't suit me. For me they're too showy and in-your-face…Me brows are quite thin and lightly penciled…Modest, like me I guess.
>
> (Carly, 65, client, ethnographic interview)

> So I live in Liverpool but I've recently started uni [university] in Leicester. I'm really conscious that I don't want people to look at me and think "she's a Scouser". I think eyebrows have the like power to do that. So I've toned down me look for uni and the brows were the first thing to go. I want to be known as Tina, known for me, not "the Scouser", as I'm the only Scouser on me course.

The decisions by these women to not don the Scousebrow demonstrates the enactment of their own agency in how they negotiate wider placemaking initiatives. From Tina's quotation, we can see that her desire to project an individuated identity (from the stereotypical Scouse identity) is sought alongside a parallel desire to fit in in her new geographical setting (Leicester, UK). Here we can see that these identity performances are not prescribed, fixed and static, as Butler (1990) also argued, rather they are socially and spatially temporal "a constituted *social temporality*".

Everyday creativity

Whilst, traditionally, creativity research focused on 'Big C' creativity, such as geniuses and fashion designers, more recently a growing body of research has focused on expression of individual, everyday creativity (e.g. Amabile, 2017; Conner and Silvia, 2005; Conner, DeYoung and Silvia, 2018; Edensor et al. 2010; Richards, 2007; 2010). Everyday creativity appreciates that society has moved from a culture owned and created by a few (in this case professional eyebrow artists) to a culture created by everyone. Creativity has come to be recognized as more widely distributed and reductive as opposed to elitist (Edensor and Millington, 2018). In other words, one need not have a particularly creative personality (e.g. having an artistic skill) to benefit from finding a creative activity in which one might be interested (Conner, DeYoung and Silvia, 2018). Emergent in our discussions with participants was a notion of creativity, mastery and craft(wo)manship in eyebrow grooming:

> I found that there's quite an art to it…it's funny, when I mix my colors – it's like it is a real art, when I – even my color palette when we're tinting, we actually have artist palettes and mix the colors.

> (Sarah, 40, brow artist, interview)

> With eyebrows you have to have the right tools and skills. It's about the color, the dye, and also how you apply it. I use different brushes and I'm careful and take me time and when I do brows on a client I stand back and admire them, like it's a painting or something.

> (Jenny, 23, brow artist, interview)

For many participants, eyebrow grooming is a creative process. As can be seen from the above quotation from Sarah, there is evidence of artistry in the grooming of brows. Indeed, the terminology of 'eyebrow artist' itself requires consideration. Whilst there are many terms associated with those who work with eyebrows, such as 'eyebrow technician', 'eye specialist', 'arch expert', and then more broadly 'beauty therapist', Sarah's decision to promote herself as an 'artist' reflects how she is engaged in an activity related to creating, practicing, and demonstrating art. Sarah's reference to the palette she uses to mix different colors for individual brows reflects how there is thought, consideration, and indeed skill, in mixing the perfect shade to compliment skin or hair tone of a client. Further, in the language used by Jenny, it is clear that this process of crafting eyebrows is an "art of care" (see Miller, 2011, p. 18).

Many participants we spoke to, though not professional brow artists, demonstrated technical skill and knowledge in the crafting of their brows:

> One of my eyebrows doesn't grow properly, so I use stencils so I draw the eyebrow to where it's supposed to like go. I don't know if you can see it because I've drawed it on, but one of them hasn't got like an end.

> (Sadie, 17, client interview)

> I work hard to keep my eyebrows looking good and, importantly, symmetrical…I use tools like tweezers, small scissors, I have an eyebrow shaping comb and I use transparent brow gel too. I've watched loads of tutorials online and also paid attention to how they do them at the salon.

> (Ed, 29, client, ethnographic interview)

Though both Sadie and Ed attend a salon to have their eyebrows styled, they both demonstrate technical skill in looking after their eyebrows in between visits to the salon. Sadie utilizes stencils to draw on her brows, whilst Ed uses a number of tools to achieve a symmetrical look. The actions of Sadie and Ed are significant in terms of the mundane creativity evident in grooming, which we argue should not be overlooked or undervalued. This "little-c creativity" (Conner and Silvia, 2015) is significant as creativity is central to our cultural and personal modes of perception, expression and memory. Other participants discussed how there was a "skill" or "art" (Gemma, 19, client, ethnographic interview) to brow grooming and presented well-groomed eyebrows as "something to be proud of" (Amy, 31, client, ethnographic interview).

Further, and in line with arguments by Gauntlett (2011) regarding knitting, there was evidence that for many of the people we spoke to, it is the process of eyebrow styling that is important, and less the creation of a product. The quotations from Emma and Samira below illustrate this view:

> The Scousebrow is about emulation and replication. You're trying to create a certain look. For me it's a look I've seen around the city for years now and then, as a result of that, seen it on TV. When I do my brows I have an image in my mind of the look that I'm trying to achieve. I guess it's like sketching or tracing – but from memory. Essentially the look I want is bold, bold and Scouse. Sometimes I get it a bit wrong, or my brows are a bit wonky, but I've put the effort in [laughs] and that's the important part.
>
> (Emma, 47, client, interview)

> It's a real work of art creating a Scousebrow, I'm not kidding. You don't just create it in one sitting, it doesn't just happen over night. It's a labor of love. My clients come back to me month after month, and we work hard to create the look they want.
>
> (Samira, 30, brow artist, interview)

In the above accounts there are resonances to Hagadorn and Springgay's (2013, p. 25) discussion of crafting as speaking "to a human desire to leave your mark on the world in an innovative and sincere manner". Emma and Samira were not the only participants to share this perspective. For instance, Sadie (17, client, interview) referred to the process of styling her eyebrows as "fun", saying "it's like about technique and stuff, like, like how precise you are with stuff. Scouse women are known for making an effort, our brows reflect that". Taken together, our data add credence to the argument, raised by Platt (2017), that the everyday creativity practices of women (and, from our data, we argue men too), can be considered part of placemaking processes in the creative city. As such, our research extends Campbell's (e.g. 2011a; 2011b; 2014) research on Liverpool and the creative economy and his questioning of 'what are creative industries?' (which are typically considered to include music, performance and art, amongst others), by presenting beauty as a creative industry which Liverpool could capitalize on.

Conclusion

In unpacking the different dimensions of what constitutes Scouse identity, Boland (2010) concludes that sound is a significant, if not defining, aspect of identity construction. With this paper, we argue that the microgesture of the eyebrow can too be considered a defining aspect of identity construction for the women and men from Liverpool we spoke to in our study. One interesting finding emergent from our data was instances of 'small c' creativity which came alive in the seemingly ordinary, mundane practices of eyebrow grooming. We were also struck by the 'art of care' evident in this seemingly banal practice of brow grooming for both men and women in Liverpool. This is an important area for further exploration regarding other beauty practices, such as nail art and spray tanning. For, as Edensor et al. (2010, p. 14) argue, vernacular creativity, "resonates with affective and expressive values and articulates communal conviviality and social solidarities". As such, following Edensor et al. (2010), this paper contributes to a rethinking of creativity as something that is more widely distributed, less exclusive and as something done by ordinary people in everyday life.

Further, with this paper, we argue that the everyday and informal creative practice of eyebrow grooming is an example of bottom-up placemaking for women in Liverpool. We presented data that demonstrated how the city of Liverpool is constructed on the skin and through bodies, and how the Scousebrow can be seen as a highly resonant marker of place identity. That is, that some Liverpool women use eyebrow grooming as a method of "corporal flagging" (Grabham, 2009, p. 63), and through the Scousebrow 'flag' the city of Liverpool on their skin. The mundane creative practice of eyebrow grooming, then, can be used to both craft and perform (Butler, 1990; 1993) place-based identities, if and when the individual so desires.

Future research in this area could explore the role of eyebrow grooming in other cities, perhaps those that do not have a distinctive or recognizable brow, for instance, arguably London or Manchester in the UK, or even other cultures where bigger, fuller eyebrows are the norm. Also, research should be conducted with other groups, for instance, those with alopecia, or those who have lost their hair through chemotherapy; this recognizes that the absence of hair is just as important for identity construction and the performance of identity as its presence. Additionally, we encourage researchers to engage with transgender or transitioning males and females; doing so will significantly enhance understandings of the significance of the eyebrow as a microgesture.

(9200 words including references)

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