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## **Knowing Bodies: A Visual and Poetic Inquiry into the Professoriate**

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### **Abstract**

Through arts-informed research (Cole & Knowles, 2007) I explore visual identity and scholarship. I conversed with and photographed Lisette, Edward, Kris, Todd, William and Theresa, asking “How are your clothing choices determined by your work as a scholar?” The photographs and transcripts inspired drawings, paintings and poetry. The study confirms that clothes are negotiated expressions of self and visual identity with the body as mediator (Braziel & LeBesco, 2001; Butler, 1993; Davis, 1997; Holliday & Hassard 2001; Shilling, 1993); scholars’ clothing choices are gendered (Butler, 1999; Kirkham, 1996; Sanders, 1996), and female scholars strategize through dress (Kaiser, Chandler & Hammidi, 2001; Green, 2001). The poems and artworks speak of triumph and pain. They provide opportunities to reflect on arts-informed research, the aesthetics of the clothed body, the body and social theory, and the semiotics of clothing.

## Questioning

In a university cafeteria one scholar says to another, “That T shirt is a lovely duck egg blue color.” Looking disapprovingly as if the very idea of duck egg blue is ridiculous, frivolous even, speaking emphatically she retorts: “No it isn’t. It’s *just blue*.” The one noticing the T shirt feels hurt. She thinks, how rude. There’s not just one blue, one truth, one way of knowing. Both scholars feel unloved.

I trust the kinds of truths expressed by artists, poets, writers, musicians, dancers and actors because when these art forms speak to the very heart of you and me, they reveal the integrity of imagination, and the authenticity of lived experience. After studies in fine art and education, I began my working life as an art teacher, identifying myself primarily as a painter. I enjoyed both lives. Then, I took up a position as an art gallery educator, and engaged in a masters program in art education. I became engrossed in ideas. I continued on to doctoral studies in art education, then a tenure track position, and scholarship. I became a mother. Time passed and increasingly I questioned why I had not made art in such a long time, feeling great loss. Now, through arts-informed research, I am home again, researching/creating new knowledge rooted in research as creation. Great artists and poets are revered because they speak to universal consciousness about the essential problem of the human condition; great research is revered because it produces new knowledge, new ways of knowing and understanding. Ultimately, that knowledge speaks also to the human condition and to the moral and ethical issues we face.

In this study through poetry and artworks I seek to understand, reveal and recreate scholars’ multiple ways of knowing, being and understanding themselves and presenting themselves to the world as scholars, performing in it, with and through their embodied selves, their knowing and unknowing bodies, and the outer skin of their clothing. This is an arts-informed (Cole & Knowles, 2007) poetic and visual inquiry into and about the visual identities of scholars and their clothed bodies in which I privilege visceral feeling and embodied knowing, expressed for millennia through multiple artistic forms. I am fascinated by the ways in which scholars re/present themselves and their scholarship through their clothed and accessorized bodies. The objects that one chooses to place on or near one’s body have inherent significance. The relation of oneself to one’s body and the presentation of one’s body in clothing signifies a sense of ease or dis/ease, a sense of or a repression of the aesthetic, a sense of what is correct and appropriate for dress in relation to one’s acceptance by a particular audience, a desire to belong or be accepted by a particular scholarly group, and most of all a sense of oneself. In turn, creating a personal visual identity through aesthetic choices in clothing provides a metaphorical connection to a particular individual's socio-economic, aesthetic and political relationship to and with the world and with fellow human beings. As Nochlin (1988) states, the personal is political.

### **Research/Creation**

While the theory and practice of the arts as a framework for doing research is visible in the literature, artists, poets and writers have engaged in research through the arts for centuries. As Goethe states,

And thus began that tendency from which I could not deviate my whole life through; namely, to turn into an image, into a poem, everything that delighted or troubled me, or otherwise occupied me, and to come to some certain understanding with myself upon it, that I might both rectify my conceptions of external things, and set myself inwardly at rest about them. (Goethe, cited in Sparshott, 1963, p. 224)

Arts-informed research (Cole & Knowles, 2007) draws upon the idea that both image and text (individually and collectively) have inherent meaning. Rooted in Dewey's (1934) thesis that criticism is the reeducation of perception, Eisner (1997) played a significant role in laying out the theoretical framework for the various forms of arts based educational research that are prevalent currently with his conceptualization of connoisseurship (Eisner, 1985; 1991). In this study I follow Cole & Knowles (2007) wherein the arts-informed researcher positions the inquiry process and the form the work takes in one or more of the arts. They state:

The central purposes of arts-informed research are to enhance understanding of the human condition through alternative (to conventional) processes and representational forms of inquiry, and to reach multiple audiences by making scholarship more accessible. The methodology infuses the languages, processes, and forms of literary, visual, and performing arts with the expansive possibilities of scholarly inquiry for purposes of advancing knowledge. (Cole & Knowles, 2007, p. 59)

Arts-informed research work must be tied to a moral purpose because "ultimately, the research must stand for something" (Cole & Knowles, 2007, p. 66). Moral and ethical issues are revealed in the artworks and poetry presented. I ask, what does it mean to be a female scholar, a male scholar, a bisexual scholar and a gay scholar? What does it mean to present and perform as a scholar of English literature, as an administrator, as an anthropologist? These are the identities of my participants, embedded in the poems and images. Living these identities as ways of being are value laden: The type of shoes one wears, the particular jacket selected and/or coordinating jewellery say and tell who I am, what I value, they even point to how I vote and who I might sleep with. They speak to and about dis/functionality and dis/ordered subjectivities. They shriek of social class, gender, oppression, culture, religion, and nationality.

### **Gathering**

Beginning in childhood, my passion was writing and making art. In doing this work I committed, as Cole & Knowles (2007) urge, to create specific art forms wherein there is a sense of authenticity, coherence and “fit” between who I am, and my knowledge, skills and understanding as a researcher, artist, poet, and scholar, incorporating conceptualization of social theory on the body, clothing, and scholarly dress. I began by talking to colleagues at universities in Canada about the study, asking them to participate. Once ethics approval forms required by my university were signed, I talked to each participant for at least an hour and a half or more. These conversations seemed unsettling at times for those who have experienced difficulty developing a coherent visual identity through struggles (for example) with body image, gender dysphoria and acceptance by the academy. I believe the participants valued our conversations and the opportunity to reflect on something often taken for granted: Sense of self, embodiment, and visual identity. My conversations were guided by a central phenomenological question: How are your clothing choices determined by your work as a scholar? I ensured that our conversations also covered the following topics: What has informed your clothing decisions and representations over and across time? To what extent might you use clothing to reveal, subvert, hide, or to clarify your particular identity as a scholar? How do you think others perceive you? Have you received feedback on your clothing choices? To what extent do you believe that your identity as a person as reflected through clothing choices relates to your visual identity as a scholar? How are your scholarly clothing choices context dependent? For example, do you wear different clothing for teaching, for attending meetings and conferences, or for working in your office?

In working to create the poems, I recreated each conversation by cutting, pasting and eliminating text, in order to develop chronological and coherent narratives. I fixated on the essential, on repeated words and themes and the most evocative imagery communicated to me. To create these images I took photographs which, together with the transcripts, inspired collages wherein I recreated the feel of the person in a metaphorical way. Then, I drew and painted from the collaged images. In reading the poems I want you to hear the voices of my participants; I wish to further enhance your sense of who each scholar is by presenting visual images in the form of artworks. Following the presentation of poetry and artwork focusing on each scholar individually are related contextualized thoughts drawn from the literature on social theory on the body and clothing.

### **Revealing: Poetry, Artworks<sup>1</sup> and Theory**

The portraits and poems explicate arts-informed research via the scholarly languages of visual art and poetry, through visual imaging and metaphor. The portraits and poems are narratives which embody and re/present visual identity and the aesthetics of scholarship, revealing and

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<sup>1</sup> The participants’ own words are italicized. They have been given pseudonyms.

concealing. Questioning what it means to be a scholar, they explore visual identity through each person's aesthetic of scholarship. Carlyle, an eighteenth century cultural theorist about clothing said "I dress therefore I am" (Keenan, 2001, p. 15). Clothing reveals subjectivities, culture, values, ideologies, and emotionality. It positions, distinguishes, classifies and legitimates social differences. It is, as Goffman (1959) claims, a way of presenting ourselves to the world and making a statement, intended or not. It is a means of self display, Giddens (1991) argues. Clothing, together with clothing choices and configurations, is a form of literacy, a nonverbal form of communication that can be constructed, read, mediated, interpreted and subverted (Levi-Strauss, 1963). As Lurie (1981) remarks, "For thousands of years human beings have communicated with one another first in the language of dress" (p. 3). Long before I am near enough to talk to you on the street, in a meeting, or at a party, Lurie continues, "you announce your sex, age and (social) class to me through what you are wearing – and very possibly give me important information (or misinformation) as to your occupation, origin, personality, opinions, tastes, sexual desires and current mood" (p. 3). In managing the body and clothing, the scholar is an active agent, complicit in creating and subverting his or her visual identity in order to mis/direct the gaze of the viewer. As Bourdieu (1984) observes, taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier.

### **POEM FOR LISETTE: THE BLACK STRETCH PANTS**

Lisette runs a program  
 She's busy  
 Efficient  
 With her blackberry beeping  
 And every day  
 She wears the same thing:  
 The Black Stretch Pants  
 Every Tuesday  
 Christmas Day  
 Meetings  
 Biking

*All this began in Summer*  
*Ten years ago at my parents' fiftieth anniversary*  
*I was so fat*  
*My old boyfriend said*  
*"Lisette, you had no right to get so fat!"*  
*And my sister said*  
*"Lisette, I have to talk to you, I'm worried..."*  
*What's going on? You don't need to be like Jane!"*

*She meant that Jane  
Doctoral student Jane  
Who'd had the affair with her professor  
Then remorse  
Subliminally  
Jane ate  
At the very least to change her body image  
To become unavailable  
Enormous  
Wobbly  
Undesirable  
To all except her husband*

*Then I went on to visit my mother-in-law  
She answered my knock on the door with  
"Oh my, aren't you getting fat?"*

*I thought  
There's something I need to do.*

*I began to walk to work  
I wasn't even sure I'd know how to walk, like, which direction to go  
I set off  
It took sixty five minutes  
It wasn't hard  
Just tiring*

*Then, that winter, walking became impossible  
Snow  
Ice  
Biting wind  
I thought  
Running this program  
The Paper Work  
I don't have time  
To walk like this*

*Then I thought  
All these papers to sort  
They'll be here*

*Whether I walk or not  
And my desk was cleared by Friday*

*Walking is when I think  
I write nasty emails in my head  
Solve problems  
Walking is essential now*

*I started losing weight  
Fifty pounds in all  
I started buying the same black stretch pants  
In smaller sizes  
I'm down to size 12*

*Now I have eight pairs of the same black stretch pants  
I just change the top  
And jacket  
If there's a meeting or dinner  
I wear a fancy newer better jacket*

*In summer I wear the same pants  
In white*

*My shoes are standard too  
Comfortable  
Always black  
And black Birkenstocks in summer*

*When I travel  
I take the black stretch pants  
One jacket, say red  
Multiple matching tops  
Usually striped combinations  
black, red, white  
It makes dressing easy  
Efficient*

*About a week ago I got a phone call out of the blue  
The old boyfriend  
He's still married*

*Happy-ish*

*He said "Are you ready to run away with me yet?"*

*"No, I'm not"*

*"You'll probably hang up on me from asking this question, but how much do you weigh?"*

*I told him 200 pounds*

*Then I laughed and I said, "No, I only weight 150. Now you're going decide which is true."*

**DRAWING FOR LISETTE FOLLOWED BY DETAIL**







In Kaiser, Chandler, & Hammidi's (2001) work, there is a mind/body tension for women scholars in "choosing between thinking and appearing" (p. 117). Green (2001) argues that female scholars strategize through dress, which is key to "any intervention in academic debate...women professors in particular, are exposed as visibly female bodies intervening in what is overwhelmingly male territory" (p. 98). In Green's study, she asserts an unspoken rule: Female scholars' bodies and outer skins of clothing cannot be sexual, revealing or provocative. This is disallowed entirely, because the sexualized revealing woman or the motherly woman with chubby arms exposes and compromises her ability to be respected, to chastise students, and to deal with colleagues. According to Green the female scholar feels vulnerable in her "floppy, middle-aged body" and must cover it (p. 110).

### **POEM FOR EDWARD**

Edward  
you answered my questions  
with stories

first  
your supervisor's sweatshirt

said *rebel, non conformist, hip, unpretentious*  
*an elitist authoritarian* in disguise

you're not that  
and you're not tatty frayed elbow-patched English prof tweedy  
you're dapper  
well cut  
designed  
thoughtfully graciously textured  
a Victorian gentleman  
like Hardy  
and Dickens: *natty, so particular about what he wore*

*seen, seeing, knowing,*  
*you say*  
*on stage one has to use every device*  
*(Olivier says so)*  
*because university teaching*  
*is theatre*

*people properly dressed are taken seriously*  
*but power-suited female administrators with*  
*sharp shoes*  
*risk intellectual substance for packaging*  
but not you

another story  
of scientists  
who subscribe to their mad scientist view  
a wardrobe  
challenges theory you say  
a wardrobe  
means engagement  
in life outside

you are confident in lilac and pink  
*but it's so effeminate!*  
*sniffed that frightened colleague across the hall*  
embarrassed by your pink shirt at that conference

then  
you tell  
another story  
of Hardy's little laugh  
in the Mayor of Casterbridge

*rich Lucetta gets scarlet*  
*Elizabeth-Jane gets puce*  
*it's symbolic of their characters*  
you say  
wanting the scarlet

your thoughts and clothes  
are detailed  
precise  
you like the feel of real  
The Power of Beauty  
The Perfect Suit  
like Hemingway's  
Perfect Pelt  
clean  
cut  
artful  
textured  
sensual  
flowing  
now

## PAINTING FOR EDWARD



Kaiser, Chandler, & Hammidi (2001) note that while “appearance symbols” for men are unexamined and presented stereotypically as the beard with tweed coat and suede elbow patches, they allege that men “don’t have to contend with discourses about fashion, femininity and feminism as women do” (p. 118).

## POEM FOR KRIS

*I knew as a toddler I was male*

*at seventeen anorexia*

*bulimia*

*body image stuff*

*I became a drug addict*

*alcoholic*

*transgendered*

*bipolar*

*at twenty seven*

*I was fired from the school board*

*for living with a woman*

*she was the center of my universe.  
I got drunk for days  
I wouldn't leave her*

*I went in  
took that principal's brown lunch bag  
and wrote my resignation on it  
yeah, it was like  
I'm not going to put any ceremony to this bullshit*

*Thank god it was about my integrity  
more than my love for her  
because that didn't last  
right?*

*In the seventies  
dykes  
wore male clothing  
and dykes don't like me  
I'm a poser  
I'm not a lesbian  
I don't like them, and their dyke hierarchy  
happy with their sexuality*

*I'm not a woman  
I love this body  
but not on me*

*I like a beautiful feminine woman  
soothing to my eyes  
skirts  
heels  
I learned to like heels  
watching strippers  
as early as I could go*

*It's been a wasted life  
I've never been able to be  
the man that I am  
my sexuality*

*is beyond these body parts  
I'm a cross dresser  
a male wearing woman's clothes*

*At fifty-seven  
I'm still juggling  
image and clothing*

*I wear men's pants  
men's shirts, black  
with a necklace*

*I put it on  
to confuse  
about what, who I really am  
in my department*

*not for the fun of it*

*I don't know if I'm obviously  
seen  
as transgendered  
a lesbian, probably  
I'm bipolar so I'm paranoid anyway*

*the necklace  
feminizes  
confuses  
calms*

*I want a sex change  
but mother's alive  
giving me women's stuff and saying "I wanted a daughter"  
and then there's work...  
it's been done by professors  
but  
I'm getting brainwashed that tenure is the most important thing  
in my future*

*maybe*

*right now my life is calm  
I go home to the cats  
get a movie*

*the other is an  
incredible  
psychic  
Volcano*

*and I'm worn out  
empty*

PAINTING FOR KRIS



In *Contested Bodies*, Holliday & Hassard (2001) assert that the Foucauldian notion of the normal controlled disciplined straight body is accorded high status in Western culture. By contrast, the (Bakhtinian grotesque) body that is fat, ugly, disfigured, and/or disabled is reviled. Mad people's bodies look just so because they move weirdly, twitch and contort, while "queer bodies get coded as promiscuous and contagious; working men's bodies are imbued with excessive masculinity and bestial aggression" (p. 6). These unruly uncontrolled bodies suggest similarly disordered subjectivities.

### **POEM FOR TODD**

*as a sociology/anthropology grad student*

*I wore jeans, T shirts, sweaters*

*then,*

*as a young prof*

*I was cool, young and hip*

*identifying with students*

*my clothes said, I'm one of you*

*in those days*

*we anthropologists did fieldwork*

*returning in the clothes*

*of our people*

*dressed as them*

*different*

*exotic*

*strange*

*we tried to counter stereotypes*

*at conferences*

*we swapped stories of*

*malaria and hepatitis*

*wearing our people's clothing*

*as a badge*

*saying*

*look at me*

*I did something*

*I studied in Cambodia, Ghana or India*

*that world has gone*

*in the 80s*

*came accessibility*



*and consciousness of cultural appropriation  
how do we fit, what do we do?  
we became self reflexive*

*now, I want comfortable participants  
I'm not pretending to be them  
in jeans  
or as a corporate executive  
participants have expectations  
a professor is coming  
I show respect  
and balance  
in chinos and a jacket*

*at our conferences  
the quantitative sociologists  
and others with NGOs and governments  
are suit and tie wearers*

*the critical ones, into political science  
wear jeans and leather jackets, running shoes or boots*

*sociologist women wear sensible shoes, sandals  
there are old hippies in flowing skirts  
and feminists with short hair  
no make up  
rejecting  
style  
superficiality  
and frivolity*

*now  
as a new Dean  
I'm self conscious  
older  
when I get my clothes wrong  
my whole day is wrong  
at some meetings they wear ties  
at others, none  
there's a logic*

*often I don't get it right*

*I'm distant*

*uncertain*

*uncool*

*marked*

*an authority figure*

*away from students*

*colleagues*

*friends*

*but for you*

*I'm in my favourite*

*black turtleneck*

*and my 1980s tweed jacket, from graduate school*

*I got it right*

*I feel comfortable*

*for today*

## **DRAWING FOR TODD**



Freedman & Holmes (2003) describe the ethnic, racial, sexed, dis/abled, gendered, aging, pregnant, and/or classed body of the professor often going unnoticed and being invisible. “Even the battered briefcase” they claim, “expresses disregard for anything but the life of the mind and the practicalities of scholarship” (p. 7).

**POEM FOR WILLIAM**

*This is me, William speaking  
In a course I was asked  
How I came to do gender theory  
I told them*

*in elementary school  
I had longish hair  
and gender confusion  
as long as I can remember  
there were questions  
about me not being  
appropriately  
normatively  
male*

*leaving high school  
I went to a speech therapist  
my speech boxed me in  
I wanted to pass as straight  
normal  
I loved wearing pink  
but if you cover  
you don't get the shaming  
around not being quite the right sort of male*

*then, as a professional  
a gay teacher of English who wasn't out  
in a community coded through dress  
people placed me  
attributed sexuality on the basis of how I did my gender  
so I never wore clothes that deviated  
professional  
class coded*

*gender coded  
in a tie and a tweed jacket  
students commented  
on how well dressed I was*

*I was teaching a year twelve class  
my students took me  
to play billiards  
guys stopped  
looked  
I got scared  
I had young people around me  
saying oh, we should go  
yes, we should go  
the boys were worried  
subjected to danger*

*I was never out in the Catholic schools I taught in  
And coming out wasn't easy  
I wanted people to know*

*but the irony  
paradox  
was they already knew  
I was named  
before I could name myself  
it was the gaze of men  
and not being able to escape it*

*I went from teaching school to university  
feeling freedom I'd never felt  
I found myself putting  
the rainbow flag on my office door  
wearing  
a rainbow bracelet  
I wanted my students to see that  
without having to confess*

*Teaching school was hetero-normative  
our faculty is hetero-normative*

*I talk about my partner  
I refer to him as he  
I wear a wedding ring  
just as heterosexual people talk about their partners or families  
as a naturalized discourse  
little things assert difference  
without threatening*

*professional norms are internalized for me  
at university I wear  
good trousers, a shirt  
a jacket  
conservative  
but as a scholar  
I am anti-establishment  
my ideas are transgressive  
challenging  
inconsistent with how I present myself*

*on weekends  
I go for comfort  
like my Brazil soccer jersey  
my partner hates it  
it's a Saturday cozy thing*

*creating an identity  
marks  
distinguishes  
visibility is associated with potential for violence and shaming  
I don't want to be bashed  
it depends where you are  
in Canada  
it's about space  
walking with my partner  
beyond downtown  
our first months here  
we had food thrown at us  
out of cars  
three times  
food*

*and a bottle  
and a can*

*I thought: maybe we're identifiable  
we're conscious of what we're wearing  
we don't want violence  
we don't want to invite it  
we're careful  
maybe it's the way we're walking, I'm not monitoring that enough  
so there's the emotional toll*

*but at the Men's Plus Club  
it's different  
the spa is closed off  
it's a different sort of space  
those men, supposedly straight  
cruise  
in the open showers, the jacuzzi  
men walk around  
intimately nude  
some erect  
those well-endowed  
want to be looked at  
brazenly, they drop the towel and walk  
buck naked  
the subject of one another's gazes  
erections everywhere  
I'm amazed  
thinking  
wouldn't you be trying to hide it?  
I would  
married players  
have a way of looking, identifying*

*in class I talk about the body  
as whole  
as a signifier  
as text  
I'd feel less constrained without this binary  
boys and girls need not be hemmed in by it, they need a spectrum to express themselves*

*but we're a long way off*

*it's taken time to be comfortable*

*with who I am*

*no matter what I wear*

*my body signifies*

*femininity*

*my identity as a gay man is tied*

*to the queering of my body*

*if it passed as straight, the vulnerability wouldn't be there*

*do you see? I use my hands as you're seeing them right now*

*it's the way I use my hands*

*the way I'm expressive*

*it's associated with the feminine*

*it used to worry me, now, I embrace it*

*people know I'm gay*

*they read it off my body*

*it's the queer body*

*right?*

*talking to you*

*I realize the extent to which I use*

*clothing as a signifier of normalcy*

*I'm subjugated by a dominant culture*

*my clothes perform*

*they assimilate*

*neutralize*

*but I can't hide*

*that second skin*

*my leather jacket and trousers*

*don't protect me*

*I feel*

*vulnerable*

*actually*

## DRAWING/PAINTING FOR WILLIAM



In Bourdieu's (1985) theories of cultural consumption and physical capital he conceptualises the body as a form and bearer of symbolic value, produced presented and managed to acquire status and distinction across social fields: Different social classes produce distinct bodily forms and dress codes, interpreted and valued differently in and across different social fields. Furthermore, bodies carry dissimilar exchange value in relation to gender, sexual orientation, social fields and social classes. According to Shilling (2003) "bodies develop through the interrelation between an individual's social location, habitus and taste" (p. 113). Shilling argues that social class wields a significant influence on the way in which individuals develop their bodies and the symbolic values attached to particular gendered bodily forms. The body is



always an unfinished entity developing in conjunction with various social, emotional and biological forces. Bodies are agents of social process as much as objects of social process (Connell, 2002).

### **POEM FOR THERESA**

Theresa  
even doing psychology  
in grad school  
you wore suits  
while other students hid books  
and viciously  
tore out the pages

you tell another story:  
*some time ago, I said to a feminist  
I'd like to be involved  
you know?  
in women's studies  
I would like  
to come  
to some of your seminars  
but I was not welcome  
the feminist said: you wear high heels and lipstick*

*then,  
that same feminist and I  
fought for a job  
left off  
a dean's shortlist  
the president said: 'you're tokens'  
right  
off to the Human Rights Commission  
and I won  
easily  
the feminist went home*

*later, a student said  
sure, we're all equal now  
I thought*

*you poor foolish girl  
the ceiling is steel reinforced concrete*

*I think first impressions really count  
people remember me  
my accent  
my shoes  
so long as they remember me  
I am dressed up  
made up  
hair  
nails  
always  
like this*

*you're in dark dark navy Ralph Lauren  
a tight skirt  
little jacket  
crisp white shirt  
shiny black boots  
black beads  
hard edges  
solid colours  
tight  
packaged*

*we don't all have to be the same  
you say  
so I'd never given it a second thought  
until*

*the grapevine  
here  
never said to my face  
always women  
one woman  
said  
"look at those nails"  
"how could she have a brain in her head?"  
"who could take her seriously?"*

*Caroline said*

*“if you were a man, you would get a lot more credit.”*

*I stand on my record and my high heels*

*people bully*

*others won't speak*

*afraid to be the next victim*

*I shine a spotlight*

*I neutralize*

*for some women*

*it's harder*

*the powers that be are men*

*open to charm*

*persuasion*

*I never miss an opportunity*

*I get votes at senate*

*for my shoes*

*like the new department*

*narrowly won*

*by my gorgeous pink mules*

*I'm focused on the job*

*ever in track pants? I ask*

*god, no*

*if I look good*

*I feel good*

*like a good night's rest*

*comfortable, confident*

*I'm still from Europe*

*no one who is just clothes*

*is in a job like this*

*I am a shopping dean*

*I pull off deals as I search through Winners for a decent handbag*

*I bet you could too*

### **PAINTING FOR THERESA**



Green (2001) holds that clothes are utilized by female scholars to assert a particular identity and authority “as part of the process of establishing themselves as serious academics, in ways which both engage with the dominant discourses of the intellectual worlds and at times subvert them” (p. 98). In Kaiser Chandle, & Hammidi’s (2001) work, there is a mind/body tension for women scholars in “choosing between thinking and appearing” (p.117). Green’s participants (senior female professors) feel the need to present an aura of authority, someone who has to be “taken seriously” (p. 105) by wearing a male skin, a suit of armour: The power suit. Hollander (1994) views the business suit for men as a design triumph; the same suit now

dominates executive wear for women. Hollander acknowledges that gender continues to be deeply encoded in the female version of the pant or skirt suit. Kaiser, Chandler, & Hammidi (2001) hold that the expensive suit is favoured by high level administrators who “know a silk tweed from a polyester tweed...it says ‘I am one of you. I know your rules, I am willing to play by them right now’” (p. 123).

### Hollywood

Through the body and its outer skin of clothing, subjectivity, resistance and/or conformity are revealed, establishing credibility, even in the academy. The multiplicity of ways of being or doing scholar revealed in this study contrasts with Hollywood/media images of the scholar: Mostly male professors are presented as serious, distracted by ideas from domesticity and things physical, sensual and present, drably dressed and unattractive. In Hollywood generated imagery such as *The Nutty Professor* we are introduced to an obese bow tied scientist, Professor Sherman Klump. The onomatopoeic name as well as his visual identity conjure up a clichéd stereotype of mind/body separation, in which the scholarly work of this clumsy male scholar overrides his sensual visceral self. Professor Klump then experiments on himself, and through his own concoction acquires a new body, sexualized, slim and appealing, arousing female attention as Professor Buddy Love. His new visual identity is expressed in the new name; the mind/body schism is resolved albeit ridiculously and unsatisfactorily. Dr Evil in *Austin Powers* again is a caricature of the mad scientist with his transgressing heavy body and white coat, wearing the clinical uniform of the deranged scientist, while in *The Hours*, Virginia Woolf, the scholarly poet and writer is ethereal and other-worldly in flowing loose clothes. In *Legally Blonde*, Holland Taylor performs as a conforming classically tailored law professor and mentor Dr Stromwell. Similarly, in *The Da Vinci Code* the professor of art history Dr Robert Langdon is curious, serious, and dressed in tweed jackets. In *Shadowlands*, Anthony Hopkins plays C.S. Lewis, also looking tweedy and slightly worn as the Oxford professor and writer. In many Hollywood incarnations the scholar is presented as mostly male, asexual, and as a human being who lives the life of the mind, engrossed in theory: The scholar is presented as disengaged from the embodied self.

### Reflections

Through poems and artworks, the study reveals that scholars’ clothing choices in university settings are gendered (Butler, 1999; Kirkham, 1996; Sanders, 1996) and negotiated expressions of self and visual identity with the body as mediator (Braziel & LeBesco, 2001; Butler, 1993; Davis, 1997; Holliday & Hassard 2001; Shilling, 1993). Female scholars and female administrators strategize through dress (Green, 2001; Kaiser, Chandler, & Hammidi, 2007). At the start of this paper a woman scholar was introduced. She said that her T-shirt could not be described as duck egg blue; it was just blue. For me, she represents a set of values that could be described as anti-aesthetic, perhaps even positivist. In contrast, the

scholar Theresa wears designer suits, heels and nail varnish. Because of this, she believes her ability and credibility as a female administrator/scholar is questioned. Todd, the anthropologist, questions whether to wear a tie in order to fit in as a new administrator. Although biologically Kris is female, in every way Kris wants to be a man. Wearing male clothing feels absolutely right for Kris. Simultaneously, Kris wants to be accepted by colleagues and students at the university. S/he believes that being openly transgendered, and/or identifying entirely as male through the language of clothes and accessories (Lurie, 1981) will invite trouble and ridicule. For this reason, Kris chooses very deliberately to soften, confuse, and androgynize his/her appearance by always wearing a necklace very visibly. The poems and portraits serve to re/present multiple situated meanings of and spaces within scholarship, centred around what it means to be a scholar, drawing attention to the human condition within the context of scholarship, and to the moral and ethical struggles experienced by scholars in relation to their bodies, gender, sexual orientation, aesthetic choices, scholarship and sense of acceptance within and by the academy. Clothing, shoes, ties and accessories speak to and reveal the values of the wearer relating to political and social views, sexual orientation, gender, culture, and religion. The poems and artworks provide opportunities to reflect on arts-informed research, the aesthetics of the clothed body, the body and social theory, and the semiotics of clothing. They draw attention to how bodies are formed, managed, clothed and situated in spaces and places, offering alternative possibilities for understanding in reference to broader considerations of the human condition, to that which is individually and socially constructed, individual yet universal.

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