**School of Education**

# Giving voice to girls:
# A child-centric examination of the lived experiences
# of young girls aged 7-13 in their personal media contexts

**Madeleine Rose Dobson**

**This thesis is presented for the Degree of**
**Doctor of Philosophy**
**of**
**Curtin University**

**May 2016**

# *Declaration*

To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

**Human Ethics** (for projects involving human participants/tissue, etc.)

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – updated March 2014. The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00262), Approval Number HR116/2012.

Madeleine Rose Dobson

26$^{th}$ May 2016

# *Contents*

# *List of Tables*

# List of Figures

# *Acknowledgments*

I would like to sincerely extend my gratitude to everyone who has contributed to the completion of my thesis. I am truly appreciative of the encouragement, support, and guidance which have been offered to me and without which this endeavour would not have been possible.

Thank you to my thesis committee for their infinitely valuable contribution. To Dr. Susan Beltman, Dr. Eva Dobozy, and Dr. Lina Pelliccione – it has been a privilege to work with you and learn from you, and I am endlessly grateful for your mentorship.

I also extend my thanks to the entire School of Education at Curtin University, which truly is a wonderful community made up of people who I consider myself lucky to work with.

Thank you to those who participated in this study. I was fortunate to work with a community of participants who were enthusiastic about their engagement with the research. To the girls who were the focus of my thesis – thank you for telling your stories, I truly appreciate your contributions.

Thank you to my family and friends for their love and support. I am fortunate to have many wonderful people in my life who inspire and encourage me. To those of you who have stayed by my side through all of this and who have shown an interest in and enthusiasm for my work, I am incredibly grateful – perhaps more than I can adequately express. I would like to make special mention of those who have made a significant difference, who I admire and appreciate, and who have made my life a happier one: Mum, Dad, Kati, Lizzie, Tasha, Colm, Ellie, Kim, Mikey, Kara, Kimia, Penny, Andrew, and Netta.

This thesis is dedicated to my grandparents, with all my love to Joan Margaret and George Dennis Dobson, and in loving remembrance of Eva Luise Margarete Irmgard Dagis.

# *Abstract*

As educators, we are responsible for guiding and supporting our students as they grow and develop. Our students face numerous challenges in contemporary society – one of which is arguably media. Media have an overt and enduring presence in contemporary society. Children are observed to be particularly avid users. They engage with media for a range of reasons, such as educational applications and personal entertainment. While media do have immense potential for positive application, its proliferation throughout society is not without controversy – in fact, there are many concerns associated with media use, particularly where children are concerned.

While all of these issues merit discussion, one of distinct note is the problematic intersection of gender and media. Over the years, this issue has been interrogated extensively. It is often contended that media representations of girls and women are lacking. The literature shows that stereotyping, idealisation, objectification, and sexualisation are commonplace across all forms of media in the Western world. It is frequently argued that these representations are damaging and dehumanising. This raises concerns for girls engaging with these media.

Research to date has focused largely on media portrayals and potential health hazards, with an emphasis placed on examining adolescent girls or women in their early twenties. Fewer studies have focused on younger girls. Very few have approached the issues from a child-centric perspective; rather, the research is largely adult-centric with little regard given to the perspectives and experiences of young girls.

The present study sought to contribute to existing knowledge by pursuing a child-centric exploration of the lived experiences of young girls in their personal media contexts. It involved a mixed research approach which blended feminist phenomenology with social semiotics. A small Western Australian primary school consented to participate with the school principal, four classroom teachers, fourteen girls aged between 7 and 13, and their parents engaged as participants. Data were generated via five phases: (1) interviews with educators; (2) student/parent questionnaires; (3) an analysis of media favoured by the girls; (4) interviews with students; and (5) student-guided/document home tours and interviews with parents.

Insight was gained into the complex media environments within which these girls exist; the contrasting perspectives of educators, parents, and children; and most importantly, what it means to be a young girl living with media, from the perspectives of girls themselves. The

knowledge attained represents a valuable contribution to this area of inquiry and will support future research and educational initiatives.

# *Chapter One*
# *Introduction*

---

The lived experiences and perspectives of young children are of tremendous value. By encouraging children to voice their experiences and perspectives, we have the potential to grow our sense of what it means to be a child and how children live in our world. This knowledge should be considered crucial to 'stakeholders' – that is, those of us who play a central role in the lives of children, such as educators – as it can assist us in consciously guiding and supporting children through their growth and development. This guidance and support is key, especially when one considers the potential challenges facing children in contemporary society.

One such potential challenge is the relationship forged between children and media. Mehita (2012, p. 1) writes, "We live in the age of media". True enough, media are omnipresent in contemporary Western society and particularly in Australia. As a cultural and communicative entity, media are wide-reaching, ever-evolving, and increasingly significant in our day-to-day lives. The term 'media' conjures many ideas and is incredibly complex in nature – for example, media are described as a principal social agent (López-Guimerà, Levine, Sánchez-carracedo & Fauquet, 2010) and a cultural and political institution (Havens & Lotz, 2012). There are 'old media', which are traditional mediums which have long existed, and 'new media', which are more recent and which are digitally interactive (Logan, 2010). Media also encompass a wide variety of genres (e.g. television, film, magazines) and platforms (e.g. print platforms, screen platforms), and are typically widely accessible to individuals of all ages. Throughout this thesis, I will employ the plural form of 'media' in order to convey its inherent diversity.

Media are prevalent in the lives of children, who now have unprecedentedly high access to an extensive variety of media. Children engage with said media for a multitude of purposes – for example, media can serve as an educational resource, a means of communication, and/or a source of entertainment. Furthermore, children are engaging with media with greater frequency (e.g. Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2010). The interactions between children and media are not without controversy; there is considerable concern voiced regarding children's readiness to engage with media. These concerns are diverse in nature and pertain to children's cognitive development (e.g. Hazlehurst 2009), identity formation (e.g. Mittal, 2005), or socialisation (López-Guimerà et al., 2010) .

An area of heightened concern is how media might influence young girls. Given that media have been alleged to diminish the humanity of girls and women through under-representation (e.g. Collins, 2011), stereotyping (e.g. Hust & Brown, 2008), idealisation (e.g. Levine, 2000), objectification (e.g. Kilbourne, 2003), and sexualisation (e.g. Hatton & Trautner, 2011), questions are raised regarding the health and wellbeing of the young girls who access these media. Research to date has examined the health consequences for girls and women, with a range of risks revealed. These include heightened body dissatisfaction (e.g. Shroff & Thompson, 2006) and lowered self-esteem (e.g. Grabe & Hyde, 2009). Many authors also call into question how girls will fare in terms of their gender identity, social interactions, and overall health and wellbeing (e.g. Aubrey, 2010). This is a profoundly concerning issue and one which merits further investigation.

The research to date provides interesting insight into the nature of media with which girls are engaging, the potential consequences of them doing so, and proposed pedagogical resources for prevention and/or intervention. However, much of the research is adult-centric and lacking a participatory focus. Therefore, the voices of participants – especially child participants – are rarely heard. Furthermore, the bulk of research in this area has examined adolescent girls and women in the early stages of adulthood. Some researchers have pursued research with younger samples (e.g. Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2006) – however, this is an area that demands further development, in order to gain thorough insight into how younger girls are experiencing the given issues.

Considering the expansive nature of this area of research, it is crucial to define the parameters of my own study. The broader area looks at a diverse range of issues. For example, there are studies with a cultural and/or communicative emphasis that examine the nature of media, the production of media, or the messages conveyed. Representation in media is a major issue, with attention given to diversity in characterisation and casting, as well as diversity behind-the-scenes. There is a substantial amount of research focusing on media use which reports on means of access and patterns of engagement. Health-based research provides diagnostic and analytical insight into the potential physical, emotional, and cognitive outcomes for girls and women engaging with media. Educationally-focused research looks at the ways students and educators engage with media, as well as resources for prevention or intervention.

Evidently, this is a diverse field. In terms of the scope of my study, I am approaching the issues from an educational perspective with an interest in the lived experiences and perspectives of young girls. Specifically, focus is placed on a small sample of girls aged 7-13

from one Western Australian primary school. Their educators and parents were also involved in the research to ensure a holistic exploration. Throughout this exploration, what was being sought was an intimate and intricate sense of what it means to be a young girl living with media. Practically speaking, this meant engaging with the girls themselves, the media that they favoured, and their educators and parents to gain comprehensive contextual insight. My focus throughout remained relatively narrow. When interacting with the girls, I prioritised listening to their stories of their lives with media in a very personal sense. In exploring samples of media, I focused specifically on those which held the most meaning for the girls (music videos and a magazine), with my analysis honing in on the representation and communication of femininity. When speaking to the educators and parents, emphasis was placed on their understandings of girls and media within school and home contexts.

Ultimately, the study seeks to contribute contextually-specific knowledge attained from a participatory, feminist, and child-centric perspective with the blended use of phenomenological and social semiotic methodologies. This approach is of great value to the field as it attends to the issue of girls' experiences and perspectives in a personal and detailed manner. In taking this stance, knowledge in this area will be further evolved.

Table 1.1: Connecting objectives and research questions

| Objectives | Questions |
|---|---|
| *To engage in a holistic examination of the relationship forged between young girls and their preferred media.* | *What are the individual and collective lived experiences of girls aged 7-13 in their personal media contexts?* |
| 1. To establish the types of media with which girls are regularly engaging; | 1. What history do girls have with the media, including past and present consumption?; |
| 2. To examine the content of this media in terms of the messages and ideals presented; | 2. What is the nature of the media that girls are accessing?; |
| 3. To explore varying perspectives from stakeholders in the girls' lives; | 3. What role do schools and families play in regards to the relationship forged between girls and media? |
| 4. To develop a greater understanding of how girls perceive media; and, | 4. How do girls perceive, understand, and relate to media content? |
| 5. To give voice to girls' experiences and perspectives regarding the media in their lives. | 5. What do girls have to say about their experiences and perspectives regarding media? |

As I considered the aforementioned issues, the research completed thus far, and my potential contribution, a number of objectives emerged. These were aligned to research questions. As shown in Table 1.1 in italics, the central objective is: *to engage in a holistic examination of the relationship forged between young girls and their preferred media.* The central question is: *what are the individual and collective lived experiences of girls aged 7-13 in their personal media contexts?* Each of these are underpinned by a number of sub-objectives and sub-questions. These objectives and questions provided structure to the study and helped in facilitating the design and delivery of the research.

As the research evolved, four dimensions were considered as per Creswell and Plano Clark (2011). These dimensions included my paradigmatic worldview, theoretical lens, methodological approach, and methods of data generation (see Figure 1.1). The paradigmatic worldview which I assumed was a participatory one, which meant that I was focused on engaging equitably with participants and eliciting their voices. This aligned with my theoretical lens, which was feminist in nature. Both of these dimensions linked to my methodological approach: a mixed research design which blended feminist phenomenology and social semiotics. Data generation included interviews with educators, students, and parents; questionnaires issued to students and parents; an analysis of media most favoured by the girls engaged in the study; and student-guided/documented home tours. By approaching the research in this way, my intention was to generate a holistic, context-specific understanding of the girls' lives and lived experiences with media, with distinct emphasis placed on eliciting their voices. This represents a valuable contribution to this area of knowledge as it will help to grow our sense of what it means to be a young girl in today's culture. This can then assist in directing future research and shaping our pedagogical practices.
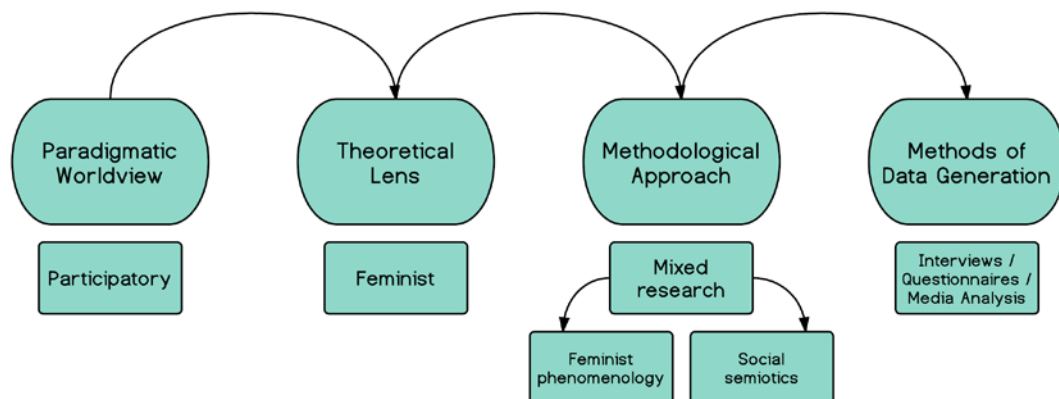


Figure 1.1: The four dimensions of research – adapted from Creswell and Plano Clark (2011, p. 39).

The conclusions reached by this study include five key findings and seven recommendations. These findings and recommendations resulted from an extensive process of data generation and analysis. Table 1.2 summarises the study in terms of the questions asked, the associated data generation, where the resulting findings are presented and discussed, what the key findings were, and, lastly, what the resulting recommendations were.

Table 1.2: Summary of the study

| Research questions | Associated data generation | Presentation/discussion of findings and resulting key findings | Resulting recommendations |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. What history do girls have with the media, including past and present consumption?; | • Questionnaires<br>• Interviews with educators, parents, and girls | • Findings are presented and discussed in Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight<br>• *Key finding 4: Intimate, meaningful, and diverse connections* (p. 199) | 1. Researchers in this area of inquiry should prioritise greater diversity in sampling; |
| 2. What is the nature of the media that girls are accessing?; | • Analysis of relevant media samples | • Findings are presented and discussed in Chapter Seven<br>• *Key finding 3: Diverse portrayals of femininity* (p. 162) | 2. Researchers in this area of inquiry should continue the investigation of child/adult perspectives;<br>3. Researchers in this area of inquiry should pursue child-centric research which privileges children's voices; |
| 3. What role do schools and families play in regards to the relationship forged between girls and media? | • Interviews with educators, parents, and girls | • Findings are presented and discussed in Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight<br>• *Key finding 1: Variant media education at Seaglass Primary School* (p. 135)<br>• *Key finding 2: The alignment between educator and parent perspectives* (p. 136) | 4. Educators should work collaboratively to develop a whole-school plan for media education;<br>5. Educators should prioritise collaboration and communication between educators, parents, and children; |
| 4. How do girls perceive, understand, and relate to media content?<br><br>5. What do girls have to say about their experiences and perspectives regarding media? | • Interviews with girls<br>• Child-guided home tours | • Findings are presented and discussed in Chapter Eight<br>• *Key finding 4: Intimate, meaningful, and diverse connections* (p. 199)<br>• *Key finding 5: Disparate perspectives regarding media* (p. 200) | 6. Parents should be actively attentive to the experiences, perspectives, and voices of their children; and,<br>7. Girls should speak to their experiences and perspectives. |

**Chapter Summary**

The focus of my research is the relationships forged between young girls (aged 7-13) and media. This is an important issue that deserves our attention and action. The specific lived experiences as voiced by girls will be of value to educators, families, and the community as we consider how to provide support and guidance to young girls amidst the current media climate.

This chapter has provided an introduction to my study. The following chapter offers a review of the literature with consideration given to what is known, what has yet to be learned, and how this guided the present study.

## *Chapter Two*

## *Literature Review*

---

**Chapter Introduction**

This chapter provides an analytical review of existing literature that proved pertinent to my study, which focuses on the experiences and perspectives of young girls living in media-rich Western contexts. The structure of the chapter is depicted in Figure 2.1. A wide-ranging review was conducted in order to examine the central issues. Included within this review was research literature from journal articles and other key texts, such as publications from government and community bodies, and books from key authors in this area.
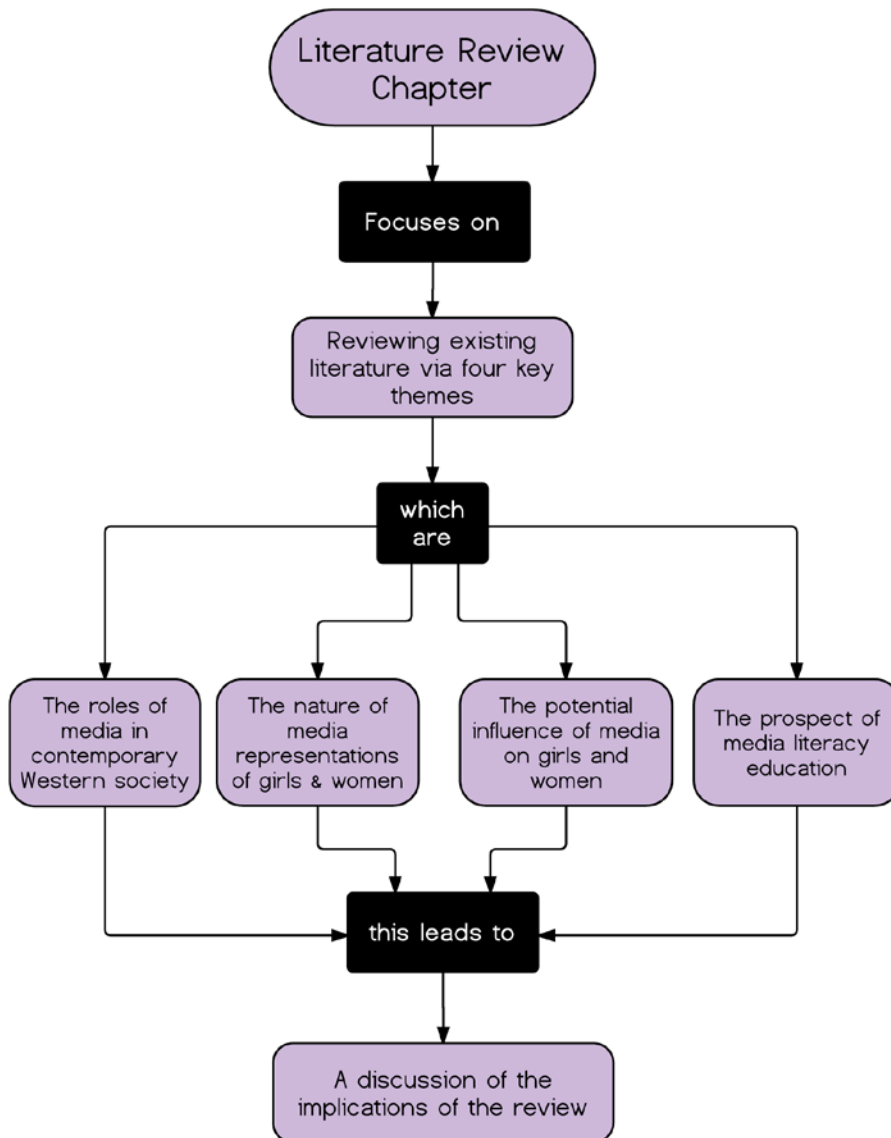


Figure 2.1: The content and structure of Chapter Two

A number of key themes were examined, which include: the roles of media in contemporary Western society; the nature of media representations of girls and women; the potential influence of media on girls and women; and the prospect of media literacy education. Hence, the review comprises a fusion of research disciplines. These include media, education, society, and health based research.

There were several questions guiding the review which I equated to key themes, as is shown in Table 2.1. After reviewing the existing literature via these key themes, I will discuss the implications. This will comprise an assessment of what knowledge has been attained to date, what gaps may exist, and what future research might contribute.

Table 2.1: Guiding questions connected to key themes

| Guiding questions | Key themes |
| --- | --- |
| What are media's roles in contemporary society? | The roles of media in contemporary Western society |
| How are girls and women represented in media? | The nature of media representations of girls and women |
| How might media influence girls and women? | The potential influence of media on girls and women |
| Can education offer resources for prevention and/or intervention? | The prospect of media literacy education |

While this literature review attempts an extensive analysis of the key themes, there are notable parameters. This review primarily focuses on Western media's under-representation, stereotyping, idealisation, objectification, and sexualisation of girls and women, to the general exclusion of non-Western media or other issues with media content, such as violent or explicit content. Furthermore, this literature review is largely focused on girls and women with minimal reference made to their male counterparts and/or how the present media culture might affect boys and men. As regards media use, this is primarily focused on children. Finally, the 'media' discussed in this literature review primarily includes popular traditional media (such as film, television, and magazines) and popular new media (such as the Internet and social media), as well as the advertising embedded within these subsections of media. It should be noted that media encompass formats that extend beyond screen, print and online media, which are not discussed extensively in this review. The focus remains on media which are most relevant to the study's intended participants, who were young girls aged between seven and 13. Lastly, the publications reviewed were generally published between

2000 – 2013, although some reference is made to earlier texts which were particularly relevant.

## The roles of media in contemporary Western society

Media are a principal social agent internationally (López-Guimerà, Levine, Sánchez-carracedo & Fauquet, 2010), and can further be identified as a cultural and political institution (Havens & Lotz, 2012). Due to the diverse range of media apparent in society and therefore addressed in this review, I will be applying the plural form of 'media' to emphasise this diversity. Buysse and Embser-Herbert (2004) identify media as one of the most powerful institutional forces in modern society, with the ability to reflect and shape social attitudes, values, and knowledge. There is a strong consensus in the literature that media are more powerful and pervasive in our society than ever before (Christakis & Zimmerman, 2009; Croteau & Hoynes, 2007; Daniels, 2009; Derenne & Beresin, 2006; Fuller & Goffey, 2012; McHale, Dotterer & Kim, 2009; Moyer-Gusé & Riddle, 2009; Strasburger, Wilson & Jordan, 2009; Talbot, 2007). This section of the literature review focuses on how media have evolved and grown as an influential force in our society, particularly in relation to children and their worlds. There are three sub-sections: *defining and conceptualising media,* which looks at how the term 'media' is defined and conceptualised, as well as what it comprises; and *children and media,* which specifically focuses on how children engage with media.

### Defining and conceptualising media

While media are often viewed as a tool, their nature is actually far more complex (Qvarsell, 2000). Berns (2012) states that media shapes, spreads, and transforms our culture: they *shape* culture by affecting us in some way, such as influencing the way we shop; they *spread* culture by extending our capacity to process information and promote multi-tasking; and they *transform* culture by creating new environments and changing the way we perceive existing environments. Media are multidimensional and vast; they comprise a variety of mediums, including but not limited to communication media, information media, and entertainment media.

Much of the literature acknowledges how the media landscape has changed in recent years with further recognition given to its continual evolution and expansion (Anand & Krosnick, 2005; Breen, 2007; Brierley, 2002; Croteau & Hoynes, 2007; Monaco, 2009; Scheibe & Rogow, 2012; Strasburger et al., 2009). Two key categories are commonly defined: 'old media' and 'new media'. 'Old media' typically refers to traditional or long-existing mediums such as print media, film, television, radio, and the telephone, whereas 'new media' may

refer to the Internet, Smartphones, tablet media, and other more recent platforms for viewing, education, and interaction. Logan (2010) offers a concise definition for 'new media', describing it as digitally interactive media. He clarifies that old media are predominantly mass media, while new media, despite having wide accessibility, are more personalised, with a sense of intimacy between the user and their media. Logan (pp. 6-7) proposes that old media can be regarded as "passive mass media", while new media comprise "individually accessed interactive media", further stating:

> What's new about today's 'new media' is that they are digital, they are linked and cross-linked with each other, and the information they mediate is very easily processed, stored, transformed, retrieved, hyper-linked, and perhaps most radical of all, easily searched for and accessed. (Logan, 2010, pp. 6-7)

Social media would fall under Logan's category of "individually accessed interactive media". However, the ways in which social media are defined and perceived are contentious. Chan-Olmsted, Cho & Lee (2013) point out that 'social media' lacks a singular, clear definition, attributing this to its rapid evolution and inherent diversity. In their discussion of the many existing definitions, it is evident that social media comprises a range of online resources which afford users the opportunity to view and consume content, discuss and respond, create and share, and ultimately, engage in an interactive manner with content and their online peers. Mayfield (2008) identifies five overarching characteristics of all social media, comprising: participation, openness, conversation, community, and connectedness. These descriptions by Chan-Olmsted et al. and Mayfield are useful in negotiating an understanding of social media.

Accessibility of media in contemporary Western society is easy, if not instantaneous. Media also have a notable presence in our communities. For example, in their discussion of hegemonic visual culture, Guerin and Hallas (2007) observe:

> Computer screens, video monitors, and electronic billboards fill the social spaces of work, leisure, and education. Television has become almost as fixed in public spaces as it has in our living rooms. Billboards and hoardings, magazines and advertisements tutor us in consumer desire. The World Wide Web has taken over as our primary source of information. (Guerin and Hallas, 2007, p. 1)

Similar observations are made throughout the literature regarding the proliferation and accessibility of media (Comstock & Scharrer, 2007; Davies, Dickey & Stratford, 1987a; Jhally, 2002; Mitchell, 1980; Semali, 2003; Weisner, 2014). It is further alleged that the mass media are powerful and persistent, transmitting and shaping ideas, values, norms, attitudes, and behaviours that collectively construct our social reality as well as our own individual self-perceptions (Choma, Foster & Radford, 2007; Gerbner, 1998; Lopez-Guimera et al., 2010).

One particularly imperative issue is how people interact with media. This is a complex issue which has been looked at from many angles. For example, with specific relevance to advertising, it is proposed that as advertising has evolved in complexity and sophistication, the responses of consumers have also ("Advertising enters the virtual world", 2011). People may understand what advertising is doing, although they may not understand the exact 'grammar' ("Advertising enters the virtual world", 2011). Taking an alternate stance, the relationship of an audience to advertising is discussed by Goldman (2013, p. 1), who writes, "Though advertising is widely acknowledged as having an impact on 'society', most people claim to have acquired personal immunity from its 'effects'". Goldman then goes on to elaborate:

> We participate, daily, in deciphering advertising images and messages. Our ability to recognise and decipher the advertising images that confront us daily depends on our photographic literacy and our familiarity with the social logic of advertising and consumerism. Yet, because ads are so pervasive and our reading of them so routine, we tend to take for granted the deep social assumptions embedded in advertisements. We do not ordinarily recognise advertising as a sphere of ideology. (Goldman, 2013, p. 1)

This presents an intriguing challenge to those invested in educating audiences about media influence and impact. Goldman's stance is similar to many authors focusing on media – for example, Singhal and Rogers (1999, p. 8) state, "We are educated by the entertainment media, even if unintended by the source and unnoticed by the audience." Here, Singhal and Rogers raise two interesting issues: source intentionality and audience naivety, both of which will be addressed in Chapter Three, which focuses on conceptual issues.

In summary, it is evident that media are a significant component of our cultural landscape. As the focus of this thesis is on young people and their bond with media, the following sub-

section will focus on children and media, and what is known about the relationship they share.

## Children and media

The relationship forged between children and media is one which has received considerable attention in the literature and beyond. Concern has been voiced in regards to children's relationship with media, particularly in terms of the level to which they are engaging with media content and whether they are cognitively able to understand the messages communicated (Hamilton, 2008; Hazlehurst, 2009). This section will focus on children's interactions with media in terms of use, access, and potential influence.

Media have an integral presence in the everyday lives of children (Cole & Henderson Daniel, 2005; Levine & Murnen, 2009; Rideout, Foehr & Roberts, 2010). In line with this statement, Harris (2011) asserts that media are entwined in the lives of adolescents and that their engagement with media continues to grow. In fact, the literature widely suggests that child media consumption is increasing with time, although modes of engagement are clearly evolving. For example, in a recent American survey study documenting developments in children's media environments and behaviours, the authors state that "big changes are afoot when it comes to children and new media technologies" (Common Sense Media [CSM], 2013, p. 7).

As to the extent to which children are engaged with media, much research has been done in this area. In their text focusing on children and media, Strasburger et al. (2009) state that young people aged between 8 and 18 spend more than 40 hours per week engaging with various forms of media. Further to this, in a later article, Strasburger (2010) specifies that children and teens spend upwards of seven hours per day with media, or up to twelve hours per day if multitasking is included. This data is drawn from the Kaiser Family Foundation study, which the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA; 2010, p. 1) describe as "one of the largest and most comprehensive publicly available sources of information about media use among eight to 18-year-olds in the United States". It provides a detail-rich and longitudinal examination of media use amongst young Americans. Data were generated via student surveys and media diaries. Within this study, Rideout, Foehr and Roberts (2010) delineate three categories of media consumption: light (less than three hours per day), moderate (3-16 hours per day), and heavy (16 hours or more per day). Of their sample of more than 2,000 American youths, 63% were in the moderate category, with a further 21% comprising heavy media users, leaving 17% in the light category. A major

finding of the study is the dramatic increase in media use between 2004 and 2009, which is attributed to the increased accessibility of media and multi-tasking behaviours (ACMA, 2010; Rideout et al., 2010).

ACMA have conducted similarly focused studies which reports on Australian contexts – in 2007, they pursued a study involving representative telephone surveys of parents, diaries completed by Australian children aged 8-17, and self-completed surveys which accompanied the diaries. They found that Australian children were maintaining their relationships with traditional media (e.g. broadcast television) whilst also engaging with new media (e.g. the internet) (ACMA, 2010). In 2009, they observed how Australian children were interacting with media – there was a transition to digital television, plus the increase in Smartphones facilitated greater accessibility (ACMA, 2010).

It is not surprising that given the recent technological advancements, that media are constantly evolving. Major transitions have occured in recent decades. This is particularly relevant to media accessed by children. For example, in recent years, there has been a rise in the viewing of reality television, while traditional comedies and dramas have decreased in popularity with children (Wright, 2009). There has also been a shift in the way in which television is viewed, with the medium expanding to include a variety of options such as viewing programming online or time-shifted programming via digital recording devices (Rideout et al., 2010). Furthermore, marketing communications have become more integrated over time, with advertising, entertainment, and brand experience intersecting seamlessly (Moore, 2004). There are important distinctions to be made between media genres, and there have been noteworthy shifts in this regard. Mobile media have become increasingly salient in the lives of children, particularly in recent years – in comparing their 2013 results to their 2011 results, CSM (2013) found that children's mobile media access was dramatically higher. They reported a "five-fold increase" (CSM, 2013, p. 9) in ownership of tablet devices, and further observed a rise in the percentage of children with access to 'smart' mobile devices (52% in 2011 to 75% in 2013). However, despite 'new media' gaining prevalence, television remained central in the lives of children both for educational purposes and entertainment. On this note, it was reported that 58% of the children recruited for the study watched television at least once per day. Similar to Rideout et al. (2010), CSM also found that viewing modes have changed with time-shifted viewing becoming more common – for example, viewing via digital recording devices.

One area of the media that children and adolescents engage with frequently is the Internet, an expansive environment which includes more traditional forms of media (e.g. news articles, music videos, gaming sites etc.) and the emerging phenomenon of social media. Tiggemann and Miller (2010) note that 94.9% of American adolescents have Internet access, spending an average of 9.8 hours per week online, while 75% of Australian adolescents aged between 15 and 17 go online every day. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS; 2009) shows that 79% of Australian children accessed the internet between 2008 and 2009, and that overall, internet consumption by children is increasing with time. The advent of social media has seen a shift in modes of online engagement, with users becoming more active and interactive. Czerski (2012) argues that younger generations (e.g. Generations Y and Z) have a different relationship with the Internet than older generations (e.g. Generation X, 'Baby Boomers') may expect. He writes:

> We grew up with the Internet and on the Internet. This is what makes us different; this is what makes the crucial, although surprising from your point of view, difference: we do not 'surf' and the internet to us is not a 'place' or 'virtual space'. The Internet to us is not something external to reality but a part of it: an invisible yet constantly present layer intertwined with the physical environment. We do not use the Internet, we live on the Internet and along it… The Web to us is not a technology which we had to learn and which we managed to get a grip of. The Web is a process, happening continuously and continuously transforming before our eyes; with us and through us. (Czerski, 2012)

Internalisation is frequently discussed in the literature on children and the media. 'Internalisation' refers to individuals both buying into cultural ideals and also engaging in behaviours aimed at achieving said ideals (Gilbert, Keery and Thompson, 2005). Many authors contend that children internalise messages purveyed by the media which can impact on their worldview, beliefs, and behaviours (Anand & Krosnick, 2005; Kjaersgaard, 2005; Robinson, Callister, Magoffin & Moore, 2006; Strasburger et al., 2010; Zuckerman & Dubowitz, 2005). Ward and Harrison (2005) describe media as powerful agents of socialisation, particularly in relation to gender and sexuality, given media's ability to depict, define, and discount. Furthermore, given that media's primary intention is to draw an audience, they aim to be as appealing, compelling, and engaging as possible (Ward, 2003). It is alleged that media-driven socialisation is most potent in areas where adolescents lack knowledge or experience (Wright, 2009). Several studies indicate the media has significant influence concerning the sexual socialisation of adolescents (Collins, Elliott, Berry,

13

Kanouse, Kunkel, Hunter & Miu, 2004; L'Engle, Brown & Kenneavy, 2006). Focusing on the potential impact of screen media, Robinson et al. (2006) state that television and movies serve to socialise children by providing them with images and ideas that establish, alter, or reinforce stereotypes. Mittal (2005) asserts that children often assume, either consciously or unconsciously, that television teaches them about the world they live in, as well as who they are and how they should behave in that world. Roe (2000) observes one of the many attractions of television for children is the possibility to identify with media figures. In an ethnographic study focusing on children aged 4-11, Griffiths and Machin (2003) observe the social capital that media potentially provide:

> Children relate to television not so much in terms of the information value of what they see in it, but in relation to the way it allows them to join in, be party to common knowledge, to be in on the latest thing. (Griffiths & Machin, 2003, p. 147)

Across the literature it is argued that children are not cognitively ready to fully understand the nature of media communications and therefore can be considered vulnerable (Brooks, 2008; Hamilton, 2008; Hazlehurst, 2009; Hutchinson & Calland, 2011; Moore, 2004). Mittal (2005) voices concern that children do not have access to enough positive programming that could help affirm their identities by educating them about life, social, and moral values, and worthwhile life skills. On a similar note, Lopez-Guimera et al. (2010) express concerns that media have become serious rivals to schools and families in relation to children's education and socialisation.

Division and debate exist within the literature concerning children and their relationship with media. Qvarsell (2000) observes that there is a tendency towards polarised views of media, reducing it to either 'good' or 'bad', 'beneficial' or 'harmful'. Qvarsell argues that media is not simply 'pro' or 'con' and that, likewise, children are not wholly resilient or entirely fragile as human beings. Both children and media are complex in nature, and their interactions cannot be simplified into simple categories of 'good' or 'bad'. It is important to note that not all children will be influenced uniformly by media messages, nor are they passive victims of the media with which they engage (Lamb & Peterson, 2012; Mittal, 2005; Ward, 2003). Mittal further states that children come from diverse backgrounds that influence their interactions with media, and that each child constructs his/her own values and beliefs when engaging with media content. An example of this was made evident by Steele and Brown's (1995) study which focused on adolescent room culture and the relationship between teenagers and media. On this relationship, Steele and Brown (p. 551) write:

"[Teenagers] appropriate and transform media messages and images to help them make sense of their lives." This points to the importance of media beyond their cultural prevalence, indicating a meaningfulness on a more personal level. Some authors contend that the media's potential to be a positive force in the lives of young people has not yet been fully realised (Lamb & Peterson, 2012; Robinson et al., 2006).

While the literature remains divided on some points (e.g. how media may be defined), there is consensus that media is a significant force in contemporary society, one that is ever-evolving and considerably influential in nature. It is particularly important in the lives of children, who have increasing access to an expanding landscape of media. There are many messages and ideals communicated by media on a vast range of topics. One of the most prominent appears to be media's representation of women. The following section of this literature review focuses on how media represent, or fail to represent, girls and women.

**The nature of media representations of girls and women**

Given how far-reaching media are in contemporary society, it is essential to consider the nature of media communications. A review of pertinent literature reveals widespread concern regarding how girls and women are represented in popular culture. Gordon (2008) explains that media offer a variety of examples of what women are like and what roles they play in our society, while Nulman (2014) discusses the cultural globalisation of Hollywood film and how the vision of women contained within may impact on ideas of gender, sexuality, and women's social roles.

Much of the literature suggests such examples are poor reflections of reality, with several authors citing concerns that worldviews presented are distorted, unrealistic and rarely representative of the wide range of roles and attributes of real women and men (Davies et al., 1987a; Gerbner, 1998; Hust and Brown, 2008; Lopez-Guimera et al., 2010; Piran, Levine & Irving, 2000). In particular, Hutchinson and Calland (2011) assess media representations of women as narrow, rigid, and inflexible. Buysse and Embser-Herbert (2004) state that there is minimal dispute that mass media play a critical role in perpetuating gender differences and gender inequality. These assessments are common throughout the literature, with numerous studies revealing that women are often under-represented or negatively represented across media. This section of the literature review will focus on how girls and women are represented in contemporary media, with focus respectively given to the alleged under-representation, stereotyping, idealisation, objectification and sexualisation that occurs.

**Under-representation**

Under-representation refers to the disproportionate presentation of certain groups, communities, or individuals (Kidd, 2016). Collins (2011) asserts that it is overwhelmingly clear that women are under-represented in media. In her content analysis of gender roles in media, Collins found a persistent disparity in portrayals of men and women, despite the evolving and expanding roles of women in society over the years. Similarly, Gunter (2002) observes women's persistent under-representation in media, noting that women have been depicted in a much more limited range of roles than men. In a content analysis of 2011's top 100 films, Lauzen (2012) found women were dramatically under-represented, with men representing 78% of protagonists, while women comprised a mere 11%. Nulman (2014) reported a similar finding regarding the positioning of women within film – through a qualitative analysis of the top twelve box office films from 1990-1999 and 2000-2009 within an American context, Nulman found that women were rarely ever central characters. They were often linked to the central male character via romantic or maternal connections. Also regarding cinematic representation, Smith and Choueiti (2010) conducted a content analysis on 101 G-rated films released theatrically between 1995 and early 2005, and subsequently found men outnumbered women by a ratio of 2.57 to 1. Kjaersgaard (2005) observes that research has shown that women are generally under-represented on television, further noting there are twice as many men as there are women on television, and that men receive more diverse representation. There is also a gender hierarchy in media coverage where women are under-represented and trivialised, particularly in sports media (Buysse & Embser-Herbert, 2004). Numerous other issues exist in sports media, such as the disparate coverage of women's sports versus men's sports (Messner & Cook, 2010), or the sexualisation of female athletes (Harris & Clayton, 2002).

Not only are women under-represented on screen, but there is also the continuing issue of women being under-represented behind the scenes. Muir (1989) is one of many authors to discuss film and television being industries controlled by men. More recently, Dirse (2013) is one to observe the under-representation of women in cinematography, pointing out that film is therefore predominantly seen through the filter of the male gaze. Through the male gaze, we are encouraged to see the world through the eyes of men and learn to see ourselves as they see us (Dickey, 1987). At present, women are the minority in film and television production – a fact which is evidenced by a number of recent studies. Returning to Lauzen's work, her analysis of behind-the-scenes staffing found that women comprised 18% of crew working on the 250 top-grossing American films in 2011. In an analysis of diversity in television writing, the Writers Guild of America West (2013) found that staffing was hugely

disproportionate in favour of employing men. In the 2011 – 2012 television season, women comprised only 30.5% of writing staff. Furthermore, increased numbers of women working behind-the-scenes seems to result in more female cast members. For example, Smith and Choueiti (2010) found that the involvement of one or more female writers or directors predicted a higher percentage of girls and/or women being shown on-screen. It is apparent from the existing literature that film and television are still male-dominated industries. With men controlling production of film and television, one must consider to what degree they control perception – that is, what impact might this have on girls and their experiences with media?

As well as the overt under-representation of women in general, media also often fail to represent certain kinds of women. One such woman is the older woman, who is relatively absent compared to her younger counterparts. This is linked to the patriarchal roots of media, which reinforce the value of youthfulness and link this to attractiveness and desirability to men (Davidson et al., 1987). Contemporary fashion media are notorious for excluding older women and overtly favouring young, thin, white women by featuring them in abundance (Grove-White, 2001; Lewis, Medvedev & Seponski, 2011). This under-representation may be viewed as ageist and – perhaps unsurprisingly – is apparent in film as well. In 2011, the majority of female characters were youthful, and as age increased, representation declined (Lauzen, 2012). Haboush, Warren and Benuto (2011) attest that in mainstream American media, youth is glorified whilst aging is seen as undesirable. Grove-White (2001) argues that the fashion industry's preoccupation with youthfulness and slenderness serves to diminish other aspects of a woman's humanity, while reinforcing the male gaze. The ageing body is seen as one which is rejected and stigmatised (Rodan, Ellis & Lebeck, 2014). Essentially, the literature suggests that youth is prioritised and glorified, while older women are either unseen or unappreciated.

As well as privileging youth, thinness is also made salient across all forms of media. Thin women receive high visibility and generous representation in media, which is typically of a congratulatory nature. Fat women, on the other hand, are typically sidelined. Barriga, Shapiro and Jhaveri (2008) note that there is an under-representation of overweight women and that when overweight women *are* represented, they are often depicted in a negative light. By conducting experiments with two groups of adult women, one comprised of undergraduates and the other of mall patrons, Barriga et al. found there was a strong bias in favour of thinner body types. Larger body types were considered realistic in domestic settings, but not professional contexts. Barriga et al. comment that their results may indicate

that the thin ideal presents a challenge to larger women and their professional success. Hust and Brown (2008) contend that when women with heavier body types are actually represented in film and television, they are often ridiculed or mocked, or their weight is made to be a part of the storyline. Several authors comment on the treatment of larger people in media and society, noting that our present culture is presumptuous, contemptuous, and dismissive towards them, automatically associating "fat" with failure and weakness and vilifying it as ugly and immoral (Garrett & Wrench, 2012; Harrison, 2000; Jutel, 2005; Klaczynski, Goold & Mudry, 2004; Kline, 2000; Levine, 2000; Levine & Murnen, 2009; Maor, 2014; Murray, 2005; Rees, Oliver, Woodman & Thomas, 2011; Wolf, 1991). In discussing the presumptions placed on fat bodies, Murray (2005, p. 155) summarises, "The fat body is discursively constructed as a failed body project."

Under-representation, whether broad (i.e. the general under-representation of girls and women) or niche (i.e. the under-representation of certain groups of girls and women), is a concern. Again, the question that arises is: what does this mean for the audience in question? How does this impact on those viewing these media – whether they are those who are represented, or those who are under-represented?

**Stereotyping**

Stereotyping can be defined as the association of typical ideas and expectations in regards to a particular group and their qualities and/or social roles (Dovidio, Hewstone & Glick, 2010). Gunter (2002) and Collins (2011) both argue that while the extent of representation is significant, it is not as important as the nature of representation. Aside from body-centric issues, other problems exist with how girls and women are depicted in media in terms of their nature, their behaviours, and their positions in society. Much of this is portrayed stereotypically, often reducing girls and women to rigidly defined roles based on traditional conceptualisations of femininity.

It is frequently observed throughout the literature that across different forms of media, girls and women are typically depicted as more passive, nurturing, and kind than their male counterparts. Boys and men are shown to be more outgoing, aggressive, and dominant (Berns, 2012; Hust and Brown, 2008). In media, it is typical for girls and women to seek out male attention; female characters are often focused on obtaining or maintaining a romantic relationship with a man. This pursuit is often linked to the character's perceived physical desirability (Puvia & Vaes, 2012).

In a review aimed at summarising research focused on sexual media content and its role in socialising American youth, Ward (2003) found a dominant theme across magazines aimed at girls and women. This theme is that their focal goal should be appearing desirable in order to attract men. Additionally, girls and women were urged to pursue attributes such as innocence, while avoiding appearing bossy or motherly. Ward also notes that magazines often imply relationships are a woman's responsibility and that men are portrayed as inept, incompetent, unaware, and emotionally and verbally unskilled. Men are also depicted as more sexually aggressive and virile, while women are seen as passive and vulnerable (Ward, 2003). Hust and Brown (2008) further indicate that women in media often demonstrate less agency than men in their relationships, and that men are largely depicted as professionals while women are homemakers. Furthermore, if women are depicted as professionals, there is an emphasis on their appearance and/or love life. Smith and Choueiti's (2010) content analysis echoes this, finding traditional roles were prevalent for female characters, who were twice as likely to be mothers or in a committed romantic relationship. Lauzen's (2012) content analysis reports similar findings, revealing female characters are more likely to be identified by marital status and be depicted as homemakers, while men are more likely to be identified by occupational status. Furthermore, leadership was a male-dominated enterprise, with men accounting for 86% of leaders in the top films of 2011. Upon reviewing a number of studies focusing on male and female representation in media, Hust and Brown (p. 104) summarise their collective findings via six broad themes:

- It's a man's world;
- Men are strong and muscular; women are thin and sexy;
- Men are serious and powerful; women are emotional and passive;
- Heterosexuality prevails;
- Boys will be boys and girls better be prepared; and
- A woman's place is still in the home.

These themes, with their patriarchal underpinnings, are potentially limiting to girls and women. They reinforce hegemonic norms pertaining to sex, gender, sexuality, and how this translates to life and lifestyles. I would assert that these themes are certainly not reflective of the realities lived by girls and women, which are perhaps absent (or absent to an extent) in contemporary mainstream media. This absence demands our attention, as we ought to question what it might mean for young girls interacting with media.

**Idealisation**

Idealisation refers to the practice of 'perfecting' in adherence with sociocultural norms (Balcetis, Cole, Chelberg & Alicke, 2013). In Western culture, there are multiple appearance ideals to which people are encouraged to aspire. The idealisation of women is particularly pervasive, especially on an aesthetic level. Idealisation is an important issue to consider when examining the relationship that girls have with media.

In terms of the idealisation of female bodies, the literature widely argues that media are responsible for perpetuating unrealistic and unattainable ideals. Barnes (2011) argues the concept of feminine beauty presented by media cannot exist in reality. The ideal image given to women in media is bound by "prescriptive norms" (Grimaldo-Grigsby, 1991, p. 100), resulting in representations that are overwhelmingly white, heteronormative, youthful, thin yet curvaceous, able-bodied, healthy, and traditionally feminine (Grimaldo-Grigsby, 1991; Harrison, 2003; Piran et al., 2000; Women's Monitoring Network, 1987). The literature acknowledges that men are also subject to idealisation, but not to the same extent as women (Kindlon, 2006; Kotarba & Held, 2006; Rambo, Presley & Mynatt, 2006). For example, Malkin, Wornian and Chrisler (1999) conducted a content analysis of popular women's and men's magazines and found minimal focus on male bodies, and extensive emphasis on female appearance. In alignment with all of this, Harrison and Hefner (2006) assert that the media is replete with images depicting and validating an idealised representation of women.

While there are several ways in which women are idealised, the most prevalent ideal is the "thin ideal". The literature widely argues that this pervasive ideal is unattainable and pernicious in nature. There are allegations that media has commodified the body through marketing an ideal of "thin is beautiful" (Kotarba & Held, 2006, p. 158). Lawler and Nixon (2010, p. 59) discuss the inextricable link between beauty and thinness, stating that low body weight is constructed as "a central attribute and key evaluative dimension of physical attractiveness". Levine (2000, p. 84) observes and delineates a 'thinness schema' in mass media which girls and women are immersed in via their consumption of media content. The schema is as follows:

- Beauty is a woman's principle project in life;
- Slenderness is crucial for success and goodness;
- Image equates to substance;
- Women are naturally self-conscious about and focused on their bodies;
- 'Fat' is equivalent to weakness, failure and helplessness; and,

- A willing, winning woman can transform herself through fashion, dieting and exercise.

Content analyses confirm that media frequently, persistently, and overtly endorse the thin ideal (Levine, 2000). One such analysis comes from Sypeck, Gray and Ahrens' (2003) study which focuses on magazine content spanning 1959 to 1999. They found that models became increasingly thinner and that their bodies became a point of focus more and more over time. Similarly, Davalos, Davalos and Layton's (2007) content analysis of prominent women's magazines over the latter half of the 20th century revealed that the central messages have failed to evolve and remain focused on relationships and the body, maintaining that women ought to be thin, beautiful and attractive to men. Park (2005) states that content analyses have revealed the size of women appearing throughout the media has decreased continuously since the 1960s, while Clark and Tiggemann (2007) argue that the media routinely link thinness and attractiveness to status, desirability, and happiness. Throughout the literature, authors unanimously observe the increasing prevalence of the thin ideal (Bell & Dittmar, 2011; Bissell, 2004; Carey, Donaghue & Broderick, 2010; Choma et al., 2007; Piran, 2000; Singh, Singh, Dixit, Agarwal & Kant, 2011; Sypeck et al., 2003). Even when the thin ideal is avoided, problematic representation persists. For example, through a qualitative content analysis of ten magazines aimed at Australian women, Boyd and Montcrieff-Boyd (2011) found that the majority of these magazines were upholding the Australian 'Voluntary Industry Code of Conduct for Body Image' by featuring diverse body types. However, the advice offered to readers varied between supportive and constructive, and problematic. Readers were encouraged at times to "disguise their diversity" through fashion choices (Boyd & Montcrieff-Boyd, 2011, p. 105).

By inundating our society with these unsettling, conflicting, and exaggerated images, immense pressure is placed on women to improve and remake themselves, often painfully so (Urla & Swedlund, 2000). Wolf (1991) speaks extensively of the pain associated with measuring up to beauty ideals. It is also argued that women are bombarded by advice from media, with the message inherent in all of this is that women are never okay as they are – there is always something to be improved upon (Maguire, 2008). Orbach (2009) also notes that our bodies are increasingly under pressure to be honed and worked on due to the pervasively homogenous visual culture in which we are immersed. Such a culture is alleged to breed body insecurity and dissatisfaction (Jacobs Brumberg, 1997; Orbach, 2009; Wolf, 1991). These hazards to the health and wellbeing of girls and women clearly merit our

attention – hence the impact on girls and women will be discussed at a later stage in this review.

The literature shows media's messages to women to be wildly appearance-centric with an overt emphasis on an idealised aesthetic. The messages directed at women about their appearance are rarely positive or constructive (Choma et al., 2007). Kim and Lennon (2007) note that from a social responsibility stance, our society's concept of feminine beauty needs to change. Thoughout the literature, authors criticise the media's omnipresent, homogenised, and prescriptive imagery as unreasonable, unattainable, and/or unrealistic (Barriga et al., 2008; Bordo, 1991; Field, Camargo, Taylor, Berkey, Roberts & Colditz, 2001; Goodman & Walsh-Childers, 2004; Granatino & Haytko, 2013; Grimaldo-Grigsby, 1991; Harrison, 2003; Jacobs Brumberg, 1997; Kim & Lennon, 2007; Kjaesgaard, 2005; Levine, 2000; Levine & Murnen, 2009; Maguire, 2008; Martins & Harrison, 2012; Piran et al., 2000; Tiggemann & Miller, 2010; Tolman, 2002).

**Objectification**

Objectification occurs when someone is seen as, made into, and treated as an object that can be used, manipulated, controlled, and known purely through their physical properties without any agency or interests of their own (Calogero et al., 2011). It is asserted that media encourage girls to create objectified relationships with their bodies (Aapola, Gonick & Harris, 2005). Aubrey (2010) identifies two dominant ways for sexual objectification to occur in the media: *visual objectification*, where women's bodies are emphasised via close-ups, dismemberment, and high levels of body display, and *textual framing*, where verbal references underscore the importance of appearance for women.

Zurbriggen, Ramsey and Jaworski (2011) assert that the objectification of women is internationally pervasive. In her book entitled *Living dolls: The return of sexism,* Walter (2010) argues that women are frequently portrayed as objects rather than subjects, and, that over the years media representations have become narrower and more powerful than ever before and increasingly sexual in nature. Speaking specifically about the practice of objectification in advertising, Kilbourne (2003) states that the situation is ever-worsening, and that advertising encourages and normalises disconnection and disassociation between women and their bodies. There are strong assertions in the literature that media treat women as objects which are subject to sexualisation, exploitation, manipulation and appearance-based evaluation by men (Aubrey, 2010; Breines, Crocker & Garcia, 2008; Carey et al.,

2010; Daniels & Wartena, 2011; Gill, 2008; Gordon, 2008; Gunter, 2002; Impett, Henson, Breines, Schooler & Tolman, 2011).

In the aforementioned review of literature pertaining to sexual media content, Ward (2003) found women were depicted as sexual objects far more often than their male counterparts across television genres, music videos, and advertising, and that girls and women were encouraged by magazines to become sexual objects in order to attract men. Goldman (2013, p. 123) makes a similar observation, stating, "Ads continue to address women about themselves as malleable surfaces that can be adorned with objects." This promotes and perpetuates the tendency to see women as collections of body parts, which are abstracted from their whole person. Within this advertising culture, women are encouraged to not only "adorn themselves with commodities", but to also "perceive themselves as objectified surfaces" (Goldman, 2013, p. 123).

Essentially, the literature positions objectifying media as commonplace and ever-increasing. The prevalence of objectification carries a number of implications, some of which are outlined in the following section which focuses on a practice which is linked (and sometimes conflated with) objectification – sexualisation.

**Sexualisation**

Sexualisation is one of the most prevalent discussion points in literature focusing on girls, women, and media. Duschinsky (2013a, p. 354) explains sexualisation as "the process through which something or someone is endowed with 'the sexual'". The etymology of sexualisation is also provided by Duschinksy (2013b), wherein he explains the term's origins and embedded narratives. The American Psychological Association (APA; 2007) recognises that sexualisation occurs when any one of the following conditions is apparent:

- A person's value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behaviour, to the exclusion of other characteristics;
- A person is held to a physical standard that equates narrowly defined physical attractiveness with being sexy;
- A person is sexually objectified, that is, made into a thing for others' sexual use, rather than a person with the capacity for independent action and decision making; and/or,
- Sexuality is inappropriately imposed on a person.

While it is probable that sexually explicit content is simultaneously objectifying, this is not necessarily the case (Zurbriggen et al., 2011). Although some of the literature uses the terms 'objectification' and 'sexualisation' interchangeably, I would propose the following distinction: a person can be reduced to object status without said reduction being sexual, and a person can be sexualised without necessarily being made into an object. It is also critical to note that sexual content and sexualisation are not necessarily one and the same. Simply encountering nudity or expressions of sexuality in media does not necessarily imply sexualisation. 'Sexualisation' should be pertain specifically to coercive, reductive practices involving one's physicality, sexuality, and overall humanity. It is essential to recognise this distinction when discussing *sexualised* content, as it does differ from *sexual* content.

Much like with idealisation and objectification, the literature suggests that sexualisation is increasing in prevalence. Once again, this is an issue of note when exploring the relationships that exist between girls and media. Daniels (2009) asserts that girls and women are routinely sexualised by media. It is alleged that sexualised imagery is threatening to erase other images of women in popular culture (Walter, 2010). Smith and Choueiti's (2011) content analysis of the top 100 grossing films of 2008 revealed significant disparity between males and females, with the analysis revealing substantially higher numbers of young women were shown wearing sexually revealing attire (39.8% of young women vs. 6.7% of young men) or were partially naked on screen (30.1% vs. 10.3%). In a longitudinal content analysis focusing on *Rolling Stone's* content over the last four decades, Hatton and Trautner (2011) found the intensity and frequency of sexualised images of women in the magazine has increased significantly. A similar finding was made by Mager and Helgeson (2010) in their content analysis of magazine advertisements from 1950 – 2000. Mager and Helgeson found that while advertising has progressed beyond showing women in purely domestic roles, the issue of sexualisation has become more and more prominent. In their discourse analysis of *Cosmopolitan* and *Glamour,* Machin and Thornborrow (2006) found the magazines primarily associated women's agency and assertiveness with their sexual functions and behaviours, thereby disregarding other aspects of women's identities and their socio-political realities. The publications were also seen to promote the idea that a woman's sexuality is inherently bound to her liberation. On this, Machin and Thornborrow (p. 174) write, "If women are primarily represented as acting on the world, around the world, through their sexuality then ultimately this is disempowerment, not freedom."

Sections of the literature also indicate that sexualisation is not confined to adult women, and that adolescent girls and younger children are increasingly subject to sexualisation by the

media. For example, the APA's (2007) report on the sexualisation of girls makes reference to a number of advertisements and television programmes where girls are overtly sexualised, further stating that these are becoming increasingly common. It is contended that adolescent girls are frequently sexualised by media, where they are often portrayed as sexy adult women (Tolman, 2012). Durham (2009) states the sexualisation of young girls has become part of mainstream popular culture, with media promoting it as normal and acceptable. A senate inquiry by the Standing Committee on Environment, Communications & the Arts (SCECA; 2008) into the matter found that the sexualisation of children is becoming more and more prevalent. Maguire (2008) and SCECA (2008) each assert there is more research needed into the extent and impact of the sexualisation of children; however, there is a substantial portion of the literature that argues that the sexualisation of young girls is common and continues to expand.

These sexualised representations of women are deemed by some to be dehumanising (Puvia & Vaes, 2012; Reist, 2009; van Heeswijk, 2011). Other authors take a different stance, wherein they reject the adult-centric view of sexualisation (Thompson, 2010) or critique the discourses and evidence surrounding sexualisation (Duschinsky, 2013a; Duschinsky, 2013b; Lerum & Dworkin, 2009; Lumby & Albury, 2010). For example, Lerum and Dworkin's (2009) interdisciplinary feminist response to the APA Task Force on sexualisation states:

> … the task force offers a summary of the literature on the negative—and only the negative—consequences of the sexualization of girls. Drawing upon several psychological theories to interpret a wide range of empirical evidence on the impact of this negative sexualization, the task force argues that commercial media in particular triggers processes of sexualization and damages girls' and women's feelings of self-esteem and self-efficacy. The list of negative impacts on girls is examined across six domains: cognitive and physical functioning, body dissatisfaction and appearance anxiety, mental health, physical health, sexuality, and attitudes and beliefs. (Lerum & Dworkin, 2009, p. 252)

Issues are also raised by the authors regarding the conflation of sexualised imagery and sexualised impacts. Lerum and Dworkin further contend that the APA report excludes evidence not pertaining to negative effects, thereby implying that the impacts are only ever negative. On this, they write, "The task force provides no explanation or justification for the systematic exclusion of a potentially large body of theory and evidence that show no effect or even positive effects of media images on girls and women" (Lerum & Dworkin, 2009, p.

253). Looking to the Australian context, SCECA's (2008) report has also been subject to critique. For example, Lumby and Albury (2010) interrogate the terms of reference used by the inquiry. On this, they write:

> The inquiry's terms of reference were telling. They were framed in a manner that strongly implied that the sexualisation of children in and by the popular media was unquestionably happening and that the purpose of the inquiry was to discover who was profiting and how to intervene in the process. (Lumby & Albury, 2010, p. 141)

When reading through these conflicting sections of the literature, it becomes evident that the issue of sexualisation is contentious. As such, nothing should be taken at face value. Rather, it is crucial to acknowledge the conflicting, contentious nature of the literature, particularly when considering research focused on the 'impact' of sexualisation.

**Section summary**

Ultimately, the literature indicates there are numerous issues surrounding the representation of girls and women in media. These comprise under-representation, stereotyping, idealisation, objectification, and sexualisation. These are identified by some as significant cultural and societal challenges due to the potential health hazards that they may pose. With this in mind, the next section of this literature review will look at the potential influence of contemporary Western media on girls and women.

**The potential influence of media on girls and women**

In the previous section, it was suggested that media promote and perpetuate unrealistic representations of women, which are potentially hazardous to girls and women. It is worth noting that the impact of media has long been a contentious issue. For example, Strasburger (2010, p. 556) comments, "The effect of media on young people has been debated since the advent of dime novels and comic books — each succeeding generation sees new media evolving and forecasts the end to civilization as we know it".

Strasburger goes on to assert that while media may not be the primary cause of childhood/adolescent health problems, they contribute substantially to a variety of health concerns facing youth. The examples listed by Strasburger include aggression, self-image, depression, and suicide. Looking more specifically to the literature focusing on girls and media, a range of physical, mental, emotional, and social effects are identified. For example, Calogero et al. (2011) suggest that children are learning that it is normative for women's

bodies to be looked at, commented on, evaluated, and sexually objectified. Furthermore, they argue that girls and women may come to view themselves in a disassociated manner and engage in chronic self-policing of their bodies. Meta-analyses of research focusing on the idealisation of female bodies offer substantive evidence that negative body image in girls and women is strongly related to their ongoing exposure to the thin ideal (Bell & Dittmar, 2011). Hatton and Trautner (2011) contend that sexualised portrayals of women have been found to legitimise and exacerbate violence against women and girls and increase rates of body dissatisfaction and eating disorders. Bissell (2004) concludes that many of the negative attitudes young girls acquire from the media during childhood may follow them into young adulthood and through their adult life.

These are critical issues which are at play. Therefore, in this section I will explore the issue of influence by engaging with existing literature that focuses on the potential consequences of media use for girls and women. As I do so, I am mindful of the writings of Lerum and Dworkin (2009) and Nulman (2014). Lerum and Dworkin raise valid points regarding a tendency to focus on negative impacts, thus providing a rationale for a more nuanced view. Nulman (2014, p. 915) raises several important questions regarding the impact of globalised cinema – "where Hollywood has stretched its productions into the cinemas and homes of more people in the world than at any other time" – on viewers:

- Is the cultural context in which the films are being viewed different from the representation of women that is shown in the film?
- Are the films' representations of women being accepted by these cultures/populations?
- In what way is the representation of women in the film different from the cultural understanding of women in a given cultural context?

These questions are worthy of consideration when looking at the relationship between viewers and media, and the potential impact of the latter on the former. The points put forward by Lerum and Dworkin (2009) and Nulman (2014) merit our contemplation when considering the potential and/or perceived impact of media on those interacting with it. Aapola, Gonick and Harris also take a view that alternates from dominant discourses, by stating:

As severe as the commercial exploitation of young women's bodies in the media is, and as many problems as have been identified in relation to young women's

identities and their bodies, it is nevertheless important to remember that the body is not necessarily a source of anxiety for girls and young women. It can also be a very positive site of self-expression, identity-creation, and enjoyment. (2005, p. 157)

Also relevant is Vanwesenbeeck's (2009, p. 269) response to the commentary by Lerum and Dworkin, wherein she states, "When it comes to media effects, there is no easy, overall conclusion. Rather, it is not the 'if' question that should be asked, but the 'how', 'when', and 'where' questions". This aligns with a point made by Ward, Day and Epstein (2006), who argue that negative outcomes are not guaranteed nor universally applicable.

These statements from Vanwesenbeeck and Ward et al. conflict with structural perspectives of media which tend to portray audiences as passive and bound to absorb the content that they view (Wilson, 2009). This conceptualisation is also evident in the effects paradigm, where the assumption is that the relationship between media and their audiences is a cause/effect scenario (Wilson, 2009). In their article focusing on political communications, Bennett and Iyengar (2008) classify today's media landscape as increasingly individualised. They challenge the relevance of cause/effect models and also question whether the concept of 'mass media' has, perhaps, been made obsolete. Bennett and Iyengar (2008, p. 724) go on to assert, "The increasingly self-selected composition of audiences has important consequences for those who study media effects". What the authors then propose is that researchers who utilise survey designs and self-report measures may now find it challenging to associate exposure with causation. This assertion has proved contentious as per the response by Holbert, Garrett, and Gleason (2010), which then received a subsequent response from Bennett and Iyenghar (2010). Essentially, what emerges from a reading of the literature on this subject is that, as per Strasburger's (2010) statement, media effects are certainly subject to debate.

In order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand, this section focuses on present and future influences that media may have by addressing the impact on girls and women throughout their lifespan. It will begin by looking at adult women and adolescent girls respectively – two groups which are thoroughly examined throughout the existing literature. This section will then proceed to discuss young girls – a group who have yet to receive equal attention to their adult and adolescent counterparts.

**Women**

There are a multitude of issues facing women in terms of their physical, mental and emotional health, many of which are often attributed to media consumption. Tiggemann et al. (2009) argue that the straightforward view that the media makes women feel bad about themselves is too simplistic. In keeping with this argument, it is frequently suggested by a range of authors that it is far more complex than that. This section will focus on these complexities with an emphasis on adult women – that is, women aged eighteen and over.

As previously discussed, media messages aimed at women are argued to be shallow and appearance-based, while media models are often sources of comparison or inspiration (Garret & Wrench, 2012; Goodman & Walsh-Childers, 2004; Haboush et al., 2011; Malkin et al., 1999). Aubrey (2010) argues that a preoccupation with appearance is detrimental to women and their mental health, which contributes significantly to their overall health. Similarly, Goldman (2013) discusses how many women come to associate their image with their moral worth, often pushing them towards self-hatred and an alienation from their bodies and themselves. Sides-Moore and Tochkov (2011) assert that women feel worse about themselves after looking at images of young, slender women, and contend studies have repeatedly shown that these types of images reduce women's feelings of beauty and impede their self-evaluations.

One of the key issues discussed in the previous section was the ongoing objectification of girls and women. Looking now to the health literature available, there is quite a lot said about the prospective outcomes of accessing objectifying media. For example, Ward and Harrison (2005) suggest portrayals of women in the media normalise objectification and limit people's perspectives on women's humanity. This is supported by research from Puvia and Vaes (2012), whose study confirmed sexually objectified women in media are significantly dehumanised by their audience. In this study, which recruited 55 undergraduate Italian women, Puvia and Vaes also looked at how media ties relationship status to physical appearance and perceived desirability. They found that the more that their participants were motivated to appear desirable to men and/or the more they internalised beauty ideals, the more they reported to self-objectify. They further confirmed that the dehumanisation of sexually objectified women in media is linked with a higher degree of self-objectification on part of their participants.

Self-objectification is a common focal point in the literature. It comprises the tendency for girls and women to see themselves as objects to be viewed and evaluated (Fredrickson &

Roberts, 1997). Self-objectification's central characteristic is an increased emphasis on appearance over internal dimensions of self (Zurbriggen et al., 2011). That is, individuals become focused on how they look rather than how they feel (Aubrey, 2010) or what they are capable of (Daniels, 2009). Choma et al. (2007) and Zurbriggen et al. (2007) each list a number of destructive consequences for women who self-objectify, including negative body image, appearance anxiety, heightened self-surveillance, eating pathology, and greater depressive symptomology. This is supported by a subsequent study by Breines, Crocker and Garcia (2008), which utilised an experience sampling methodology with 49 female tertiary students in America. They found that self-objectification undermined the ability of women to feel engaged and vital. It also resulted in decreased self-esteem – a finding which is common throughout the literature (e.g. Choma, Visser, Pozzebon, Bogaert, Busseri & Sadava, 2010; Strelan, Mehaffey & Tiggemann, 2003). Self-objectification is also linked to increased objectification of other women (Strelan & Hargreaves, 2005), body dissatisfaction (Grippo & Hill, 2008), and body shame (Miner-Rubino, Twenge & Fredrickson, 2002; Rolnik, Engeln-Maddox & Miller, 2010; Tiggemann & Boundy, 2008). Evidently, these outcomes may cause considerable damage to the wellbeing of women, and are therefore of great concern.

The link between self-objectification and media consumption is not concrete. To date, research investigating the link has yielded mixed results. For example, in their study which focused on objectification in the context of romantic relationships between American tertiary students, Zurbriggen et al. (2011) found that there was no relationship between self-objectification and consumption of objectifying media – except in the case of magazines. They did, however, find a link between consumption of objectifying media and heightened partner objectification, which led to decreased satisfaction with the relationship.

There is also concern that media's homogenous ideal of beauty may influence women's interest in pursuing cosmetic surgery. Haiken (1997, p. 12) describes cosmetic surgery as being situated "at the nexus of medicine and consumer culture". Markey and Markey (2009) state that by exposing young women to excessive media messages about physical appearance, women risk internalising these messages which may lead to body dissatisfaction and behavioural attempts to alter their appearance, such as dieting or cosmetic surgery. In their study of 101 female tertiary students in America, they found that body dissatisfaction significantly predicted women's interest in cosmetic surgery, and that women with higher internalisation of media messages also harboured stronger desires to pursue surgical enhancements or alterations. Similarly, in a cross-sectional study of undergraduate men and women, Harrison (2003) found exposure to idealised bodies on television predicted women's

approval of surgical alteration procedures, including breast augmentation and liposuction. Notably, Markey and Markey comment that research has yet to establish whether or not undergoing surgical procedures actually improves women's self-perceptions.

The subject of body dissatisfaction, which comprises the affective component of body image, is common in the literature and would appear to be one of the more significant issues for women (Barker & Galambos, 2003). Shroff and Thompson (2006) observe there is strong evidence that body dissatisfaction represents a causal risk factor for eating pathology. Much of the literature suggests a connection between body dissatisfaction and the aforementioned idealisation of women's bodies. It is stated by Ward and Harrison (2005) that research has indicated exposure to the thin ideal is associated with increased self-conciousness about one's weight and greater levels of disordered eating symptomatology. Sypeck et al. (2003) observe the increase in eating disorders in recent decades has coincided with a decrease in women's body weight in media depictions. Similarly, Hutchinson and Calland (2011) also assert that people are adversely affected by the rigid images of beauty perpetuated by media, stating there is a direct link between the thin ideal and the rise of eating disorders. Jacobs Brumberg (1997) comments that although eating disorders cannot be wholly attributed to our visual culture, such pathologies thrive in a society that is body obsessed. It is imperative to distinguish between 'disordered eating' and 'eating disorders'; disordered eating is illustrated by bingeing, restrictive dieting, negative body image, overexercising or abusing laxatives, diuretics or dieting pills, whereas eating disorders include anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa or other unspecified eating disorders (Moriarty & Harrison, 2008).

Returning to the issue of ageism in media, Lewis et al. (2011) argue that the messages conveyed by fashion media fuel a fear of aging. Furthermore, they are alleged to damage women's self-esteem and urge women to undergo extensive beauty work and unhealthy dieting practices. Such allegations against fashion media are not uncommon. In an American study concerning mass media exposure and its potential relation to self-esteem, body image, and eating disorder tendencies, Kim and Lennon (2007) found there was a significant association between exposure to fashion and beauty magazines and eating disorder tendencies in female tertiary students. Most studies have demonstrated that an exposure to the thin ideal has an adverse effect on body image and eating behaviours in women (Krahé and Krause, 2010). Goldman (2013, p. 125) describes this obsession with body and food as "the scourge of young women".

While a substantial portion of the literature focuses on the negative outcomes for women, this is not the sum of the research. The potential for positive outcomes is certainly evident. For example, the presence of strong female characters can be positively influential. In Ferguson's (2012) study focusing on mood responses to sexually violent media with a participant sample of 150 students from an American university, aged 18-38 and primarily of Hispanic origin, it emerged that, "Women were most anxious following a sexually violent show with negative female portrayals than when watching neutral shows [and] women were least anxious after watching sexually violent shows with positive female portrayals" (Ferguson, 2012, p. 895). Ferguson concludes that the presence of strong female role models can negate the impact of troubling material, such as sexual victimisation or graphic sexual violence.

Social media also has the potential for positive outcomes for women. One example of this is Odine's (2013) study, which examines how social media has served women's rights issues through a theoretical communication framework with an emphasis on Arabic women. Odine concludes that there have been remarkable gains in women's empowerment due to social media's potential to enhance participation and spread information. On a similar note regarding media's capacity for disseminating information, Ward, Day and Epstein (2006) contend that media can positively influence the sexual health and development of young women. This may be accomplished through media offering information, diverse models of sexuality, vicarious practice, and the opportunity for self-expression.

In summary, there are a range of potential outcomes for women engaging with media – both positive and negative. While this is not prescriptive or deterministic, the existing literature has established that women may be at risk of body dissatisfaction and mental health issues, which may encourage them to pursue appearance-altering practices. This could potentially include an interest in surgical alterations or the development of disordered eating practices or eating disorders. Similar outcomes are seen earlier on in life – with this in mind, the next sub-section focuses on girls in their adolescent years.

**Adolescent girls**

This sub-section will focus on media's influence on girls in their adolescent years – that is, girls aged between 12 and 17 years. Adolescence is viewed as a crucial period for personal development, social exploration, and identity formation (Barnes, 2011; Bell & Dittmar, 2011; Gordon, 2008; Harris, 2011; Singh et al., 2011; Taylor, 2010; Tolman, 1994). It is characterised by ongoing social, biological, and psychological changes, which can be trying

for individuals to navigate (Ata, Ludden & Lally, 2007; Barnes, 2011; Daniels, 2009; Dorak, 2011; Horn, Newton & Evers, 2011; Taylor, 2010). Barnes (2011) identifies adolescence as a critical point in life when one's true identity starts to emerge. However, due to the allegedly toxic media environment within which girls are immersed, they may enter adolescence to find they have limited opportunities and are under immense pressure to look or act a certain way (Gordon, 2008; Impett et al., 2011; Kjaersgaard, 2005; Tolman, 1994).

Although this environment is arguably toxic, it is also one that has personal significance for adolescent girls. An example of this is made evident in Steele and Brown's (1995) room culture project, which clearly demonstrates the significance of media in the lives of adolescents. By exploring the bedrooms of adolescents, Steele and Brown established that teenagers draw extensively from media content and that this plays a significant role in their ongoing identity formation. As they engage with media, teenagers "appropriate and transform media messages and images to help them make sense of their lives" (Steele & Brown, 1995, p. 551). Another example would be the parasocial interactions that take place between adolescents and media figures, which were investigated by Theran, Newberg and Gleason (2010). They examined 107 adolescent girls using self-report measures focused on involvement, emotional intensity, and attachment. In doing so, they found that parasocial interactions were normative in adolescent development and that the majority of their participants "enjoyed watching and learning more about media figures" and that "imagined interactions with media figures offer a risk-free way of being with an admired person. These adolescents may find safety and comfort in interactions with a favorite media figure, knowing that they will never be rejected" (Theran, Newberg & Gleason, 2010, p. 275). The concept of celebrity is also interrogated by Allen and Mendick (2013, p. 77), who write that their intention is to "interrupt dominant public discourses which either trivialise young people's celebrity consumption or judge it harmful". They argue that these responses "ignore the contemporary significance of celebrity; they assume an obviousness to young people's relationship to celebrity and thus homogenise young people" (Allen & Mendick, 2013, p. 77). Their research on the concept of celebrity – comprising three studies with adolescent participants – involved interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires. They identify the relationship of adolescents to celebrity figures as a social practice and a component of their identity development (Allen & Mendick, 2013). These studies by Steele and Brown, Theran et. al, and Allen and Mendick, are examples of research that points to the potentially positive value of media in the lives of young people and how it can contribute to the evolution of their sense of self.

That said, concerns persist regarding adoldescent girls' interactions with media. One major concern is body image. During adolescence, the body becomes a central site of critical focus and anxiety (Jacobs Brumberg, 1997; Taylor, 2010). Bissell (2004) notes that adolescent girls' perceptions of their bodies are easily understood when one considers the prevalence of the thin ideal in media. Bell and Dittmar (2011) state that adolescent girls are seemingly the most vulnerable to this ideal. Body image is identified by Carey et al. (2010) as the number one concern of adolescent girls in Australia. By conducting semi-structured interviews with a sample of nine girls enrolled in Year 10, Carey et al. found appearance to be a major area of contemplation. Appearance was considered highly significant, contributing to social inclusion and popularity (Carey et al., 2010). Chan, Tufte, Cappello and Williams (2011) had a similar result in their qualitative study of 16 pre-adolescent girls from Hong Kong, where they applied a visual adaptation of autovideographical research. They found that the girls considered good physical appearance highly desirable and related to social acceptance. Focusing on gender differences in weight-based teasing in a secondary school, Taylor (2010) conducted an ethnographic study with fifty male and female adolescents, where she found girls' body fat was subject to increased surveillance and scorn, and that boys and girls were considerably critical of anyone who displayed body fat – even girls within a healthy weight range.  In this context, weight-based teasing was often used by adolescents to elevate their own social status and distance themselves from the seemingly undesirable reality of fatness. Barker and Galambos (2003) also point to teasing as a significant risk factor. In the second wave of a three year longitudinal study of adolescent boys and girls, Barker and Galambos found one significant contextual risk factor for body dissatisfaction in girls was appearance-based teasing. Body image concerns are linked to multiple dimensions of psychosocial health in adolescence, including depression, disordered eating patterns, and low self-esteem (Horn et al., 2011).

Adolescence is a particularly important stage of development with regard to self-esteem (Impett, Sorsoli, Schooler, Henson & Tolman, 2008). As an evaluative construct, self-esteem is influenced by many factors (Reasoner, 1982). One that is particularly salient is an adolescent's relationship with her body, which Dorak (2011) assesses as considerably influential upon adolescent self-esteem. Unfortunately, the relationship between adolescents and their bodies is presently a troubled one. Horn et al. (2011) contend that adolescent girls are particularly at risk for low self-esteem and poor body image, partly due to the tumultuous biological changes that they go through. Findings of low self-esteem and negative body image are common across the literature and linked to a range of unhealthy behaviours and outcomes. In a prospective cohort study of 6,982 American girls aged between 9 and 14,

Field, Camargo, Taylor, Berkey and Colditz (1999) found there was a higher risk of purging or using laxatives to control their weight for girls who reported they made an effort to emulate female characters and/or actors from television, film, or magazines. A subsequent study by Field et al. (2001) reported a similar finding, noting an effort made by girls to look like women in media predicted the development of weight concerns and the emergence of constant dieting. In their study of 335 female 12th grade students who were issued self-report questionnaires, Horn et al. reported that the girls with more egalitarian approaches to gender issues demonstrated higher global self-worth and lower body appearance orientation. Focusing on the impact of music videos – "which is argued to be among the most egregious of objectifying media" – Grabe and Hyde (2009, p. 2852) utilised questionnaire-based research with 195 adolescent girls. They established links between music video viewership and anxiety, dieting, and lowered body esteem. With an emphasis on exploring the influence of the internet, Tiggemann and Miller (2010) issued questionnaires to 156 Australian female high school students that measured media consumption and body image. They found that Internet exposure was associated with body dissatisfaction, internalisation of the thin ideal, appearance comparison, and drive for thinness, thereby paralleling and extending previous findings for traditional forms of media, such as television and magazines.

In summary, it is well-established that adolescence is a critical life stage. For girls, it is also a body-centric stage during which they become succinctly aware of their physical appearance. There are a range of concerns for adolescent girls pertaining to their media use; these may include body dissatisfaction and self-esteem issues, which may then lead to toxic practices such as appearance-focused bullying, disordered eating, or eating disorders. Now that issues pertaining respectively to adult women and adolescent girls have been assessed, the focus will shift to girls at an earlier stage in life.

**Young girls**
It is critical to consider the implications of media use for young girls as they are arguably the most vulnerable and impressionable age group. Robinson and Jones Díaz (2006, p. 4) describe these years as "formidable" in a developmental sense. This is quite apt; in the early years, children are still emerging in terms of their cognitive, emotional, and social development, and require support from adults to navigate this development (Neaum, 2010). Through the middle childhood years, children develop a more concrete sense of self (Ormrod, 2011). As they then enter into early adolescence, they encounter an important life stage where they think of themselves in more abstract terms (Ormrod, 2011) and may become more self-aware and simultaneously more self-conscious (McDevitt & Ormrod,

2013; Ormrod, 2011). Furthermore, their development is influenced by social contexts which will impact on their ways of understanding, knowing, and being (Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2006). This section will focus on the potential issues for young girls – that is, girls in either early/middle childhood or early adolescence, who are aged from 3 to 11.

The literature suggests body ideals develop quite early in life (Harriger, Calogero, Witherington & Ellen Smith, 2010; Harrison, 2000). In her book entitled *What's happening to our girls?,* Hamilton (2008) observes that young girls today are increasingly anxious about their bodies and how they look. She argues that this has a significant impact on their growth and development, explaining that a preoccupation with physical appearance leaves little room for girls to enjoy their childhood and develop a healthy self-image, among other things. Kindlon (2006) cites similar concerns, arguing that the manipulative images of femininity that girls are presented with do nothing to help them live rewarding lives. This aligns with Ward and Harrison's (2005) commentary, wherein they propose that media use appears to be affecting girls' beliefs about what it means to be a woman. They specifically cite girls' expectations of the real world, relationships, sexual activity, professional possibilities and their own body image. By conducting research with 55 three to five year old girls where participants took part in small assessment tasks, Harriger, Calogero, Witherington and Ellen Smith (2010) found girls as young as three exhibit body size stereotyping and thin ideal internalisation by conveying a preference for thin body types.

It appears, increasingly, that younger children are showing disturbing levels of anxiety concerning their weight and physical appearance (Hutchinson & Calland, 2011; Urla & Swedlund, 2000). Walter (2010) points out that young girls naturally seek approval and admiration, and that the current sexualised media landscape pressures them to strenuously prioritise their physical appearance in order to gain said approval and admiration, which may prove limiting. Gordon (2008) contends that sexualised portrayals of women in media may limit girls' self-perceptions and prove influential regarding how important they believe their appearance to be. Upon interviewing a sample of girls aged between five and eight, Dohnt and Tiggemann (2006) found that media exposure is related to aspects of body image and dieting awareness in young girls, particularly concerning the promotion of the thin ideal. In a longitudinal panel survey conducted with pre-adolescent Caucasian and African American children, Martins and Harrison (2012) found television viewing predicted a decrease in self-esteem for all children except Caucasian boys. Martins and Harrison state this may be explained by television media's reinforcement of gender and racial stereotypes, children's

capacity/tendency for comparative self-evaluation with characters in the media, or television viewing replacing and displacing real-life experiences that may build self-esteem.

Ultimately, the early and middle years of a girl's life are highly influential in regards to her development. As many young girls are extensively engaged with media – which has a limited portrayal of girls and women – it is important to consider what they are taking away from that and what the short-term/long-term impact may be. There are multiple contentions across the literature that young girls are not cognitively ready to engage safely with media. Hamilton (2008) argues that the concepts present in contemporary media are too complex or mature for young girls. Hazlehurst (2009) shares this view, stating that the images and concepts children are bombarded with are ones they are not able to assimilate, understand or contextualise. This is a crucial point to keep in mind when considering the relationship girls forge with media and the potential outcomes of this. However, it is also important to note that the research in this area is less extensive and does require further growth.

**Section summary**

Essentially, the under-representation, stereotyping, idealisation, objectification and sexualisation of women and girls in media can be seen as a cause for concern for several reasons. Some issues discussed here include negative health consequences such as body dissatisfaction, negative self-image, and poor self-esteem. There are also potential behavioural outcomes including disordered eating practices, the emergence of eating disorders, or the desire to pursue surgical alterations. However, positive outcomes also exist – for example, in adolescence, there is the potential for media and media figures to contribute to identity formation. Common in the literature are recommendations for media literacy education, which will be examined in the section to follow.

## The prospect of media literacy education

In the previous section, the potential influence of media communications on young girls was discussed. Across the literature it is argued that children are not cognitively ready to fully understand the nature of media communications and are therefore potentially vulnerable (Brooks, 2008; Davies et al., 1987b; Hamilton, 2008; Hazlehurst, 2009; Hutchinson & Calland, 2011). A number of sources suggest that a culture of sexism is pervasive, observing that media are a powerful, manipulative entity that is sex-obsessed and replete with double standards, gender bias, unrealistic imagery, and unattainable ideals (Dickey, 1987; Durham, 2009; Gunter, 2002; Hutchinson & Calland, 2011; Kindlon, 2006; Maguire, 2008; Reist,

2009; Streitmalter, 2004; Urla & Swedlund, 2000). Newman (2009) states we need to develop new strategies to help children understand and evaluate the complex messages they are receiving from the media. Although the literature indicates there is social and political initiative towards auditing sexualised and idealised media content, much of the literature focuses on education as an important strategy to counteract the allegedly toxic media climate. This is a strategy which is well worth interrogating considering the critical role of schools in the personal contexts of young girls. Therefore, this section focuses on media literacy education in schools as a potential approach that can be adopted to deal with these issues.

The Ontario Association for Media Literacy (1989) defines media literacy education as enabling students to develop an informed and critical understanding of the nature of media, the techniques used by media and the impact of said techniques. Streitmalter (2004) suggests that media literacy education could aim to help individuals recognise and analyse the messages that various forms of media routinely communicate. There is enormous potential in utilising digital media, mass media, and popular culture as educational resources (Hobbs, 2011). Building on this, Hobbs (2011, p. 168) states, "When teachers use mass media, digital media, and popular culture to address social, political, and cultural issues, students develop the capacity to make sense of and critically analyse the world around them."

Scheibe and Rogow (2012, p. 5) argue for the necessity of media literacy education due to the pervasiveness of media in contemporary society by asserting, "As long as media continue to play a significant role in society, there will be a significant, universal need for media literacy education." However, there are challenges inherent in approaching media literacy education. One major challenge is that the evolution of media has seemingly outpaced pedagogy, curriculum, and methods of instruction (Semali, 2003). Throughout the literature, there are recommendations for how to evolve this area of education. For example, Vize (2008) advocates for skills such as decoding visual and text information, comprehension of underlying meanings, analysis of messages, and the application of understanding to one's own world and experiences. She asserts: "It is vital to expose [primary-school children] to activities which focus on the construction of media messages, the purpose of advertising, and the techniques used by advertisers" (Vize, 2008, p. 80).

With specific regard to the issues addressed in this chapter, there is quite a lot said throughout the literature. The American Psychological Association (2007) asserts that the development of school-based media literacy education is essential and should focus on

teaching critical skills in viewing and consuming media with specific emphasis on the sexualisation of girls and women. Streitmalter (2004) proposes that the most effective response to sexualisation in contemporary media is to help children learn how to identify and understand the messages that are being communicated. A similar contention is made by SCECA (2008), wherein they state that improving the ability of children to assess, contextualise and discuss imagery in the media is essential. Hamilton (2008) contends that media awareness training should be adopted in schools to educate children about the nature of advertising and how girls and women are sexually exploited by the media. This is supported by Farley (2009) and Durham (2009), who each argue that children need media literacy education so that they can learn to counteract the potentially toxic messages that they encounter. Bailey (2011) also recommends media literacy education as a key strategy, but further identifies a number of other important factors that should be considered by parents, communities and governments. Much of the literature acknowledges the importance of an integrated, cooperative approach where all involved parties take responsibility to deal with the aforementioned issues. This would include children, parents, schools, communities, governments, corporations, advertisers and people working in media. However, overall, school-based education is identified as a crucial element in supporting children in the current media climate, with the literature strongly advocating for the implementation of quality media literacy education in schools.

In considering the prospect of media education, it is crucial to ascertain what is known to date regarding its efficacy. It is worthwhile noting that research on the effectiveness of media literacy education is still in its infancy (Bergsma & Carney, 2008). After reviewing existing literature focused on the application of media literacy to promote health amongst young people, Bergsma and Carney (2008, p. 537) conclude that "evidence for its potential is based more on theory than on rigorous demonstrations of efficacy or effectiveness". However, there have been some indications that media literacy education might be useful in attending to the issues addressed throughout this chapter. For example, following their study focusing on internalisation of media ideals, Wilksch, Tiggemann and Wade (2006) contend that media literacy education represents a promising prevention approach to decrease media internalisation and reduce the risk of eating disorders in adolescents. However, it is important to mention here that there have been issues raised regarding the basis of media literacy programs. There has been some criticism of programs that focus exclusively on protection or intervention. For example, Scheibe and Rogow (2012) question the merit of intervention-based approaches, explaining:

Concerns about harmful media influences… are not a viable foundation for literacy-based media literacy education in schools. It does not make pedagogical sense to approach education from the perspective of protecting children from harmful content… approaching media literacy education with the primary goal of inoculating children against harmful media content is incompatible with… constructivist pedagogies. (Scheibe & Rogow, 2012, pp. 2-3)

Bergsma and Carney (2008) also veer away from approaches grounded in protection. They explain:

Rather than trying to protect youth from potentially harmful messages, media literacy education to promote health involves them in a critical examination of media messages that influence their perceptions and practices. It is designed to give youth the critical thinking skills necessary to ameliorate the influence of these messages and make healthy choices. (Bergsma and Carney, 2008, p. 523)

Furthermore, Hutchinson and Calland (2011) point out that most of the research and literature has focused on adolescents, and subsequently assert that methods of prevention or intervention should be taking place in primary schools rather than secondary schools in order to be most effective. The American Psychological Association (2007) also recommends further research into any potential preventative or interventive practices such as media literacy education to establish efficacy.

Essentially, the literature indicates that there is considerable support for the implementation or expansion of media literacy education in schools. It is widely advocated as an initiative that might help to counteract the pervasiveness of sexualised, objectified, idealised, and stereotyped imagery and messages in contemporary media. However, much of this advocacy seems to be grounded in theory and some approaches have been argued to be problematic or counterproductive.

## Implications of the review

A review of the literature reveals a range of implications for future research and the present study. Firstly, it is apparent that media have a pervasive and powerful presence in our society and in the lives of our children. There is substantial research on children's media consumption and much is written about the potential outcomes of this, many of which are deemed hazardous. There are also many recommendations for continued research regarding

children and media, which seems fitting given the evolving nature of media. For example, ACMA (2010, p. 2) makes the following recommendation: "Future Australian studies should continue to monitor the relationships between increased access to technologies and levels of media use by young Australians."

Furthermore, there are gendered issues pertaining to media influence. For example, the stereotyping, idealisation, objectification, and sexualisation of women and girls are cause for concern for a number of reasons. Some issues discussed here include negative health consequences such as body dissatisfaction, negative self-image, and poor self-esteem. There are also potential behavioural outcomes including disordered eating practices, the emergence of eating disorders, or the desire to pursue surgical alterations.

That said, there is controversy surrounding the terminology here, as 'idealisation', 'objectification', and 'sexualisation' are sometimes used interchangeably, or they are conflated with one another. It is also contended that these terms are prescribed adult meanings, which may not align with children's perspectives. For example, Thompson (2010, p. 398) asserts that, "We need to examine and clarify what exactly are the adult concerns about sexualised behaviour amongst children, and what does behaviour that adults describe as sexualised actually mean to children?" This is reminiscent of Lerum and Dworkin's (2009) commentary on the APA Task Force on sexualisation, wherein the authors contend that the concepts of objectification, self-objectification, sexual objectification, and sexualisation are conflated – perhaps carelessly so. The consequence of this is a lack of recognition of girls' and women's sexual agency and resistance. Lerum and Dworkin (2009, p. 258) advocate for a contextual approach, explaining, "Because objectification comes in different forms and with different meanings, it is important to note the contexts and institutions under which objectification occurs".

There are also several authors who critique the literature and commentary surrounding sexualisation as being moralistic (Duschinsky, 2013b) or symptomatic of moral panic (Egan & Hawkes, 2008; Thompson, 2010), which is proposed to disempower individuals by inflicting regulation upon them (Herdt, 2009). This is a contentious issue. On the one hand, Gale (2011, p. 21) takes the following stance: "In the early days there were some suggestions that [the issue of sexualisation] was a 'moral panic', but it is now recognised by child development professionals, and increasing research, as an issue of mental health and wellbeing". However, it is evident from a review of the literature that suggestions of moral panic are not confined to the 'early days', but are in fact still present. For example,

Thompson (2010, p. 395) raises a number of queries regarding the "ongoing moral outrage over the assumed sexualisation of young girls by the media". This moral outrage is perhaps most apparent when contemplating public discourse pertaining to such issues. Maguire (2008) also adopts a more discerning perspective on the matter; she argues that while women are definitely sexualised more than men and that girls with high-level exposure to media have been shown to have lower self-esteem, there is insufficient evidence to prove exactly what is causing this. She further questions whether all girls are susceptible and suggests that there may be other factors at work that deserve consideration. Maguire acknowledges that the sexualisation of women may be harmful, but also proposes that the relationship of an individual to their cultural environment is highly complex. Returning to the writings of Aapola et al. (2005) and their assertion that the body can be a positive site for girls and women, these authors further contend that this is an issue which lacks popularity and prevalence in research and in media.

Essentially, the research literature and public discourse to date should not be taken for granted. While public discourse may indicate otherwise, there are gaps and inconsistencies in the knowledge that we have accrued to date. These gaps and inconsistencies would be well addressed by continuing research. For example, Maguire (2008) concedes that our sexualised culture is not going to go away. This concession is in keeping with much of the literature, which similarly posits that idealisation, objectification, and stereotyping are strenuously embedded in media. With so many studies indicating that idealisation, objectification and sexualisation are long-enduring, persistent practices, it is crucial to consider how we can proceed forward. Throughout the literature, there is a call for more research into the extent and impact of media where young girls are concerned. Ward and Harrison (2005) call for further research into how the media shapes girls' constructions of femininity, citing need for a broader understanding of the issue. Similarly, Ferguson, Winegard and Winegard (2011) contend that media effects cannot be viewed in a vacuum; rather, we need to consider other related influences such as peers and families. Shifrin (2006) asserts that future research must focus on parental awareness, concerns, and strategies. The subjectivity of media use is addressed by Ward and Harrison, who subsequently note that research should address girls' personal media histories in terms of levels of consumption and viewer involvement. To date, the literature has predominantly focused on adolescent girls and young women, with relatively limited focus on younger samples. Granatino and Haytko (2013) contend that this lack of focus is somewhat negligent, given the younger ages at which children are becoming aware of body image. Several authors note the limited diversity of participants in studies to date, with a predominance of middle-class, Caucasian girls, and recommend future research

pursue more diverse samples (Ata et al., 2007; Gordon, 2008; Grabe & Hyde, 2009; Tiggemann & Miller, 2010; Ward, 2003).

Returning to Thompson's (2010) call for a more nuanced approach, she stresses the need to explore children's perspectives on media content and sexualisation in order to develop more child-centric understandings. She observes that adult-centric perspectives have been predominant in the conversation about sexualisation thus far. This is certainly an important point to keep in mind, as the majority of research literature (and, subsequently, public discourse and policy) is focused on adult perspectives and ways of knowing. Furthermore, research that does focus on children and adolescents often fails to elicit their voices or contains a limited acknowledgment of their own perspectives and experiences. This is not confined to my area of inquiry, but spans across different areas of research. For example, Merewether and Fleet (2014) discuss how research has tended to position children as objects of study rather than subjects, which perpetuates a culture where children are not listened to and their perspectives are neglected. This arguably results in substantial gaps in our knowledge. While this has been changing in recent years (Merewether & Fleet, 2014) with a growth in interest towards children's participation in research (Clark, 2010; Einarsdottir, 2005), it is an issue which demands further attention and action. Pursuing child-centric research which allows young participants to share their thoughts would be of immense value as we continue to evolve knowledge in relation to children and media and, more specifically, girls and media.

After reviewing the literature and considering the implications, potential future directions, and conceptual issues, a research design emerged. My aim was to pursue a study that would further our knowledge about girls' media contexts. Most significantly, I wanted this to derive from their lived experiences and perspectives. Therefore, I prioritised creating a child-centric study which would engage girls as equal participants in the research process, thereby giving them ownership over their valuable contributions.

I established an overarching objective, which was to engage in a holistic examination of the relationship forged between young girls and their preferred media. Following on from this, I identified the following underpinning research objectives:

- To establish the types of media with which girls are regularly engaging;
- To examine the content of these media in terms of the messages and ideals presented;

- To explore varying perspectives from stakeholders in the girls' lives, including parents and educators;
- To develop a greater understanding of how girls perceive media; and,
- To give voice to girls' experiences and perspectives regarding the media in their lives.

This led to the creation of several research questions. The main question was: "What are the individual and collective lived experiences of girls aged 7-13 in their personal media contexts?" I then established five sub-questions, which are as follows:

- What history do girls have with the media, including past and present consumption?;
- What is the nature of the media that girls are accessing?;
- What role do schools and families play?;
- How do girls perceive, understand, and relate to media content?; and,
- What do girls have to say about their experiences and perspectives regarding media?

In establishing these objectives and asking these questions, my aim was to address several of the gaps in knowledge in the existing literature. I wanted to pursue child-centric research with an emphasis on giving the girls involved voice and agency – something which has been lacking in the research to date. Furthermore, I decided to take a holistic approach which might take into account their home lives, schools, media histories, and present media contexts. This holistic view stands in contrast to much of the existing literature, which has a tendency to adopt a more singular approach. Lastly, I wanted to unearth the essence of what it means to be a young girl living with media. The aim inherent in this was to cut to the heart of matters so that invested individuals and groups (e.g. educators, parents, and researchers) can determine how to move forward with conscious awareness of girls' experiences.

The nature of the study is further explored in subsequent chapters which respectively focus on conceptual issues, the study's methodological approach, and ethical considerations.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter has provided a review of the literature. It has become evident that media is central in contemporary culture, that its representations of girls and women are narrow and limited, and that this may have a range of potential consequences for girls and women engaging with media. The health and wellbeing of girls and women is a vital issue that merits attention. Thus, research and public discourse have proposed preventative and

interventive resources. One such resource is media literacy education which is seen as promising in this regard. Future research should focus on more in-depth accounts that prioritise the perspectives and experiences of children, with more attention paid to younger age groups. Now that the background for my study has been established, the following chapter will move on to delineating my conceptual framework.

# *Chapter Three*

# *Conceptual Framework*

---

## Chapter Introduction

The previous chapter provided a review of relevant literature. This chapter presents key conceptual issues and ideas that informed the research. Its structure permits a gradual introduction to my researcher identity and, thus, my research. As depicted in Figure 3.1, it first explores three key areas: *my paradigmatic worldview,* which looks at my conceptualisation of contexts, individuals, and experiences; *my theoretical lens,* which is the defining theory that has shaped my research; *Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory,* which was the basis for the conceptual framework that shaped the research. Lastly, emerging from these three areas, is *my conceptual framework,* which provides an in-depth account of the framework that I developed and utilised.
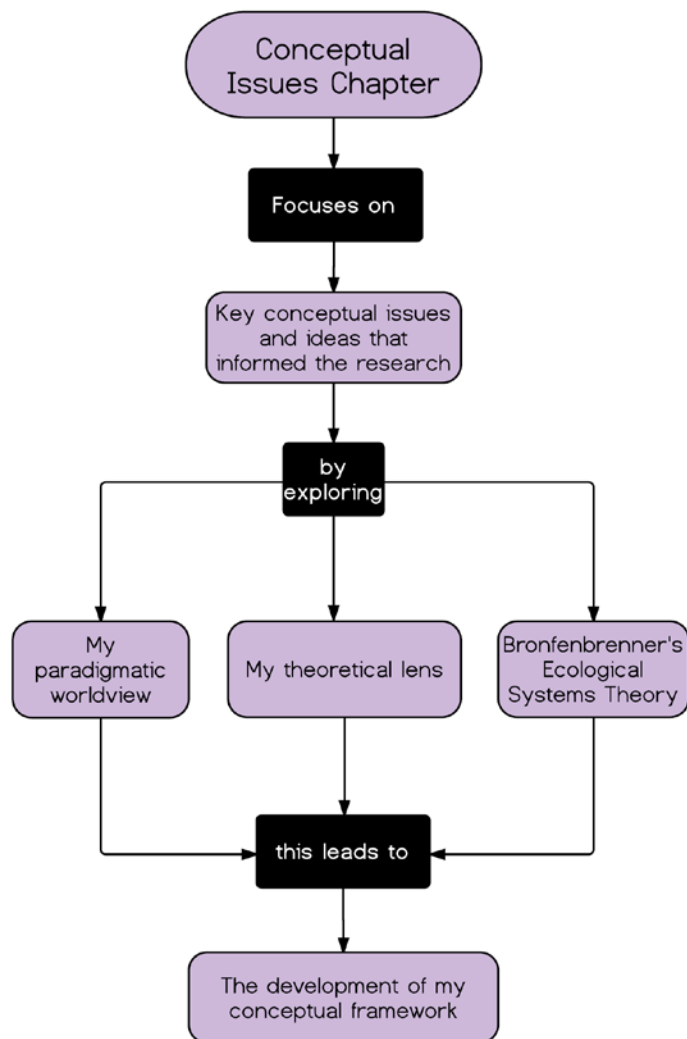
Figure 3.1: The content and structure of Chapter Three

As was discussed in prior chapters, there is a need for further research into the nature of the relationship between girls and media. Hence, my research focuses on exploring the lived experiences of young girls (aged 7 – 13) within their own personal media contexts. The central question which this study seeks to answer is: *What are the individual and collective lived experiences of girls aged 7-13 in their personal media contexts?*

While there are a multitude of angles from which this could be approached, this study is focused on a holistic exploration of the girls' lived contexts and experiences from their own perspectives. This is complemented by the perspectives of their parents, teachers, and school principal. The defining conceptual framework for the study is primarily influenced by Bronfenbrenner's socioecological theory, which recognises the critical interrelationships between an individual and the contexts within which they exist (Gray & MacBlain, 2012). The nature of Bronfenbrenner's theory is explored in-depth in the following section. Other key influences include feminist theory and Bartky's (1990) concept of 'divided consciousness'.

The way in which I approached my research is also inextricably linked to my identity as a researcher, which is underpinned by several formative dimensions. These dimensions, as defined by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), are: paradigmatic worldview; theoretical lens; methodological approach; and methods of data collection (see Figure 1.1, page 3). In this chapter, I will explore the first two dimensions, whilst the latter two will be attended to in Chapter Four.

### Paradigmatic worldview

The first key dimension as defined by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) is paradigmatic worldview. One's paradigmatic worldview is critical as it pertains to how reality is perceived and how contexts, individuals, and experiences are conceptualised. Embedded within a researcher's paradigmatic worldview are ontology, epistemology, axiology, methodology, and rhetoric (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), which will be attended to in Chapter Four. Paradigmatic worldview contributes substantially to a researcher's identity and, thus, the nature of the research undertaken. The driving question here is: *Through what paradigmatic lens do I view the world?*

My identity as a researcher has contributed substantially to the present study and how it took shape. The origin of my identity was the establishment of my paradigmatic worldview, which is participatory in nature. A participatory worldview embraces the value of the

researched and their role in the research process. In adopting a participatory worldview, focus is placed on empowering participants, giving them voice, and engaging equitably with them as a researcher (Nind, 2011). For example, with my participants, I encouraged them to see their role in the research as "telling their story", in which they were a "character" with a self-assigned pseudonym. This child-accessible approach was successful in giving the girls a sense of ownership.

## Theoretical lens

Creswell and Plano Clark's (2011) second dimension is the theoretical lens. This should be considered crucial as it contributes to the conceptualisation of the key issues and to how the research is constructed and conducted. The driving question here is: *What theoretical lens have I used to define and design my research?*

My theoretical lens is feminist in nature. This feminist approach has made several formative contributions to my researcher identity and, subsequently, my research. Feminist theory is a diverse field, embodying a wide variety of perspectives and objectives. Given its diversity, feminism seems to defy simple or static explanations (Ackerley & True, 2010; Adams St. Pierre, 2000; Beasley, 1999; Christman, 1995; Gamble, 2001; Letherby, 2003; Shukla, 2006). It is a highly subjective area, with many diverse theories applied to inform different branches of feminism, including but not limited to Marxism, post-modernism, radicalism, environmentalism or liberalism. Therefore, it seems problematic, if not altogether impossible, to truly 'summarise' feminist theory. Given the wide-reaching diversity of feminism, it is challenging to condense or consolidate its many theories. Furthermore, feminist theory is still evolving – for instance, Grosz (2002, p. 13) asserts that, "feminism has just barely begun to fathom the intellectual depths of its project". However, it is possible to identify certain central characteristics of feminist thought. Whilst it is imperative to be mindful that feminism exists beyond these characteristics, I will discuss four central themes which link to my study: gender, patriarchy, equality and autonomy.

One of the absolutely crucial components of feminist theory is the subject of gender; most significantly, how gender is conceptualised. Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002) identify gender as crucial to feminist theory and practice, explaining that how one perceives the nature of gender has significant theoretical, political and methodological implications. For example, the position taken by post-structural feminists is that gender is a social construction, and an unstable one at that, as it is a concept which is subject to change over time and/or across contexts (Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2006). Central to the issue of gender is

its distinction from sex; it is proposed by some that sex is biological, while gender is a social construct (Gamble, 2001). The argument presented by de Beauvoir (1952) is that one is not born a woman, but rather, becomes one. Drawing from de Beauvoir's theories relating to gender, Greer (1970) views women's lesser status as a social construct devised and reinforced by men. However, there is contention over the concepts of sex and gender and their relationship. Gamble (2001) mentions feminists influenced by psycho-analytic theory frequently argue sex and gender are intertwined, while many other feminists believe gender to be independent of sex. My position as regards sex and gender is that sex exists biologically, while gender is constructed socially – however, in the current cultural climate, there exists an influential bond between sex and gender. Furthermore, I recognise gender as an evolving and contextual construct, which is shaped by circumstances such as time, location, and culture. This stance is important in terms of how I conceptualise the girls involved in my study as well as gendered media.

Also central to feminist thought is the pervasiveness of patriarchy, which Gamble (2001) defines as a system ruled by male authority, which is enforced via social, political, economic and religious institutions. Gamble states that all feminists oppose patriarchy, although much like with the discussion of gender versus sex, conceptualisations differ. Holland et al. (1995) argue there is a normative framework of male knowledge in our society, within which it is not possible to create female knowledge. De Beauvoir (1952) states it is certain that women's possibilities have been suppressed by the masculine norm, and subsequently asserts that it is in the best interest of women and society that women rise above this – a contention predominant in feminist literature (Gross, 1986; Hooks, 2000; Lerner, 1979; Levy, 2005; Millett, 1969). My perception of patriarchy is that it underpins and pervades contemporary society. From a Bronfenbrennian perspective, it exists as a macrosystem which pervasively influences all other systems. My acknowledgement of patriarchy is intertwined with intersectional theory, which recognises the many interrelated components of identity and existence (Gines, 2011). I acknowledge the relation of gender/sex to other pertinent aspects of identity such as race, nationality, ethnicity, culture, sexuality, class, and ability (Adams St. Pierre, 2000; Gines, 2011; Lykke, 2010; Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2006). An intersectional perspective can facilitate a progressive and inclusive feminist philosophical framework for "contemplating being-in-the-world and being-with-others" (Gines, 2011, p. 275). My intersectional perception of patriarchy is vital as it relates to how I view society and, in turn, how I developed the conceptual framework for the present study.

Equality and autonomy are both considered critical elements of feminist theory. Within feminism there is contention and frequent dispute over the definition, application and significance of the concepts of equality and autonomy. Lerner (1979) states autonomy means women are able to define themselves and the values by which they live, with the freedom to act, choose and confidently shape one's own future. Considering it a personal trait and a framework for morality, Christman (1995) says autonomy embodies ideals of self-determination, authenticity of character and independence from manipulation and oppression. A differentiation between the two concepts is given by Gross (1986), wherein she explains that 'autonomy' implies the right to see oneself in whatever terms one chooses, while 'equality' implies a measurement according to a given, normative standard. Gross argues the struggle for equality implies an acceptance of given standards and conformity to them, while the struggle for autonomy allows individuals to reject these standards and create new ones. Greer (1999) says the notion of equality as we know it takes the male status quo as the condition to which women should aspire. As did Gross, Greer argues this is a false equality; that what is actually being achieved is a future of men and women dwelling as images of each other in a world unchanged. A frequent point of discussion on this matter is sexual equality, or the illusion of it that exists in our society. For example, Greer argues sexual freedom is male-oriented, while Levy (2005) asserts sexual liberation has not been achieved and women are still being oppressed by a stereotypical, male-driven idea of sexuality. This argument applies to many issues affecting women, with several authors arguing equality is an insufficient ideal, as it translates to women meeting the standard of men (Greer, 1999; Gross, 2006). An alternative ideal or goal for women, therefore, would be the acquisition of autonomy. Christman (1995) notes some feminists have been critical of autonomy, perceiving it much like equality: a male ideal marred by inequality and privilege. Christman recognises the relevance and value of such criticisms, but argues autonomy still has an important part to play in feminist theory. My position is one reminiscent of Greer's (1999), in which I would argue that the 'equality' that girls and women are encouraged to pursue is male-centric, heteronormative, and potentially exclusionary – and, therefore, not representative of true equality. Autonomy, therefore, seems a more fitting goal for girls and women to strive towards. My negotiation of equality and autonomy pertains to my participatory focus, how I positioned my participants, and how I engaged with them.

The ongoing evolution of feminist theory has led to the development of feminist research, a field which is equally diverse but which can be recognised by some central traits. Letherby (2003) argues research too often serves the purposes of the researcher rather than the researched, and has been exploitative in nature. Feminism seeks to combat this exploitation

by engaging compassionately and ethically with marginalised groups and offering them the chance to express themselves, articulate their experiences, and seek out empowerment. There is an overt emphasis on ensuring the best interests of the participants are prioritised and properly met. While there is no one epistemology, ontology, or methodology assigned to feminism, feminist research prioritises giving its participants a voice and striving for research practices that are honest, non-exploitative, and in the best interests of the participants involved. This is well-aligned with a participatory worldview, and thus is what I aimed for as I planned and conducted the study.

### Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Child development occurs within a variety of social, cultural, and political contexts (Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2006). A further key driver of the present study was Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. The model proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes the interactive and influential physical and social contexts within which individuals develop (Woolfolk & Margetts, 2013). This prominent model (Shaffer, 2009) has contributed a system for understanding the interconnected settings and circumstances in which children are engaged. It has particular relevance to my research and how I have conceptualised the core concepts of children, schools, families, and media. With reference to the relevant field of research, Bronfenbrenner's work (shown in Figure 3.2) has been referenced in a number of studies focusing on children's socialisation via media (e.g. Jordan, 2005).
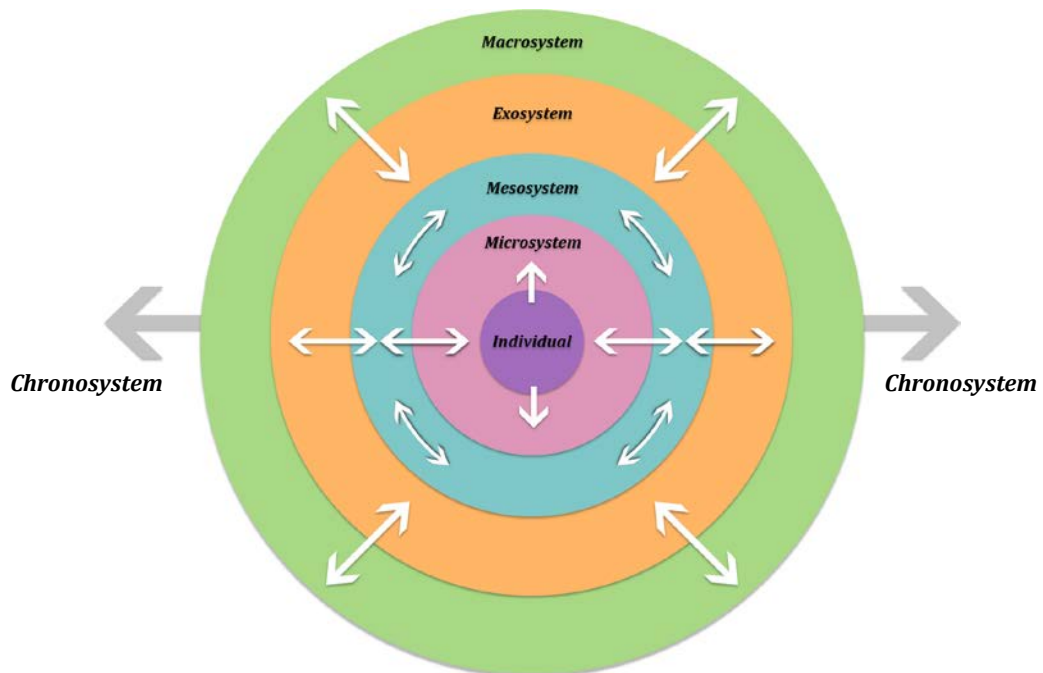


Figure 3.2: A visual model of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model (adapted from Woolfolk & Margetts).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model delineates a system of nested, interconnected settings which affect the development of an individual. Of critical importance is that an individual's ecological context extends far beyond their immediate setting – for example, their family members – and reaches as far as something quite external to the individual, such as the belief systems and ideologies that shape our cultural and societal contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The model includes a number of contexts, comprising microsystems (an individual's everyday settings – shown in pink), the mesosystem (interrelations between microsystems – shown in blue), exosystems (social settings – shown in orange), the macrosystem (the cultural context at large – shown in green), and the chronosystem (how one's contexts transition over time – shown as grey exterior arrows). There are various interconnections between these contexts (shown with white interior arrows) and the arrows are bidirectional, indicating the mutual influence between an individual and their contexts.

With regards to examining the contexts of children, Bronfenbrenner's model allows the child's world to be examined in-depth, acknowledging that children are not only influenced by one force (e.g. parents, media), but by many interrelated forces. As children grow up, they are inevitably influenced by dynamic, ever-evolving contexts (Gray & MacBlain, 2012). Emphasis is placed on a diverse range of systems, ranging from the micro- to the macro-, and mediated by the chrono-, with attention paid to intimate influences (e.g. one's immediate family) and more perceptibly distant influences (e.g. the political structures of one's wider social context) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

I have applied Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory to frame this research project, as it has provided a model for understanding the worlds within which contemporary young Australian girls exist and the interconnected systems that influence their development. The specific links forged between Bronfenbrenner's systems and the research context for this study are delineated in Table 3.1.

In addition to Bronfenbrenner's formative contribution to the research, a number of other conceptual models were examined. This was done so that I could gain an understanding of the conceptual underpinnings evident throughout the literature. Appendix A summaries the theories and models which were reviewed, and which therefore contributed to developing my understanding of the extensive issues related to this area of inquiry.

Table 3.1: The research context through Bronfenbrenner's lens.

| Bronfenbrenner's Systems | Examples |
| --- | --- |
| Microsystem | Each girl's everyday setting, including her family, school, peers, community, and her *personal media context*. Other settings may also include day care, frequented community settings such as the local library, or religious settings such as her church. |
| Mesosystem | Relationships between each girl's microsystems (e.g. the interactions between the girl's family and her school, or the links between her school and church). |
| Exosystem | The larger social context within which the girl is located, including political systems, mass media, industry, etc. |
| Macrosystem | The cultural attitudes and ideologies at large (e.g. patriarchal attitudes and ideologies), as well as laws and customs as defined by government bodies (e.g. educational policies, the Australian Curriculum). |
| Chronosystem | How these contexts shift and evolve as time goes by (e.g. how will the girls change as they grow up? How will media continue to evolve?) |

## My conceptual framework

In this section, I will explain my conceptual framework in terms of how it was developed and the various aspects of it, with focus given to situating and conceptualising girls and media. This will further clarify my perception of the research context and the issues at play.

### Developing the framework

The development of my conceptual framework was driven by several factors:

- A review of the literature which included an assessment of pre-existing frameworks;
- My paradigmatic worldview which is participatory in nature;
- My theoretical lens which is feminist in nature;
- Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory which proposes a way of conceiving the interconnected contexts within which individuals are situated; and,
- An assessment of 'voice' elicited to date.

The fusion of these factors allowed me to develop the framework depicted in Figure 3.3. This framework extends upon previous models and integrates a participatory focus, feminist theory, and Bronfenbrennian theory in order to clarify the contextual placement and conceptualisation of young girls. The key feature of my framework is that it places young girls at the heart of the structure. This is reflective of the girls' key positioning within the

research due to the participatory paradigmatic worldview. As per Bronfenbrenner's theory, consideration has been given to the multiple contexts within which these girls exist and the influence of time's passage across these contexts. It embeds them within a range of critical social and cultural contexts which formatively influence their development. These contexts are interconnected and there is substantial interplay between them, as illustrated by the arrows spanning between the different sections of the framework. Furthermore, these contexts exist within the fluid context of time, which has a key role to play in the development of the individual girl and the evolution of her surrounding systems. This is reflected by the outwards facing arrows on either side of the framework.
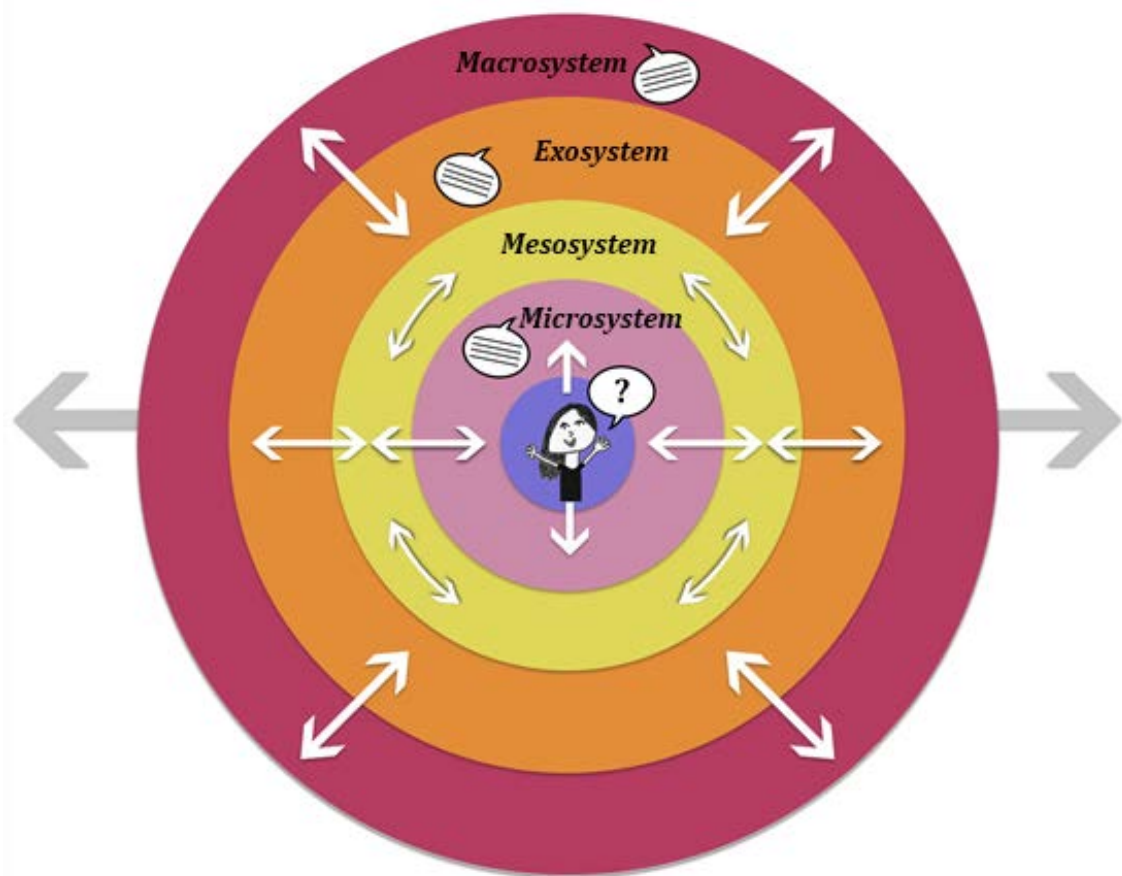


Figure 3.3: Conceptualising girls and their lived worlds

The following sub-sections will further explore my conceptual framework in terms of how I view the situation and conceptualisation of girls and media, as well as a review of the elicitation of voice in the existing literature.

**Situating girls**

In their text focusing on the evolving and negotiated meanings of girlhood, Aapola et al. (2005, p. 1) write, "Girlhood is something that is both individually and collectively accomplished through participating in the social, material, and discursive practices defining young femininity. Thus, what it means to be a girl is constantly changing." This passage aligns with how I have negotiated the situation and conceptualisation of girls within my framework and, hence, within my research. The recognition of girlhood as 'constantly changing' is crucial and connects to Bronfenbrenner's chronosystem.

Through my fusion of feminist theory and Bronfenbrennian theory, I have identified the overarching cultural attitudes and ideologies at the macrosystem as patriarchal. As such, it would be fitting to propose that the patriarchy of the macrosystem influences all sub-systems and is therefore likely pervasive throughout the girls' contexts. The potential consequences of this will form a focal point throughout this thesis.

Furthermore, the framework which I have developed relates significantly to Bartky's (1990) feminist writings focusing on patriarchal oppression, in which she describes a 'divided consciousness' of victimisation. Bartky asserts that it is possible for women to acknowledge how society often causes them injury and diminishes their being, while also celebrating their own strength and potential to grow and exist beyond their victimisation. My conceptual framework attempts to demonstrate awareness that, although there are a multitude of highly influential forces shaping girls' upbringing, girls do have agency and authority over their own lives. This is evidenced through positioning girls at the heart of the framework, thereby prioritising them, and also by indicating *mutual* relationships between girls and their contexts. While this also relates to the interconnections posited by Bronfenbrenner (1979), I also consider it illustrative of girls' agency and authority. Through Bartky's writings as well as other key feminist texts (e.g. Gines, 2011; Letherby, 2003) and texts advocating for children's rights (e.g. Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2006), I have chosen to conceptualise girls as important individuals who are active within their many contexts. With this in mind, I will proceed to a discussion of how young girls were conceptualised throughout the study.

**Conceptualising girls**

The way in which girls are conceptualised was a critical consideration when developing the present framework as a foundation for the research. Feminist research prioritises participants and focuses on hearing their voices (Letherby, 2003). Therefore, I have placed girls at the heart of my framework. In positioning girls in this way, my aim is to produce research that

recognises young girls as valuable members of society who have a right to voice their perspectives and have their experiences recognised. Critically, the research intends to give voice to the perspectives and experiences of young girls, which will hopefully extend our understanding of their health and wellbeing in the current cultural climate. The centrality of young girls is not the only issue that merits discussion – there are a range of other factors that contributed to the conceptualisation of young girls and their role in the research.

My conceptualisation of girls links to my broader conceptualisation of children, which is informed by the United Nation's 1989 treaty, called the Conventions on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The CRC represents a "major package of rights for children" including rights of protection, provision, and participation (Freeman, 2011, p.27). It encompasses all aspects of a child's life and thus promotes children's wellbeing (Doek, 2014). Arts (2014, p. 271) describes the CRC as a "truly comprehensive standard of children's rights, both in its substantive scope and in its geographical application". As well as providing endorsement for children's rights, the CRC advocates for children as active individuals (Smith & Taylor, 2000a).

One major issue within the literature and public discourse was the tendency to dichotomise children in terms of passivity versus activity. Mittal (2005) says that there is a tendency to depict children as passive victims of the media. This does not do justice to the relationship children have formed with contemporary media, where they actively engage with content and often have a say in how they shape their interactions with media. To this point, Qvarsell (2000) argues the media is not simply 'pro' or 'con' and that, likewise, children are not wholly resilient or entirely fragile as human beings. This is also an issue in education – for example, Robinson & Jones Díaz (2006, p. 5) assert that dominant discourses which construe children as too young, naïve, innocent, or passive are "highly influential" in educational contexts. Robinson & Jones Díaz further argue that this dominant discourse of childhood perpetuates the silencing of children's voices. My conceptualisation of girls rejects the dominant discourse which serves to dichotomise, simplify, or silence girls. Hence, my framework acknowledges that girls actively interact with the systems surrounding them (represented by the bidirectional arrows), and that the media have the potential to be both positive and negative in their influence.

Although the media often produce positive role models that girls can relate to (Theran et al., 2010) they have also been shown to diminish the humanity of girls and women by under-representing (Collins, 2011) and misrepresenting their gender (Hust & Brown, 2008). This

carries a number of risks, such as those discussed in the literature review, where concerns are voiced about the way girls shape their identities and notions of femininity, based on media's narrow and lacking depictions. As previously discussed, a core element of my study is to recognise this agency and endorse it by giving girls voice.

Essentially, the conceptual framework has been developed with focus placed on young girls. It proposes that girls are agentic, authoritative, and active individuals with thoughts, feelings, and experiences that merit our attention. It also positions media as a key influence in their lives across multiple contexts.

**Conceptualising media**

My perception of media is that it is created intentionally with all dimensions attended to consciously by the creators – for example, within film, these dimensions would include decisions regarding scriptwriting, cinemography, casting, etc. As posited by Iedema (2001), texts are not created accidentally. Media is made with intention and the choices made by its creators matter. Furthermore, media is positioned as mutually connected to cultural ideologies and attitudes. It is also seen to be a major component of contemporary society which potentially contributes to the socialisation of individuals, as it relays key messages which convey values, beliefs, and ideals. The following statement by Lerum and Dworkin (2009) particularly resonates with me:

> … images are a site of social power, struggle, and conflict... All images are socially produced within particular contexts for particular purposes, and all images are also socially consumed, navigated, ignored, or subverted within particular contexts for particular purposes. It is only through understanding the contextual meanings of images that one can provide a contextually meaningful critique. (Lerum & Dworkin, 2009, p. 255)

**Situating media**

It is also imperative to consider how media are situated within lived contexts. While previous models have often identified media as an external force (e.g. at the outmost levels of exosystem and/or macrosystem), I would propose that media may exist pervasively throughout all systems, thus existing both distantly and intimately in the lives of girls. For example, Czerski (2012) describes the Internet as embedded within the immediate realities of younger generations – hence, it cannot be viewed exclusively as an external entity. It is also key to consider the factor of time, which influences the evolution of contexts and media.

Each of these contextual aspects will be considered in the following sub-sections, beginning with the broadest level and progressing inwards to the critical personal context.

### *Media at the macrosystem*

The macrosystem is illustrated in the outermost circle shown in the framework and includes laws, customs, attitudes, and ideologies. Through my feminist theoretical lens, I identify these components as patriarchal in nature. Media are critically influenced by the macrosystem and are therefore aligned with patriarchal ideologies and ideals. Media are also paramount in circulating culture and cultural meanings (Talbot, 2007), thus potentially perpetuating patriarchy.

One way of framing the relationship between the macrosystem and media would be to view media as a reflection or transmission of what exists at the macrosystem; another way would be to acknowledge a mutual bond between the two. For example, media may reflect patriarchal ideals and then in doing so reinforce them, thereby strengthening the patriarchal nature of the macroysystem. It is the contention of my framework that a mutual relationship exists between the two.

### *Media at the exosystem*

The next contextual level is that of the exosystem, depicted in Figure 3.3 in orange. Media at this level would include news media (print, screen, and online), entertainment media (film, television, music, literature), interactive media (games, apps, social media), and all of the associated advertising. Media at the exosystem links to the macrosystem and feeds into the more immediate contexts, communicating dominant attitudes and ideologies in the process. As evidenced in the literature review, there an abundance of messages communicated by media regarding girls and women. These messages are frequently patriarchal in nature due to the connections between the exosystem and macrosystem. Consequently, it is important to acknowledge the inextricable link between these systems. While the macrosystem does inform the exosystem, the reverse can be said as well. This is particularly true when considering media, which have unprecedented power and influence in our society at present. Given the saturation of our society with media products and content, it is inevitable that media messages will shape cultural attitudes and ideologies and form part of multiple lived contexts.

### *Contextual interconnections and media*

The contextual interconnections, represented by the arrows that connect the different systems, are an important factor for consideration. Media exist within the interconnections –

for instance, with relevance to the present research, this may involve the interplay between the girls' home contexts and their school context. A possible example of this interplay could be the continuity of rules and guidelines as regards media use at home and school, or perhaps possible inconsistencies between these settings.

### Media at the microsystem

The microsystem includes aspects of a child's everyday settings. Such settings would include school and home, and perhaps the homes of friends or other family members, childcare facilities, the local library, or other community settings. The types of media present at the microsystem go beyond what an individual may access but would also include media owned by parents, media commonly available in community settings, or media favoured by friends. These media would be visible and possibly accessible to the child.

### Media at the individual level

With regard to how children are currently engaging with media, it could be proposed that the media do not only exist within broader contextual levels. Looking back to Bronfenbrenner's theory briefly, Jordan (2005) writes that the exosystem comprises social settings that are influential to child development, but in which children are not directly involved. However, as children are now more connected to media than ever before, it is my assertion that the media also now form part of children's individual contexts in a highly personal manner.

This personalised level of media might include any online media, print media, 'smart' media (i.e. apps), music, film and television, and/or gaming media the girl might access, and the advertising and merchandising that go along with said media. Most significantly, this cannot be depicted as a one-way process where the media is feeding into the girl as though she were passive. Much like Bronfenbrenner (1979) acknowledges the interplay between a person and their environment, Figure 3.3 acknowledges the interaction that goes on between girls and their media.

### Media and the chronosystem

Lastly, the ever-evolving nature of media is crucial to observe. This is made evident by the outwards spanning arrows shown in Figure 3.3, which represent the chronosystem and indicate the passage of time. As time passes, media technologies and media content will shift and change accordingly. Likewise, as girls grow and develop, their media habits and interests will also shift and change. This fluidity is imperative when seeking to understand

the nature of media and its potential influence, as well as the nature of the relationships forged between girls and media.

**The elicitation of voice**

One of the major outcomes of the literature review was the realisation of the disparity of voice. In research and in public discourse, voice has been given to certain individuals, groups, and entities, while others have not received the same attention. Hence, the proposed conceptual framework is developed to include an assessment of the elicitation of voice to date.

The speech bubble depicted above the girl refers to my study's interest in giving girls voice and hearing their perspectives on the media, rather than continuing to focus on adult-centric analyses of what the media means to children. Several other speech bubbles appear throughout the framework to indicate groups that have been given voice in research to date and in public discourse surrounding the issues at hand, and whose positions are generally known. There are also speech bubbles used to indicate groups which I am interested in hearing from in my study. This is summarised in Table 3.2. With relation to who has been given voice, the bulk of research has focused on adolescent girls and young women in their late teens through mid-twenties, with only a few studies exploring younger girls. Furthermore, studies that do focus on young girls often engage key stakeholders rather than the girls themselves, or fail to fully acknowledge the identities, experiences, or perspectives of the girls in question.

Table 3.2: Voices heard and unheard in previous research and in public discourse.

| Groups given voice | Groups without/with limited voice |
|---|---|
| • Community organisations | • Girls (particularly young girls) |
| • Media | • Schools |
| • The culture at large | • Families |

Additionally, due to their pervasive presence, the media arguably have the loudest voice of all the groups mentioned. This includes their voice in general (i.e. what they communicate via different mediums, such as messages about women's roles) and their response to public debate (e.g. in the case of sexualisation, where media often defend media practices and their right to freedom of speech and creative expression).

With regard to other key stakeholders, the burden of responsibility for the welfare of children in a media-rich world seems to most often be placed on schools by community groups, governing bodies, and the media. My research gives focus to hearing the perspectives of teachers, principals, and other school staff on these issues and these persons' places in relation to managing the issues.

And lastly, the culture at large has a very prevalent and recognised voice. Contemporary Western cultural attitudes and ideologies are patriarchal in nature, hence privilege and voice is most often given to affluent, heterosexual, able-bodied, white men, thereby limiting and/or erasing the experiences and needs of people existing outside those narrow parameters. Feminist research focuses on marginalised groups; in the case of my research, I have chosen young girls from a primary school population (aged 7-13) as a group whose experiences deserve attention and elucidation.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter has looked at key conceptual ideas that have informed the research. The paradigmatic worldview – participatory – and the theoretical lens – feminist – have been explored, and a defining conceptual framework has been proposed. This framework draws on Bronfenbrenner's Theory, with emphasis placed on regarding girls as active participants in their media contexts with the potential to exercise agency. This involves integrating feminist theory and Bartky's (1990) concept of 'divided consciousness' with the theory set out by Bronfenbrenner. Essentially, my conceptual framework centres around girls and aims to focus on how they explore and negotiate the world around them, with an emphasis on media's role in their ongoing development. The next chapter comprises an account of my study's methodology.

# *Chapter Four*

# *Methodology*

---

## Chapter Introduction

The previous two chapters respectively presented a literature review and my conceptual framework, both of which guided the study. This fourth chapter will explore the methodology of my study. It follows a specific structure, which is visually delineated in Figure 4.1.
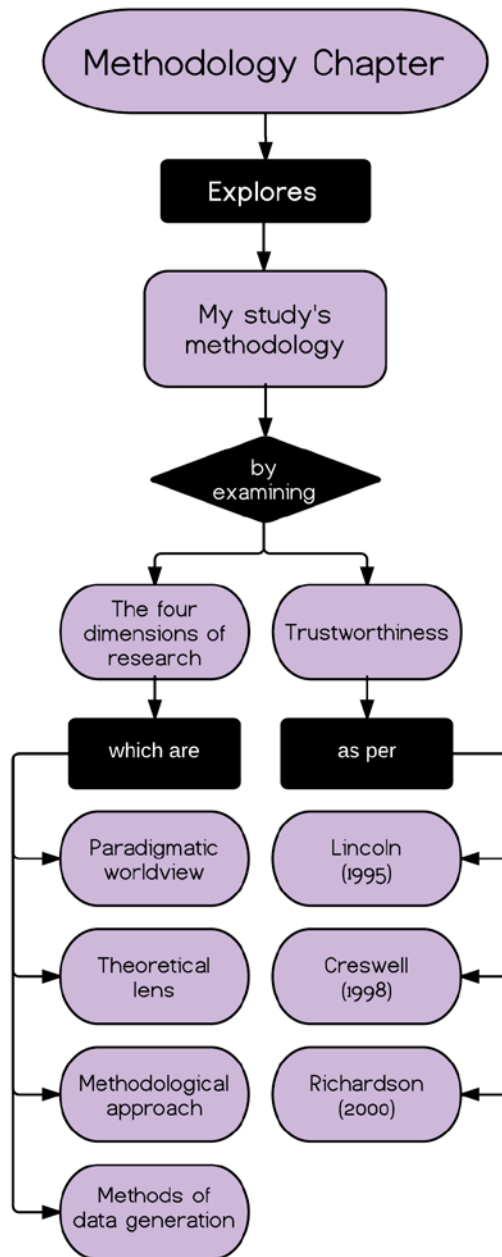


Figure 4.1: The content and structure of Chapter Four

These ideas are explored in a specific order. Firstly, I will revisit my paradigmatic worldview, which was previously discussed in Chapter Three. A researcher's paradigmatic worldview is important as it defines how the researcher views, understands, and engages with the surrounding world (O'Leary, 2007; Walker & Solvason, 2014). Secondly, I will revisit my theoretical lens, which was also addressed in Chapter Three. A researcher's theoretical lens is significant as it contributes to the understanding of phenomena in research (Anfara, 2008). Thirdly, I will describe my methodological approach. This is a crucial consideration as clearly identifying one's methodological approach assists in defining the nature of the inquiry and how it proceeds (Schwandt, 2007). I will also give focus to the background of the methodological approaches which were selected, as it is imperative that researchers understand and actively explain their methodology (Creswell, 2013). Fourthly, in order to clarify the structure and procedure of the project, the study will be described in terms of the generation and analysis of data. It is imperative that researchers provide a clear account of this so that it is fully understood how evidence was gathered in order to establish insight (Walker & Solvason, 2014). Finally, I will look at the issue of trustworthiness and how the study employed a variety of approaches linked to this. Trustworthiness reflects the truthfulness and accuracy of the research and is a quality determinant (Castle, 2012).

**Paradigmatic worldview**

My paradigmatic worldview was previously addressed in Chapter Three where I discussed my participatory approach. A participatory approach focuses on engaging equitably with participants and allowing them voice via the research process. This ties in with feminist theories, which embrace an egalitarian relationship between the researcher and the researched. Both have a critical basis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Embedded within one's paradigmatic worldview are ontology, epistemology, axiology, methodology, and rhetoric (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Each of these aspects will now be addressed.

Ontologically, I am focused on a reality which is political. Hence, I am invested in ideas of empowerment and emancipation of individuals who tend to be marginalised by hegemonic patriarchy. Furthermore, I acknowledge a subjective-objective reality in how we perceive and shape the world around us. This aligns with a participatory worldview; as Heron and Reason (1997, p. 3) state, "To experience anything is to participate in it, and to participate is both to mould and to encounter, hence experiential reality is always subjective-objective". As to my ontological perception of children and childhood, I view children as young people who are in possession of their own thoughts, feelings, values, attitudes, and experiences. Furthermore, I support children's emerging rights to autonomy, agency, and voice, which

aligns with the United Nations' Conventions on the Rights of the Child (CRC). I consider childhood to be a critical life stage in which children proceed through development into adulthood. This life stage is mediated by multiple contexts, which as discussed previously in Chapter Three, I view from a Bronfenbrennian perspective. Although children may be considered vulnerable in some regards, I also see them as capable and competent individuals. I also reject the idea that children are inherently passive and perceive them as active participants in their social and cultural worlds. My perspective here relates back to Bartky's (1990) divided consciousness of victimisation, which was also discussed in Chapter Three as it was a central component of my conceptual framework. Therefore, my ontological perspective contributed to the conceptual framework which shaped my perceptions of the research context and participants, and guided my interactions with them.

Epistemologically, the participatory paradigm connects to critical theory (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In possessing a critical epistemology, I engage in pluralised knowledge (Newton & Parfitt, 2011) and recognise multiple realities which are politically, culturally, and socially situated (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Furthermore, within the participatory paradigm there exist four interdependent ways of knowing: experiential, presentational, propositional and practical (Heron & Reason, 1997). Additionally, I believe that my role as a researcher in pursuit of knowledge is to actively collaborate with participants and act with responsibility towards the research context. With regards to working with children, I believe that research should be focused on further evolving our knowledge in relation to what it means to be a child and how children experience living in our world, with an intention to apply this knowledge to enhance their quality of life. Therefore, this study was conducted with a participatory and critical epistemology with a child-centric emphasis.

Axiologically and methodologically, I find myself merging participatory and pragmatic worldviews. Creswell (2013) defines pragmatism as being solutions-focused and responsive to problems, whilst allowing researchers freedom of choice and permitting multiple approaches to data generation. I believe in involving my participants in all phases of research, negotiating with them, and engaging with them to review and reflect on the findings, while I also believe in combining sources of data and mixing the qualitative with the quantitative. I value the degree to which the participatory approach embraces connectedness between the researched and the researcher (Newton & Parfitt, 2011). When working with children, I consider it vital that they are allowed a sound sense of 'ownership' over their role in the research. Therefore, this study employed a variety of tactics to give the participants ownership, agency, and voice within the research process.

Lastly, looking to rhetoric, I assume a participatory worldview in that my writing is focused on advocacy and change for those involved in my research. I am also focused on this writing being truthfully representative of the perspectives of my participants. Furthermore, it is my contention that regardless of age, participants should be permitted and encouraged to contribute to the writing process. Therefore, member-checking was utilised to give the participants the chance to contribute to how the research would be reported. My writing also contains pragmatic elements as it employs both formal and informal styles (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

The ways in which I accomplished the above will be further explored in Chapter Five, which looks at my engagement in ethically literate research practices. To summarise, I am primarily focused on a participatory worldview which facilitates equality between the researcher and the researched. There are also elements of pragmatism which are crucial to my identity as a researcher and the nature of the present research. These stances are summarised in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: My paradigmatic worldview

| Dimensions of researcher identity | Participatory | Pragmatic |
|---|---|---|
| Ontology | ✓ | |
| Epistemology | ✓ | |
| Axiology | ✓ | ✓ |
| Methodology | ✓ | ✓ |
| Rhetoric | ✓ | |

**Theoretical lens**

As was discussed in Chapter Three, feminism is the defining theory that has shaped my researcher identity and thus my research. Feminist theory is diverse – however, there are unifying elements. I would consider these to be gender, patriarchy, equality, and autonomy. This emerged from a review of feminist literature which included a broad range of publications focusing on various dimensions of feminism (e.g. Adams St. Pierre, 2000; Bartky, 1990; Beasley, 1999; Beasley, 2006; Christman, 1995; de Beauvoir, 1952; Gamble, 2001; Greer, 1970; Greer, 1999; Hannam, 2007; Hartsock, 1981; Letherby, 2003; Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2006; Tandon, 2008; Tong, 1989; Walter, 2010; Wolf, 1993). My perspectives regarding these elements are summarised in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: My perspectives regarding core elements of feminist theory

| Elements of feminist theory | My perspectives |
|---|---|
| Gender | Sex exists biologically; gender is constructed socially. In the current cultural climate, an influential bond exists between sex and gender. |
| Patriarchy | Patriarchy is predominant in contemporary society and it exists at the level of macrosystem which pervasively influences all other systems. |
| Equality | The 'equality' that girls and women are encouraged to pursue is male-centric, heteronormative, and potentially exclusionary – hence, it is not representative of true equality. |
| Autonomy | Autonomy may be a more fitting goal for girls and women and may reconcile the potential issues surrounding a male-centric notion of 'equality'. |

## Methodological approach

Methodology pertains to the nature of the inquiry and how it is carried out (Schwandt, 2007). The driving question to refer to here is: *What methodological approach will I adopt and why?* My methodological approach is an integrative one. Mixed research is the overarching approach, with feminist phenomenology and social semiotics blended within. The term 'mixed research', as utilised by Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007), implies an approach involving synthesis. I selected such an approach in order to generate comprehensive knowledge regarding the relationship between girls and media.

### Mixed research

There are various names that have been given to the mixed research movement throughout its complex history. For example, Johnson et al. (2007, p. 118) identify the following as prevalent terms: "blended research, integrative research, multimethod research, multiple methods, triangulated studies, ethnographic residual analysis, and mixed research". One predominant definition takes the approach of linking qualitative and quantitative methods with a specific weighted emphasis (Morse & Cheek, 2014). It is evident that Morgan's (1998) Priority-Sequence Model has great prevalence in the existing literature. Morgan's model advocates for priority to be given to either the qualitative method or the quantitative method as the principal tool for data generation, thus establishing a sequence of importance and application. Indeed, many authors have discussed the issue of how data is prioritised in mixed research (Johnson et al., 2007). Greene's (2007a) definition focuses on the multiplicity of an integrative approach. She describes it as engaging in "multiple ways of seeing and hearing, multiple ways of making sense of the social world, and multiple

standpoints on what is important and to be valued and cherished" (Greene, 2007a, p. 20). As well as proceeding with Greene's definition, I have also elected to use the phrase 'mixed research' as I agree with the following contention made by Johnson et al. (2007, p. 118): "An advantage of the broader term mixed research… is that it does not suggest a limitation of mixing to methods only".

Mixed research designs are recognised as one of the fastest growing research methodologies (Bergman, 2008). They are particularly prevalent within educational research (Cameron, 2014). The fundamental rationale underpinning mixed research is that more can be known about a research topic if various sources are merged (Punch, 2009).  For example, Greene and Caracelli (2007) make the following assertion:

> The underlying premise of mixed-method inquiry is that each paradigm offers a meaningful and legitimate way of knowing and understanding. The underlying rationale for mixed-method inquiry is to understand more fully, to generate deeper and broader insights, to develop important knowledge claims that respect a wider range of interests and perspectives.  (Greene & Caracelli, 1997, p. 7)

Adopting a mixed research approach can be perceived as "a dialogic, respectful, and educative conversation across difference" (Greene, 2007b, p. 755). It represents an important expansion of the research world as we know it by expanding on the developments of exclusively quantitative or exclusively qualitative research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). When it is applied appropriately, a mixed approach can make important contributions to a study's quality and capability (Greene, 2007a). There are multiple research needs which mixed research may be able to address, including extending data sources, enriching explanations of findings, and enhancing the scope of a study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). A mixed research approach may also represent an extension of knowledge, as sound mixed research will engage respectfully with multiple perspectives and ways of knowing (Greene, 2007a).

Mixed research can have also different emphases (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007) – for example, researchers can elect to pursue a balanced approach (where qualitative and quantitative sources are given equal credence), a quantitative dominant approach (where quantitative sources are prioritised), or a qualitative dominant approach (where qualitative sources are prioritised). As regards my approach to mixed research, I pursued a qualitative dominant approach. This was because qualitative data were considered to be best suited to

the majority of my research questions, my research participants, and their contexts and experiences. As I set out to obtain an in-depth, meaningful, and holistic appreciation of what it means for young girls to engage with media, I chose to pursue the 'heavy' incarnation of mixed research. This involved fusing the levels of method, methodology, and paradigm. Furthermore, it meant inviting dialogues between these three levels (Greene, 2007b). Incorporated within this approach were two methodological components: feminist phenomenology and social semiotics.

Now that I have explained the overarching aspect of my methodological approach, which was a qualitatively focused mixed research approach with mixing occurring at the levels of method and methodology, I will proceed to explaining the two other key methodological components: phenomenology and social semiotics.

**Phenomenology**

Speaking broadly, phenomenological research explores peoples' perceptions of the world and its realities (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993; Willis, 2007). It is primarily focused on embodied and experiential meanings (Finlay, 2012) and seeks out the essence of an experience (Merriem & Tisdell, 2016). As both a philosophical and methodological approach, phenomenology has been applied extensively across numerous fields of research to address questions about shared human experience (Ary, Chester Jacobs & Razavieh, 2009).

Despite phenomenology being marked by diversity, there are a number of traits that could be considered to be universal throughout phenomenology. One of the core assumptions of phenomenology is that there are multiple interpretations of experience and that each person's sense of meaning is a reality in itself (Ary et al., 2009). A further core assumption is that human experience makes sense and is consciously known to those who live it, and that it can therefore be articulated (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenology actively rejects objectivity and emphasises the subjective nature of meaning and experience (Creswell, 2013; Jun, 2008; Kohák, 1978; Merleau-Ponty, 2002; Sharkey, 2001; Tiryakian, 1978). As Finlay (2014, p. 125) states, "To think that it is possible to go into some totally presupposition-less space of 'pure objectivity' is a fallacy perpetuated by natural science". Therefore, rather than denying subjectivity, phenomenologists seek to acknowledge it and manage it (Finlay, 2014). There is an emphasis on refusing the dichotomy of subject/object and recognising that objects are only contextually perceptible (Creswell, 2013). The distinguishing features of a phenomenologist's viewpoint are:

- A belief in the importance, and in a sense the primacy, of subjective consciousness;
- An understanding of consciousness as active as meaning bestowing; and,
- A claim that there are certain essential structures to consciousness of which we gain direct knowledge by a certain kind of reflection.

<div align="right">(Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p. 22)</div>

As phenomenology is long-enduring and ever-evolving, there is significant variance from phenomenologist to phenomenologist in terms of their perspective and phenomenological praxis. For example, Husserl transitioned from realistic phenomenology (focusing on metaphysical realism) in his early years to constitutive phenomenology (emphasising the processes of conscious life) in his later years; Heidegger possessed both an existential and hermeneutic outlook; and, Sartre and de Beauvoir were adherents to existential phenomenology (Embree, 1998; Moran, 2002).

Phenomenology in all its diversity presents a range of opportunities and challenges to philosophers and researchers. From a reading of phenomenological literature, it emerges that phenomenology is not simple, static, or solitary. For example, Smith (1970) advocates for phenomenology being multi-faceted, while more recently Finlay (2012) acknowledges the diversity of the field. I would contend that phenomenology may have the potential to co-exist with a range of other philosophical perspectives, and perhaps offer mutual enrichment.

One such philosophical perspective is feminism, with which phenomenology can be meaningfully combined to elucidate the lived experiences of women and other marginalised groups. Feminism – whether it be on a philosophical, political, or practical level – is centrally concerned with equality and autonomy for all, aiming to activate meaningful change and empower marginalised groups and individuals through advocacy (Newbold, 1995; Olesen, 2008). It seeks to pursue egalitarianism within society, with a primary focus on gendered equalities (Hannam, 2007; Maguire, 2008) – although, more recently, feminism has evolved to acknowledge the importance of intersectionality, which acknowledges the relation of gender/sex to other pertinent sociocultural frameworks of race, nationality, ethnicity, culture, sexuality, class, and ability (Gines, 2011; Lykke, 2010). There is a strong emphasis on reflexivity (Stanley & Wise, 1993). At the heart of feminist research are relationships with participants (Olesen, 2008) and ensuring their needs are met. Letherby (2003) argues that research has traditionally served the researcher rather than the researched. Feminism seeks to combat this exploitation by engaging compassionately and ethically with

marginalised groups and offering them the chance to express themselves, articulate their experiences, and seek out empowerment. There is an overt emphasis on ensuring the best interests of the participants are prioritised and properly met.

These goals of feminism are well-aligned with that of phenomenology. As Stanley and Wise (1993) explain, there is an emphasis in feminism on lived experience – particularly that of women. This experiential focus marries well to phenomenology's aim to elucidate how people live in the world and with particular phenomena. There is also an emphasis in feminism and feminist research on acting empathetically and compassionately, which is mirrored in phenomenology; phenomenologists are encouraged to sustain openness, sensitivity, and compassionate responsiveness (Finlay, 2014). Phenomenologists also must negotiate between "being inside and outside" (Finlay, 2014, p. 124), which is also inherent in feminist research (Oakley, 1995). Returning to feminism's focus on reflexivity, this also this matches well to phenomenology, which is inherently self-questioning (Natanson, 1973), encouraging mindfulness on part of the researcher (Finlay, 2014).

I selected a feminist phenomenological approach as a component of my mixed research study because it was well-aligned with my paradigmatic viewpoint, my theoretical lens, and the research issues at hand. Phenomenology seeks to illuminate lived experience from the perspectives of those who have lived or are living it, whilst embracing subjectivity. There is also an implicit emphasis on the participants – for example, Leedy and Ormrod (2013, p. 145) write, "The actual implementation of a phenomenological study is as much in the hands of the participants as in the hands of the researcher." This aligns well with the participatory paradigm and a feminist theoretical lens, which each seek to serve the researched and give voice to participants (Hoyt & Kennedy, 2008; Letherby, 2003; Newton & Parfitt, 2011; Tolman, 2012). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) assert that phenomenology has value when seeking to explore affective, emotional, and intense human experiences. There was evidence throughout the literature review to support girls' engagement with media being personal and emotive, which further led to phenomenology being deemed fitting.

There are also other ways in which phenomenology connects to my research focus. Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen & Razavieh (2009) state that the first task of a phenomenology is to identify an issue for which an exploration of shared lived experience is necessary. Much of the research and social commentary in this area to date has been adult-centric. Few studies have given explicit voice to the participants' experience at any great length. Therefore, I considered the application of feminist phenomenology to be of value to this area. Danaher

and Briod (2005) clarify that the purpose of phenomenological research with children is to strengthen our sense of what it means to be a child, and live in the world as a child, rather than categorising or explaining children's behaviour. The primary aim of the present study was to establish a child-centric examination of lived experience that would give voice to girls who were engaged with media, and pursue an understanding of what it means to be a girl in the present cultural climate. Therefore, as my study aimed to focus on exploring the perspectives and experiences of young girls, a feminist phenomenological approach (on a philosophical and methodological level) seemed optimal as it would allow me to engage with young girls and elicit their viewpoints.

Once I established that feminist phenomenology was philosophically suited to my participatory worldview and my feminist theoretical lens, I focused on constructing an appropriate research design. As I engaged in translating phenomenological theory into practice with my research topic in mind, I chose to pursue a feminist phenomenological design with a hermeneutic emphasis. This was well aligned with several components of my study. Firstly, it correlated with how my study was set out theoretically and conceptually. A key aspect of Heidegger's philosophy was his recognition of the critical interplay between an individual and their lifeworld (Lopez & Willis, 2004). This corresponds with the conceptual framework which I established in Chapter Three. Furthermore, hermeneutic phenomenology permits the application of a theoretical stance or conceptual framework. On this matter, Lopez and Willis (2004) explain:

> Hermeneutic phenomenology… does not negate the use of a theoretical orientation or conceptual framework as a component of inquiry. A theoretical approach can be used to focus the inquiry where research is needed and is used to make decisions about sample, subjects, and research questions to be addressed. Use of an orienting framework by the researcher is also a way of making explicit study assumptions and the researcher's frame of reference. (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 730)

In the context of my study, my feminist theoretical lens and my Bronfenbrennian conceptual framework were imperative elements which helped guide the development of my study.

Furthermore, in terms of its phenomenological design, my study took shape based on van Manen's (1990) writings as well as Finlay's (2009; 2014). Several sources of data informed the research questions in order to best achieve a holistic understanding of the phenomenon. All data generated were analysed extensively in order to draw out important themes and

reveal the essence of the phenomenon, which is integral to phenomenological pursuits (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The data sources and how they were analysed will be discussed in the final section of this chapter: 'Methods of data generation'. Throughout the study, I was committed to openness, sensitivity, and genuine curiosity (Finlay, 2014). This involved situating myself in relation to the research and directly addressing prejudices and subjectivities. This was an ongoing process which demanded substantial dedication to reflexivity. I became very conscious of the preconceptions I possessed, whether they were sourced from personal or professional experience, or academic knowledge (e.g. insight gained via my literature review). I strove to retain this consciousness throughout the course of my study. In addition to this, I also continued examining my ways of thinking, seeing, and understanding as the research progressed and I accrued more knowledge from a multitude of perspectives. Essentially, I worked to ensure that openness, sensitivity, and curiosity were embedded in the research process and embraced by myself as a researcher.

**Social semiotics**

The other central component of my methodological approach is social semiotics, which was selected as an appropriate way to frame and devise my media analysis. Social semiotics belongs to the broader area of semiotics, which is a critical, wide-reaching, and highly influential field that provides the means to explore the world around us in-depth. Semiotic systems pervade life as we know it and range from broad systems (such as semiotic systems of language) to narrower systems (such as the semiotic system of interior design). At its most basic level, semiotics focuses on studying signs, which are considered the "basic-building blocks of communication" (Lowe, 1995). On the importance of signs, Chandler (2007, pp. 10-11) writes, "We learn from semiotics that we live in a world of signs and we have no way of understanding anything except through signs and the codes into which they are organised."

Semiotics is wide-reaching with relevance to all societal systems and, within the context of media research, all types of media and communication (Jensen, 2012). Within semiotics exist a diversity of perspectives – for example, Peircian semiotics, Barthesian semiotics, or Saussurian semiotics (Kress, 2009; van Zoonen, 1994). What emerged from semiotic theory was social semiotics, which has since evolved to become a highly influential approach to studying culture and communication (Jensen, 2012). The field of social semiotics has a strong interdisciplinary basis (Jensen, 2012; Roderick, 2014) and, as such, it is considerably diverse in terms of how it is engaged with and put into practice. Social semioticians draw from traditional semiotic theory and, in particular, the work of Halliday (Roderick, 2014; van

Leewen, 2005). In referring to Halliday's work, there tend to be two primary approaches – one which focuses on the linguistic perspective of Halliday's theory, or one which focuses on the semiotic perspective (Kress, 2009). Social semiotics also focuses on relating semiological analysis to social theory. Van Leeuwen (2005) stresses that social semiotic analysis cannot exist independently and that it can only come into its own when it is fully engaged with social theory, and when a researcher is immersed not only in semiotic methods and concepts but also some other field of relevance. For example, a social semiology of cinema would require grounding in not only social semiotic concepts and methods, but also those deriving from a relevant social theory (such as feminist theory, queer theory, etc.) and film theory as well.

Rather than pursuing signs as one would in traditional semiotics, social semiotic analysis focuses on "socially meaningful and entire processes" (Iedema, 2001, p. 187), or texts. Iedema (2001) distinguishes between signs and texts, clarifying that signs represent an analytical category while texts are social categories. Texts are therefore defined as "the semiotic manifestation of material social processes" (Iedema, 2001, p. 187). While traditional semiotics focuses on *signs,* social semioticians prefer the term *resources.* This is because it avoids the assumption that signs' meanings are pre-determined and unaffected by how they are utilised (Van Leeuwen, 2005). Resources might include colour, lighting, texture, gaze, point of view, facial expressions, or bodily orientation. These resources have histories and contextual origins, deriving from specific interests and purposes (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). Furthermore, they are not static or objective – rather, they hold a fluid, subjective status. Jewitt and Oyama (2001, p. 136) assert that a key emphasis of social semiotic analysis is that resources have a dual purpose – they are simultaneously "the products of cultural histories and the cognitive resources we use to create meaning in the production and interpretation of visual and other messages". Social semiotic analysis also emphasises multimodality in communicative artefacts, acknowledging that visual resources rarely exist in isolation (Rose, 2013). As well as preferring the term *resources,* social semioticians focus on *meaning potential* instead of *meaning* (Roderick, 2014).

Social semiotics is an important field which fuses the social with the semiotic, demands reflexivity and critical awareness, and which has value for researchers who wish to approach analysis contextually and with specificity. I chose a social semiotic approach for several reasons. Firstly, it aligned well with my paradigmatic worldview, theoretical lens, and phenomenological stance as it is grounded in subjectivity. Secondly, I was not seeking to conduct an analysis which was broad or generalisable – rather, I wanted one which was

contextually specific and relevant to the girls participating in my study. Thirdly, I wanted my analysis to be politically and culturally focused in keeping with my participatory worldview and feminist viewpoint.

Social semiotics applies semiotic theories in conjunction with specific social theories. I employed feminist theory to frame the analysis, which strengthened its connection to the overarching dimensions of my study. The design of the analysis is discussed in greater depth in the final section of this chapter, which looks at methods of data generation with emphases on the setting, participants, and procedure that shaped the study.

## Methods of data generation

The previous section provided an extensive account of my methodological approach and an exploration of mixed research, phenomenology, and social semiotics. This section looks at the fourth dimension of research as defined by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011): methods of data generation. The methods linked to data generation are critical as they are part of the procedure of the research and influence the knowledge attained. The driving question where methods are concerned is: *Which methods should I select to generate relevant and meaningful data?* As such, this section describes how data were generated throughout the study. It looks at the setting within which the study was situated, the sample of participants, the study's procedure, and how data were analysed. As previously stated, my study's ethical framework forms the focus for Chapter Five.

There are several key objectives which were aligned with research questions. These objectives and questions emerged from the literature review and together they informed and guided the study. The overarching objective for this study was to engage in a holistic examination of the relationship forged between young girls and their preferred media. The central question for this study was: "What are the individual and collective lived experiences of girls aged 7-13 in their personal media contexts?" The overarching objective and central question were collectively informed by a variety of sub-objectives and sub-questions (see Figure 1.1). To achieve thorough and precise answers to these questions, a mixed research approach was established with a variety of associated data sources. These included interviews, questionnaires, an analysis of relevant media, and home tours. The data generation was sectioned into phases which spanned the course of a full school year. This was for procedural purposes and was also set up to facilitate the growth of strong working relationships with the participants, and to accomplish in-depth data generation.

Subsequently, the generation of data through multiple sources generated a substantial amount of data pertaining to the research questions.

The following sub-section provides a description of the setting within which these participants were situated. I will then proceed to introduce the participants themselves, accompanied by an overview of how they contributed to data generation throughout the course of the study.

**Settings**

The study took place in multiple settings within a Western Australian coastal city, including a primary school and the homes of several of its students. Seaglass Primary School is located in a medium-to-high socioeconomic area and is a non-governmental co-educational school espousing Christian values. At the time of the study, there were a total of 140 student enrolments. The school was one of several approached regarding potential participation in the study; Seaglass Primary's principal, Ryan, voiced an avid interest in the project. Following a meeting to discuss the nature of the research and Seaglass's prospective participation, Ryan and I agreed that the school setting was well-suited to the project and that there was noticeable interest from fellow Seaglass staff. Hence, Seaglass Primary was selected as the site at which the study would commence.

Seaglass Primary's Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) value stood at 1048, with 9% of the students in the bottom quarter, 66% in the middle quarters (32% lower-middle, 34% upper middle) and 25% in the top quarter (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2013). The ICSEA is a measure which facilitates equitable and meaningful assessments to be made across Australian school settings. Information provided by ICSEA includes the school's location, its regional/remote/metropolitan status, and the proportion of Indigenous versus non-Indigenous students enrolled (ACARA, 2013).

While the school principal has observed a recent shift in the school community which has seen an increase in more affluent families enrolling, Seaglass Primary does prioritise offering scholarships and bursaries to less advantaged students. There is religious diversity – it is not compulsory for students attending to follow the school's Christian faith. The student body also comprises a mix of local and non-local students, with some having relocated from other countries or interstate to attend the school.

The school promotes four core values that align with their Christian faith: compassion, respect, resilience, and excellence. Their principal believes these values to be generally accessible as well, which he considers important given that not all students attending Seaglass Primary are of Christian faith. In 2013, which was the year the study commenced, the school had introduced an iPad program, which became very salient in the curriculum. Every student from Year 4 upwards was required to own an iPad, while the younger students were permitted to use school iPads. The Year 4-7 students could use their iPads as a personal resource outside of school hours, but during school hours, use of the iPads was restricted to academic activities only.

The homes visited were spread around the city in a variety of surrounding suburbs, which ranged from low-medium socioeconomic status to high socioeconomic status. The family structures included two households led by single parents and five led by married couples.

**Participants**

The participants were students, staff, and parents from Seaglass Primary school. The Years 2 – 6/7 classrooms were involved. Within a Western Australian educational context, this means that the students were aged between 7 and 13 years. This section will introduce the various participants who elected to engage with the study.

### *Staff participants*

As the study included an examination of educational contexts with which the girls were engaged, one key priority was to converse with educators. A detailed account of the procedures surrounding obtaining consent is provided in Chapter 5. Table 4.3 provides an overview of each staff participant, their position at Seaglass Primary, and their experience in education.

Table 4.3: Staff participant profiles

| Participants | Position | Teaching history (as at December, 2013) |
|---|---|---|
| Ryan | Principal | • Twenty years in education<br>• Three years at Seaglass Primary |
| Elizabeth | Year 2 teacher | • Sixteen years in primary education<br>• Additional experience in tertiary education<br>• One year at Seaglass Primary |
| Meredith | Year 3/4 tandem teacher | • New graduate teacher |

| | | • | First year teaching at Seaglass Primary |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sarah | Year 5 tandem teacher | • | Twelve years in education |
| Jacqueline | Year 6/7 teacher | • | Twenty-seven years in education |
| | | • | Six years at Seaglass Primary |

As per Table 4.3, some of the educators were 'tandem teachers' with a split teaching workload – i.e. they shared their class with another teacher. These participants were involved in the educator interviews, and also contributed to subsequent phases in terms of facilitating the student interview schedule and assisting with communication between myself and the students and parents.

### *Student participants*

As there was an aim to establish a wide age-range in the student sample, female students from Years 2 – 7 were approached regarding potential participation. They were provided with insight into the study during class time – further ethical issues are discussed in Chapter Five. Table 4.4 provides initial insight into the girls involved in the study, including their year groups, ages (which ranged from 7 years to 13 years), and which phases they participated in. Fourteen girls participated in Phase 2; thirteen took part in Phase 4; and seven took part in Phase 5. More comprehensive information regarding the girls will be provided in Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight.

Table 4.4: Student participant profiles

| Participant information | | | Phases of participation | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Participants | Year Group | Age (as at 01/12/2013) | 2 | 4 | 5 |
| Hayley | 2 | 7 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Abigail | 3 | 8 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Summer | 4 | 9 | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Lily | 4 | 9 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Kat | 5 | 10 | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Sam | 5 | 10 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Roxy | 5 | 10 | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Michelle | 5 | 11 | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Alana | 6 | 12 | ✓ | | |
| Aisha | 7 | 12 | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Rosline | 7 | 12 | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Whippet | 7 | 12 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lola | 7 | 13 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Tuscany | 7 | 13 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

In total, 14 girls consented to participate in the study overall, although the retention rate decreased as the phases of research progressed. This was due to the phased structure of the research and the ongoing decline of parental permission – for example, a higher number of parents provided consent during Phase 2 (Student/Parent Questionnaires), but fewer were interested in permitting their daughters to engage in Phase 4 (Student Interviews), and an even smaller number were willing to consent to Phase 4 (Home Tours). This is attributable to the perceived increased demands associated with Phases 4 and 5 – for example, Phase 4 involved the girls taking time away from regular class activities, whilst Phase 5 required that I visit the girls and their families at home.

### *Parent/guardian participants*

In order to develop a holistic study which would maximise insight into the girls' lived contexts, it was important to work with their parents and/or guardians. Table 4.5 provides an overview of the parents who engaged with the second and fifth phases of research. It can be seen that seventeen parents consented to completing questionnaires in Phase 2, whilst only seven agreed to take part in the home tours and parent interviews involved in Phase 5.

Table 4.5: Parent/guardian participant profiles

| Participant information | | | Phases participated in | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Participant(s) | Child | Relation to child | 2 | 5 |
| Patricia | Hayley | Mother | ✓ | ✓ |
| Elisa and Alan | Abigail | Mother and father | ✓ | ✓ |
| Carrie | Summer | Mother | ✓ | |
| Helena | Lily | Mother | ✓ | ✓ |
| Jade | Kat | Mother | ✓ | |
| Kira | Sam | Mother | ✓ | ✓ |
| Billie | Roxy | Mother | ✓ | |
| Lila | Michelle | Mother | ✓ | |
| Charlotte | Alana | Mother | ✓ | |
| Grace | Aisha | Mother | ✓ | |
| Lee | Rosline | Mother | ✓ | |
| Amanda | Whippet | Mother | ✓ | ✓ |
| Hannah and Dave | Lola | Mother and father | ✓ | ✓ |

| Carla and Marie | Tuscany | Mother and grandmother | ✓ | ✓ |

**Data generation and analysis**

This section focuses on the procedures of generation and analysis as regards the questionnaires, interviews, and media analysis. The data were generated over the course of a full school year across five key phases. These phases were designed to permit the gradual evolution of the study. The first phase involved interviewing the principal and teachers, and facilitated access to the site and an initial understanding of the school context. This was followed by issuing questionnaires to the girls and their parents, which facilitated my understanding of these participants and their various contexts. The media analysis was the third phase but ran throughout the course of the study due to the complexities of social semiotic analysis, and gave me a sense of the girls' media contexts. The fourth phase involved interviewing the girls in-depth, which extended my understanding of their identities and their contexts, as well as facilitating an exploration of their lived experiences and perspectives. This was further evolved in the fifth phase, which involved home tours with the girls and interviews with their parents, which provided rich and detailed data to flesh out my understanding. In sum, the procedural design of the research was as follows:

- **Phase 1:** School-based interviews with educators
- **Phase 2:** Questionnaires issued to students and parents
- **Phase 3:** Media analysis
- **Phase 4:** School-based, in-depth interviews with students
- **Phase 5:** Student-guided/documented home tours; home-based interviews with parents

*Questionnaires*

Questionnaires comprise a collection of carefully written questions which intend to collect data from participants regarding an issue of interest (McLean, 2006). There is some ambiguity regarding what a 'questionnaire' comprises – for example, some use the term to refer to questionnaires issued by post, whilst others use it in reference to questionnaires administered face-to-face (McLean, 2006). Nonetheless, they are a valuable tool for gaining initial insight into an issue. Additional insight can then be gleaned through other methods.

The questionnaires utilised in this study were created for this study and were issued to the girls through their class groups, in the format of a hard-copy questionnaire for them to take home and return at a later date. As the specific procedure involved in issuing the

questionnaires pertains to ethical considerations, this is discussed more extensively in Chapter Five.

One important aim of the questionnaires was to gauge the parents' and girls' perspectives of the level to which girls were engaging with media content, as well as their preferred media. After conversing with staff members and then meeting with the students, questionnaires were issued with an intention to inform the first sub-question of the study: *What history do girls have with the media, including past and present consumption?*

The questionnaires were also intended as an efficient way to enable the girls and their parents to provide some preliminary insight regarding their views and experiences. This insight facilitated the analysis of their favoured media and thus assisted in understanding their media contexts. The questionnaires also provided a gentle yet informative introduction to myself and my research which gave the girls and their parents the opportunity to consider the subject matter and whether they were willing to be involved. It also helped the girls understand the nature of the research and it began the process of eliciting their voices.

Responses were sought from students and their parent(s)/guardian(s). The questionnaire items for girls included a mix of closed-ended questions (e.g. "Do you have a television in your bedroom?") and open-ended questions ("What does the word 'media' mean to you?"). A full list of the questions issued to students is provided in Appendix B and questions issued to parents are in Appendix C.

Following return of the questionnaires by students to their classroom teachers, the questionnaires were sent to administrative staff for secure holding. They were then returned to me so that I could scan each questionnaire and upload the files to NVivo10. The data generated by the questionnaires were analysed for patterns and trends. Closed-ended questions were subject to simple statistical analysis (e.g. how many girls had Internet access?) while open-ended answers were inductively coded. Inductive analysis involves working from the data to establish conclusions (Schwandt, 2007) and in this case involved coding via five key steps:

1. **Preliminary coding:** searching for phrases which were relevant and significant to the focus of the inquiry.
2. **Categorisation:** arranging these phrases into major organisational categories.
3. **Sub-categorisation:** creating meaningful sub-categories.

4. **Eliciting themes:** seeking out meaningful themes via the significant phrases and their categories.

5. **Illustrating themes:** finding illustrative quotes to associate with the themes.

Findings from the questionnaires are presented in Chapter Seven.

### *Interviews*

There were three types of interviews involved in this study – educator interviews, student interviews, and parent interviews. All of these interviews were semi-structured in nature as they comprised a standard set of questions but had an emergent emphasis to facilitate conversation (Bloor & Wood, 2006). Each interview was subject to audio-recording. Following data collection, the recordings were uploaded to NVivo10 and transcribed. Analysis involved inductive coding of the transcripts as per the five steps delineated above. During this analysis, a number of themes emerged. Findings from the interviews are presented in Chapters Six and Eight.

### *Educator interviews*

The focus of the educator interviews was to determine the school community's role in educating girls about the media and their perspectives on the issues at hand, thereby informing the fifth sub-question: *What role do schools and families play in regards to the relationship forged between girls and media?* The principal and five teachers consented to be interviewed, with each interview taking place in a private administration office. Set questions for the educator interviews are presented in Appendix D. Some of the questions included: "What does media mean to your students?" and "What media education exists at Seaglass Primary/within your classroom?" The interviews with the teachers and principal also aimed to provide insight into the classroom contexts and students. This was a valuable component of the study's ethical procedures, and thus will be discussed in Chapter Five.

As the educator interview transcripts were analysed and subsequently coded, the themes became more concrete and detailed and were linked to specific quotes from the educators which were indicative of certain perspectives and sentiments based on their experiences and experiential reflections. The coding schema for the educator interviews is given in Chapter 6, in Table 6.3.

### *Student interviews*

Two types of student interviews were conducted – there were school-based interviews involving a sample of fourteen girls, and later on there were student-guided/documented

home tours utilising an interview format and involving a sample of six girls. In addition to the audio-recording, the interviews were photographed and the girls were invited to contribute work samples (e.g. self-portraits). The content was uploaded to NVivo10 for analysis. The coding schema for the student interviews is given in Chapter 8, in Table 8.1. The specific procedural and analytical details for the school-based and home-based interviews are provided below.

*School-based student interviews*

Following return of the questionnaires, the girls were approached about their interest in the interviews. I sat down briefly with each year level to discuss what the interviews involved, after which consent was obtained. The aim of the interviews was to gain an in-depth understanding of each girl's relationship with the media, including how she perceives certain issues, how she feels about media content, and what she would like to see in the media.

The interviews were semi-structured and flexible. Semi-structured interviews utilise a partial set of questions but have a strong degree of flexibility, thus providing an opportunity for elaboration on the given questions or to follow different tangents as they become relevant (Carley-Baxter, 2008). This was seen as a fitting way to engage with the girls given their age, and gather preliminary information which would give focus to the interviews. The set questions were intended to gather preliminary information. For example, one area of focus was each girls' understanding of media, where each girl was asked, "Can you tell me what 'media' means?" Once the girls provided a definition, we discussed their definition and whether they had any questions. Other set questions focused on obtaining information about each girls' sense of self. For example, each girl was asked to describe herself and assign a name to her 'character'. This facilitated a sense of familiarity and rapport, which then supported our dialogues. A full list of the set questions is presented in Appendix E. The questions were open-ended to permit the girls freedom and ownership. Furthermore, the girls were encouraged to direct the interview and decide what they wished to focus on. This kind of flexibility and negotiation is a worthwhile pursuit with child participants as it embraces their competencies, interests, and preferences (Einarsdottir, 2005). The overall intention was to let the girls speak to their experiences. As is the case with open-ended questioning, the priority was accessing the perspective of the girls (Patton, 1990).

The interviews aimed to inform the fourth sub-question: *How do girls perceive, understand, and relate to media content?* Furthermore, they were conducted with a feminist approach that emphasises asking, listening, and avidly positioning the girls as narrators of their

experiences (Tolman, 2012). The interviews involved materials that were intended to foster engagement, reflection, and discussion. These included:

- Magazines the girls reported reading;
- Music videos;
- Clips from television shows;
- Examples of advertising; and
- The girls' iPads and/or any other personal media devices (e.g. iPhones, laptops, iPods).

Some questions were re-phrased based on the age or cognitive ability of the participants. The interviews aimed to promote open discussion and conversation between myself and each of the participants. Further attention is paid to this in Chapter Five, as it pertains to the study's ethical considerations.

In keeping with the participatory/feminist phenomenological approach which underpinned the study, follow-up interviews were conducted where I reconvened with each participant to review a summary of their interview. The account was presented in a personalised PowerPoint designed to be accessible for each child based on their age. The PowerPoints presented a narrative about the participant accompanied by pictures relevant to each girl's interests and passions. After discussing the purpose of the follow-up interview, I asked each girl to:

- Listen and/or read through the narrative;
- Verbally reflect on how she felt about the narrative;
- Consider whether she thought anything needed to be changed or added;
- Decide whether she felt comfortable or not with the narrative;
- Contribute any final thoughts regarding her contribution to the study; and
- Reflect on her overall feelings about the research process and her role in it.

As engaging in these reflective processes with the girls was also considered to be a core ethical procedure, it is discussed in greater depth in Chapter Five.

The recordings were listened to repeatedly in order to ensure immersion in and familiarity with the data. This derives from the phenomenological tradition of dwelling with data (Finlay, 2014). The recordings were also transcribed, with each transcription being re-read

and dissected to uncover the essence of the phenomenon. The focus of the analysis was to seek out the essence of the phenomenon – that it, what it means to be a girl living with media. In order to seek this out, several specific techniques were applied (see Table 4.6 for examples). These included:

- 'Epoche' – the reflexive process of bracketing;
- 'Reduction' – returning to and isolating the phenomenon;
- 'Horizontalisation' – examining all data equally and then arranging into themes; and,
- 'Imaginative variation' – viewing data from various perspectives and angles.

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016)

Table 4.6: Phenomenological analytical techniques and procedures

| Analytical technique | Procedure | Example |
|---|---|---|
| Epoche | Reflexive bracketing | I maintained a strong consciousness of myself as an individual and as a researcher, with emphasis placed on acknowledging my perspectives. |
| Reduction | Returning to and isolating the phenomenon | Throughout all phases of data generation, the central question was referred back to. The pursuit of the essence was always a key priority through planning, data generation, and data analysis. |
| Horizontalisation | Examining data equally; arranging into themes | All data generated were considered equally. Part of the analysis was developing categories and sub-categories, and then eliciting and illustrating themes. |
| Imaginative variation | Viewing data from various perspectives | Various participants (students, educators, parents) were engaged in the study, which took place across different settings (school, home). This allowed me to consider diverse perspectives. |

As the analysis proceeded, individual narratives were also created in order to provide in-depth insight into certain aspects of the girls' experiences.

*Student-guided/documented home tours*

The aim of the home tours was to reach a clear conception of the families' media environments, the girls' own media environments, and to obtain a more in-depth sense of the girls' emerging identities. In doing so, the following research sub-questions were addressed:

- *What role do schools and families play in the relationship between girls and media?;*
- *How do girls perceive, understand, and relate to media content?; and,*
- *What do girls have to say about their experiences and perspectives regarding media?*

The girls engaged in another interview in conjunction with a tour of their home, which they were primarily responsible for guiding and documenting through taking photos. By giving the girls this responsibility, it ensured that the tours had personal relevance from the girls' perspectives. This also reinforced the study's child-centricity. The girls' parents were interviewed following the conclusion of the tours.

This kind of approach is growing in prevalence and is seen as advantageous in child-centric research (Einarsdottir, 2005). My interest in the home tours originated from reviewing Steele and Browne's (1995) study, which focused on the development and expression of identity. Steele and Browne investigated media in the context of adolescents' everyday lives by exploring their room culture. In doing so, they were able to look closely at how their participants interacted with the media in order to construct their identities and personal worlds. More recently, many early childhood focused studies have included tours supported by child photography as a research method. For example, Einarsdottir (2005) utilised digital photography during child-led tours of a playschool environment. She advocates for the method as a way of enhancing children's power, freedom, and expression of perspective (Einarsdottir, 2005). Similarly, Merewether and Fleet (2014) included child-led and child-photographed tours of indoor and outdoor early childhood settings. Merewether and Fleet note that the children were enthusiastic about the method and that it led to the generation of rich data.

The home tours involved in this study applied similar techniques to those seen in the aforementioned studies. Prior to the commencement of data generation, I employed convenience sampling based on who was willing and available to accommodate the home tours. I drew from the previous stage's sample of young girls and selected a smaller group of six girls and their parent(s)/guardian(s) who voiced interested and subsequently consented to participate.

The aim of this stage was to establish what kind of media environment the girls are immersed in at home (e.g. how many computers and televisions the family has, and where they are located) and how the girls' bedrooms reflected their ongoing identity formation and

their bonds with media. The tours involved the girls guiding me around their homes, with a semi-structured interview format, accompanied by an audio recorder and digital photography of relevant settings at the family's discretion.

A semi-structured format was selected due to the time constraints. The families who agreed to engage in the tours often had only limited time to do so – most of them could only spare one to two hours after school or on the weekends. Therefore, with the needs of these families at heart, I designed a semi-structured procedure which would allow the tours and parent interviews to run efficiently. Set questions for the home tours (presented in Appendix F) included items such as: "How do you use media at home?". These set questions were helpful in ensuring a certain degree of focus; however, the girls were free to shape the tours so that they were personally relevant. They were encouraged to focus on what was most meaningful to them, thereby reinforcing the study's participatory emphasis. Ultimately, the semi-structured format was selected to ensure focus and efficiency to aid the families' needs, whilst freedom of expression was encouraged to support the participatory/child-centric nature of the study.

### Parent interviews

The parent interviews took place immediately following the home tours. These interviews were mainly targeted at seeking an answer to the sub-question: *What role do schools and families play in regards to the relationship forged between girls and media?* However, I also invited parents to share their insights regarding two other sub-questions:

- *What history do girls have with the media, including past and present consumption?*
- *What is the nature of the media that girls are accessing?*

Seven parents consented to participate in the interviews. Interview questions that were asked of these parents are presented in Appendix G and comprise items such as: "How important is media in the life of your daughter?" and "Do you talk to your daughter about the media?" Like the other interviews, these were subject to audio-recording. The recordings were transcribed, and these transcriptions formed the base for the five-part inductive analysis technique. Findings from the parent interviews are primarily presented in Chapter Six, as is the coding schema (see Table 6.6).

*Media analysis*

The purpose of the media analysis was to examine media accessed by the girls and, in doing so, establish the contextual nature of this media. The analysis engaged a social semiotic framework and involved an assessment of media which were relevant and meaningful to the girls at the time of the study as indicated in the girls' questionnaire and interview responses.

After the return of the questionnaires, I engaged in an initial assessment of the types of media and what they comprised. Samples were drawn out and saved for use during the student interviews. These included favoured magazines, music videos, clips from television shows, and examples of advertising. It was also decided, based on a review of the questionnaires and conversations with staff, that the girls would be invited to bring along their iPads and/or any other personal media devices (e.g. iPhones, laptops, iPods) to share with me.

After the interviews took place, I engaged in a thorough social semiotic analysis of the girls' most favoured media. This was done for several reasons. Firstly, I wanted to prioritise speaking with the girls and hearing their perspectives before analysing the media myself, so as to avoid entering the interviews with any personal prejudices or preconceived notions. In keeping with phenomenological practices, the knowledge I attained during the first phase was bracketed out and revisited reflexively throughout the interview process. Secondly, while the information provided via the questionnaires was of immense value, I wanted to gain deeper insight into the girls' media preferences. It was ultimately through our conversations that I finalised the sample for analysis.

The questionnaires revealed a broad range of media interests possessed by the girls. Viewing/engagement habits were also established, as were some preliminary insights into how this was mediated by their parent(s)/guardian(s) and/or teacher(s). Additional insight gained throughout the interview process led me to focus on the genres of **magazines** and **music videos**, both of which the girls valued deeply. I chose to narrow this down to samples which were from 2013, the year in which the study took place, to maintain optimal topical relevance. Table 4.7 provides a summary of the selected samples.

Table 4.7: Media samples selected for analysis

| Magazines | Music videos |
| --- | --- |
| *Total Girl* – February 2013 (Total Girl, 2013a) | *22* by Taylor Swift |
| *Total Girl* – April 2013 (Total Girl, 2013b) | *Roar* by Katy Perry |
| *Total Girl* – June 2013 (Total Girl, 2013c) | *Salute* by Little Mix |
| *Total Girl* – August 2013 (Total Girl, 2013d) | *Work B\*\*\*h* by Britney Spears |
| *Total Girl* – October 2013 (Total Girl, 2013e) | *Wrecking Ball* by Miley Cyrus |
| *Total Girl* – December 2013 (Total Girl, 2013f) | |

Each sample was assessed using several criteria drawn from social semiotic theories and practices. Analysis centred around the three metafunctions (Harrison, 2003) and the construction of femininity. Key questions pertaining to the metafunctions were as follows:

1. The representational metafunction: *What is this about?*
2. The interpersonal metafunction: *How does it engage the viewer?*
3. The compositional metafunction: *How do the representational and interpersonal metafunctions relate to each other and integrate into a meaningful whole?*

In terms of the construction of femininity, four core questions were asked:

1. How does this image represent femininity?
2. What does it seek to communicate about femininity?
3. What resources are used to portray femininity?
4. What narrative(s) of femininity exists?

Then, based on the genre at hand, different dimensions were reviewed and reflected upon. As regards music videos, the dimensions included visuals, lyrics, and music. Magazines were reviewed in terms of their visual resourcing. As well as being explained more extensively in Chapter Seven, the basic structure of the dimensions is summarised in Figure 4.2. The emphatic focus on visual resourcing was based on the importance of visual imagery and messages in today's world (Metros, 2008) and also the girls' descriptions of their engagement with these media, which often began with visual appraisals.
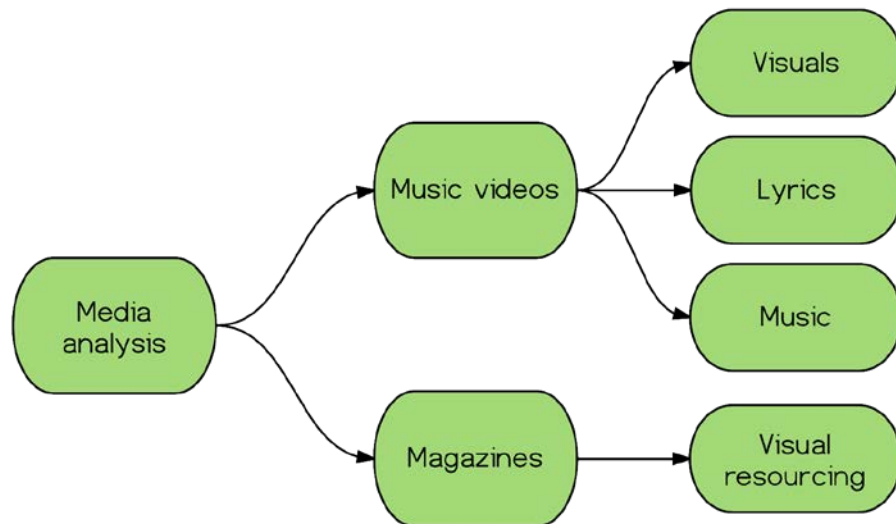
Figure 4.2: The dimensions for analysis of music videos and magazines.

Additional insight into the sampling and analysis of media and how it was conducted via a social semiotic framework is provided in Chapter Seven.

## Trustworthiness

The final aspect which I will attend to in this chapter is that of trustworthiness, which underpinned the procedure and analysis. It is essential that researchers be able to confirm that their account is accurate, trustworthy, and credible (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This is critical to ensure that the research is of sound quality and thus of value to key stakeholders. There were several ways in which I sought to accomplish trustworthiness as the study was conducted.

As trustworthiness is linked to the quality of research (Castle, 2012), it is worth noting the different approaches that exist. Quality in qualitative research is markedly different to that in quantitative research. Emphasis is placed on manageability, as per the following statement from Flick:

> In qualitative research, discussions about quality in research are not so much based on the idea of standardization and control, as this seems incompatible with many of the methods used here. Quality is rather seen as an issue of how to manage it. (Flick, 2007b, pp. 61)

To ensure that my research was of a sound standard, I continually reflected on and assessed the quality of my research via the three sets of criteria delineated by Creswell (2008). These

include Lincoln's (1995) philosophical criteria, Creswell's (1998) procedural criteria, and Richardson's (2000) participatory and advocacy criteria. Table 4.9 presents these criteria and my evaluation of their relevance to my study. By referring to these three sets, I was able to achieve a comprehensive and sound approach to trustworthiness. I have also drawn out key examples in the sub-sections to follow, including those related to the application of reflexivity, member-checking, peer review, triangulation, and contextual emphasis in this study.

**Researcher reflexivity**

Researcher reflexivity is key in studies which take a feminist and/or participatory stance. Reflexivity is defined as the process of critical reflection on the self as both the inquirer and respondent within the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 2008). In evaluating my role as researcher, I would like to begin by acknowledging that I was a primary instrument for data generation and analysis. As the goal of this study was to seek out a deep understanding of girls' relationships with media by working with students, parents, and educators, it was essential that I was adaptive and responsive in my interactions. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) identify this adaptiveness and responsiveness as a major strength for researchers seeking to attain understanding. They also recognise the value of a researcher's ability to expand their understanding through verbal and nonverbal communication, to process information immediately, to clarify and summarise content, to delve deeper, and to conduct member-checking (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). There are evident disadvantages to a researcher engaging themselves as primary instrument. Bias is a major issue which researchers must attend to consciously and proactively (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Table 4.8: Evaluating via quality criteria

| Set | Criteria | Evaluation |
|---|---|---|
| Creswell's procedural criteria | Rigorous data collection | There were multiple means of data generation spread across five strategically developed stages of research. |
| | Consistent with philosophical assumptions | The philosophical assumptions of mixed research, phenomenology, and semiotics were examined. I negotiated the intricacies of pursuing a blended methodology as there were areas of alignment but also tensions that had to be resolved. |
| | Employs tradition of inquiry | The study employed traditions of mixed research by pursuing a blended/integrated methodology. The traditions of phenomenological inquiry and social semiotic inquiry were also observed. |
| | Starts with focus on central phenomenon | The central phenomenon – girls and media – was emphatically focused on throughout the design and delivery of the study, as well as the writing of this thesis. |
| | Written persuasively | I have aimed to write in an engaging and compelling fashion. |
| | Multiple levels of analysis | The various data were subject to diverse analytical techniques with different levels of analysis taking place. |
| | Narrative engages the reader | My aim was to develop an engaging narrative which would focus on the girls' and their voices. |
| | Includes strategies to confirm accuracy | Triangulation was employed. Member-checking was also used to ensure the participants could confirm their contributions. |
| Lincoln's philosophical criteria | Positionality | My researcher identity has been stated and referred to throughout this text. |
| | Community | The study focused on the context of Seaglass Primary and focused on the perspectives and experiences of the girls (primarily) and also their parents and educators. |
| | Voice | The elicitation of voice was a key focus of this study. The participants all engaged in member-checking to ensure accurate and agreeable reporting. |
| | Critical subjectivity | I recognise my subjectivity as a researcher. Reflexivity is central to my researcher identity and was a continual point of emphasis. |
| | Reciprocity | I focused on research *with* the girls rather than *on* or *about*. The 'researched' were considered partners in the process and were afforded agency and ownership. |
| | Sacredness of relationships | As above. |
| | Sharing privileges | The participants all received small tokens of appreciation as per Curtin HREC's guidelines – gifts for the girls; thank you cards for the girls, parents, and educators; flowers and chocolates for the school. |
| Richardson's participatory advocacy criteria | Substantive contribution | My study contributes a holistic, context-specific account of how young girls are living with media. A substantive contribution is also made by taking a child-centric approach. |
| | Aesthetic merit | My writing was structured to ensure cohesive organisation and clarity of expression. Furthermore, I intended to create an engaging and meaningful narrative. |
| | Reflexivity | I have engaged in reflexive practices throughout the design and delivery of the study, as well as the writing of this thesis. My writing intends to make my position known to myself and the reader. |
| | Impact | I aimed to write with realism and relevance to the girls' lives with dedicated focus to their voices, perspectives, and experiences. |
| | Expression of reality | Portraying the research realistically was a major priority. I facilitated this by providing contextual descriptions and elaborating on the identities of the participants. Realism was also ensured via member-checking. |

**Member checking**

The study also sought confirmation from its participants. The participants were all asked to review, reflect on, and confirm their contentedness with accounts of their contributions to the research. At this relates significantly to the study's ethical procedures, it will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Five. As will be seen in Chapters Six and Eight, I attempted to write in-depth accounts that would thoroughly illuminate the context for the research and what I uncovered. Finlay (2014) explains:

> Phenomenological research reports tend to demonstrate their scientific rigor and trustworthiness by offering examples and quotations from the data to illustrate points made… examples and quotations make transparent the evidentiary base of any analytical claims. (Finlay, 2014, p. 133)

A substantial amount of examples and quotations were integrated to enrich my writing and provide evidentiary support.

**Peer review**

From the very commencement of this study, peer review has been integral to its continuation and evolution. Supervisory feedback was sought regarding the development and writing of the research. I also presented components of the research at a variety of conferences and, in doing so, sought valuable feedback from my academic community (Dobson, 2013a; Dobson, 2013b; Dobson, 2013c; Dobson, 2013d; Dobson, 2014; Dobson, 2015a; Dobson, 2015b; Dobson, 2015c; Dobson, 2015d).

**Triangulation**

The basic concept driving triangulation is that applying multiple methods will open up several perspectives, thereby enhancing quality (Flick, 2007a). It permits the growth of knowledge across different levels, thereby extending beyond what knowledge might be attained by a singular approach (Flick, 2007a).

Triangulation was a key technique applied throughout the study to enhance trustworthiness. It was employed via gathering multiple sources of data throughout the study as a whole, and also via collecting multiple sources of data throughout certain phases. For example, the first phase sought perspectives from several staff members with varying roles and responsibilities throughout the school. They also possessed diverse educational experience and teaching philosophies. Furthermore, the questionnaires were issued to both students and parents with

some questions being replicated for confirmation. This was mirrored during the final phase, where I conversed with the students and their parent(s)/guardian(s).

**Contextual emphasis**

Due to the nature of the research and the relatively small size of the sample involved, there was no attempt at generalisation in this study. Generalisation posits that a study's findings can be translated universally throughout other contexts or assigned from a smaller population to a larger one (Allan, 2010; Creswell, 2008; Hartas, 2010). Hartas (2010) argues that this has little relevance to educational research where the goal is to understand behaviours and relationships within local contexts. Furthermore, generalisation does not align with phenomenological or semiotic research, where subjectivity is embraced and the examination possesses a very specific and contextual focus. The aim was not to seek broad generalisations, but to establish contextual understandings that would provide deeper insight into the given issues and how they might play out in particular settings.

<div align="center">

**Chapter Summary**

</div>

This chapter has outlined the study's methodology. In doing so, it has looked at the four key dimensions of research which comprise: paradigmatic worldview, theoretical lens, methodological approach, and methods used to generate data. These dimensions relate substantially to researcher identity and the nature of the inquiry. My worldview fused participatory and pragmatic elements, whilst feminism was used as my theoretical lens. The blended methodological approach included feminist phenomenology and social semiotics. Data generation involved questionnaires, interviews, and a media analysis. These were subject to various incarnations of data analysis, which have also been detailed throughout this chapter alongside the important issue of trustworthiness.

Another imperative component of research is ethics. Ethics are significantly applicable to all research, but are particularly crucial where feminist research is concerned. Hence, the following chapter will detail my engagement in ethically literate research practices.

# *Chapter Five*

# *Ethics*

---

## Chapter Introduction

The previous chapter provided an account of my methodology, which included my paradigmatic worldview, theoretical lens, methodological approach, methods of data generation and analysis, and trustworthiness. This chapter is dedicated to ethical issues. As I possess a feminist and participatory focus, I wish to foreground the issue of ethics by featuring a separate and detailed chapter. The chapter will include a discussion regarding the centrality of ethics in research (and, in particular, feminist research) and the application of ethical procedures in my study (see Figure 5.1).
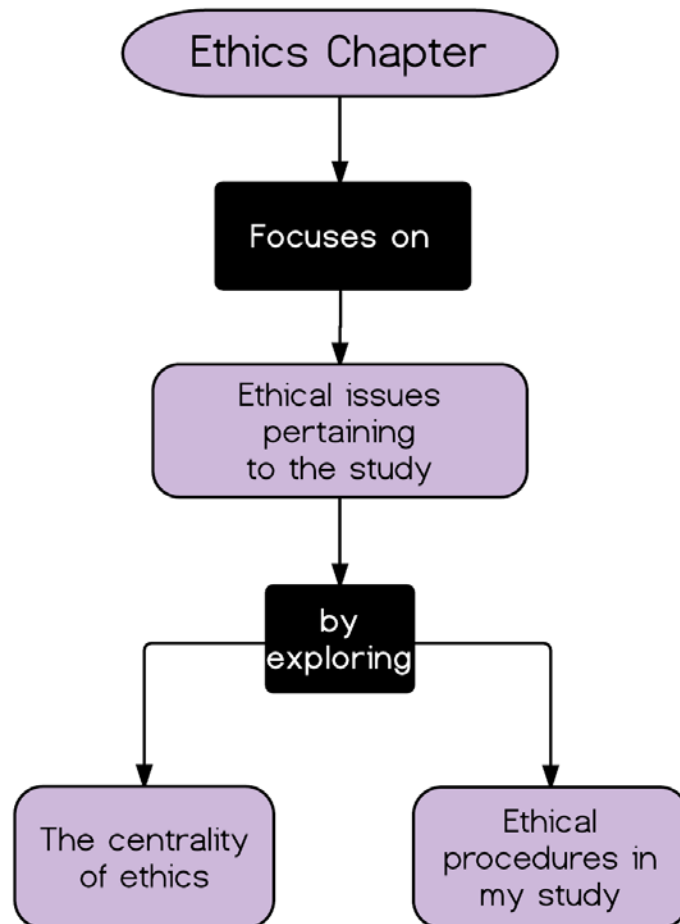


Figure 5.1: The content and structure of Chapter Five

**The centrality of ethics**

Ethical procedures in research are of critical importance. They are particularly crucial as regards studies involving human subjects (and especially with children) as they seek to create safe contexts for non-exploitative, non-harmful research practices. Furthermore, ethics are a core component of high quality research (Mac Naughton, Rolfe & Siraj-Blatchford, 2010). There is variance between fields of research as to what ethical issues a researcher will encounter. It is the responsibility of each researcher to consider the context and circumstances encountered and created by their study (Rose, 2012). According to Flick (2007b), ethics should be an ongoing part of a researcher's practice. He writes:

> Reflection of ethics is not only relevant while you are in the field and it is not only something to work on while you prepare a proposal – for the ethics committee or the institutional review board of your institution. Ethics should play a role in your considerations of how to plan a study, of who you want to work with, and how you (or your fieldworkers) should act in the field. (Flick, 2007b, p. 70)

There is variance between researchers themselves as to which ethical framework they subscribe to (Wiles, 2013). Key ethical concerns within educational research include respecting and protecting participants, their rights throughout the duration of the study, and the research site itself (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2007). Flick (2007b, p. 69) identifies seven basic principles of ethically sound research:

1. Informed consent means that no one should be involved in research as a participant without knowing about this and without having the chance of refusing to take part;

2. Deception of research participants (by covert observation or by giving them false information about the purpose of research) should be avoided;

3. Participants' privacy should be respected and confidentiality should be guaranteed and maintained;

4. Accuracy of the data and their interpretation should be the leading principle, which means that no omission or fraud with the collection or analysis of data should occur in the research practice;

5. In relation to the participants, respect for the person is seen as essential;

6. Beneficence, which means considering the well-being of the participants; and,

7. Justice, which addresses the relation of benefits and burdens for the research participants.

These principles are similar to those set out by the National Health and Medical Research Council, which were directly addressed in my application for ethics approval through Curtin University's Human Research Ethics Committee (see Declaration, p. ii).

The ethical framework to which I subscribe aligns with my overarching research philosophy. That is, I have adopted an ethical framework which is feminist in nature – an ethic of care. Feminism and ethics are inextricably connected, as per Elshtain's (1991, p. 126) assertion: "Feminism without ethics is inconceivable". She further contends, "One cannot separate feminist politics from ethics; they are entangled at each and every point" (Elshtain, 1991, p. 128). It is essential that feminist researchers recognise the importance of ethics and embrace it as they engage with research. This means not only acknowledging and adhering to ethical guidelines, but also inquiring: "How does my research contribute to enhancing the conditions of women and all oppressed people?" (Brabreck & Brabreck, 2009, p. 39). Feminist frameworks of ethics are potentially of great value – not only to the research community, but the communities that lie beyond. There have been several important contributions made by feminist approaches to ethical thought, which include: contesting patriarchal assumptions, embracing different "ways of knowing," respecting participants, including marginalised groups, and prioritising research integrity (Brabreck & Brabreck, 2009).

While feminism is not unitary and there are divisions amongst feminist scholars as to how ethical frameworks are approached and applied (Brabreck & Brabreck, 2009, p. 40), there are predominant models within the field. Browning-Cole and Coultrap-McQuin (1992, p. 1) identify a range of questions pertaining to feminist ethics, which they classify as a form of inquiry. These questions comprise:

- How can we resolve moral conflicts, both personal and social, in feminist ways?;
- What is the place in ethics of the moral traits traditionally associated with women such as sympathy, nurturance, care, and compassion?;
- What are the ethical ramifications of human relationships?; and,
- How can feminist principles be lived in the workplace, the classroom, and the world at large?

These questions are useful in guiding feminist thought as it relates to the pursuit of ethical research. The ethic of care framework as originally established by Gilligan (1982) – and which continues to evolve – is focused on care, compassion, and beneficence towards research participants (Wiles, 2013). This approach acknowledges the "relationality and interdependency" that exists between participants and the researcher(s) (Wiles, 2013, p. 15), with the goal being "to enhance the human condition and create a more just and caring world" (Brabreck & Brabreck, 2009, p. 50).

Therefore, ethics are of paramount significance in research – broadly speaking, of course, and especially in feminist research, where the needs and rights of participants are made a distinct priority. I will now explore my own study and how I applied my appreciation of ethics, thus translating crucial ethical principles into effective ethical practices.

### Ethical procedures in the present study

Throughout my research, from its earliest stages to its conclusion, ethical procedures remained a distinct priority. As a feminist researcher, I sought to establish a research context for my participants which was equitable, accessible, transparent, safe, and supportive. I was also invested in acting as an ethically literate researcher – that is, a researcher who understands and engages with ethical issues throughout the research process (Wiles, 2013). There were a variety of ways in which this was achieved. In the subsections to follow, I will detail a number of key approaches which contributed to the establishment of a study which was consciously ethical and ethically literate.

### Ethical conceptualisations of childhood and children

I assumed a paradigmatic worldview and theoretical lens which have ethical underpinnings. My perspectives on research – especially research with children – and the specific issues pertaining to this study were shaped by my possession of a participatory and feminist disposition. These aspects of my researcher identity contributed to the creation of a conceptual framework which emphasised the centrality of young girls and which sought to elicit their voices.

This aligns with the United Nations' Conventions on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which recognises children as individuals with identities, evolving capacities, civil rights, and liberties (Doek, 2014). The CRC also supports a child's rights to express their views and have them taken into account, which can be seen to imply "an active and growing participation of the child, linked to her or his evolving capacities, in all matters affecting her

or him" (Doek, 2014, p. 2016). I considered this document and its intricacies throughout the study.

One particularly important example of this is the way in which I framed the research. I focused on framing the study as research *with* children, rather than research *on* or *about* children. Beazley, Bessell, Ennew and Waterson (2011) make a clear distinction between these practices:

> … from both a human rights perspective and within social sciences, the history of research on children is vexed. Children have usually been objects of research, with data collection aiming to advance a theoretical or policy perspective, rather than positioning children as research participants who are subjects of human rights. (Beazley et al., 2011, p. 159).

Further to this statement, Beazley et al. (2011) assert that children should be partners in the research process and that their participation must be meaningful on their own terms. They too argue for the centrality of ethics in research and contend that children must engage voluntarily and non-exploitatively. Beazley et al. (2011) align their rights-based research approach with the following articles from the CRC:

- Article 3.3: Children have the right to expect the highest possible standards of services from professionals who work with them;
- Article 12: Children have the right to express their opinions in matters concerning them;
- Article 13: Children have the right to express themselves in any way they wish – not limited to the verbal expressions used by adults; and,
- Article 36: Children have the right to be protected from all forms of exploitation, including being exploited through research processes and through the dissemination of information. (Beazley et al., 2011, p. 161).

Each of these articles was addressed throughout the study. In the following subsections, I will identify the articles' relevance to my ethically literate research practices. Essentially, my paradigmatic worldview, theoretical lens, and conceptual framework were implicitly ethical by aligning with the CRC and thus affording  the girls equality, agency, and voice within the research process.

**Ethical methodology and methods**

As well as embedding ethics within my researcher identity and conceptual framework, I also developed the research methodology and methods with ethics in mind. In terms of the methodology, this was developed to align with the research objectives, questions, and conceptual framework. Again, there was emphasis on recognising the full humanity of children and facilitating their active engagement with the study. The methods were designed with a sense of mindfulness regarding the age of the children, their developmental and behavioural needs, their contextual situations, and their rights as the 'researched'.

### *Seeking and obtaining informed consent*

Recognising and respecting the rights of participants is of upmost importance, and ought to be a key priority for any researcher (Creswell, 2008; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). This standard was first met by initially ensuring that all potential participants:

- Were fully aware at all times of the purpose, aims and process of the study;
- Understood how the findings of the study would be used;
- Understood any potential consequences that the study might have; and,
- Recognised that they had the right to refuse to participate and withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequence(s).

All four points shown above were considered imperative as I worked towards seeking and obtaining informed consent from all potential participants. In terms of my engagement with the student participants, this aligns with Articles 3.3 and 36 from the CRC. There were variances in terms of how this was approached due to both children and adults being approached for participation. I will now discuss how I respectively sought and obtained consent from the school principal, his teaching staff, and their students and parents.

After seeking and obtaining Level A ethical clearance from my university's Human Research Ethics Committee (see Declaration, p. ii), which aligns with national ethical guidelines, I made contact with schools who were potential candidates to participate in the study. Each school's principal was sent an email informing them of who I was, what my research entailed, and what their potential participation would involve (see Appendix H for the email template). Once I had secured the interest of a school who were available to participate, I visited with the principal (Ryan) and explained my study in greater depth. Ryan was provided with an information letter and consent form (see Appendix I), which he signed, agreeing to engage his school in the study.

Once Ryan's consent was obtained, we worked together to seek consent from the relevant teachers in his school community. As previously discussed, Ryan prioritises fostering and sustaining an inclusive and supportive school community. One core aspect of this is involving all staff members in key decisions and seeking their feedback. As such, he requested to be the one to first introduce the study to his staff so that they could discuss their thoughts and raise any issues that may potentially need to be resolved. Following their staff meeting, Ryan contacted me and confirmed that all staff were happy to proceed. He also shared the feedback provided, which was primarily that the staff felt that my study was relevant to their school context and especially their female students. We then set up one-on-one meetings between myself and the teachers, so that I could discuss the study with them in greater depth and proceed with the first phase of the research, which comprised educator interviews. During these meetings, informed consent was obtained from each teacher (see Appendix J), and we then proceeded with their interviews. One central aspect of these interviews was gaining insight into each teacher's classroom context and the girls situated within. We discussed at length whether there were any issues – for example, how were the girls proceeding academically/behaviourally/socially and emotionally? Were there any risks that I needed to be aware of? Fortunately, the teachers were able to provide in-depth insight into their students and were open in sharing their thoughts, reflections, and concerns. Although their concerns were minimal, some potential issues were identified – for example, Jacqueline (the Year 6/7 teacher) cited Tuscany's appearance-consciousness. I recorded these issues and recommended to the relevant teacher that we commit to being diligent in our awareness and monitoring of said issues. We then agreed to sustain open communication throughout the course of the study, to ensure that the students in question (should they choose to participate) were well cared for and supported.

After carefully establishing preliminary insight into the wider school context and each individual classroom context, I prepared to meet with the students to seek consent for the second phase of research – the questionnaires. Ryan and all of the teachers enthusiastically agreed that it would be best for me to explain my research to the students face-to-face, so that they would have a clear idea of who I was and what my research involved. I visited each classroom for approximately fifteen minutes and spoke to the students about my study. I prioritised explaining the second phase of research, which was imminently due to commence, but also provided preliminary information about the fourth and fifth phases (respectively: the student interviews and home tours) so that they had a comprehensive idea

of what the study entailed. I was particularly clear about their role in all of this; for example, I clearly outlined:

- That if they had any questions they could ask me, their teacher, the principal, or their families;
- That it was their choice whether they wanted to participate or not;
- That they didn't have to participate and that saying 'no' was okay; and,
- That if they said 'yes', they could change their mind at any time and it would be okay.

Throughout all of this, I maintained an awareness of the age of the students and prioritised communicating in child-accessible language (which varied based on year level). I also continually facilitated checks-for-understanding and encouraged the students to ask questions, which myself and the teacher answered together. There were two sets of resources being issued to the students: student information letters and consent forms (see Appendix K) and parent information letters and consent forms (see Appendix L). Each set was colour-coded and labelled so that they were clearly distinguishable. Once we had established which set was for their parents/guardians and which set was for them, we ran through their set comprehensively. After we read through their information letter, which was written in plain, easily understood, developmentally appropriate language, I again asked the students if they had any queries. Once all were answered, I then explained the consent forms, which were again written and presented very simply and accessibly. It was made clear that both the student *and* their parent(s)/guardian(s) needed to consent/'say yes' in order for them to be allowed to help with the study. Again, I checked for full understanding by asking the students questions such as:

- "Which colour is for your parents? Which colour is for you?";
- "Who can remind me which page should be kept safely at home? Which page comes back to [teacher]?";
- "If you have any questions, who can you ask?";
- "Do you have to say 'yes'? Who gets to decide whether you say 'yes'?"; and,
- "How many 'yeses' do we need to have you help with my study?"

To conclude each visit, the classroom teacher walked the students through a summary of the information provided and reinforced what the next step was should they wish to participate. These visits were repeated prior to the fourth phase, involving the same provision of

information, age-appropriate communicative procedures, checks-for-understanding, and the opportunity for students to ask questions and discuss their thoughts. Information letters and consent forms for the school-based student interviews and home-based student interviews are respectively provided in Appendices M, N, O, and P.

Consent for the fifth phase of research (the home tours) was sought on a one-to-one basis following the student interviews. After the interviews had concluded, I thanked each girl for her contribution to the study and explained that there was a final phase in which she might be interested. Again, the same approaches stated above were taken to ensure that each girl had a sound understanding of what the fifth phase of research involved and what they needed to do if they wanted to participate.

Ultimately, every time consent was sought, I ensured that the prospective participants were well-informed and prepared to make an educated decision about their engagement with my research.

### *Creating an appropriate research environment*

Olesen's (2008, p. 336) statement that "relationships with participants lie at the heart of feminist ethical concerns" is not only of critical importance, it is truly illustrative of my approach to my research. I considered it essential to build and sustain strong working relationships with all involved with my study. By developing a healthy rapport and respectful bonds with participants, I hoped to create a functional, open, and productive research environment. This aligns with the CRC's Articles 3.3 and 36 (Beazley et al., 2011). There were many ways in which I approached this, including:

- Maintaining open communication with the principal and regularly updating him re: my study's progress;
- Keeping in regular contact with each classroom teacher/classroom teacher team and communicating about any potential issues;
- Making myself accessible and approachable to all participants so that they could contact me with queries, concerns, etc.; and,
- Conducting ongoing checks to ensure that all participants were willing to proceed and comfortable with doing so.

While these four approaches were very important to creating and sustaining an appropriate research environment, there was one other approach which was truly central to the successful

procession of my research: encouraging and empowering the girls. I wanted to create a research environment in which they felt a sense of belonging and in which they felt free to speak and act freely and with agency. There were several ways in which I worked towards achieving this, which I repeated from my first meeting with the girls, right through my final meeting with them.

Firstly, I positioned them in very specific roles; once again, they were not merely students or participants, they were *partners* in the research process. Furthermore, as partners we each had our parts to play. I was the author responsible for writing a story about the girls. They shared this responsibility with me by acting as narrators of their experience or 'storytellers', and they would eventually become 'characters'. I took this approach for two reasons: one, it was an age-appropriate way of framing my research and their role in it, and two, it gave their contribution meaning. It also proved to be very motivational – as I will discuss in more depth later on, the girls responded very positively to this approach and were thrilled with the idea of telling their stories and creating a character. To further facilitate a sense of responsibility amongst the girls, I allowed them to 'name' their character – i.e. choose their own pseudonym. This also proved to be highly motivational. It also gave the girls a concrete sense of what their role was and reinforced that they were trusted and valued.

Once the girls had accepted their roles as research partners, storytellers, and characters, I began building strong working relationships with them. I wanted to get to know the girls – not only because it was necessary for the 'story' we were seeking to tell, but because it facilitated a good rapport between us. It was also helpful given my contextual and personalised approach to the research – by understanding who each girl was, I was able to pursue relevant and meaningful lines of questioning. This also supported Articles 12 and 13 of the CRC.

Furthermore, I continually sought feedback from the girls about their role in the research. They were often asked to reflect on how they were feeling and whether they were okay with how the study was proceeding. Authenticity is a crucial aspect of representing the experiences of participants (Brabreck & Brabreck, 2009). Hence, I also wanted to ensure that they were comfortable with how I was writing about them. During the fourth phase of research, I encouraged the girls to engage actively and collaboratively with the reporting process. To achieve this, I presented each girl with a PowerPoint summarising what we had talked about. As shown in Figure 5.2, these were personalised, visually stimulating, and presented accessibly. To ensure comprehension, I read each slide aloud to the girls. This also

achieved a stronger sense of what 'story' was being told. The girls were invited to reflect on what was written and provide revisions or additions.



Figure 5.2: An example of the PowerPoints shown to the girls

Finally, throughout the study, I repeatedly and consistently encouraged the girls to see that their contributions to my research were very valuable. I considered it vital to communicate my appreciation and make each girl feel valued. This was achieved through ongoing verbal commendations and also through the provision of small gifts. As the fourth phase concluded, each girl was given a gift bag with stationery products and a card expressing my gratitude for their help. After the fifth phase, each family was given a thank-you card. These small tokens were provided to reinforce the value attributed to the girls' contributions and the contributions of their schools and families also.

Essentially, I was seeking to create a respectful and reciprocal research environment where the girls felt a sense of agency and ownership. This seemed imperative to me – after all, my study focused on eliciting their voices and elucidating their lived experiences. Hence, giving the girls a sense of meaning, agency, and ownership was seen to be essential.

### *Protecting participants and data*

Protecting the privacy and anonymity of participants is a crucial responsibility of any researcher. This was something I made transparent in my ongoing discussions with all participants: that their identities would be wholly protected. For example, each participant was made aware that they would be assigned a pseudonym and that any identifying information would be obscured or amended to protect their privacy. Practices such as these align with the CRC's Articles 3.3 and 36 by ensuring that the girls were engaged in a study with high standards of professionalism and that they were protected. The girls were also invited to self-select their pseudonyms as a way to give them ownership, which aligns with Article 13.

I was also invested in protecting the environments within which I was immersed. It is imperative that researchers minimise their impact and seek to prevent/limit disruption to the research site (Creswell, 2008). This was something that I continually self-monitored and reflected on. The site chosen for participation was one which I had no pre-existing relationship with, and no relationship continued after the study's conclusion. I also requested ongoing feedback from the principal and teachers to ensure that they were comfortable with my presence within their school community. I wanted to ensure that the school setting wasn't disrupted and that the participants were free to proceed with learning and teaching as usual. By rigorously self-monitoring, reflecting, and seeking feedback from staff, I was able to ensure absolutely minimal disruption to the school site, its staff, and its students. During the fifth phase, everything was conducted at the families' conveniences and I continued to seek feedback from the parents about their perception of the study's impact on their home/family. Again, by proceeding introspectively, sensitively, and collegially, I was able to ensure that any disruption was kept to a bare minimum and that all participants were happy with their engagement with the fifth phase of research. An adverse events management protocol was established to assist with any exigent circumstances (see Appendices Q and R).

Furthermore, all data collected throughout the study were subject to protection. I ensured that all data storage and protection was up to standard with my own university's expectations and the standards set by the Western Australian University Sector Disposal Authority (WAUSDA). The data collected during the course of the study was stored by myself and my supervisor. We committed to these compulsory storage procedures for a minimum period of five years (2013 – 2018) before being transferred to secure archives (re: WAUSDA 14.3.1). Prior to this archival period, electronic data (e.g. Word documents, digital photographs, audio/video files) were stored securely in password-protected files with all content made

clearly identifiable. Any hard copies of data were filed in a lock-box. During the study, only myself and my supervisor were able to access the data and this is slated to continue for the duration of the mandatory storage period.

**Ethical reporting**

It is imperative that data be reported fully and honestly, with an emphasis on reporting research accurately, in its entirety, and with sufficient clarity of communication. This aligns with Article 3.3 and Article 36 (Beazley et al., 2011, p. 161). To best achieve reporting of a high ethical standard, I adopted two approaches. The first involved keeping ongoing records regarding how the research was proceeding. Included in these notes were reflections on my progress and important developments. These helped to guide future phases of the research and ensured that I maintained a reflexive disposition.

Secondly, throughout the phases involving human participants, I was committed to ensuring that they were well-informed regarding reporting and comfortable with their contribution to the research. This meant that I checked with each participant as to whether they were content with my retelling of their contribution – the school staff and parents reflected on this with me verbally, while the girls were provided with written summaries (as shown previously in Figure 5.2) which they were invited to amend. Through self-reflection and collaborative reflection, I was able to ascertain how the research should be reported so that it was as accurate and truthful a representation of the participants' perspectives and experiences as possible.

**Ethical reflections and evaluations**

Reflecting on and evaluating my study's ethics and my own ethical literacy was deemed critically important. To accomplish this, I continually self-reflected and kept copious notes on how the study was proceeding (an approach which also aligned with ethical reporting). One critical element of this was assessing my study's ethics against the relevant criteria from the CRC. I also referred to other existing evaluation criteria in order to ensure best practice. For example, Creswell (2008, p. 290) identifies three sets of criteria for evaluating qualitative research. These include criteria from Creswell (1998), Lincoln (1995), and Richardson (2000). My self-evaluations against these criteria were presented in Table 4.8.

By maintaining an awareness of the CRC and criteria from a variety of authors, I was able to continually reflect and evaluate on my research practices. This supported my emphasis on reflexivity and facilitated a conscious approach to ethics. Ultimately, I was able to plan,

conduct, and report on an ethically literate study that prioritised the rights of its participants, especially those who were children.

Table 5.1: Reflecting and evaluating via the CRC

| CRC Articles | Reflection and evaluation |
| --- | --- |
| Article 3.3: Children have the right to expect the highest possible standards of services from professionals who work with them. | I achieved this by sustaining a commitment to quality research practices re: obtaining informed consent, creating an appropriate research environment, protecting the participants, and pursuing ethical reporting. |
| Article 12: Children have the right to express their opinions in matters concerning them. | I focused on engaging the girls as partners in the study and affording them ownership. There was an emphasis on eliciting their voices so that their perspectives and experiences could be known. |
| Article 13: Children have the right to express themselves in any way they wish – not limited to the verbal expressions used by adults. | I was flexible in my interactions with the girls by adapting my language where appropriate, permitting them to shape the interviews as per their own interests and ideas, and giving them freedom of choice regarding how their stories were told. |
| Article 36: Children have the right to be protected from all forms of exploitation, including being exploited through research processes and through the dissemination of information. | The protection of all participants was supported by myself, my supervisors, and my university's ethical requirements. All participants were engaged in the study via informed consent and were free to leave at their own discretion. The girls were framed as partners and the research was seen to be *with* children rather than *on* or *about.* |

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter has focused on the centrality of ethics and how I applied ethical procedures throughout my study. In keeping with my overarching research philosophy, I adopted the feminist 'ethic of care' framework. Ethical considerations were prioritised throughout the study, from its inception to its conclusion and dissemination, and focused on creating an equitable, accessible, transparent, safe, and supportive research environment for all involved. The following chapter presents the study's findings, beginning with an exploration of the lived contexts within which my participants were situated at the time of the study, and continuing into an in-depth account of their lived experiences as girls engaging with media.

# Chapter Six

# Interpersonal Contexts: Findings and Discussion

---

## Chapter Introduction

The previous chapters provided the foundations of the research with regard to the literature review, conceptual framework, methodology, and ethics. This chapter and the two that follow will present key findings and discussion. In Chapter Six, I will report on the educational and familial contexts within which the girls were immersed. It is structured as shown in Figure 6.1.
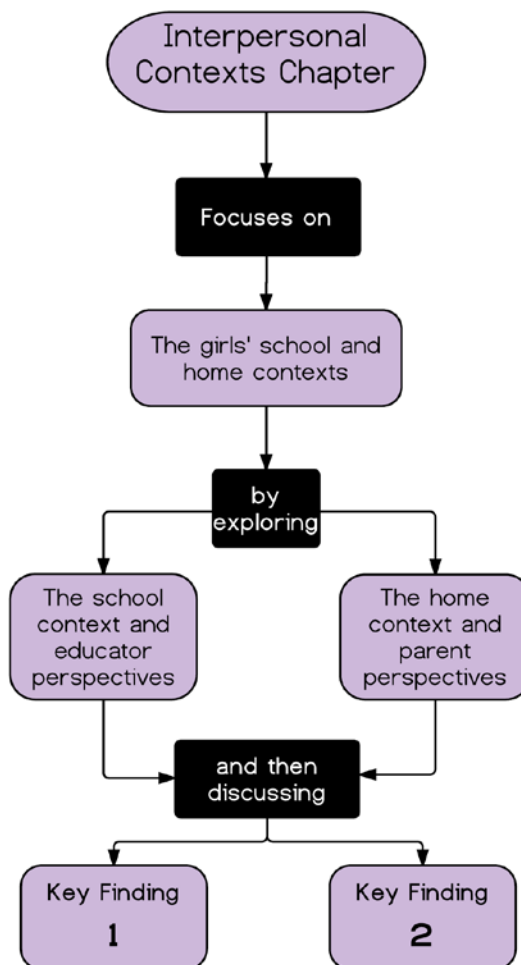


Figure 6.1: The content and structure of Chapter Six

An individual's context comprises their total surrounding environment with which they interact (Woolfolk & Margetts, 2013). Within the broader sense of context, a variety of contexts exist. As per my conceptual framework which draws from Bronfenbrennian theory,

these contexts are nested, interconnected, and mutually influential, and include settings such as home, school, community spaces, various systems of government, and the broader social and cultural systems. Contexts influence an individual's development as regards their beliefs, knowledge, and behaviour via resourcing, support systems, expectations, modelling, and more (Woolfolk & Margetts, 2013).

This study focused on three specific contexts that are highly influential as regards child development: their school setting, their home contexts, and the media contexts with which they engage. These are contexts which have immediacy for children – that is, they exist within the microsystem. School and home form the focus of this chapter, whilst the girls' media contexts form the focus of the chapter to follow. The findings and discussion presented in Chapter Six derive from the interviews with educators and parents, which primarily sought to answer the fifth sub-question of the study: *What role do schools and families play in regards to the relationship forged between girls and media?* The themes emerged from a five-tiered approach to analysis as outlined in Chapter Four, which involved preliminary coding, categorisation, sub-categorisation, elicitation of themes, and the illustration of themes (see page 80 for a full elaboration). Member-checking was employed to ensure that the participants were satisfied with my account of our interviews.

The overall purpose of this chapter is to establish the nature of the school and family contexts within which the girls exist, with emphasis given to the perspectives of educators and parents. The findings in this chapter are foregrounded due to their pertinence to the research questions (specifically, Sub-Questions 1, 2, and 3 – see Figure 1.1, p. 3) and, in terms of the unifying themes, their salience in the dataset. Due to this thesis' educational focus and as per the chronological carry-out of the study's phases, I will begin by presenting the findings pertaining to the school context and the educators' perspectives, which were that media are promising, powerful, pervasive, and inevitable. I will then proceed to a presentation of the findings pertaining to the girls' home contexts and their parents' perspectives, which were that media are powerful, pervasive, world-expanding, unfamiliar, problematic, and inevitable. Lastly, I will engage in a discussion of two key findings regarding the variant presence of media education at Seaglass Primary, and the apparent alignment of adult perspectives.

<div align="center">**School context**</div>

Schools are highly influential settings which influence child development. They represent a major context with the potential to shape the lives of children in various ways, including a child's education and academic development, their socialisation, and their psychological, emotional, and physical development (Cemalcilar, 2010). Therefore, I considered it to be crucial that the girls' school context should form a part of the study. In this section I will address key features of Seaglass Primary before exploring the perspectives of the educators and the themes which emerged.

**Key features of Seaglass Primary**

The interviews with the principal and teachers, combined with researcher observations, provided insight into the whole school context. As was stated in Chapter Four, the school the girls attended, Seaglass Primary, is a small private school located in a Western Australian coastal town. In the year that data collection took place, 140 students were enrolled. The school principal, Ryan, described his school as *"a growing school"* due to ongoing expansion of the early childhood community. There was also continual expansion of the curriculum and resourcing at Seaglass Primary. Table 6.1 indicates important features of Seaglass Primary. These features were defined through researcher observations and commentary provided by educators, parents, and students during their interviews. The educators involved are identified in Table 6.2, while more detailed profiles were provided in Table 4.3.

Table 6.1: Features of the girls' school context

| Whole school context | Classroom contexts |
|---|---|
| • Described as safe and secure with minimal peer issues | • Generally described as happy and healthy |
| • The small size permits greater staff influence | • Some peer issues among girls in upper grades related to appearance-consciousness |
| • Very values driven | • Media education varies from classroom to classroom |
| • Community is a major focus | |

Table 6.2: The educators who participated in interviews

| Participants | Position |
| --- | --- |
| Ryan | Principal |
| Elizabeth | Year 2 teacher |
| Meredith | Year 3/4 tandem teacher |
| Sarah | Year 5 tandem teacher |
| Jacqueline | Year 6/7 teacher |



Figure 6.2: A student from Seaglass uses her iPad.

During the time that Seaglass was engaged in this study, the school had an increasingly strong emphasis on technology-rich learning and teaching practices. Each classroom included a Smartboard and computers for student access, which were also readily available in the library. Most significantly, in 2013 the school's iPad program commenced. The program required all students from Years 4 through 7 to have access to their own personal iPad (see Figure 6.2). Students in the lower grades were also required to have access to iPads, but these were primarily provided by the school (although parents of younger students could purchase an iPad for their child if they so wished).

**Educator perspectives**

Now that some preliminary insight into the school context has been achieved, I will present the educators' perspectives regarding their students and media. These perspectives were considered highly valuable to the overall study as they would inevitably contribute to pedagogical practice and the development of the girls engaged in the research. Figure 6.3

shows the major themes that emerged from the educator interviews, each of which will be examined in the sub-sections to follow. As per Table 6.2, the educators involved included the principal (Ryan) and the classroom educators from Year 2 (Elizabeth), Year 3/4 (Meredith), Year 5 (Sarah), and Year 6/7 (Jacqueline). Following the exploration of the major themes, key findings regarding media education in the classrooms and wider school community at Seaglass Primary will be presented.
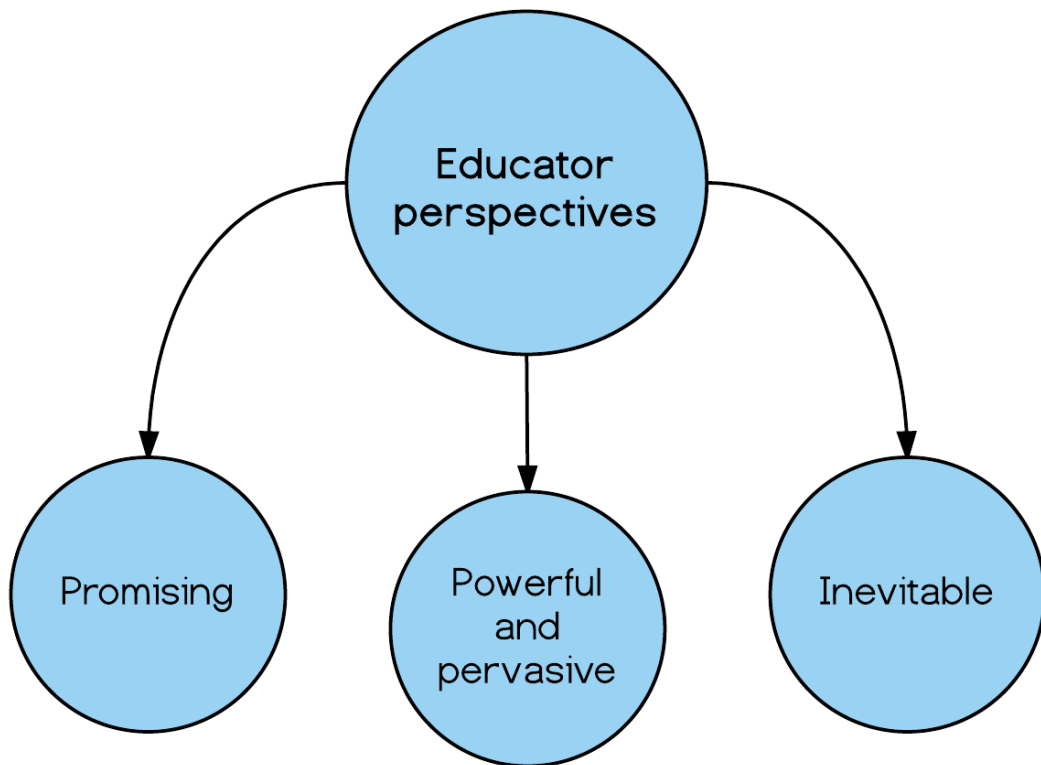


Figure 6.3: Educator perspectives of media – unifying themes

In terms of how I arrived at these themes, I followed the five-tiered approach mentioned earlier in this chapter and described in full in Chapter Four. In Table 6.3, I have provided the coding schema for data generated from the interviews with educators. Included within are specific examples the categories and sub-categories that emerged with example statements from the educators and my own analytical notes. In the third column, a summary of further categorical elements is given – for example, when an educator made a certain statement, was it positive, negative, or neutral? The approach shown in Table 6.3 was applied throughout the analysis and coding of the educator interviews.

Table 6.3: Coding schema for the educator interview data

| Categories | Sub-categories | Further categorisation | Example statements | Analytical notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Educator descriptions of the whole-school context | Opinions and observations<br><br>School policies<br><br>School values<br><br>School priorities | • Positive/negative/neutral – are these values evident in their statements, e.g. a positive perception of the class curriculum?<br><br>• Past/present/future – is time a factor here, e.g. differentiated references to previous and future school priorities? | *"I find because we are a small school we are able to have a lot more say and control and influence on the children"* - Sarah<br><br>*"The contract we made - we had it on the first day of this year. We got parents and students all in together, and teachers, and we went through the contract and so all three parties have to sign that so students, parents, and then the school signs it. It's a contract between each child with their own iPad and their use of it here at school."* - Ryan<br><br>*"Our values of respect, resilience, and compassion stem from our Christian beliefs anyway, really, but um... they're an important reason why people choose our school and knowing it's a safe community, bully-free."* - Ryan<br><br>*"It's a priority of mine to have a community... I think building a successful school, you've got to build community. A school like ours, if you don't build community, then you won't have a very happy school."* - Ryan | Sarah is positioning the educators as the authority and children as subject to that authority, i.e. educators have 'more say' and children are 'control(led) and influence(d)'.<br><br>The school's iPad policy seems to promote a partnership between educators, parents, and students which aligns with statements from some of the educators about the importance of continuity between school and home.<br><br>Ryan has provided contextual information about the school and its values, which he frames as important and thus positive.<br><br>Connects to statements from Jacqueline, Meredith, and Elizabeth re: the importance of continuity between school and home. |
| Educator descriptions of the classroom context(s) | Descriptions of the students<br><br>Descriptions of the class curriculum<br><br>Teaching philosophies<br><br>Pedagogical intentions and ambitions | • Active or passive – is the educator construing entities, e.g. media, students, as active or passive?<br><br>• Issue for attention/action – is this something which I will need to be conscious of as the study progresses, e.g. a behavioural issue with a student? | *"Every child in my class has Christian values and comes from a Christian family."* - Michelle<br><br>*"Yeah... for us, what, Year 5, we don't do... too much - other than what's maybe happening in the news, and it all depends on the subject area. Like we haven't focused on anything major in the media as of yet."* - Sarah<br><br>*"I think it's important that we teach students from a very young age how to read ads."* - Michelle<br><br>*"I'd really like to teach the Year 3/4s more critical literacy skills so they can identify what is an ad and what's not an ad. I think that's really important."* - Michelle | By her account, Michelle's classroom is wholly Christian – others have religious diversity as per Ryan's statement that the school welcomes children from all faiths.<br><br>Sarah's classroom curriculum does not have any major focus on media. Any media-related teaching is topical and varies based on the subject area.<br><br>Michelle attributes importance to children developing their media literacy and based on her other statements, this is reflected in her teaching.<br><br>Michelle would like to feature more media education in her classroom – this aligns with similar goals from Ryan, Elizabeth, and Jacqueline. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Educator references to other contexts/systems | References to home/family context | *"The parents are quite strict with what they're allowed to watch."* - Sarah | Something to follow up – will this be reflected in questionnaire, student interview, or parent interview data? |
| | References to wider community context | *"Building things like the Parents and Friends Committee to me, it's a fundraising committee, I work really hard to make sure that's a successful committee because that committee goes out into the community. It's a real voice in the community."* - Ryan | Seaglass Primary has connections to the surrounding community – this relates to commentary re: links between school and home, plus fleshes out understanding of the girls' micro-/mesosystems |
| | References to broader contexts | *"Some of the big fast food chains - they're so strategic with how they place their ads and where they place their ads in relation to certain readerships and audienceships and stuff like that. They know what they're doing, and they can't sort of hide now and pretend that they don't know what they're doing. They're contributing to some of our more social problems, I feel, and I think the community - and funnily enough the media itself - is pulling them up more and more on that."* - Michelle | References to macrosystem; connections to perception of media – Michelle is constructing them as strategic (even manipulative?) and responsible for social issues. |
| Educators discussing girls | General information about the girls | *"So they will have iPads, and that can be very secretive."* - Jacqueline | Something to be aware of when interacting with the girls. |
| | Specific information about individual girls | *"I do have one girl who is very very concious of her beauty, like her appearance"* - Jacqueline | Be aware of this and be sensitive to it during interactions with this girl. |
| Educators discussing media | Girls' relationships with media (shared category between discussion of girls/discussion of media) | *"It's all to do with music and movies that their main focus is."* - Sarah | Is this the girls' main area of interest re: media? Elizabeth said something similar, as did Ryan. Will it be reflected in later data generation? |
| | Perspectives re: the nature of media | *"I think it's very important. It's a fact of life."* - Elizabeth | Elizabeth sees media as important and by describing it as a 'fact of life' it also seems inevitable. |
| | Media at Seaglass Primary | *"I would say only a small focus on that, though since our iPad program began this year we have a much greater focus on cyber management and cyber bullying. But I wouldn't have... I'm not aware that we've had a really strong focus on media awareness by today."* - Andrew | Aligns with Sarah's statement about the media education in her classroom. Also connects to statements from Elizabeth (she teaches topically) and Jacqueline (limited focus). |

**"A great tool": Media as promising**

During my interactions with Seaglass's educators, it became evident that many of them saw media as a promising resource. They acknowledged its potential value as an educational resource and also as a cultural entity. For example, regarding the education potential of media, Ryan (the school principal) was very enthusiastic about the iPad program. He avidly described iPads as *"a very powerful [and] great tool"*. Sarah was similarly enthusiastic and expressed that she wanted to use iPads in her classroom *"as much as possible"* and described the iPad program as *"our biggest thing at the moment"*.

Although the school's media use was wholly educational, Ryan acknowledged other potential applications. One example which he provide was that of social networking. Ryan considered this a potential risk for his students. Regarding this, he stated, *"We just want to be able to control that in a primary school situation I suppose. We don't believe the students are old enough to make their own [decisions] or the right decisions about social media."* Hence, a formative component of the iPad program was ongoing education for students and parents regarding responsible use of the iPads. On this note, Ryan reflected, *"Since [the program] began this year we have a much greater focus on cyber management and cyber bullying."*

Expanding on these concerns, Jacqueline warned that there was the potential for secrecy amongst students when it came to their iPads. Regarding this, she said, *"I don't know if the parents would know about all the things that their children would watch, because... we do one-to-one iPads here. So they will have iPads, and that can be very secretive."* Several of the educators voiced similar worries, wondering about what apps might be being downloaded and the ready accessibility of social media via the iPads. For example, Elizabeth explained, *"Some of the games the boys play are quite concerning... [such as] violent games."* However, their concerns were outweighed by their celebration of the program. Ryan believed the iPads would encourage student responsibility with technology and media, stating that self-management was one of the main goals when planning the program.

**"They have very specific tactics and strategies that work": Media as powerful and pervasive**

In our dialogues, it became clear that the educators associated media with power. For example, when I asked the educators to reflect on their understanding and point of view regarding media, Ryan described the impact of media as *"huge",* while Elizabeth recognised

media as a *"very important"* force. This was seen as good in an academic context, but risky in other contexts. For example, take Ryan and Sarah's overt enthusiasm about the iPad program, where the educational opportunity of media is clearly embraced. This contrasts with some of the educators' concerns about media in other contexts – for example, Elizabeth discussed her concerns about the boys in her classroom and their media use at home which involves *"violent games"* and *"obsessive [behaviours]"*, while Meredith and Jacqueline both touched on media accessed by girls at home and the body image issues. Meredith reflected, *"I have concerns... about body image and the way young women can sometimes be, and, you know, the gender stereotypes in ads"*. On the subject of celebrity portrayals, Jacqueline observed:

> *You know how they're touched up and the pictures are touched up and how they're criticised as well and if they've put on weight or if it's a flattering picture. They often use very attractive people, often very blonde people, always smiling, always really happy... and young! [laughs] And slim.*

The issues discussed by the educators were seen as risks which children may be exposed to when accessing media in environments other than their school context.

The educators also believe media to be extremely pervasive; Meredith observed media to be a *"saturated market"* and described children as *"bombarded"* by media. Similarly, Elizabeth described her students' access to media as effectively *"instantaneous"*. Building on this, Sarah commented on how much there is *"out there"* for children to connect with. Much of this is seen as highly persuasive, with staff discussing the nature of advertising and its ability to manipulate their students. Meredith, who formerly worked in advertising, described the industry's practices as highly strategic and very effective. She noted that the industry is very aware of how to target children, and in particular, impressionable girls who are often persuaded to purchase by their favourite celebrities representing different companies. She gave the example of Emma Watson, star of the Harry Potter franchise, fronting for Lancôme cosmetics (shown in Figure



Figure 6.4: Lancôme's campaign featuring Emma Watson (Fanpop, n.d.)

6.4) as one that she finds particularly concerning. She said: *"They have very specific tactics and strategies that work. [Children should] not feel like they need to have that just because it's someone from their favourite movie fronting that campaign."*

**"A fact of life": The inevitability of media**

In addition to perceiving media as powerful and pervasive, the educators viewed media as inevitable. For example, Meredith stated, *"It's becoming more and more hard to avoid",* and went on to describe media as a fixed aspect of life and as something *"we consume every day"*. Regarding the growth of media, Ryan said that institutions such as schools *"can't catch up"*. Elizabeth concluded that media is *"a fact of life"*, which effectively summarises the thoughts shared by the educators. There was occasionally a sense of helplessness associated with this, with the staff admitting they didn't know how to handle certain issues. They seemed to generally frame their students as vulnerable in relation to media, and hence expressed concerns about how they could handle this. However, despite some expression of helplessness, the educators also demonstrated a positive attitude at times. For example, Elizabeth said, *"… there's a lot of positive to come out of media."* One example she gave was how well-informed her students are. So although Elizabeth had concerns about media, she also acknowledged the potential positives. This was a common thread among the educators; they identified media as inevitable and enduring, and they also showed some acceptance and an interest in moving forward – one such strategy for doing so would be media education.

**Media education at Seaglass Primary**

One of the key findings of the study was the extent to which media education varied within the school context. Although Seaglass Primary maintains a strong focus on teaching *with* media, teaching students *about* media is minimal. When queried about media education, Ryan reflected on the school's limited focus, relaying, *"I'm not aware that we've had a really strong focus on media awareness by today."* However, all staff members acknowledged that media education was necessary and something that merited greater focus.

While media education was seen to be limited at Seaglass Primary, it did exist to some extent – albeit a highly variant one. There appear to be three different incarnations of media education at Seaglass Primary:

- Incidental teaching in Year 2

- Intentional teaching in Year 3/4
- Integrated teaching in Years 5 and 6/7

In her Year 2 classroom, Elizabeth focused on keeping matters topical. There was no set curriculum for media education, rather, it was purely based on student interest. For example, students often wished to discuss programs they had seen on television or events in the news. On such occasions, Elizabeth was happy to talk with her students about media and find out what they were thinking. She stated that one of her goals was to *"keep it real"* by discussing reality in media with her students, either because they had become confused by something they had seen or because she saw reason to point out unrealistic practices – for example, the appearance and perceived lifestyles of celebrities. Regarding this, Elizabeth stated:

> *Girls like to look up to heroes and icons and there's always someone they're relating to, particularly in the music industry. I think particularly with music it's definitely more pronounced on TV, it's more in your face, being able to see these people being put on a pedestal for the way they look, the types of music that they sing. It's certainly not a merit based popularity contest, is it? I let [the girls] know it is pretend - these women are just like you, they looked just like you when they were that age. We have talked about that in class, they're just everyday people. They're not superheroes, these people, it's just what the media make them out to be.*

Meanwhile, in her Year 3/4 classroom, Meredith had chosen to explicitly address media literacy. There was a specific curriculum that Meredith developed to deliver to her students. She dedicated considerable time to teaching her students about advertising practices, explaining her goal was for her students to develop critical media literacy skills. Regarding this, Meredith said, *"They've got to understand what the purpose of advertising is and who the audience is. Once they understand that context then they can start to see through advertisements a little bit and not believe them so much."*

And finally, in the Years 5 and 6/7 classrooms respectively led by Sarah and Jacqueline, media education was integrated into other subject areas but was limited overall. Sarah offered some insight into media practices whilst teaching Health or English, and Jacqueline covered some information about advertising in Society and Environment. However, both educators conceded that this was not something they focused on very much. For example, when I asked Jacqueline about media education in her own classroom and the extent to

which she taught about or with media, she replied, *"Not a great deal if I'm being honest."* Sarah's response was similar – *"Not really."*

Regardless of the extent to which media education took place at Seaglass Primary, it was deemed important and of interest. Ryan identified it as something he'd like to focus on increasingly, and further stated he would like to involve the parent body as much as possible:

> *I think we're probably a bit behind where we would like to be, but it's certainly becoming an increasing emphasis and something in our program that we're putting greater emphasis on. I think for us to get a good hold... we'll need to work closely with out parent community.*

He also acknowledged that there was a need for it, particularly due to social media's increasing prevalence, with which institutions like schools often have trouble keeping up. There have been a number of incidents concerning the misuse of social media among students and parents at Seaglass Primary and its sister campuses that make Ryan believe media education would be very relevant indeed. Regarding this, Ryan provided examples:

> *From our link with our secondary campus, I know that nearly daily they would have minor issues to do with in regards to things like Facebook. And [at Seaglass] there have been issues with parents arguing at school because of what they've said on Facebook. These are parents of students in Year Four. We had a big falling out with these two boys in Year Four because of what their mums had said about each other on Facebook. So my big concern is, yeah, dealing with that cyber bullying and the power of social media.*

**Issues for consideration**

In addition to misuse of social media, there were other issues within the school community that the staff brought to light. These were minimal, but were seen to be of consequence to the study. Ryan and Elizabeth acknowledged media use was very different when comparing girls and boys, and Ryan also pointed out distinctions in the peer group, claiming that the girls related to each other very differently than did the boys. However, on the matter of the disparity between the genders, this was not seen to be a huge issue – differences between the girls and boys were reportedly quite minor. Jacqueline was the only staff member to cite any

major issues of which to be aware. She described an increasingly strong culture of appearance-obsession among the girls in her class, identifying two who were particularly avid about their looks. However, she didn't deem this to be negative or harmful, but simply a point of interest that might guide and support my interactions with the students throughout the study.

**Summarising the school context**

The school culture was perceived by the educators and myself to be a positive and supportive educational setting. Its emerging emphasis on technology-rich teaching was enthusiastically endorsed by all of the educators who were interviewed, although they did collectively concede that there was still much ground to be covered as regards media education. Behavioural issues were classed as minimal and the school setting was generally conveyed as highly functional. Furthermore, the whole school community was described in an overwhelmingly positive light by the educators. They all reported enjoying working at Seaglass Primary and believed it to be a very effective school community, with strong relationships fostered between staff and with students and families. This was attributed by the principal to the school's underpinning values and their strong focus on community. Of this focus, Ryan explained, *"It's a priority of mine to have a community, a good strong sense of [it]. I think building a successful school, you've got to build community."* This is accomplished by involving staff, students, families, and the wider community in meaningful ways, such as the school's Parents and Friends Committee.

The school also believes in sustaining strong ties between school and home. Ryan believes that the school has generally built good relationships with its families, and during the interviews he stressed, *"For any program to be successful, [we] have to work together."* Elizabeth shared similar thoughts, stating,

> *You need to have the support of the family, because if they're not in agreeance with the way we're doing things at school then there are going to be contradictions. You see things from your parents' perspective for a long time. So, we don't want that contradiction happening, obviously, and that's why we try and work with partnership with the school and families.*

With this in mind, the following section will explore the girls' home and family contexts.

**Home contexts**

A child's home context is highly influential over their development across all domains (Minett, 2010). From a Bronfenbrennian perspective and in terms of my conceptual framework, the home context has immediacy in the life of a child and is a prime site for socialisation. There is also substantive influence over a child's physical, linguistic, emotional, and cognitive development, as well as their values, attitudes, and behaviours (Neaum, 2010). Therefore, I was interested in exploring the girls' homes and meeting with their families. As was discussed in Chapter Four, these visits involved interviews with the parents. As is shown in Table 6.5, seven parents consented to participate in home visits and parent interviews. During these interviews, we discussed their daughters and their relationships with media. The parents shared their perspectives regarding children and media, their parental influence, and Seaglass Primary's role. Questions asked of the parents included, "Do you discuss media with your daughter/children?" and "What do you believe media means to your daughter?" A full list is provided in Appendix G. There was considerable diversity amongst the different families and their home settings. This diversity is summarised in Table 6.4.

Table 6.4: Family structures and home settings

| Student | Parent(s) interviewed | Family structure/home setting |
|---|---|---|
| Hayley | Patricia | • Parents separated; shared custody arrangement<br>• Mother has majority custody<br>• Hayley, her sister, and her mother reside at Hayley's grandmother's house |
| Abigail | Elisa | • Abigail and her sister live with their mother and father |
| Lily | Helena | • Lily lives with her mother and stepfather |
| Sam | Kira | • Sam lives with both parents; her older siblings live internationally |
| Lola | Hannah and Dave | • Lola lives with her many siblings and mother and father |
| Tuscany | N/A | • Tuscany's mother is a single parent<br>• She has formed a parenting team with her own parents who act as guardians to Tuscany<br>• Tuscany lives with her grandparents, although her mother lives in another house on the property |
| Whippet | Amanda | • Whippet and her brother live with their mother and father |

**Parent perspectives**

As I conversed with the girls' parents, a diversity of perspectives emerged. There were parents who loved the school's iPad program and those who loathed it; parents who strictly monitored all media use and parents who were more lenient; and parents who saw it as either positive, negative, or somewhere in between. In amidst all of these dissonant ideas were several major unifying themes which the parents tended to share. These themes are summarised in Figure 6.5 and findings regarding each will be presented in turn. In Table 6.5, I present the coding schema for the data generated from the interviews with parents. As with Table 6.3, which presented the coding schema for data from the interviews with educators, I have provided categories, sub-categories, further categorical elements, example statements, and analytical notes.
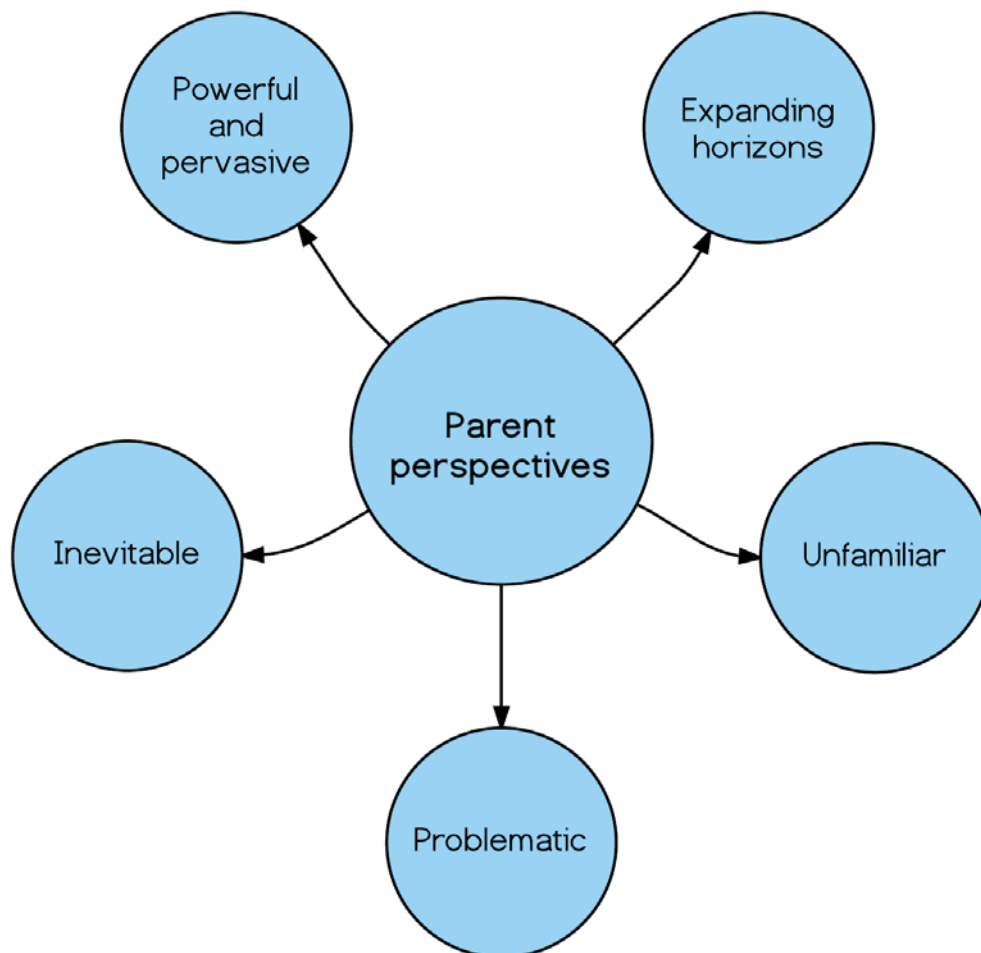


Figure 6.5: Parental perspectives of media – unifying themes.

Table 6.5: Coding schema for the parent interview data

| Categories | Sub-categories | Further categorisation | Example statements | Analytical notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Parents discussing media | Perspectives re: the nature of media | • Positive/negative/neutral – *are these values evident in their statements, e.g. a positive perception of the girls' iPads?* | *"I think they're bombarded these days with things"* - Helena | This aligns with one of the educator's comments about children being 'bombarded'. Again children are seemingly constructed as passive recipients of media's power and pervasiveness. |
| | Media in the home context | | *"I choose not to have anything that's not overly exposing... like Woman's Day magazines with pictures of women in bikinis with fat lumps hanging out and arrows pointing!"* - Elisa | Elisa's decision alters the nature of her daughter Abigail's home media environment by limiting the presence of problematic body-centric/body-negative imagery. |
| | Media in other contexts | • Past/present/future – *is time a factor here, e.g. past parenting practices versus present?* | *"I also don't like how kids bring their phones to school. They may not have access during class time, but the simple fact that they're there, they're on them before and after school and it's another avenue to bullying. It's scary."*- Helena | Helena has concerns about how children access media in other contexts and in her expression of these concerns, she has touched on the issue of bullying |
| | Parents' relationships with media | • Active or passive – *is the parent construing entities, e.g. media, students, as active or passive?* | *"I don't feel like I'm really prepared for it. I'm not computer minded. I just feel like I hope that I can keep up with her because if she has any questions I don't feel like I'm going to be able to answer them."* - Amanda | The sense of unfamiliarity expressed by Amanda here is reminiscent of statements made by Patricia, Elisa, Helena, and Kira. This is a common thread: generational unfamiliarity. |
| Parents discussing girls | Girls' relationships with media | • Issue for attention/action – *is this something which I will need to be conscious of as the study progresses, e.g. a behavioural issue with a student?* | *"It's part of their life."* - Kira | Kira stated this with a sense of resignation, which reminds me of statements made by other parents and educators where a theme of media as inevitable or unavoidable became evident. This also aligns with statements made in the literature where media are described in this way. |
| | Insights about their daughters | | *"In so far as the actual self-image issue, we're not kind of there yet with [Hayley]..."*- Patricia | Hayley is not yet experiencing self-image issues (to her mother's knowledge) – the concerns seem to increase along the age span, with the mothers and/or educators seeming more alert or more |

123

| Parents and Seaglass Primary | Speaking broadly about girls | | "I think that … girls and what they see and what's real... it has been talked about for decades and still needs to be talked about."- Elisa | concerned depending on the girls' ages – e.g. concerns about Tuscany as voiced by Jacqueline are quite pronounced in comparison to what Patricia has said about Hayley here.<br>The issue of girls and media and how girls/women are portrayed in media has enduring relevance. Similar to perspectives voiced by several other parents (e.g. Helena, Patricia) and educators (e.g. Meredith, Jacqueline) and aligns with the literature. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | General opinions and observations | | "Community wise, it's the best school ever... I love that we get together, we have gatherings, we have community things happening at the school. I love it." - Elisa | Elisa's endorsement of Seaglass' sense of community complements statements from educators (e.g. Ryan and Elizabeth) and other parents (e.g. Kira, Hannah, Dave). It seems that the sense of community at Seaglass is commonly appreciated by educators and parents. |
| | The iPad program | | "Don't know how I feel about iPad time every day... if there were an educational function behind it, that would be fine, but just using it to use it seems not worth it. I think there's another way to teach. You don't have to use that technology." - Helena | Patricia's perspective aligns with other parents like Patricia and Hannah, where they seemed conflicted about the iPad program. It's interesting to notice the clash here… the educators promote it as a fantastic program with immense potential, while the parents are not necessarily convinced. |
| | Media education at Seaglass | | "I think the school is doing what they can but from the school's perspectives it doesn't discharge parental responsibility. I think some parents like to quite easily palm things off to the school." - Hannah | This goes back to the issue of continuity between home and school. Hannah's perspective aligns with many others e.g. Ryan, Elizabeth, Meredith, and Jacqueline. |

**"It is important. It's hugely important": Media as powerful and pervasive**

As evidenced by the quote above, Whippet's mother, Amanda, was repeatedly insistent about media's centrality in the lives of her two children and in general. After acknowledging its present importance, she went on to say, *"It's only going to get more important next year and the years to follow."* Sam's mother, Kira, was also observant of this importance, stating, *"It does play such a huge part in [children's] lives."* This was reminiscent of the staff's perceptions of media – they, too, saw it as quite significant on a societal level and on a local, contextual level.

Not only were media seen as important, but the parents further positioned media as powerful and pervasive. For Patricia, part of media's power is that it is fluid in nature. Of this, she said, *"It constantly changes, so there's always a new risk or a new threat. There's always something new. There needs to be constant updates of the changes out there."* Meanwhile, Lily's mother, Helena, possessed perspectives on the pervasiveness of media which were reminiscent of Meredith's. As we began our discussion about media, Helena lamented, *"I think [children] are bombarded these days."* This sentiment was echoed by a number of other parents who observed an ever-increasing proliferation of media in the lives of their children.

As well as detailing media's centrality, Amanda seemed to perceive media as a powerful and distant force. She described it as *"far out there"*, as though it were out of her reach and its powers extended far beyond that. This was of concern to Amanda – she reflected anxiously, *"It's something I can't protect [Whippet] from."* Similarly, Helena stated, *"It's another reality. These things are another reality. It's horrible. It's horrible."* Helena's conceptualisation of media as another reality was not uncommon – much like the school staff, many of the parents reported to perceive media as something external and removed from their own reality.

**"There's another world out there": Media expanding children's horizons**

Although media were construed as an external reality, they were also perceived as a gateway to different realities. Lola's mother, Hannah, believed her daughter's love of music derived from its ability to reveal new ideas and ways of life. She said, *"There's another world out there. She gains a bit of insight into how people live life differently."* Reflecting on media's strengths, Abigail's mother, Elisa, stated:

*There is a lot of learning to be had with some things in the media. Probably with TV and computers, I suppose, in that they can be exposed to things that we could never show them. We can't take them to Africa to live with the animals, for example... but they can watch it.*

Hayley's mother, Patricia, possessed similar perceptions – discussing the explorative potential of several genres of media, she explained, *"[Media] opens up unlimited possibilities for information, research gathering. You know, there's a wealth of knowledge there."*

Helena went one step further in her assessment of media as expansive and explorative. Much like Elisa and Patricia, she saw media as a gateway to new worlds and positioned it as a way for children to gain insight into realities other than their own. Building on this, she then suggested that media could expand the horizons of children not only in terms of insight, but in terms of opportunity. Regarding this, she said:

*I think it opens a lot of doors for children. I think having so much content and information accessible... it's instant, isn't it? Her opportunity to do great things is greater because of her ability to have so much available at her fingertips.*

The language used by Elisa, Patricia, and Helena is certainly emotive and illustrative. As they discussed media's potential to *"[open] up"* or *"open a lot of doors"*, its educative capacity, and its boundlessness, it seemed that media and the worlds contained within were full of promise for children. This way of conceptualising media was not limited to the parents – as will be discussed in Chapter Eight, the girls themselves saw media as expansive and explorative also. But while media were seen as a way to open doors for children, many of the parents felt that they were confronted by closed doors due to generational unfamiliarity with media.

**"In 'the olden days'…": Media's generational unfamiliarity**

Patricia was one of several parents to reflect on what she jokingly referred to as *"the olden days"* and *"the dark ages"*. Amanda was similarly humorous when she reflected, *"When you and I used to go on excursions, we were told not to bring lollies. Now it's don't bring iPads or iPhones, no listening to music or watching YouTube!"* Though both Patricia and Amanda delivered these observations with evident mirth, it was nonetheless demonstrative

126

of an apparent sense of dissonance between past and present. A lot of the parents saw a stark distinction between *then* and *now,* which manifested in a variety of ways.

Firstly, there were a multitude of complaints regarding technology's perceived infringement on the girls' academic progress. Elisa discussed these issues at length:

> *I think my mum and dad must have been old fashioned in their day, and now I feel like I am too. I don't think that kids in that class have good enough handwriting, they don't even... they <u>whinge</u> about their sore arms when they do a little bit of writing. I just can't get my head around that. I can't get my head around how they cannot have perfect handwriting before they're allowed the privileges of touching buttons on an iPad to get answers to an essay or to complete a project. I would like to see my daughter be able to trawl through a dictionary to find a word. And nobody's going to teach her that at school. You know, I was taught at school how to find a word through the dictionary, going in order, through the alphabet, through the letters. She can look up anything on an iPad. She could get a job where she needs to alphabetise, and I just don't know that she's going to get taught to do that. I get frustrated that it's my job. So, I send [my daughters] to school for eight hours, and when [they] come home I'm still going to have to teach you simple things to be a contributing member of society when you get a job? [Where I work], we have a lot of kids coming in for work experience and their lack of paper skills just astounds me. They've just got no idea. I just don't want my daughters to be like that. So I just worry that in keeping up [with] the times that we're just going to create kids who just don't know the simple things. It's hard to let go of that and just get on with it. Even with spelling, if you have that ability to just enter in a few things and then it comes up with the options and you can just say oh, yep, that's it. That doesn't teach them how to spell! You know, that's a shame.*

Elisa was not alone in experiencing these frustrations. Kira rejected the school's emphasis on technology-based learning and teaching, asserting, *"I think there's still a place for pen and paper."* With self-awareness to potential generational bias, she then went on to joke, *"Maybe I'm old fashioned!"* Patricia spoke with admiration of Hayley's adeptness with technology, but still noted regretfully, *"I think we're losing a lot of the old stuff with the new stuff."* After repeating many of Elisa's concerns, she went on to say, *"I think, 'Have you*

*actually learnt anything? Have you read anything?' I don't like it.  Actual, tactile learning*
*actually sticks with them a lot more."*

Helena drew from her experience as an educator and as a parent when she discussed her
unfamiliarity with media. She began by reflecting on Lily's overt familiarity with all forms
of media, stating:

> *It's almost innate. I don't know where it comes from or why our children can do this.*
> *Perhaps as we get older, we inhibit our own ability to adapt. I'm frightened if I do*
> *something that I'll break it. She doesn't have that fear. And she just hops on and*
> *does her thing and works her way around it. And that's the way they're made*
> *though, isn't it? They're intuitive.*

These self-professed fears were of concern to Helena, particularly regarding her ability to
understand, manage, and mediate Lily's media use. She explained:

> *When we bought Lily her iPad, we bought one for us so we could learn along with*
> *her. But she took to it like a slippery slide while we struggled with it. I don't have a*
> *lot of confidence there.*

And while Lily's proficiency with media continues to accelerate, Helena admitted she is
unable to match this: *"Can I use it to its full capacity? No."* She then went on to discuss the
implications of this:

> *In my classroom though, I know how to work a computer better than the kids. And I*
> *like it that way! [laughs] Because I'm in control. And I can control the environment*
> *that they're in. I would feel null and void if I walked into a classroom where the*
> *children knew the technology better than I did.*

Several other parents shared this fear of becoming *"null and void"*. Reflecting on the
generational issues at play, Helena said:

> *A lot of parents don't understand the technology that's around them or the media*
> *that's around them, I don't think they're looking at the repercussions of that and*

*that's the part that bothers me. I have some girls in my class and some of the stuff they're exposed to, and I just think, what's happening? Where has that control gone?*

This ties in to two critical themes which arose during the parent interviews, the first of which is media being problematic for girls.

**"I don't want her exposed to that": Media as problematic for girls**

While the parents did see media as problematic in general, addressing issues of violence in media and so forth, these were mentioned in passing and were ultimately backgrounded. What was foregrounded were specific concerns for the girls involved in this study and, perhaps, girls in general. As discussed previously, several parents believed that media and related technology were infringing upon the academic progress of their daughters. This sub-section will address some of the other concerns shared by the parents about media's perceived influence and impact on their daughters.

One concern that repeatedly arose throughout the parent interviews was the lack of awareness in relation to media content. Regarding teaching children to enhance their awareness, Helena noted, *"I wonder though if [it's] a little bit late."* Patricia discussed a whole host of concerns including children being passively entertained/'babysat' by the television, communicative issues in social media such as cyber-bullying, and age-appropriateness of certain content. She reflected on this at length, explaining:

> *I know you have to teach them protective behaviours pretty much from birth. I will be teaching her more about the media when body image and everything become an issue, which I'm sure is not that far off! [laughs] There are kids in Maggie's [kindergarten] class who are really into it already - you know, they love One Direction, they go to concerts and all of that. And I think, 'That's not what I want for my kid! Like, really? Let them be kids!' We'll need all of the different media awareness as Hayley grows. It's more just accepting who she is and knowing to teach to accept who they are. And I want her to know when I set boundaries that they're not for my own benefit, you know? They're for her own.*

On this note, the most prevalent issue was media's portrayal of girls and women. This was an issue which was of immense concern to several parents. Helena asserted:

129

*I was watching* Next Top Model*, and I turned it off when [Lily] came in because I don't want her exposed to that. I don't want her to grow up thinking that what she sees on the TV is the norm, and that that's what the expectation of the rest of the world is. That she has to look like that. I was the same with her older sister.*

Mirroring concerns previously professed by Meredith during the staff interviews, Kira had similar worries regarding the culture of celebrity apparent in media:

*You know, Hollywood and all the stars... that's not real life for most of us. I hope [Sam] is always able to see the reality versus the other side. I'm not sure I'd want to see her living that kind of life in any way. I hope she can define between those two: what you see on the media and what real life is.*

Elisa was adamantly disparaging of this lack of realism in media and honed in specifically on music videos:

*I don't let them watch music videos because I just think they're terrible. So we don't turn on RAGE. I don't like the way they represent females. There's some terrible stuff out there! We do have the radio on so the girls can sing along. But you're thinking, 'If they only knew what she was singing about!' But they just sing along and I'm cool with that. They don't try to analyse the undertone.*

She expanded on what she considers to be problematic about the representation of women, stating:

*I don't think it's changed enough, unfortunately. I think the model figure is still a disappointment. The girls don't say anything, but I hope they don't admire that size and shape. But I'm sure they will... because that's still what they're seeing on TV and in magazines and they're always done up with beautiful hair. There's not a lot of average people in media unfortunately! I don't think women are doing themselves many favours. A lot of it is obviously the publication's responsibility but these singers that do these kind of music videos are totally responsible for how they come across, so I don't even go there. It's just terrible.*

130

Elisa framed this as a *"battle"*, with her on one side, media on the other, and her daughters caught in the middle. Believing them to be threatened by the images of girls and women in media, she elaborated with evident frustration:

> *It's hard. You want your girls to be self-sufficient, independent, strong-willed... almost stubborn. I don't think there's anything wrong with being stubborn because you give yourself time to make better choices. Yeah, I just... I just hope that they have enough self-worth to make good choices.*

Amanda shared the sentiments expressed by Helena, Kira, and Elisa. She openly reflected on the possible influence this has had over Whippet, explaining:

> *Whippet has really grown up. Suddenly she's gone from being a kid to someone who is very aware of herself, who is into her hair, and has started wearing makeup to school. She's a bit more feminine in the way that she's dressing. And she's more worried than ever about what people think about her than she's ever been before. Her teacher at the beginning of the year said that this would happen but I never believed it. I'm not joking - within four weeks of being at school, it happened. It really was quite an amazing transformation. She's more into boys. She's more into looks. It's a big thing. All the girls in her class are into it, too - like, 'I love your hair!', so it's those compliments that you get and all that."*

Regarding these changes in Whippet, Amanda reflected:

> *I think that children need to be exposed to things. Then again, they seem to be exposed to things so much younger now than what they would before. Like, she seems to be pushed into doing things before she's ready for it.*

Threaded through these discussions were many strong emotions such as anger, disappointment, and despair. There was also a very strong sense of resignation, as though the problems with media were undesirable yet inevitable. Much like with the staff at Seaglass Primary, this was commonly felt amongst the parents.

**"That's just the way that the world turns, I suppose": The inevitability of media**

The statement above was provided by Elisa, on the tail-end of a lengthy discussion about media's permanence and increasing prevalence. It would seem that these two factors have resulted in media being perceived as inevitable – a notion shared by the parents and school staff. Elisa seemed to see it as irrevocable, claiming, *"We can't take [media] away because that's just the way the world's going."*

This sense of resignation was commonplace amongst the parents. Patricia provided the following description of media: *"It's a necessary evil, in our days."* She also joked, *"I don't even think we'll have devices in a few years' time, we'll just be hardwired at birth!"* Helena also predicted media's continued ascension and reported concerns regarding the impact on educative practices, stating:

> *Well, I'm pretty sure that media is going to play more and more of a role in young people's lives. I dread the day when there's no more writing in classrooms because it's all done on some piece of technology. But I know, in all seriousness, that that day will eventually come.*

Amanda made a similar prediction, asserting that, *"iPads are the future!"* However, while Helena and Amanda made their predictions with confidence, Patricia was less certain. She explained, *"I have no idea what the future holds but it does freak me out. What are we in for?"* Patricia was very expressive of her heightened concern regarding the unknown future. Regarding media influence, she mused, *"There's no way that you can actually say, 'My kid's a good kid and they're not going to do that'. Because you just don't know."* She also said, *"It does concern me where [it's] going, but what can you do?"* As we continued our discussion, there was a sense of helplessness that became evident in Patricia's statements. This was characteristic of all the parents I spoke to – they seemed to frame media as primarily formidable, with a great degree of permanency, and the potential for escalation as regards its centrality in our lives. Furthermore, they seemed at a loss as to how to cope with this. Helena reflected on the disparity between raising her now-adult daughters and the younger Lily:

> *I think my opportunities are less now. They're less now than they were with her sister at the same age. I can't control Lily's environment - her media environment -*

*like I could control her sister's. We all know what kids are like and they're going to be doing things that they're not meant to be doing. And will she... does she see..?*

Amanda was also anxious about Whippet's media access and the potential consequences of this:

*Suddenly [it's] out of my control and she's out in the big wide world with this device. I don't feel like I'm really prepared for it. I just feel like I hope that I can keep up with her because if she has any questions I don't feel like I'm going to be able to answer them.*

What then became evident is that, for some parents, this sense of helplessness seems to manifest as a race to the finish line. In seeking to protect or control their children, some are taking the approach of attempting to pre-empt media influence. Elisa explained, *"I have to educate her... that means telling her things that I would rather not tell her yet!"* Patricia has had similar experiences with her girls:

*One of the things that bothers me is you can't tell them not to look at porn without telling them what porn is. Along those lines, you know what I mean? It's kind of like... how do you actually draw that line? Where you say, 'this is what you're not allowed to look at', without actually telling them what's out there, because then they'll go looking for it! It's like... that sort of stuff. That sort of stuff bothers me.*

**Summarising parental perspectives**

So, ultimately, how did the girls' parents perceive media in the lives of their daughters? The unifying themes unveiled include media as powerful and pervasive; as horizon-expanding; as unfamiliar to the parents; as problematic for their daughters; and, as inevitable. In addition to these themes, I would like to touch on how the parents framed their daughters in relation to their media contexts. This framing was revealed throughout our conversations and formed an additional analytical component.

To begin with, there was a repeated emphasis on passivity. Several parents seemed to view their daughters as idle and inactive in their media use. For example, Elisa said:

133

*Media feels like it's a sit-down kind of thing. [Abigail] loves watching a movie, she loves watching telly, she loves her DS. She is the first person to ask to put on the TV and then she'll just sit there.*

She also said, *"I think it's a shame that [media] is used to entertain children."* Patricia had a similar view, complaining, *"You know, kids get babysat by the TV and they're entertained."* She also constructed children as relatively unknowledgeable regarding media influence, stating, *"Kids don't understand the impact or repercussions."* Helena acknowledged children's fascination with media but seemed to convey this as an immature sort of preoccupation when she said, *"It's a subject they devour; they want to talk about it. So they're obviously experiencing these sorts of things, they're in it... but they're not mature enough yet to make choices to turn the thing off."* Amanda was also concerned about children's ability to mediate their media use. Honing in on social media's popularity with pre-adolescent and adolescent girls, she said, *"There's no real self-control at this age."* Regarding the idea of 'control', Patricia was very focused on exercising control over her own daughter and also her students in her classroom – for example, she said:

*I can't **control** Lily's environment - her media environment - like I could **control** her sister's. I'm not at school all day with her and she has an iPad with her all day. And I know that the teachers are setting rules, but we all know what kids are like and they're going to be doing things that they're not meant to be doing. I have some girls in my class and some of the stuff they're exposed to... I just think, what's happening? Where has that **control** gone? I just worry that when Lily's not here and when she's somewhere else, that I just don't have the **control**. And there's just so much more to **control**.* (emphasis mine)

Patricia's repeated reference to 'control' is indicative of how she views herself in relation to children – she believes she ought to be in control for the good of the children in her care, who need to be subject to said control. This goes back to the issue to passivity, as well as authority and compliance – all of which have considerable influence over one's conceptualisation of children.

In addition to the emphasis on passivity, the parents primarily positioned media as a source of education and/or entertainment. When asked about what Sam draws from her media use, Kira theorised, *"Some of the stuff is educational. I think some of it's probably just*

134

*entertainment, more. So... some of it's entertainment, some of it's educational."* Dave and Hannah were the only parental participants to reach beyond this perception – they explained that Lola enjoys watching movies and TV shows as it allows her to spend time and connect with her older sisters. Other than that, the parents were primarily focused on media as something educative, something entertaining, or – sometimes – something existing somewhere in between. This was in keeping with the staff's points of view, but stood in direct contrast to the girls' own perspectives, which will be explored in-depth in Chapter Eight.

## Discussion

Through an exploration of the girls' school and home contexts, a variety of findings emerged. These have been addressed thematically throughout this chapter. I will now foreground two key findings and engage in a discussion related to these findings, their connections to the literature, and their significance.

### Key finding 1: Variant media education at Seaglass Primary School

The extent to which media education varied at Seaglass Primary was a key finding of the study. The fact that the school was teaching *with* media yet not *about* media, and that instruction varied from classroom to classroom, is an intriguing issue. It seemed as though there was a lack of coordination and cohesion where media education was concerned, which contradicts not only the enthusiasm voiced by the educators, but the recommendations evident in the literature.

The literature advocates for media literacy education (Durham, 2009; Farley, 2009; Streitmalter, 2004) – for example, it is described as having enormous potential (Hobbs, 2011) and as being significantly necessary (Scheibe & Rogow, 2012). The support for media literacy education is particularly fervent in the literature about girls and media (APA, 2007; Hamilton, 2008; SCECA, 2008; Streitmalter, 2004). For example, Streitmalter (2004) advocates for helping children with their identification and understanding of media messages, while Hamilton (2008) asserts that children should be educated about the exploitation of girls and women in media. In fact, these recommendations are persistent – a reading of subsequent literature proves that support remains robust. For instance, with regard to sexualised media, Ey (2014, p. 157) identifies the need for early intervention as "urgent" and proposes early education as potentially useful, while Andsager (2014) voices support for media literacy education for promoting critical analysis skills to combat media-related body

dissatisfaction. It is critical here to mention the efficacy of media literacy education; in my earlier review of the literature, the assertion was made that said efficacy remains relatively unproven (Bergsma & Carney, 2008). This, too, appears to be persistent – for example, Scharrer and Ramasubramanian (2015, p. 182) state, "Can media literacy education reduce the media's role in perpetuating stereotypes? We have precious little data to apply to that socially significant question", thus indicating the need for continued research. Furthermore, they raise issues regarding differing conceptualisations of media literacy education and the associated implications (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2015). It is important to be mindful of the need for further inquiry into media literacy education. That being said, a reading of recent literature shows that support for its implementation is persistent and robust.

Such support was evident among the educators at Seaglass Primary, but yet, their classroom and whole-school practice did not necessarily reflect this. This finding is a noteworthy one - particularly in anticipation of an exploration of how the girls were engaging with media. While this relationship is mediated by certain factors (this is addressed in Chapter Seven), there is limited evidence of mediation, guidance, or support within the girls' school context. Therefore, questions are raised regarding how this limited mediation might influence the girls' relationships with media. The influence could be quite substantial, given the significance of the school context and its impact on multiple facets of students' development. Hence, I have translated this finding into a set of recommendations for Seaglass Primary and other schools with comparable circumstances. These recommendations are delineated in Chapter Nine.

**Key finding 2: The alignment of adult perspectives**
After drawing out unifying themes from the educators' and parents' perspectives, it emerged that there was a sense of alignment. Two themes were common to both groups:

- Media as powerful and pervasive
- The inevitability of media

This finding is an important one – it establishes congruence between the educators and parents and, thus, between school and home. This sense of congruence was promoted by some of the educators and parents. For example, as previously indicated, Elizabeth spoke about the support of the family being necessary to avoid contradictions and to promote partnerships.

From an educational perspective, a cohesive approach between school and home can be beneficial to students – for example, it can support their academic progress, social development, and overall wellbeing (Stringer & Hourani, 2013). Returning to Ey (2014), in addition to her recommending early education, she also advocates for collaboration between educators and parents as this may support proficiency in critical analysis of sexualised media for both children and their families. In this sense, the similarities between the perspectives of the educators and parents may be helpful. However, my perspective is that there could be other factors at play – such as whether the educators' and parents' strategies also align, or whether their perspectives align with those voiced by the girls. This kind of strategic or perceptive discontinuity could prove problematic for all involved. Elizabeth's assumption is that children adopt their parents' worldview – whether or not this was the reality will be addressed in Chapter Eight, which focuses on the girls' perspectives. For now, I will focus on discussing the alignment of adult perspectives.

The themes shared between the educators and parents were also evident when reviewing the literature. The power of media is frequently addressed and is a common conceptualisation – for example, Berns (2012) discusses capacity of media to shape, spread, and transform culture, while Ward and Harrison (2005) identify media as powerful agents of socialisation. The prevalence of media is also commonly referred to in the literature (Comstock & Scharrer, 2007; Guerin & Hallas, 2007; Semali, 2003; Weisner, 2014). In terms of the inevitability of media, there is a sense of this in terms of how various authors describe media – for example, Mehita (2012, p. 1) describes our current era as "the age of media", while Guerin and Hallas (2007, p. 1) describe media as filling and being fixed in social spaces, as tutoring us, and has having "taken over". Such statements are reminiscent of perspectives voiced by the educators and parents – for example, Elisa professed, *"… that's just the way the world's going",* while Elizabeth saw media as, *"a fact of life".* At times, the terminology used was identical – for example, Meredith's description of children being *"bombarded"* by media is comparable to Hazlehurst's (2009) statement that children are bombarded with images and concepts which they are not able to assimilate, understand or contextualise.

There were also connections between the educators, parents, and the literature in terms of issues raised regarding the representation of women. For example, Elisa described her disappointment with *"the model figure"* and touched on the issue of idealisation in terms of *"size and shape"* and women *"always [being] done up with beautiful hair".* Similarly,

Jacqueline focused on how images are *"touched up",* the use of *"very attractive people",* and the concept of attractiveness being *"blonde", "happy", "young",* and *"slim".* Through these statements, Elisa and Jacqueline have effectively summarised the hegemonic idealisation of beauty that is explored so frequently in the literature. The literature describes idealisation as the practice of 'perfecting' as per sociocultural norms (Balcetis, Cole, Chelberg & Alicke, 2013) which are deemed "prescriptive" (Grimaldo-Grigsby, 1991, p. 100). Various authors touch on how these prescriptive sociocultural norms may manifest with reference to whiteness, heteronormativity, youthfulness, thinness, and the conventional display of femininity (Grimaldo-Grigsby, 1991; Harrison, 2003; Piran et al., 2000; Women's Monitoring Network, 1987).

This conceptual continuity between these educators and parents, and several authors contributing to the literature, is highly noteworthy. It establishes a sense of how adults may tend to view media. This perspective is important to keep in mind as I approach the perspectives of children.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter has focused on two interpersonal contexts within which the girls exist – the significant sites of school and home, with an emphasis on the perspectives of educators and parents. This is due to the crucial role that school and home have in mediating the development, health, and wellbeing of children. Thus, it was deemed imperative that the educators and parents be provided some voice in the study so that the girls' contexts could be appreciated in some depth.

There were a variety of perspectives voiced amongst the educators and parents. It was evident that the educators perceived media as powerful, pervasive, promising, and inevitable. The parents had some similar perspectives – collectively, they too viewed media as powerful, pervasive, and inevitable. They also felt that the contemporary media landscape was unfamiliar but that it had the potential to be horizon-expanding for their children. By engaging with the educators and parents and exploring their perspectives, a wealth of knowledge was generated about the girls and their school and home contexts.

There are two key findings which I wish to foreground – the variant nature of media education at Seaglass Primary (Key Finding 1) and the alignment of adult perspectives (Key

Finding 2). These findings are of significance to this study and the knowledge that emerged throughout. Firstly, the fact that media education was scattered across the school context yet still identified as something which ought to be a priority is interesting. The latter issue aligns with much of what the literature has to say, wherein media education is put forward as a key strategy for raising children's critical consciousness regarding the media with which they engage. The contrast between the former and latter issues seems contradictory. Secondly, the sense of alignment between the adults engaged in this study is quite telling, especially since their perspectives are also evident in academic literature. While it is crucial to note that not *all* adults share these views, the fact that this group of adults do has implications for this specific context. This finding piqued my interest, particularly with regard to the girls, who were at the forefront of my consciousness throughout this study – would they share these views, too? Whether or not the continuity was shared is an issue of great importance, and one which will be addressed in the eighth chapter of this thesis.

Now that two of the girls' interpersonal contexts have been explored, the following chapter will focus on the girls' media contexts. These contexts will be explored in terms of how the girls access and use media, how this is mediated by the adults in their lives, and how their most favoured media depict girls, women, and femininity.

# Chapter Seven

## Media contexts: Findings and Discussion

---

### Chapter Introduction

The previous chapter focused on two interpersonal contexts, which included the girls' shared school setting – Seaglass Primary – and their individual home settings, with an emphasis on the perspectives of their educators and parents. This chapter focuses on the girls' personal media contexts.



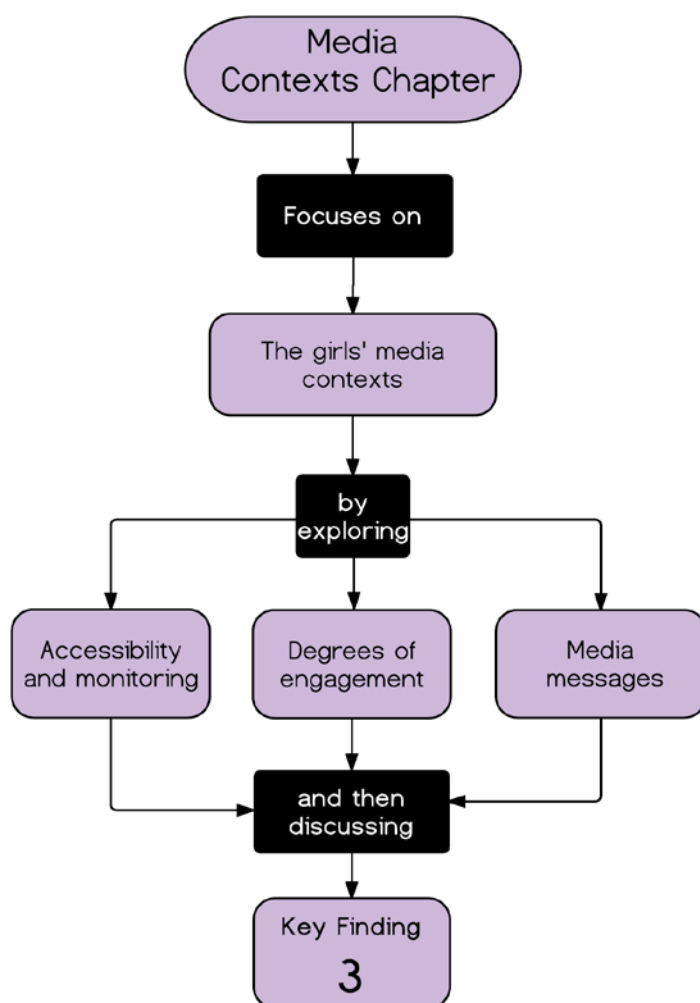Figure 7.1: The content and structure of Chapter Seven

As was discussed in Chapter Six, the girls' media contexts have been perceived by their educators and parents as powerful, pervasive, and inevitable. This leads to the issue of the nature of the girls' media contexts. This chapter will present findings regarding the girls' access to media, how their educators and parents monitored this, and to what degree the girls

were engaging with media. It will also delve into an analysis of what the content comprises with an emphasis on representations of girls and women. The findings shared here derive from Phases Two and Three, which respectively comprised student/parent questionnaires focusing on media access and use, and a social semiotic analysis of media favoured by the girls themselves. These findings have been foregrounded due to their relevance to the research questions (specifically, Sub-Questions 1 & 2 – see Figure 1.1, p. 3) and, with regards to the unifying themes, their salience in the dataset.

As shown in Figure 7.1, the chapter has three focal points. It commences by looking at issues pertaining to accessibility and monitoring. It then examines the degrees to which the girls were engaged with media. Lastly, it looks at messages communicated by their most favoured media, including the tendency to portray of women as glamorous, powerful, resilient, and as leaders in narrative terms, whilst still favouring beauty ideals on an aesthetic level. After exploring the findings, a third key finding is foregrounded and discussed – this being focused on the conflicting portrayals of femininity. The overall intention of this chapter is to provide an illustration of the girls' media contexts before proceeding to an exploration of their lived experiences.

### Accessibility and monitoring

The extent to which children are able to access media is a focal point in the literature. For example, research by the Rideout et al. (2010), the Australian Communications and Media Authority (2010), and Common Sense Media (2013) all examine means of access and patterns of use. This research is large-scale, encompassing sizeable samples of young people. Through my study, I was interested in determining the extent to which the girls in my study were able to access media and their degrees of engagement, as well as whether this was monitored/mediated by the school and/or their parents.

While the school did readily endorse technology as a learning/teaching resource and therefore provided several avenues for students to access media, there was an aim to restrict this access. For instance, the school's policies on iPad access were quite rigorous. Regarding this, Ryan described the contract which the school developed and implemented:

> *The contract we made - we had it on the first day of this year. We got parents and students all in together, and teachers, and we went through the contract... all three parties have to sign that so students, parents, and then the school signs it. It's a contract between each child with their own iPad and their use of it here at school. We just want to be able to control that in a primary school situation, I suppose.*

Furthermore, each classroom promoted careful and consistent guidelines for how media could/should be used. Elizabeth acknowledged that the students of Seaglass Primary had *"instantaneous access"* to media, primarily via their iPads. She then went on to say:

> *It's very well monitored. The students are pretty good at monitoring it themselves. We have very strict standards and regulations, and the parents sign a contract as well, so they know what's acceptable.*

The parents confirmed that their daughters were permitted to watch television from an early age; all but two of the girls began watching before two years of age. Comparatively, the girls' access to computers generally came at a much later stage, with 11 of the girls (61%) being afforded access to a computer from age eight onwards. At the time of the study, all but one of the girls were allowed to browse the internet. However, several girls had only recently gained permission to access the net, with 50% (n=9) being granted access within the last year. All of the parents confirmed that they monitor their daughters' internet usage. Their descriptions of this monitoring showed a variety of different approaches, as illustrated in Table 7.1. Their approaches were categorised to indicate the extent of parental monitoring, which was seen to exist on a spectrum ranging from 'light' to 'extensive' based on the parents' descriptions. The categories assigned to the responses are detailed in Table 7.1.

The parents were also asked to identify whether or not they discussed their daughters' media use with her and 15 of the 18 claimed they did discuss their daughters' media use with her, while three claimed they did not.

Some parents were keen to clarify what conversations they were having with their child(ren) regarding media. Aisha's mother, Andrea, stated, *"We have talked to Aisha about being open and honest with us if she has any questions or if she has something she is worried about."* Helena, Lily's mother, responded:

> *Lily has been educated about what and what not is to be acceptable viewing or listening media. She understands... what is appropriate for her. We [encourage] her to become familiar with media to complement her natural inquisitiveness and curiosity.*

The dialogues between the girls and their parents regarding media will be further discussed in Chapter Eight.

Table 7.1: Examples of parental monitoring.

| Parent of… | Year group | Approaches to monitoring | Extent of monitoring |
|---|---|---|---|
| Daisy | 4 | *Yes – check on history.* | Light |
| Tuscany | 7 | *Look up the history.* | Light |
| Whippet | 7 | *Sort of. She is very trustworthy and understands her parents can look at any history on her recent internet use if we need to.* | Light |
| Alana | 6 | *Yes, my husband check [sic] to see the kind of research done etc.* | Light |
| Summer | 4 | *Yes, she is always in the same room as me, so I can watch what she is looking at.* | Light - Moderate |
| Hayley | 2 | *Only limited Wi-Fi time when I am in the general vicinity.* | Light - Moderate |
| Aisha | 7 | *PC is in full view of living areas. Conversations with our children regarding what is safe and appropriate.* | Moderate |
| Abigail | 3 | *We open the internet sites for our children.* | Moderate |
| Lily | 4 | *Yes, parental control, adult supervision.* | Moderate |
| Kat | 5 | *Yes, age restricted settings and location of access.* | Moderate |
| Rosline | 7 | *I have my child use the internet in my presence while at home.* | Moderate |
| Michelle | 5 | *Internet for school research only. Internet accessed in family areas only.* | Extensive |
| Sally | 5 | *Yes. Password access, restrictions on computer. Often check what she's doing. Time restrictions.* | Extensive |
| Josie | 3 | *Only allowed to go on specific games, all parental controls are switched on. Only allowed access for short periods and the computer is easily viewed at all times by myself or husband.* | Extensive |
| Lola | 7 | *No internet devices are allowed in bedrooms without permission. Not supposed to download without parental permission. Devices are charged overnight in loungeroom.* | Extensive |
| Roxy | 5 | *Yes.* | Unclassifiable |

The girls were asked to identify what media tools and/or platforms they owned or had access to. As seen in Figure 7.2, the most popular tools and platforms included TVs, DVD/Bluray players, and iPads. Social media platforms were reportedly only used by the older girls in Years 5-7.
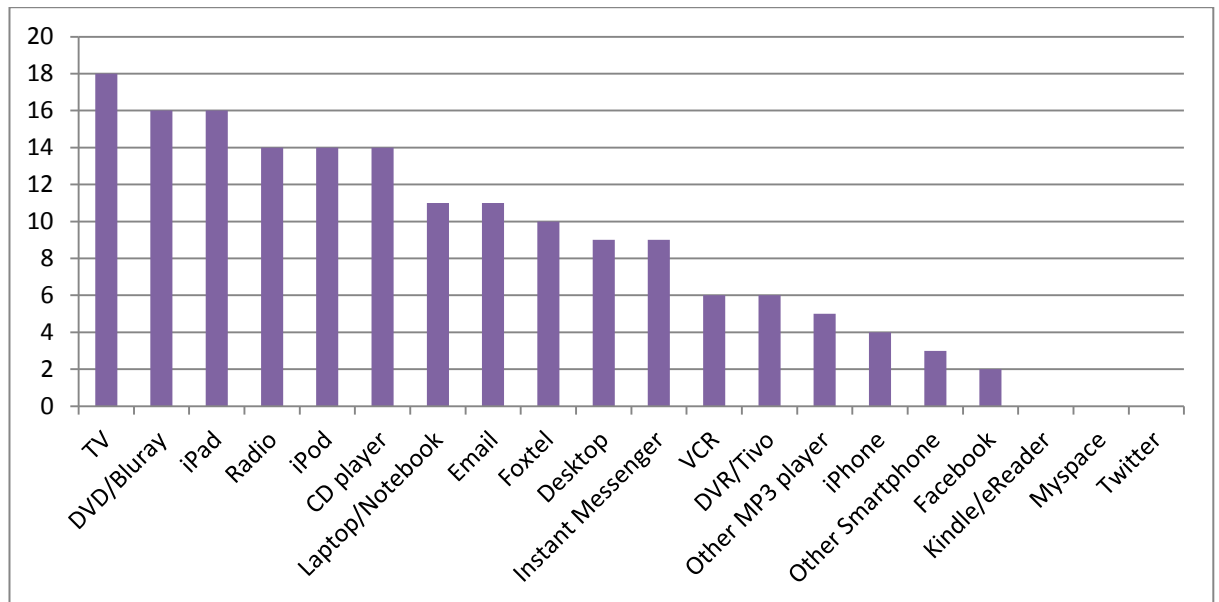


Figure 7.2: Media tools and platforms owned or accessible by the girls.

The girls were also queried about what screen media were located in their bedroom. 39% (n=7) had a TV in their bedroom, while only 17% (n=3) had a computer in their bedroom.

Overall, it was made evident that the girls had quite expansive media environments which were easily accessible. While several of the parents adopted an extensive approach to monitoring, many were less rigorous and didn't exert as much influence over their daughters' access to media.

### Degrees of engagement

After establishing what access the girls were afforded to their media, the degree to which they engaged with it was addressed. With regards to the girls' television viewing, 55% (n=10) spent 0-1 hours watching TV per day, while the remaining 45% (n=8) spent 1-3 hours, whereas 88% (n=16) of the girls spent 0-1 hours online per day, compared to a mere 12% (=2) using it for 1-3 hours. Television viewing, therefore, would appear to be a more popular activity with these girls than browsing online.

Other popular genres of media included magazines (read by 72% of the participants; n=13), music videos (viewed predominantly on YouTube by 66% of participants; n=12), and movies, of which each girl provided an expansive list of her favourites. Furthermore, the girls spent a considerable amount of time on their iPads; primarily, they used these as educational resources throughout the school day, but after school the iPads became platforms for recreation and socialisation.

The girls also identified a wide variety of specific favourites, which gave me deeper insight into what their media contexts looked like. The following section will present some of these favourites and the nature of their content, with specific emphasis on the representation of girls and women.

**Media messages**

Media representation and communication are of vital importance. While representation focuses on the intent of someone producing media, communication relates to how it might be received and perceived by its intended recipient (Kress, 2009). The recognition of the distinction between representation and communication is a central tenet of social semiotics, a field dedicated to the analysis of texts with a social emphasis to complement the semiotic element. As was previously addressed in Chapter Four, I adopted a social semiotic approach throughout my media analysis. I sought to elicit an understanding of the messages embedded in and conveyed by the girls' preferred media. To do so, I utilised a feminist theoretical lens and focused on visual resourcing and the three metafunctions. This section will examine the representation and communication of femininity as seen in selected samples of the girls' preferred media.

**Selecting media to analyse**

After reviewing data generated from the questionnaires and student interviews, my goal was to determine what media the girls favoured most and then build this into the analysis of media, in order to facilitate a contextually relevant and personally meaningful analysis.

The girls favoured an incredibly diverse range of media, including hundreds of television shows, films, and musical artists/songs, and dozens of magazines. As I approached sampling for the media analysis, I first focused on finding out which genres were most significant to the girls. During an in-depth review of questionnaire and interview data, I pursued media samples which the girls discussed with frequency and ardour. After establishing that these were magazines and music videos, specific samples were selected which were relevant and meaningful to the girls at the time of the study. Therefore, the focus was limited to media

released throughout 2013 – the year in which the study took place. One magazine and five music videos were selected for analysis. These samples are reflected in Table 4.7 and are explored in-depth in the following sub-sections.

### *Total Girl Magazine*

Magazines are a highly prevalent genre of media. Mehita (2012, p. 5) describes them as "everyday media commodities" that also comprise "a powerful media force that… [make] a profound impact on aesthetic sensibilities and socio-cultural orientations". As such, these common commodities have a high degree of familiarity with consumers. Regarding this, Mehita (p.5) explains, "Their format and shape are familiar, their full-colour glossy visual style instantly recognisable." This was certainly the case with the girls involved in this study. Magazines were an everyday commodity in their lives with which they were very familiar. There were three publications that the girls read: *Total Girl [TG], Girlfriend,* and *Dolly.* The most favoured by far was *TG;* hence, it was selected as a sample for analysis.

*TG* is a monthly Australian publication aimed at young girls. The magazine states their audience is 'tween' girls, implying their targeted age range to be between ten to twelve years of age (Total Girl, n.d.). It was immensely favoured amongst the girls engaged in my study, although some fell outside of the targeted age range – there were a few as young as eight who enjoyed reading the magazine.

### *Total Girl magazine: Intent*

Before discussing the magazine's intent, I will look at my own intention – which was to explore what this publication means to the girls in my study. Lived contexts were key here – they were an important component of my study overall, and they are an essential element of social semiotics. Therefore, I considered the following questions:

- How is this magazine used by its audience?
- Where is it read?
- How is it read?
- What does this magazine mean to them?

This was discussed with the girls during the fourth phase of the study, which comprised in-depth student interviews. Together, we discovered several approaches to engaging with the magazine:

- The girls look to the magazine for entertainment, information, and inspiration.
- They enjoy reading it on their own at home and also like bringing it to school to share with their friends.
- Many of the girls collect the issues and continually revisit back issues.
- Some are keen on keeping their back issues in pristine condition; others enjoy 'dissecting' the magazine and using it to decorate their rooms, school supplies, and so forth.

While discussing *TG* with the girls, it became evident that these magazines are not seen as disposable or frivolous – they are treasured items with enduring personal relevance. Although issues may come and go from the shops from month to month, they remain in the lives of these girls for much longer – stored in their bedrooms, decorating their school books, shared with their friends, and re-read or re-utilised over and over again.

Now that the girls' relationship(s) to the magazine have been addressed, it is important to consider how *TG* perceives and positions itself as a publication. *TG* describes itself as:

> [a celebration of] everything that's great about being a girl, speaking to girls in their language and always being fun, positive, stimulating and safe. It's a girls only zone where our readers can get all of the latest celebrity gossip and fashion tips, test their skills with our quizzes and puzzles, see what's hot with movies and music and be inspired by our campaigns. (Total Girl, n.d.)

The way in which *TG* frames their identity is important as it contributes considerably to what their publication represents and communicates.

### *Total Girl magazine: Sampling and analysis*

After establishing *TG*'s significance to my participants and its own intentions, I progressed to sampling and analysis. A range of samples were drawn from six of the twelve issues for 2013. The six issues chosen were from alternating months – February (Total Girl, 2013a), April (Total Girl, 2013b), June (Total Girl, 2013c), August (Total Girl, 2013d), October (Total Girl, 2013e), and December (Total Girl, 2013f). The sample included a range of images from different sections of the magazine, including advertisements, fashion spreads, posters, and features. To begin the analysis, four advertisements were chosen from *TG*'s 2013 collection. Advertising has become so ingrained in contemporary society that it may often be taken for granted and assumed to be free from ideology (Goldman, 2013). On the

147

contrary, advertising is a central social and economic institution with distinct ideological underpinnings (Goldman, 2013). It is an instructional medium that seeks to connect with and inform its audience as to how they can achieve happiness, success, or status through purchasing relevant products (Jhally, 2002). The advertisements shown in *TG* comprise samples with a very clear aim: to create interest in their product and encourage *TG* readers to purchase said products. How they attempt to accomplish this is of interest; hence, the analysis considered the advertisements' tripartite metafunctions with an emphasis on the construction of femininity in the images. Once again, the three metafunctions as defined by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) are:

1. The representational metafunction: *What is this about?*
2. The interpersonal metafunction: *How does it engage the viewer?*
3. The compositional metafunction: *How do the representational and interpersonal metafunctions relate to each other and integrate into a meaningful whole?*

There were also three fashion spreads selected for analysis which collectively comprised sixteen images. Fashion spreads are interesting samples to consider as they are often considered to be a manifestation of idealised imagery (e.g. Sypeck, Gray & Ahrens, 2003) Furthermore, several of the girls engaged in my research favoured this section of the magazine and specifically looked at it for inspiration and stylistic guidance. Following on from the fashion spreads, two posters were selected for analysis. It is important to note the specific function of these images – they are intended for readers of *TG* to remove from the magazine and present somewhere, perhaps in their bedroom. This was certainly reflected amongst the girls engaged in my study, many of whom loved to collect, preserve, and present posters in their bedrooms, on their schoolbooks, or in scrapbooks. They are arguably the most personal form of imagery contained within the magazine due firstly to their purpose and also to how they are constructed.

Lastly, *TG* includes a variety of different features each month. Two of the most salient sections in the magazine respectively focus on 'big issues' and creative activities for girls to engage with. Three features were selected for analysis. Consideration was given to what the intent of each feature was, how the magazine sought to engage girls with this, and what messages and meanings they represented and communicated through their combined use of imagery and text. A summary of all of the samples chosen is presented in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2: Samples sourced from *Total Girl*

| Ads | | Fashion spreads | | Posters | | Features | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Brand | Issue | Title | Issue | Celebrity featured | Issue | Title | Issue |
| Energetiks | February 2013 | *Tropical Paradise* | February 2013 | Christina Parie | April 2013 | *DIY: Picture perfect* | August 2013 |
| Justice: Just for Tween Girls | April 2013 | *Winter Wonderland* | June 2013 | Bridgit Mendler | October 2013 | *The big issue: The true you* | August 2013 |
| Crayola | June 2013 | *Miami Heat* | October 2013 | | | *DIY: Cute eye masks* | October 2013 |

The analysis of *TG* led to two important findings. Firstly, I will look at resourcing and how the magazine sought to make meaning via colour, gaze, facial expressions, and bodily orientation. Secondly, I will look at the depiction of femininity. Both areas are critically important and contribute to the media contexts with which the girls are engaged.

### *Resourcing choices in TG*

In social semiotics, 'resources' include compositional components of an image that influence its meaning (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). Within the context of visual media, such resources might include the utilisation of camera angles, point(s) of view, distance, gaze, facial expression(s), bodily orientation(s), touch, non-diegetic text (i.e. text which is superimposed onto the image), diegetic text (i.e. text which is part of the represented world), texture, or touch (Rose, 2012). Each of these resources has an enduring history within social semiotics and on a broader scale (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). The choices made regarding resourcing have an impact on how meaning is made and how ideas are represented and communicated.

In *TG,* a range of resources were employed to make meaning. Prevalent resources included colour, gaze, facial expression, and bodily orientation. Colour is considered to be central to visual communication and design (Arnkil, 1995; Bleicher, 2005). Gaze is also crucial as it mediates our connection to what we are perceiving – if a person in a photograph looks directly at us, this creates the idea of a connection and constitutes an act of demand (Harrison, 2003; Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). Facial expression then elaborates on this by defining what demand the person is making (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001) – for example, friendship, admiration, or deference. Alternatively, the person looking away from us

(perhaps to another represented participant in the shot or outside of the frame) is on offer and there for us to contemplate (Harrison, 2003). Bodily orientation contributes to this as well and can have a significant influence over narrative and conceptual meanings in imagery. These were all major resources utilised by *TG* throughout the selected samples.

One of the major ways in which resourcing was used was to position the reader in relation to the models shown in the magazine. The girls shown in *TG* were made to fulfil a very important role; they were repeatedly and rigorously constructed as peers, companions, and equals of the reader. By applying interpersonal resourcing techniques, the magazine attempted to create emotive and engaging imagery that would prove inviting for their readers. This was primarily accomplished via gaze, eyelines, and facial expressions, which worked to construct the models as friendly, approachable, and familiar (examples are seen in Figure 7.3). This sense of intimacy was accompanied by a sense of equality – through the use of angling, readers are given the sense that the girls in the magazine exist on the same level and in the same reality as they themselves do.



Figure 7.3: Examples of images constructed to demand viewer engagement

However, the proposed sense of equality and intimacy is essentially an illusion. The girls in the magazine are definitely not the equals of the readers for a multitude of reasons; the most important of which, arguably, is that the girls in the magazine belong to a narrow category of femininity which is normalised and idealised. For example, they are primarily white, thin, and conventionally feminine. While the magazine attempts to equate the reality of their readers to the 'reality' of their models, this is ultimately impossible as although the

150

models might seem familiar, they are fictional and contained within a static context which is subject to multiple forms of manipulation. These manipulations (which might include industry techniques such as lighting, digital alterations, etc.) are also subtle and unacknowledged by the magazine, and therefore made to appear natural and normal. Hence, there exists an imbalance between the models and the readers – the former are fictional, idealised, and irretrievably 'perfected', while the latter are encouraged to perceive the models as real, accessible, and representative of what it means to be a girl.

### *Depictions of femininity in TG*

A visual social semiotic analysis of advertisements, fashion spreads, posters, and features from *TG* reveals a range of depictions of femininity. The narratives the female represented participants were embedded in were varied, as were their roles to some extent – they were shown as creators, performers, explorers, and more. They were, at times, constructed as strong, talented, and active. There was also equally a tendency to portray them as overtly sweet, kind, and docile. A focal point of the publication was female friendship and solidarity – this was the most common narrative and it underpinned and enriched almost all of the samples. Glamour was also made highly salient – it was visually apparent in all of the samples, and it was reinforced as a normative and desirable pursuit for young girls. It was also generally similar to an adult-centric idea of glamour – quite often, the girls were dressed and styled very much the same as adult women might be.

Overall, the notions of femininity were predominantly traditional. There were three intersecting levels across which traditional femininity existed. As is delineated in Figure 7.4, this included a behavioural level (e.g. engaging with fashion and cosmetics), a symbolic level (e.g. girls as princesses, angels, etc.), or an aesthetic level (e.g. girls portrayed as young, thin, white, and pertaining to other hegemonic conventions of beauty – as shown in Figure 7.5). While there were narratives that would appear empowering to young girls, these were inextricably linked to hegemonic ideals regarding femininity. Although girls were constructed as strong, talented, and active, these same girls were inevitably of a very narrow ilk.

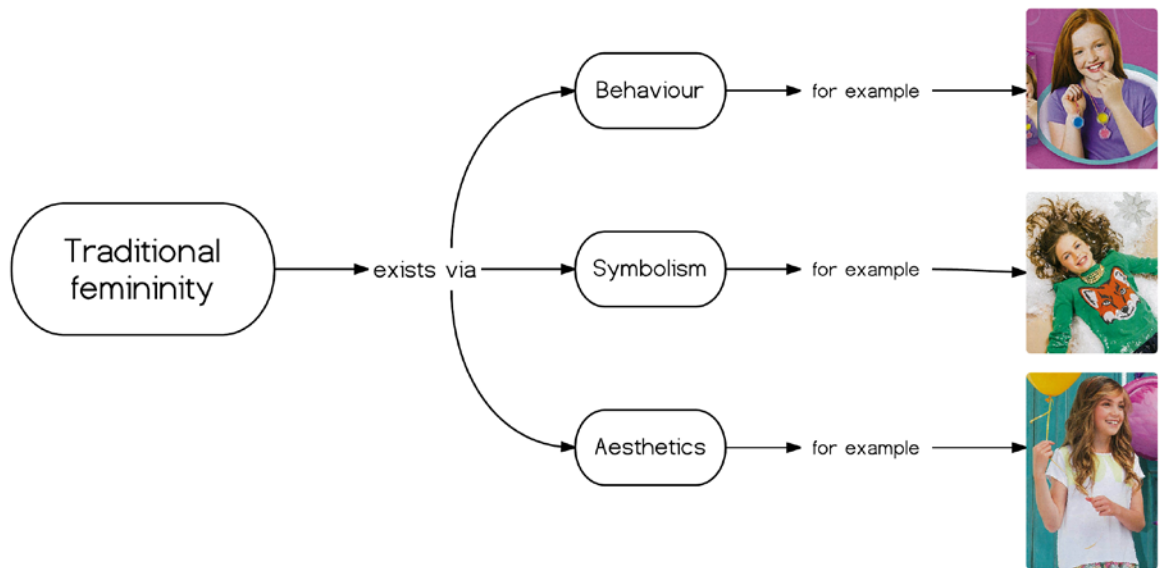Figure 7.4: Incarnations of traditional femininity



Figure 7.5: Aesthetically conventional femininity on display in *TG*.

### *Music Videos*

The other most popular form of media accessed by the girls were music videos. Popular music is a type of media which has considerable cultural significance and salience. It represents a "leading cultural industry" (Shuker, 2008, p. 2) and has for some time. As the

music industry has evolved, music videos have become an utterly essential component of this landscape. Furthermore, in recent years they have become unprecedentedly visible and accessible (Railton & Watson, 2011). It has also been argued that music videos represent a legitimate art form which has inspired pervasive changes to advertising and film-making (Ayeroff, 2000). As such, music videos should be recognised as an important component of the broader music industry and as a significant type of media.

*Music videos: Intent*

Representing a convergence of audio and visual modes of representation and communication, music videos possess two important functions. Firstly, they function as promotional devices with commercial intent (Railton & Watson, 2011; Shuker, 2008). Railton and Watson (2011, p. 2) explain, "All music videos have an avowedly commercial agenda: they are first and foremost a *commercial* for an associated but distinct consumer product, the music track itself". However, music videos are not purely commercial in nature. They also function as multimodal texts that are reflective of an artist's identity (Machin, 2010).

The significance of music videos was certainly made clear by the girls during my conversations with them. It was one of their most beloved types of media and their engagement was often very personal and emotive. As I approached the media analysis, the following questions arose:

- How are music videos used by their audience?
- Where are they viewed?
- How are they viewed?
- What do music videos mean to them?

Much like with *TG,* this topic was addressed during the student interviews. Upon hearing the girls' reflections and explanations, I came to understand the following:

- Music videos are avidly adored by the girls.
- The girls seek out music videos on a daily basis (sometimes more than once per day) and are very emotionally invested in finding new ones or rewatching old ones.
- They are viewed privately at times – the girls seek out solitude and sing and dance along.

153

- They are also viewed socially – the girls view music videos with their friends and enjoy them together.
- They are viewed for entertainment and as a way to connect with and admire their favourite artists.

Music videos have prevalence and significance in the lives of these girls. They engage with music videos in a variety of ways and for a range of purposes. Much like with *TG,* music videos are often enduringly relevant to the girls. Although they can't hold on to them as physical artefacts, they bookmark them online or download them onto their iPads, iPods, or PCs. Some music videos are more fleeting than others; there are those that come and go, and those that have a degree of permanence. Those with permanence are the girls' favourite songs from their favourite artists, which are often listened to/viewed repeatedly over an extended period.

*Music videos: Sampling and analysis*

In terms of sampling, two priorities were established. Firstly, I wanted to pursue an analysis of music videos which were favoured by the girls participating in my study. Maintaining relevance to these girls and their personal media contexts was deemed very important. Secondly, I aimed to engage in an in-depth examination of a small selection of music videos, rather than a broader review of a larger selection. This sampling approach is advocated by Railton and Watson (2011) and further aligns with the study's research objectives and questions, which were primarily focused on the lived experiences and contexts of the girls, with a less emphatic focus on the nature of the media with which they engaged. It was also not my intent to attempt broad generalisations. Therefore, by selecting a smaller sample of music videos, this ensured the focus remained specifically contextual to the participants and directly relevant to the overall thrust of my research, which was to identify their lived experiences and perspectives.

After assessing which artists/songs/music videos were most valued by the participants via a review of questionnaire and interview data, I established a small sample of five videos. These five videos were frequently favoured by the girls and often assigned a sense of meaningfulness. All five were released throughout 2013, therefore maintaining relevance to the year in which the study took place. The videos selected for analysis are summarised in Table 7.3.

Table 7.3: Music videos selected for analysis

| Artist | Song | Reference |
|---|---|---|
| Miley Cyrus | *Wrecking Ball* | (MileyCyrusVEVO, 2013) |
| Little Mix | *Salute* | (littlemixVEVO, 2013) |
| Katy Perry | *Roar* | (KatyPerryVEVO, 2013) |
| Britney Spears | *Work B***h* | (BritneySpearsVEVO, 2013) |
| Taylor Swift | *22* | (TaylorSwiftVEVO, 2013) |

The videos were viewed on YouTube as this was the preferred listening/viewing platform for my participants. I viewed the videos repeatedly and assessed them with an emphasis on several important aspects. The analytical dimensions covered were music, lyrics, and visuals. A breakdown of these dimensions is seen in Figure 7.6. They were analysed separately at first, with specific attention paid to the utilisation of each dimension. Then they were considered in terms of how they integrated and formed a cohesive fusion. The key question here – as asked by Machin (2010, p. 185) – was: "How do sound, image, and word work together *multimodally*?"
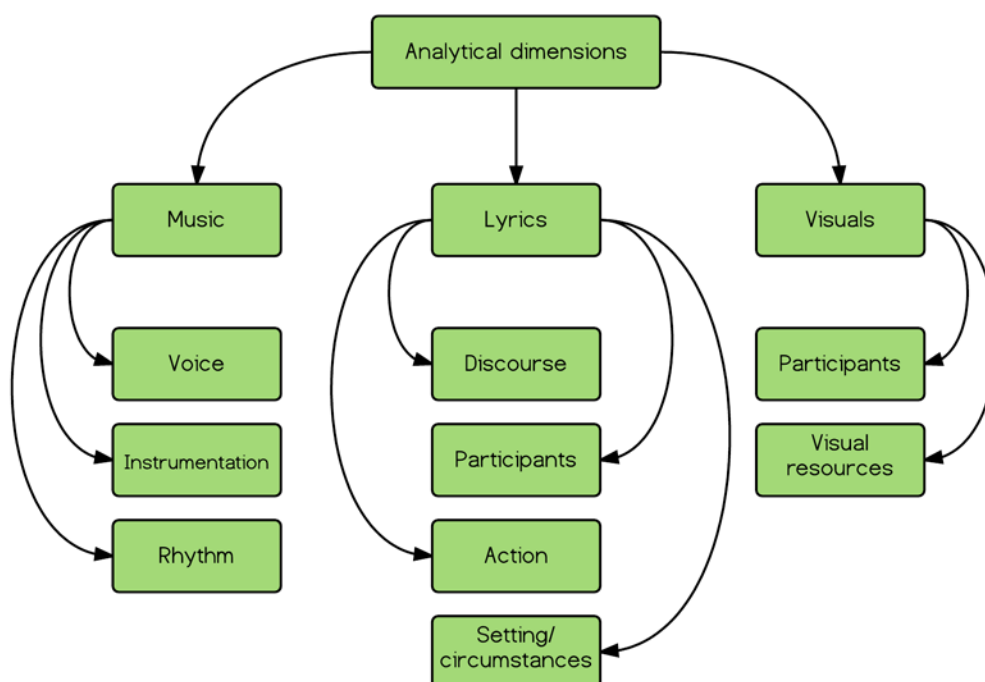


Figure 7.6: Analytical dimensions for music videos

The three metafunctions were also essential to how meaning was made in each of the music videos. As previously discussed, these three metafunctions address the subject of a text, how

155

it engages its viewer(s), and how it forms a meaningful whole as regards composition. There were a number of important findings that resulted from an analysis of the music videos. In the sections to follow, I will first look at the role of resourcing in the music videos and how this helped to make meaning. I will then proceed to an exploration of major unifying themes.

*Resourcing in the music videos*

The videos employed a range of techniques to convey their narrative, engage their viewer(s), and create compositional cohesion. This varied between the different music videos, but there were some which were prevalent throughout. These included interpersonal resourcing techniques, colour, and lighting and camera angles.
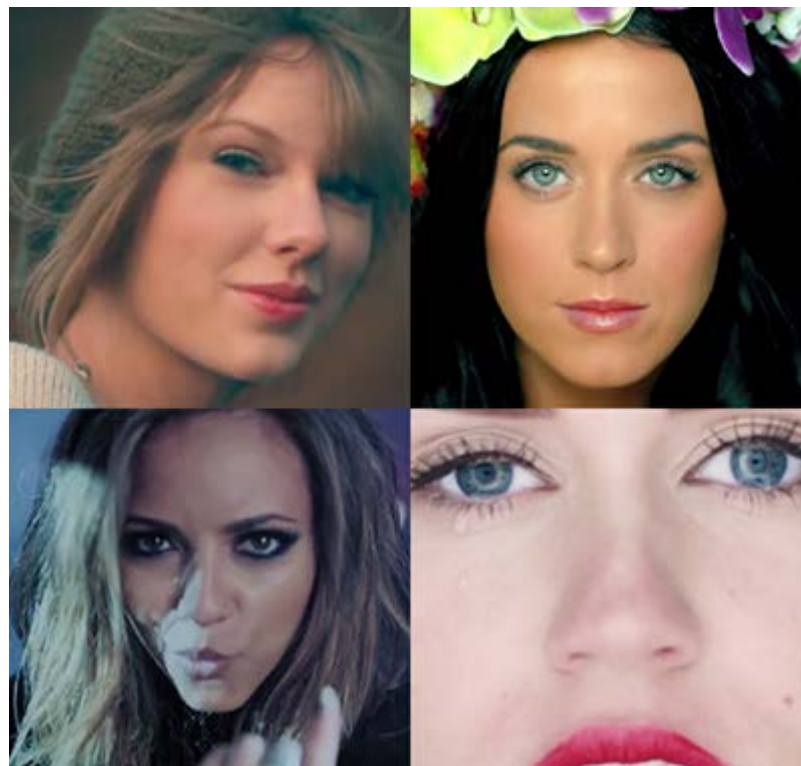


Figure 7.7: Interpersonal resourcing techniques
(Clockwise from top left: *22, Roar, Wrecking Ball, Salute)*

Interpersonal resourcing was typically used to demand attention from the viewer and to then create a connection between the viewer and the artist. As shown in Figure 7.7, this included the use of direct gaze and certain types of facial expressions shown. For example, in *22* Taylor Swift is shown gazing into the camera (at her audience) with an affectionate smile. In *Salute,* Jade Thirwall leans in towards the camera and beckons to the viewer. In both *Roar* and *Wrecking Ball,* Katy Perry and Miley Cyrus also use direct gaze and emotive expressions to engage with their viewers.
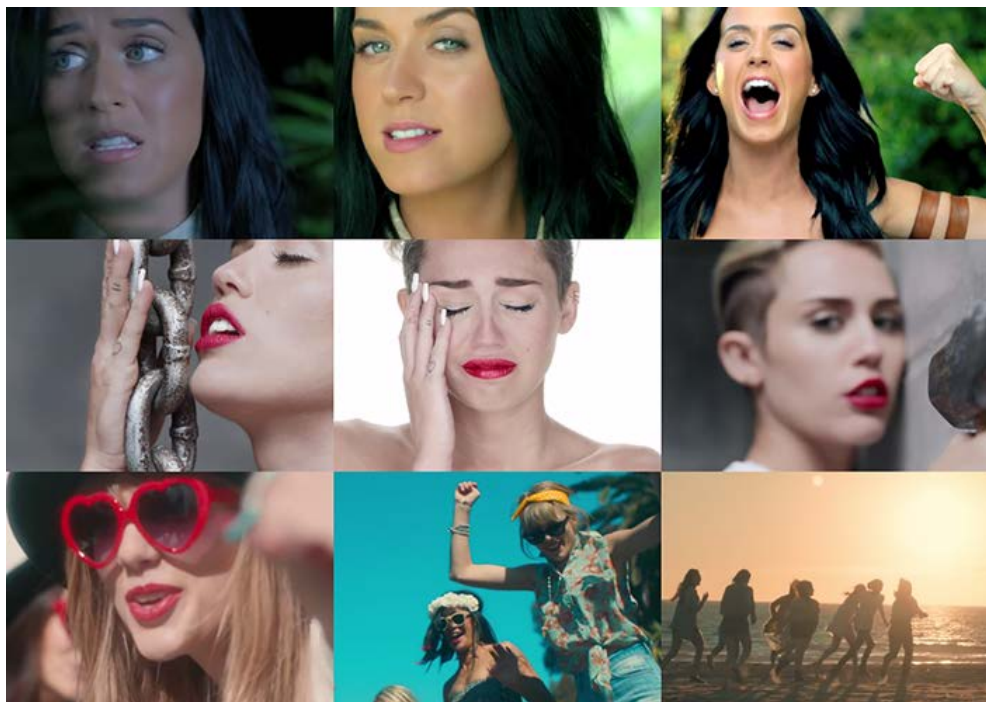
Figure 7.8: Colour fulfilled multiple functions across the music videos
(top: *Roar;* middle: *Wrecking Ball;* bottom: *22)*

Moving on to the use of lighting, this was a prevalent resource in all of the videos and it fulfilled a variety of purposes. For example, in *Work B\*\*\*h* and *Roar,* lighting was often used to enhance the artist and reinforce her role in the video (see Figure 7.9). Camera angles were also important here. As illustrated in Figure 7.10, *Work B\*\*\*h, Roar,* and *Salute* all have hierarchical elements (e.g. Spears as dominant, Perry as a regal heroine, and Little Mix as empowered and in charge). This was often established and/or reinforced via the use of high camera angles, positioning each woman as superior to other represented participants and/or the viewer. Alternately, in *22* the emphasis is on girlfriends having fun. The viewer is supposed to feel a sense of belonging with these girls, hence camera angels are used to sustain a sense of equality and familiarity.
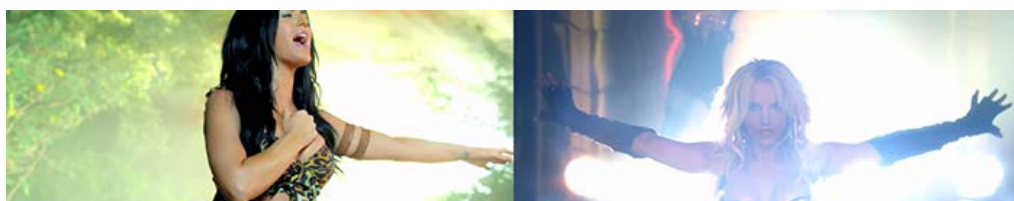


Figure 7.9: Lighting as a key resource in *Roar* (left) and *Work B\*\*\*h* (right).

Figure 7.10: Camera angles used to imply power in *Roar* (left), *Salute* (middle), and *Work B\*\*\*h* (right).
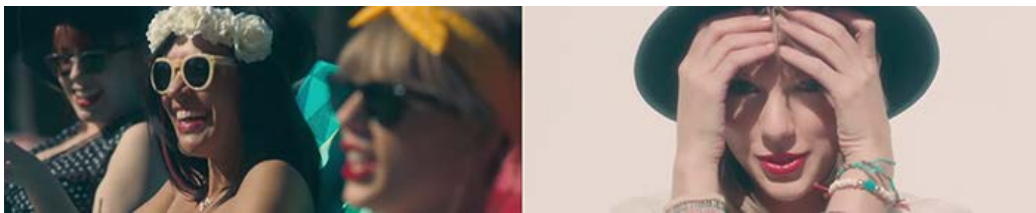


Figure 7.11: Camera angles fostering familiarity and equality in *22*.

### *Unifying themes*

The music videos were thematically diverse. Each of the songs and artists had their own identity which were conveyed differently through sound and sight. Focus was specifically placed on the identities of girls and women and the concept of femininity. Each video was examined carefully to see how this was addressed. I will explore each of the common themes (shown in Figure 7.12) in the following subsections, though it should be noted that there were other themes that were unique to each music video. Each theme is illustrated by a lyric from one of the songs, as shown in Table 7.4.

Table 7.4: Quotes reflecting themes common to all of the music videos

| Theme | Quote | Source |
|---|---|---|
| Glamour | "You wanna live fancy?" | *Work B\*\*\*h* by Britney Spears |
| Power | "I am a champion" | *Roar* by Katy Perry |
| Resilience | "Dancing through the fire" | *Roar* by Katy Perry |
| Leadership and regality | "The female federal" | *Salute* by Little Mix |
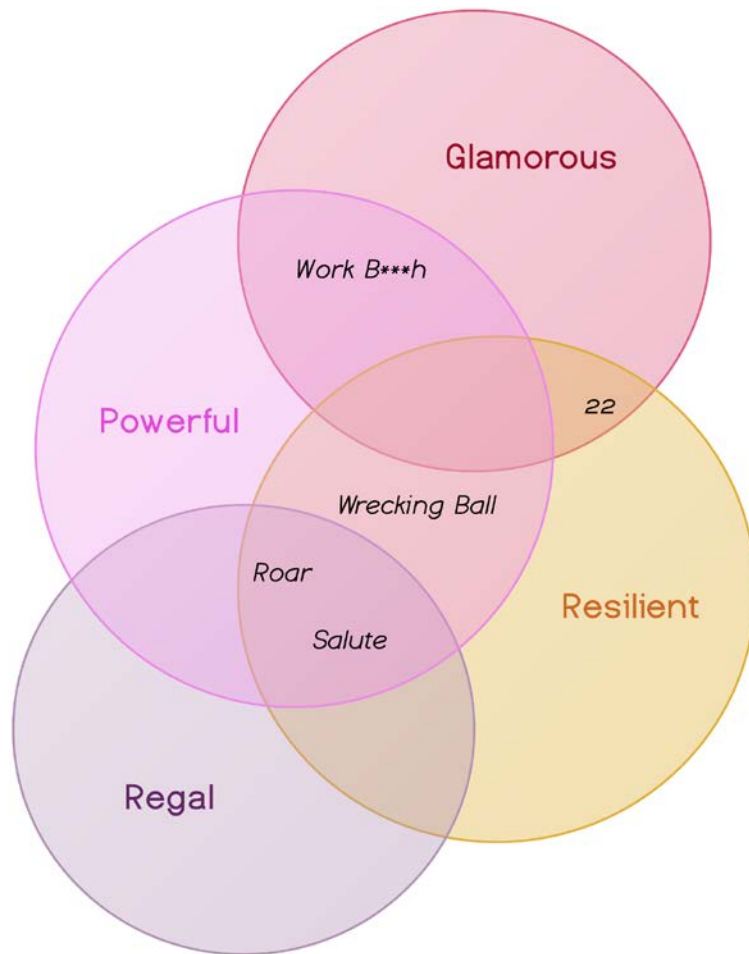
Figure 7.12: Common concepts in the music videos

*"You wanna live fancy?": Glamour*

Glamour is visible throughout the music videos to some extent – the women are often well-dressed and adorned with makeup and jewellery. It is portrayed somewhat satirically in *Roar,* where Perry is shown using elemental resources to fashion clothing or concoct cosmetics. However, glamour is most prevalent and pertinent in *22* and *Work B\*\*\*h,* where Swift and Spears are respectively shown pampering themselves (see Figure 7.13).



Figure 7.13: The portrayal of glamour in *22* (left) and *Work B\*\*\*h* (right).

159

*"I am a champion...": Power*

Power is one of the most salient themes throughout the music videos. It forms a central component of the narratives in *Wrecking Ball, Work B\*\*\*h, Roar,* and *Salute.* As mentioned previously, power is reinforced through use of camera angles, lighting, and interpersonal resourcing. The female singers in these videos are emphatically positioned as powerful individuals, which is constructed as a major component of their identities.

*"Dancing through the fire": Resilience*

Resilience is also highly salient and is crucial in *Wrecking Ball, Roar, 22,* and *Salute.* In *Wrecking Ball* and *Roar,* resilience comes to life visually, audibly, and lyrically. In *Salute* and *22,* the emphasis on resilience is largely lyrical. *Salute* evokes this through the use of potent language. For example, the "female federal" are said to "[stand] strong" and "carry on". In *22,* Swift sings, "Everything will be alright/If you keep me next to you/…/Everything will be alright/If we just keep dancing like we're/22". This is reflected on-screen as well, but perhaps not to the same extent as was seen in *Wrecking Ball* and *Roar,* where there is an overt focus on the resilience of Cyrus and Perry respectively.

*"The female federal": Leadership and regality*

Lastly, the women in *Salute* and *Roar* are positioned as leaders and/or regal beings. This forms a significant narrative point in both videos. *Salute's* lyrics target women and address them as allies in a war against patriarchal ideals. The women singing and their audience/recruits are positioned as strong, agentic individuals who are capable of fighting, thriving, and ascending. Terms used to position their audience include 'warriors', 'queens', 'female federal', 'fighters'. This is reflected visually as the singers assert themselves, attain power, and are shown in ruling and regal capacities.

*Summary*

The music videos selected for analysis told a variety of stories about women. It is worthwhile noting that although the identities and narratives of the women portrayed varied, their aesthetic was considerably uniform. Overall, the women displayed conventional beauty standards, as shown in Figure 7.14. They are predominantly thin and traditionally attractive (e.g. with long hair, makeup, etc.). Much like with *TG,* this raises concerns regarding how girls might perceive themselves in comparison to the women seen on-screen – especially when several of the videos have a high degree of bodily focus. For example, *Wrecking Ball* and *Work B\*\*\*h* are particularly focused on the forms of Cyrus and Spears (and her fellow

female performers, too). That said, *Wrecking Ball* also focuses lyrically and visually on narratives of heartbreak and the resulting despair, which may be meaningful to those listening to the song and/or viewing the video. The diversity of ideas contained within the music videos and also within *TG* is a key finding, which will be discussed in the section to follow.



Figure 7.14: Body diversity was limited in the selected music videos.
(Clockwise from top left: *Wrecking Ball, Roar, Salute, 22, Work B\*\*\*h)*

### Discussion

In Chapter Six, two key findings were identified: firstly, that there was variance in terms of media education at Seashore Primary School; and secondly, that there were commonalities between the educators' and parents' perspectives. Here, I will discuss the third key finding which relates to how femininity was portrayed in the girls' favoured media.

### Key finding 3: Conflicting portrayals of femininity

My review of the literature revealed numerous issues concerning the representation of girls and women throughout media. Girls and women were under-represented on-screen (e.g. Lauzen, 2012; Smith & Choueiti, 2011) and behind the scenes (e.g. Lauzen, 2012; Smith & Choueiti, 2010; Writers Guild of America West, 2013). When they were shown, they were frequently subject to stereotyping (e.g. Berns, 2012; Hust & Brown, 2008; Ward, 2003), idealisation (e.g. Davalos, Davalos & Layton, 2007; Sypeck, Gray & Ahrens, 2003), objectification (e.g. Aubrey, 2010; Ward, 2003), and/or sexualisation (e.g. Hatton & Trautner, 2011; Mager & Helgeson, 2010; Smith & Choueiti, 2011).

The ways in which femininity was portrayed in the girls' favoured media – which were editions of *TG* magazine and a number of music videos, all of which were sourced from the year 2013 – is a key finding that raises a number of curiosities and questions. Under-representation certainly was not an issue, as the samples selected were distinctly female-focused. Onto the exact nature of representation, I discovered various expressions of femininity in a narrative or thematic sense. For instance, the girls and women represented in the magazines and music videos assumed a wide range of identities and communicated a variety of messages. Common themes included glamour, power, resilience, leadership and regality. The stories told included the experience of heartbreak and despair (e.g. *Wrecking Ball),* one's capacity to survive and thrive (e.g. *Roar*), and the importance of female friendships (e.g. *TG: 'Justice'* and *'Miami Heat', 22).* Much of the content was relatable and it was often conveyed in a way that was intentionally appealing and enticing for viewers due to visual resourcing tactics, such as colour and gaze.

From my perspective, the complications arise when looking at the aesthetics of the magazines and music videos. The girls and women contained within were aesthetically homogenous. The majority were traditionally feminine and aligned with conventional standards of 'beauty'. Although the landscape was thematically diverse, it was visually static. This is a particularly pressing issue when one considers that the visual context is the first access point for these girls – for example, many of them begin reading a magazine by flicking through it without reading any of the text. The girls also expressed that they enjoy visual aspects of media – hence, the question becomes: By rendering the visual context static, what might the implications be?

As I watched the music videos and read through the issues of *TG,* I was reminded of important points made in the literature regarding the prevalence of the thin ideal (Davalos et al., 2007; Kotarba & Held, 2006; Levine, 2000; Sypeck et al., 2003) and its potential impact. Previous research indicates that the aesthetic presented in mainstream media may carry negative consequences. For example, media promoting the thin ideal may provoke increased self-consciousness (Ward & Harrison, 2005), an interest in dieting (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2006; Field et al., 2001), or other body modification pursuits such as purging or using laxatives (Field et al., 1999). Indeed, the aesthetic homogeneity can be construed as concerning. A further question that must be asked is: what about the other elements contained within the girls' favoured media?

In their response to the report published by the APA Task Force, Lerum and Dworkin (2009) raise an important concern regarding the APA's tendency to focus on negative elements of

media. Lerum and Dworkin are not alone here – similar points are made by other authors and there is demand in the literature for research and public discourse to adopt a more nuanced perspective (Aapola et al., 2005; Strasburger, 2010; Qvarsell, 2000; Vanwesenbeeck, 2009; Ward et al., 2006). The notion that media content exists beyond the negative elements is valid and worthy of recognition. While it is concerning that the girls' favoured media routinely featured an aesthetically homogenous concept of girl/womanhood, there were other aspects that could be construed as positive. For example, the depiction of Perry in *Roar* as a woman who survives and thrives could be cathartic and inspiring for young women. The focus on female friendship that was evident in *TG* and *22* might feel familiar or comforting.

I would propose that the diversity evident in these media may translate to their audience in terms of their reaction. For example, it is possible that a young girl may desire to look like Taylor Swift – thin, blonde, and conventionally beautiful – and that she may feel disappointed if she cannot meet this ideal. Simultaneously, it may also be possible that the same girl could draw comfort or inspiration from the music video for *22*. Therefore, my proposal is that there is potential for negative and positive to co-exist. Furthermore, girls engaging with these media might well find meaning beyond what I'm describing – it is important here to note that I possess an adult and academically-geared perspective. Hence, the all-important question that we must ask is: What does this mean for the girls who engage with this media?

## Chapter Summary

This chapter has focused on the girls' media contexts by exploring their media access and use through data generated via questionnaires. The girls' most favoured media – magazines and music videos – have also been explored in terms of how the girls relate to these genres and what is being represented and communicated by several pertinent samples. The representation and communication was analysed via a social semiotic approach which focused on the three metafunctions, key resourcing techniques, and unifying themes.

It is evident that the girls exist in expansive media contexts with an array of different media which they use for a variety of purposes. The girls have a pronounced interest in magazines and music videos, particularly in those aimed at a female audience such as *TG* and music videos starring popular female artists. The analysis of *TG* focused on the use of visual resourcing to achieve certain aims (such as appealing to their audience). It also delved into the representation and communication of femininity as a concept, where it was revealed that these were predominantly traditional. The music video analysis focused on a variety of important dimensions and elicited themes pertaining to the portrayal of girls, women, and

femininity. There was thematic diversity overall, but there were some common concepts such as glamour, power, resilience, and leadership/regality.

Both the magazines and music videos shared in presenting a homogenous aesthetic of femininity pertaining to hegemonic conventions of beauty – that is, the human represented participants were largely young, white, thin, and normatively attractive. The tensions between thematic diversity and aesthetic homogeneity led to the foregrounding and discussion of the study's third key finding, which looked at the conflicting portrayals of femininity. Subsequently, questions are raised regarding how viewers might respond to these messages and imagery. The following chapter will focus on an immensely important issue which resides at the heart of this thesis: the girls' experiences and perspectives with media, as told by the girls themselves.

# Chapter Eight

# Girls' lived experiences: Findings and Discussion

---

**Chapter Introduction**

The previous two chapters provided insight into multiple intersecting contexts within the girls' microsystem, including their school, home, and media contexts, with three key findings being foregrounded and discussed. This chapter focuses on the girls' individual contexts with an emphasis on their perspectives, their experiences, and the elucidation of their voices. As the girls' perspectives and experiences were varied and complex, this chapter approaches the issues from three key angles as shown in Figure 8.1.
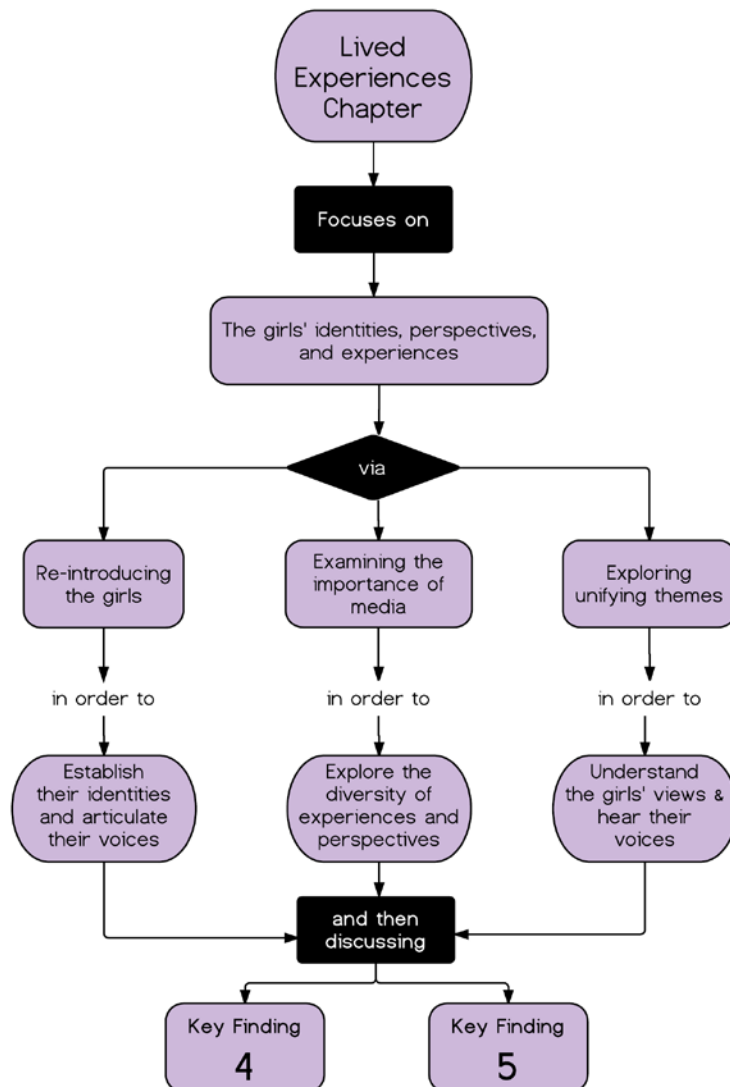


Figure 8.1: The content and structure of Chapter Eight

Firstly, I will reintroduce the girls engaged in the study. Secondly, I will discuss the significance of media to the girls and delineate a spectrum of importance, which will be followed by illustrative case studies. Thirdly, I will approach the core themes that were relevant to all of the girls – i.e., 'unifying themes', which were the girls thought of media as exciting, emotionally significant, curious, and eye-opening. The girls also reported that they did not perceive their educators and/or parents as particularly communicative about media. Finally, I will engage in a discussion of the key findings that emerge from this chapter, of which there were two: the fourth reports on the intimate, meaningful, and diverse nature of the connections shared between girls and media, whilst the fifth reports on the disparity of perspectives between children and adults. The findings presented in this chapter have been foregrounded due to their pertinence to the research questions and, with regards to the unifying themes, their salience in the dataset.

All of the findings presented here primarily derive from the school-based student interviews and the home-based student interviews and home tours, although some incidental reference is made to other means of data generation. The student interviews were phenomenological in nature and involved engaging in deep dialogues with the girls regarding their experiences and perspectives. Analysis involved epoche, reduction, horizontalisation, and imaginative variation (see Table 4.6).

**"All about us:" Re-introducing the girls**



Figure 8.2: Samples of self-portraits by the girls (top left: Abigail; bottom center: Lily; top right: Sam).

The first part of this chapter focuses on reintroducing the girls who were engaged in the study and provide some additional information as to who they are. This is in keeping with my conceptual emphasis on positioning the girls at the heart of the study.

As previously outlined in Chapter Four, the girls who consented to participate were aged 7 – 13 and were in Years 2 – 7. As per my participatory worldview and feminist theoretical lens, they were considered equal to myself in the research process and were attributed ownership over their contribution to the study. Their self-selected pseudonyms, ages, class groups, and the extent to which they participated is reflected in Table 4.4. Some samples of the girls' self-portraits are provided in Figure 8.2.

The findings presented in this chapter have emerged from analysis of girls' many contributions to the study, including their questionnaires, interviews, and home tours. The coding schema which was utilised is shown in Table 8.1. As per the previous coding schemas for the educator and parent interview data, included within are details regarding categories, sub-categories, further categorical elements, example statements, and analytical notes.

This chapter will continue to introduce the girls by exploring their identities, perspectives, and lived experiences in greater detail. Further work samples will be provided as a visual companion. The following section presents findings illustrating the importance attributed to media by the girls.

Table 8.1: Coding schema for the student interview data

| Categories | Sub-categories | Further categorisation | Example statements | Analytical notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| About the girls | Girls' self-descriptions<br><br>Girls describing their home contexts/families<br><br>Girls describing their school contexts/educators | • Positive/negative/neutral – are these values evident in their statements, e.g. a positive perception of the class curriculum? | *"I... my favourite colour is blue. I'm a tomboy."* - Lily<br><br>*"I have two sisters and a brother. My brother goes to this school in Year 5 and my other sisters go to the [local] college, they're – Rose is in Year 11 and Brooke is my other sister and she's in Year 9."* - Lola<br><br>*"Well, with our class it's... the boys are dominant when it comes to sports. Like, our class has heaps of good sportspeople. Earlier on this year we played cricket. They didn't let us do anything but field! They were kind of being dominant. So that's a bit of a downside."* – Aisha | This was an important aspect of Lily's identity, as evidenced by her continued discussion of her being a tomboy.<br><br>The makeup of Lola's family is noteworthy – this could potentially expand her media context as she would have access/exposure to her siblings' favoured media.<br><br>Aisha isn't the only student to raise issues around gender relations at Seaglass – Lily and Whippet also made reference to issues like this one. |
| Girls and their media | Girls and the iPad program<br><br>Girls and magazines<br><br>Girls and music videos<br><br>Girls, film, and television<br><br>Girls & other genres | • Past/present/future – is time a factor here, e.g. differentiated references to previous and future school priorities?<br><br>• Active or passive – is the educator construing entities, e.g. media, students, as active or passive? | *"It's really cool to learn stuff on the iPads because they're touchable. And some iPads have these sort of keyboards where they're attached to the case."* – Lily<br><br>*"I love girly magazines! I like to look at the toys because sometimes I look at these magazines and see if I can get mum or dad to buy me a present. I like lots of things in here."* – Hayley<br><br>*"Miley Cyrus is one of my most favourites because she sings* Wrecking Ball, *which is my most favourite song. It's a fun song. I like Miley's music and I've been to one of her concerts, it was so cool."* - Tuscany<br><br>*"I love Rose. I also like Donna. And Amy Pond, she's my favourite. She's a bit like me. I always love to go on adventures."* -Kat<br><br>*"Mum used to get me onto the games and I used to play them... although I've forgotten what games I played. Now... I play Minecraft a lot."* – Lily | Lily speaks very positively about the iPad program with a sense of admiration for their design shown here, as well as an appreciation of their educative capacity shown in other statements.<br><br>Hayley, like many of the girls, is fond of 'girly' magazines – e.g. *Total Girl.* It is interesting to note that she uses it to get her parents to buy her things.<br><br>Tuscany's perception of *Wrecking Ball* and Miley Cyrus is noteworthy. She also mentions many other female artists and their music videos.<br><br>As soon as Kat started talking about *Doctor Who,* she leapt to admiring the female characters. Many of the girls (e.g. Tuscany, Whippet) seem drawn to women in media.<br><br>Lily is the only girl to mention gaming. As per educator interview data, this seems to be a more prevalent interest amongst the boys at Seaglass. |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Girls experiences and perspectives re: media | Importance of media | • Issue for attention/action – is this something which I will need to be conscious of as the study progresses, e.g. a behavioural issue with a student? | *"It's important... well, sometimes."* – Michelle | Michelle attributes some importance to media – much like Lily. Is there a spectrum of importance amongst the cohort? |
| | Emotions and media | | *"I'm happy that there's people like Olivia."* – Tuscany | Many of the girls describe happiness associated with their media, as well as a wide variety of other emotions. This seems to be an important aspect of the relationship. |
| | Curiosities about media | | *"I want to know why and that kind of stuff, and how colours effect ads and that sort of stuff."* - Lola | Lola's curiosities about advertising practices has a lot of potential – this could guide future media education in her classroom. |
| | Media as an inspiration | | *"Bethany Hamilton is, like, my idol. I love her. She inspires me because she never gave up on something that she loves and she's got a best friend that helped her and she made her dreams come true because she keeps trying and she never gives up."* – Whippet | The importance of women in media becomes evident again. Here Whippet makes it evident that she sources inspiration from media and, specifically, her heroine Bethany Hamilton. |
| | Discussions with parents and educators about media | | *"They'll say no. I'll ask why, what's it about, and they'll say, "We can't really explain it to you cause it's not something you can watch". That's about it."* – Aisha | Many other girls said similar things regarding their educators and parents, indicating that they perceive a lack of communication or limited communication. This contrasts with what the educators and parents had to say which is intriguing. |

**"Top of my list": Examining the importance of media**

During the course of the study, one key issue which was focused on extensively was how the girls perceived media in terms of its importance in their lives. The girls were keen to reflect on this and often engaged enthusiastically in monologues or dialogues about how important media was to them. Many girls sought to position media in comparison to other things that they held dear; for example, Sam said:

> *All of those kinds of media, I think they're a little important to me. I watch a lot of TV shows, like* Home & Away*, and I have Nintendo 3 and I use heaps of stuff on my iPad, and I have my computer. But there are other things.*

When asked to detail these 'other things', Sam discussed her love for animals and her passion for working with younger children as a school buddy and a babysitter. Other girls were adamant about media's centrality. For example, Kat stated passionately, *"It has a lot of meaning. It's very, very, very important. 'Cause I couldn't survive in my life without media."* Rosline provided a similar assessment, explaining that she sees media as *"very important"*. In keeping with the sentiments shared by Kat and Rosline, Whippet said, *"It's good... it's important. What would we do without it?"*

What emerged throughout these discussions was that there was a clearly delineable spectrum of importance. Some girls considered media to be absolutely crucial to them, whereas others were more *laissez faire* in their approach, and many of the girls existed somewhere in between. Shown in Figure 8.3 is a visual model of this spectrum. To illuminate how the spectrum functions and what it might mean for media to be of 'limited', 'moderate', or 'high' importance to an individual, I will now present three illustrative case studies.
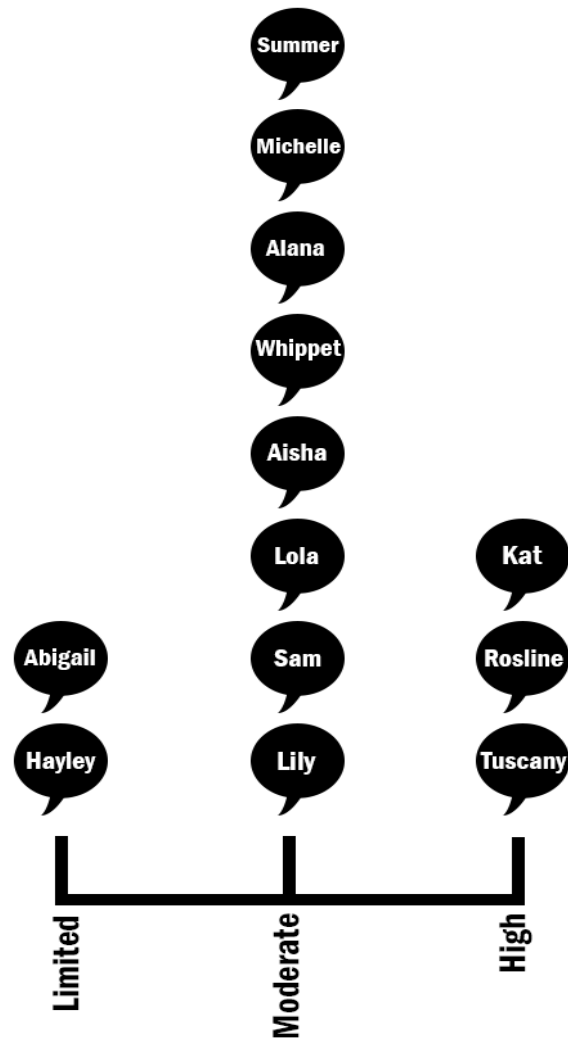
Figure 8.3: The spectrum of importance

**Illustrative case studies**

Each of the three girls discussed here – Hayley (limited importance), Lily (moderate importance), and Tuscany (high importance) – participated in the second, fourth, and fifth phases of the study, contributing questionnaires and interviews, and eventually participating in the room/home tours. Hayley and Lily's mothers also contributed to data generation during the second and fifth phases, whilst Tuscany's mother contributed only during the second phase. Each of the following sub-sections focuses on an illustrative case study, which begin at the lower end of the spectrum and ascend accordingly. There are two aims associated with these case studies. Firstly, there is an aim to provide insight into the function of the spectrum shown in Figure 8.3 and to give the reader a sense of what it means for media to possess a certain degree of importance in the life of a young girl. Secondly, there is an aim to illuminate the specific points of view, lived contexts, and lived experiences of Hayley, Lily, and Tuscany, as each of these three girls made very valuable and insightful

171

contributions throughout their participation in this study. It is also worth noting that the importance of media increases across the age span shown here – this may be attributable to the girls' experiences with media expanding with time, and may be significant in developing our understanding of girls' relationships with media.

### Hayley (Limited importance)

Hayley is a 7-year-old girl in the Year 2 class at Seaglass Primary. She is described by her teacher, Elizabeth, and her mother, Patricia, as a quiet, friendly, and imaginative girl. This was certainly reflected during the time I spent with Hayley. During our first interview, she started the session as shy and reserved. As her enthusiasm for the subject matter grew, she became more confident and engaged. This continued to increase throughout our second interview and culminated in Hayley being very eager and outgoing during the fifth phase of the study during which I visited her family at home.
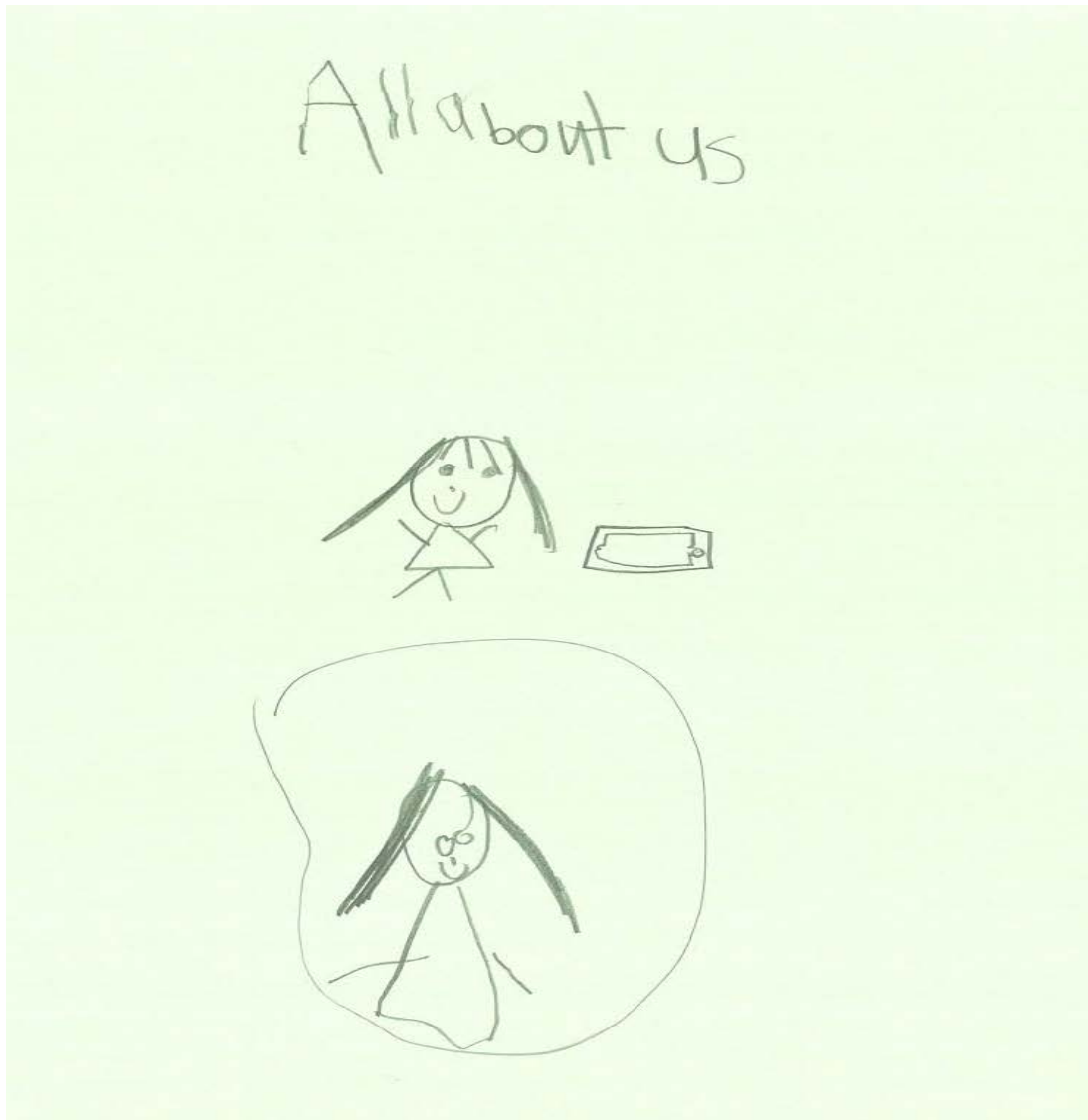
Figure 8.4: Hayley's self-portrait

Hayley's mother, Patricia, was observant of the prevalence of media in their home:

> *We listen to the radio in the car, we have CDs in the car, we have a jack for the*
> *iPad. At home they've got heaps of movies and games.*

Hayley made similar observations, stating enthusiastically:

> *My mum's got a 3D TV at her house but when I go to my dad's he has Foxtel. I've got*
> *a screen in my mum's car and in my dad's car. And I love girly magazines!*

Her self-portrait (see Figure 8.4) includes herself and her sister Maggie playing with Hayley's iPad, which is Hayley's primary gateway to media – it contains her music library

and connects her to her favourite apps and websites. It also contains a vast library of photos of herself, her family, her friends, and also her favourite celebrities. After some discussion about the role media plays in her life, Hayley reflected on its importance. She said that media is, *"Not really important but kind of. It's not very important."* As we expanded on this, it became clear that Hayley has other interests that she considers superior. For example, she mentioned her family: *"I like spending time with Maggie and mum and having a girls' afternoon. We only have one boy in our house, which is our dog."* She was also passionate about reading and shared that she is currently invested in a particular series of books:

> *I like reading* Go Girl *books. It's about girls and I've got* Christmas Girl*, Birthday Girl*, *and others. I've seen more than that [that I want] like* Sleepover Girl *and* Flower Girl.

Essentially, while Hayley is surrounded by a wide variety of media, her family and other hobbies tend to take precedence.

Although Hayley doesn't attribute much importance to media, when she does find something she enjoys, she develops a deep bond with it. For example, she has come to adore *Home & Away,* which she watches every evening with her mother. She was also very emotive in her descriptions of films such as *Mamma Mia* and *Bratz.* It would seem that when Hayley does take an interest in media, it begins as a seed and flourishes upwards and outwards. While there were several ways in which this was made apparent, I will focus on Hayley's love of *Mamma Mia,* which is a musical starring Amanda Seyfried. Hayley has watched the movie countless times and is reputed to *"know it by heart".* Her mother further noted that it has branched out into other interests for Hayley, such as singing and dancing – two pastimes which may have previously been deemed uncharacteristic given Hayley's quiet demeanour. Hayley also showed me all the other ways in which she connects with the film, its star, and its subject matter. Her iPad contains a huge range of apps focused on singing and dancing. One app – *Amanda True Make Up* by KaiserGames – focuses on Amanda Seyfried, allowing users to dress her up and apply makeup (see Figure 8.5). Hayley professed this to be her favourite app and said she spent the most time on it by far. She also confessed to seeking out more films starring Amanda Seyfried, further indicating her deep personal bond with the star.

Figure 8.5: Seyfried (shown left) is featured in *Amanda True Make Up* (shown right).

Overall, though Hayley asserted that media was *"not really important"* to her, the media with which she did engage was very personal and beloved. When Hayley does devote attention to media, she does so with great dedication. She singles out appealing elements and pursues them with fervour. These elements – be they actresses, characters, or shows/films - grow to have an enduring aesthetic presence in her life, appearing as posters in her bedroom or saved as photos on her iPad. She also seeks out websites, apps, games, and other ways of connecting with these elements. After reflecting on our interview at school and our extensive discussion during the tour of Hayley's home and bedroom, I came to conceptualise her media environment as something of a garden to which she carefully tends. It is as though seeds are planted (e.g. watching *Mamma Mia),* they begin to grow (e.g. performing song and dance routines), and they continue to branch outwards as time goes on (e.g. engaging with other related media).

### Lily (Moderate importance)

Lily is a 9-year-old girl in the Year 4 group of the 3/4 split class. When I spoke to Lily, it was immediately evident that she was very mature and eloquent. She was also humorous and spirited during her participation in the study. When we first met, Lily introduced herself with confidence. She discussed her many interests and described her family in-depth and with considerable clarity. She then assertively identified herself as a tomboy, which clearly was of great consequence to her. When asked what this means to her personally, Lily reflected:

> *It means a lot. Some people say... 'Why do you do this?' Like, 'Why are you doing this? Can't you just be doing this instead?' But I don't usually do the stuff that they tell me to do because it's... it just doesn't feel um, normal, sometimes. And, uh, yeah. It means a lot.*

Figure 8.6: Lily's self-portrait (illustration by Lily)

Although Lily prefers to engage in conventionally masculine pastimes (such as football and soccer), she often finds it challenging to relate to boys. Of this, she said:

> *If we're playing soccer, the boys... sometimes get a little bit bossy and say, 'Oh, you shouldn't be there, you should be over there, or over there.' But I know where I am. But sometimes they always think that they know best.*

During my tour of Lily's home, she was keen to continue developing her 'character'/representation of self in our 'story'/research. Her self-portrait is included in Figure 8.6 and illustrates what Lily considers most important about herself: her love of animals and *My Little Pony,* her athleticism, and her love of media (detail shown in Figure 8.7).
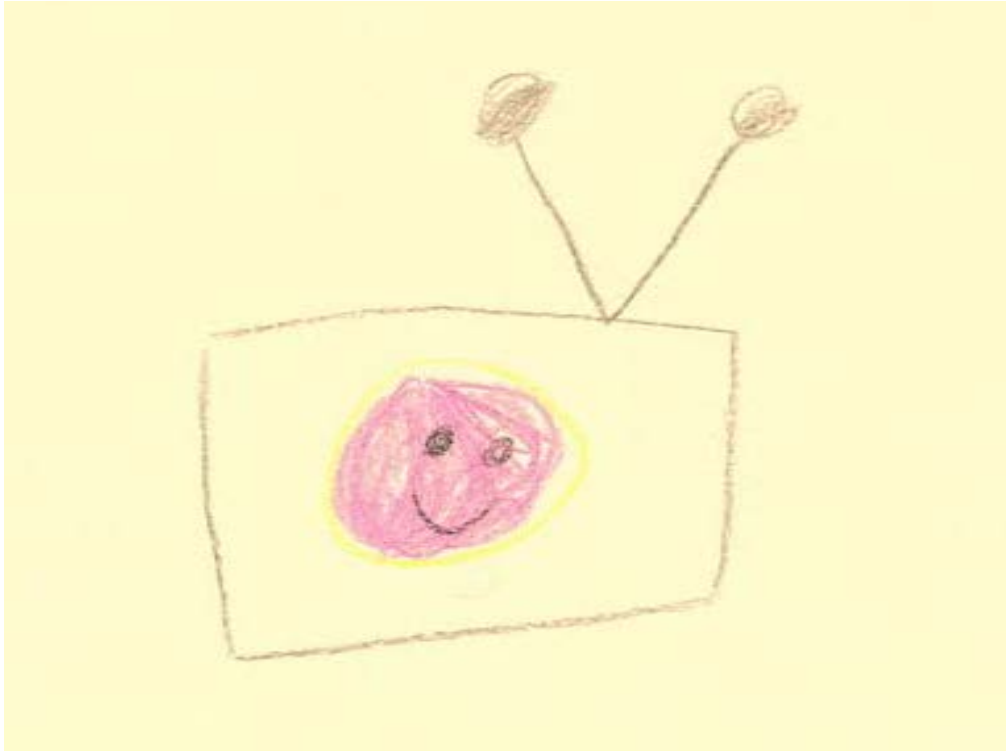
Figure 8.7: A detail from Lily's self-portrait (illustration by Lily)

Lily's media context is rapidly expanding, perhaps most of all out of the entire cohort of participants (the girls' expanding media environments will be explored later on in this chapter). Not only is her class increasingly engaging with technology-based learning and intentional learning and teaching focused on media, but Lily's personal context is increasingly media-centric. As she continues to grow up, she is afforded heightened agency by her mother where media access is concerned. For example, she has recently been allowed to create her own YouTube channel. She is also allowed to watch a greater variety of television shows and access more apps and websites than she had been previously. Although this worries her mother at times (as was addressed in Chapter Six), Lily is very pleased by the growth of her media environment and would like to see that growth continue. She also seemed invested in taking charge of that growth and tailoring it to her needs – for example, as regards ownership and creative freedoms with her YouTube channel, which will be discussed momentarily.

As was the case with many of the girls, Lily has developed a deep emotional bond with media. She connects with it as though it were a friend: she engages with it attentively, listens to it, and even talks back. When Lily uses media, she does so with a reflective and responsive mindset. Lily's adoration of media was evident from multiple data sources: my interviews with her, my tour of her home and bedroom, my interview with her mother, and the illustrations which Lily provided. For example, in her self-portrait Lily has depicted a

177

television with the image of a happy flower on the screen (see Figure 8.7). This is reflective of how media makes Lily feel and the emotive importance that she assigns to media.



Figure 8.8: Part of Lily's *My Little Pony* collection (photo by Lily)

Furthermore, Lily's interests in media are rapidly evolving. She has broad tastes in media in terms of genre, stating that she favours, *"The internet, and apps, and TV, and movies!"* She then went onto say that she reads *Total Girl* every month as well and listens to music very frequently, sometimes via radio but mostly via YouTube. This leads me to Lily's primary fascination with media, which is media creation and sharing via YouTube. Of this, she said, *"I like YouTube a lot - I make my own YouTube videos!"* At the time of her school-based interview, Lily had recently opened her own YouTube channel and had uploaded one video, which was focused on *My Little Pony* (*MLP*). Only a month later, during her home-based interview, her channel had exploded in terms of the amount of content and the extent of the subject matter. While her first video was Lily's own *MLP* episode, subsequent videos included episodic recaps and reflections, instructional clips, and personal diary entries. They also include Lily's extensive collection of *MLP* merchandise (see Figure 8.8). Throughout 2013, Lily became increasingly active as a member of the YouTube community. She stated in her school-based interview, *"I watch these channels [about] ponies and music. I watch them and I also listen to like, music as well, on YouTube. I like dancing to the music."* She also gained a number of subscribers and formed reciprocal online friendships with them,

where the parties commented on each other's videos and shared links to each other's content. This was welcomed by Lily, who had stated, *"I'm pretty lonely having a secret about* MLP.*"*

As well as intending to grow her YouTube presence, Lily has other media-centric ambitions. She would like to enter the industry and establish a career as an actress or voice actress. Of this, she said:

> *When I grow up I want to be a voice actress. When I watch* MLP, *I really like the voices. I can do some of their voices! I really want to do the voices when I'm older 'cause it just sounds so fun. They have these voice actress panels where they sit down and talk about their characters and um, what they're like. And I'm going to get into it! I really want to do that.*

She went on to identify one of the *MLP* voice actresses as a role model of hers, along with Katy Perry and Lady Gaga. She expanded on her admiration of Katy Perry, stating,

> *I really like her singing. I also really want to be a singer when I get older! I want to do a lot of things when I'm older. I look up to her because she's really talented and I just really want to be like her when I'm older.*

For Lily, media holds a multi-faceted role in her life. It is increasingly prevalent in her classroom community, both in terms of 'teaching with' and 'teaching about', of which Lily says, *"[Media] is very good for education, and if you're learning about media... it's really cool."* It also has enduring personal relevance for Lily as it has an overt presence throughout her home and bedroom. For example, in her illustration of her bedroom (shown in Figure 8.9), Lily has depicted her computer, her television, and her *MLP* paraphernalia. Furthermore, she is an avid viewer, reader, and listener, stating, *"I usually like [media] for humour, 'cause it's very funny. And entertainment. It's exciting. I get adventures from it."*

Lily also seeks out role models with whom she can identify – as well as Katy Perry, Lady Gaga, and the voice actresses behind *MLP,* Lily excitedly discussed how the characters on *MLP* make her feel:

> *When I watch* MLP, *Rainbow Dash and Pinkie Pie always remind me of me, because Rainbow is this tomboy adventurous girl, and that's me! And 'PP' is this fun, excitable, random girl, and that's me too!*

Perhaps most importantly, Lily is heavily invested in creating media. Her YouTube videos are responsive, reflective, personal, and increasingly original. Furthermore, as she connects with media, she seeks to build a reciprocal relationship with it. Lily is also interested in evolving this relationship, which could be viewed as an ascension of sorts. She began as a viewer of *MLP,* then began creating her own content, and has ambitions to pursue it or something similar professionally as she grows up. In her relationship with media, Lily is active, agentic, and ambitious.

Essentially, Lily's personal media context is an important and multi-faceted one. I envisage Lily as engaging with media as a lifelong companion – she regards it with enthusiasm and affection, she engages with it for enjoyment, and she sees it as relatable. Lily also converses with it as though it were her equal. Media has been with her since she was very young, it has an important presence in her daily life, and Lily intends for this relationship to continue.
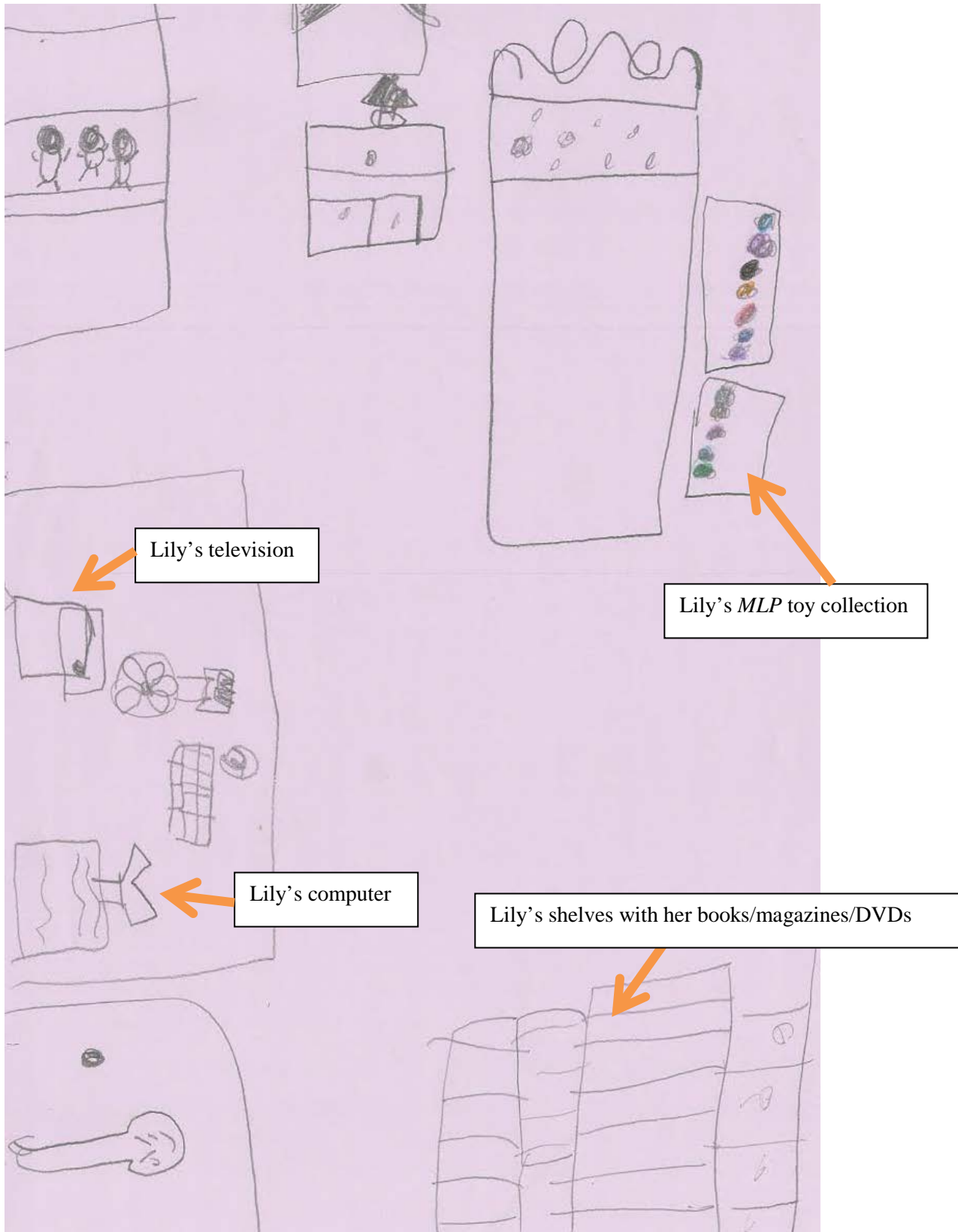
Figure 8.9: Lily's bedroom contains a variety of media (illustration by Lily; annotations mine)

### Tuscany (High importance)

Tuscany is a Year 7 student at Seaglass Primary. She is described by her peers and teacher as outgoing, cheerful, and deeply invested in media. This was certainly apparent as I worked with Tuscany during the fourth and fifth phases of my study. She was very eager to engage in the study and telling her story, and was friendly and forward in all of our interactions. Most of all, Tuscany demonstrated a great passion for media. She positioned it as one of her nearest and dearest, in amongst her family and friends. Hence, Tuscany is a definitive example of a participant who attributes high importance to media.

When we were touring Tuscany's home, I asked her to take photos of the environment that emphasised who she was. Tuscany attended to this task with great enthusiasm and divided her time between photographing and describing significant areas (e.g. her bedroom), beloved artefacts (e.g. her jewellery stand), her most treasured media (e.g. her laptop, DVDs, and iPod), and what all of these mean to her. Tuscany's photographs are presented in Figure 8.10. This exercise was one of many which resulted in a realisation that media is incredibly important to Tuscany.
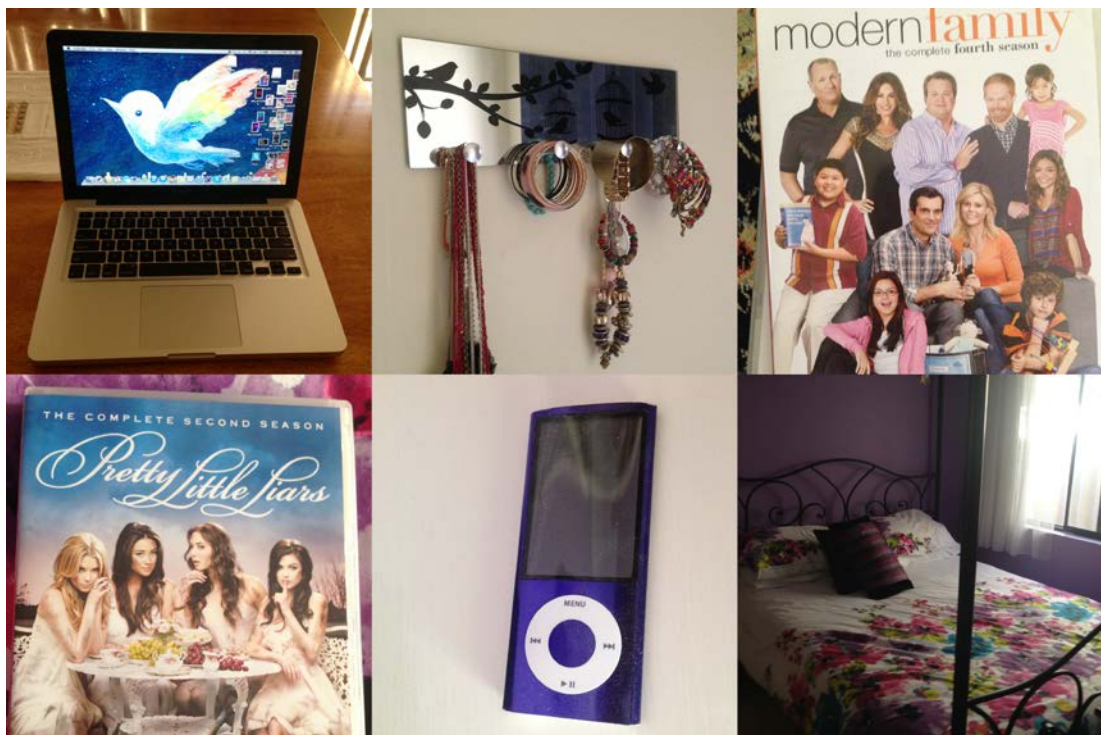


Figure 8.10: Photographs reflecting Tuscany's identity (photos by Tuscany)

In fact, of all the girls interviewed, Tuscany possessed the most overt and enduring bond with media. She asserted this herself, stating that in terms of her priorities, media is, *"Top of my list."* This was continually reinforced by Tuscany herself, as well as her educators and

peers. Several referenced Tuscany during their interviews as someone who adored media and who was very connected to certain shows, films, and celebrities. Tuscany expanded on this, explaining, *"I've always [had] media. I've never not had it."*

When asked to identify what media mattered most to her, Tuscany identified television shows, magazines, and music as her favourite genres. She was also avid in her description of the technology in her life, of which there is a considerable amount. During the second phase of research, she stated in her questionnaire that she had access to a wide variety of media platforms and reeled off an extensive list of preferred television shows, films, websites, magazines, and musical artists. Most of this is on Tuscany's own terms as her mother and grandparents are quite permissive where media is concerned. In recent years, Tuscany has been allowed to *"do [her] own thing"* and access what content she chooses.

While there were some girls who regarded media as a mere pastime, Tuscany considers it more crucial. Media is multidimensional in her life: it is a way for her to relax, something for her to explore and learn from, and something with which she connects on a deep level. Her bond with media is intimate, imperative, and – above all else – highly emotive. She became emotional at several points during our interviews – for example, she was elated to discuss One Direction, who are her favourite band. She described her love for them exuberantly, stating, *"One Direction? I just love 'em. I want to marry all of them. [They make me] happy... I'm in love with them."* When asked to elaborate on her feelings, Tuscany was thrilled to share more. She said:

> *It's kind of like you can't stop thinking about them. But like, you cry when you see them, and you scream because you love them so much, and you'd kill just to touch them. I love their music and I love how they feel free to do what they want. And they're good role models to kids.*

Tuscany was eager to talk about role models, which are clearly an integral part of her media environment. It was highly evident during our time together that Tuscany looks to media for people to connect with and admire. When asked about One Direction's role model potential, Tuscany explained:

> *Well, they did say on the X Factor to always follow your dreams and in the end you'll get there. You mightn't come first or you might not get 100% but you will get your dreams. Like they did! They came third and they're still so successful.*

183

She further elaborated that One Direction encourage their fans to *"be themselves"*, which is a message with significant value for Tuscany. She returned to it again and again throughout our interviews, adamantly reinforcing its importance. She considers this a message with great personal merit and which other girls deserve to hear, too. Regarding this, she said:

> *Don't worry about what other people think, just be you. And if you don't like being you, don't change yourself. Just don't listen to the people who tell you that you aren't good enough or that you're not nice or not pretty. Just be yourself.*

As well as One Direction, there are other people in media that communicate this message to Tuscany – primarily female characters in television shows and films. She discussed several girls and women whom she admires, but focused extensively on three in particular: Hermione Granger from the *Harry Potter* franchise, Spencer Hastings from *Pretty Little Liars,* and Olivia Benson from *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit* [*SVU*] (all shown in Figure 8.11). She identified Hermione as her favourite character, admiring her for her strength: *"She's really brave and she says what she feels."* Of Spencer, Tuscany said with warmth:

> *She's always herself and she has a quirky personality and quirky clothing. She doesn't get embarrassed because she's her. Her brain is always on, she's always thinking about something... she's a good role model for girls. She's not fake or anything.*

And of Olivia, Tuscany said, *"I love Olivia. She's... comforting and nice, and she's been through situations that most people have been through. It looks like you can talk to her. I'm happy that there's people like Olivia."* Then, with reference to all of her role models, of which there were a vast array, Tuscany summarised:

> *I feel happy that there's people like that. That, like, aren't afraid to be themselves and love themselves (sic), and aren't self-conscious or anything. Cos I used to be so self-conscious, like my face and my weight and I wouldn't go out unless my hair was perfect... now I just don't care. In case people are like that, you need people who are role models to say, 'Just be yourself and don't worry about what people think'.*

Figure 8.11: Tuscany's heroines – Spencer Hastings (left) (Abidor, 2014), Olivia Benson (centre) (NBC, 2014), and Hermione Granger (right) (Hypable, 2012).

Ultimately, it was clear from her many passionate statements that Tuscany perceives media as utterly essential in her life. She has grown up with media as a consistent part of her life, she is highly connected to it, and seeks it out for a multitude of purposes. It seems as though a life without media is unimaginable for Tuscany. As I conversed with her and as I worked through the interview data she generated, I came to envisage media as an integral part of her – perhaps her heart, given her emotive statements and media's vitalness in her life. My conceptualisation aside, perhaps Tuscany's relationship with media is best summarised by the following statement, which she made after clarifying that media has always been present in her life: *"You can't <u>not</u> have these things."*

## "I feel…": Unifying themes

Proceeding on from the three illustrative case studies which provided in-depth insight into the individual perspectives and experiences of Hayley, Lily, and Tuscany, I will now explore unifying themes which reflect commonalities amongst the girls. These themes derived after extensive analysis of the recordings and transcripts from our interviews, the goal of which was to determine what it means to be a girl growing up with media. As the themes arise, they will be illustrated through associated quotes (see Table 8.2) and then fleshed out with descriptions focusing on the girls' perspectives and experiences.

Table 8.2: Quotes reflecting themes for the girls' perspectives and experiences

| Theme | Quote | Source |
|---|---|---|
| Growing media contexts | *"New things are very exciting"* | Rosline (Year 7) |
| Emotional bonds with media | *"I don't feel alone"* | Rosline (Year 7) |
| Curiosities | *"I want to know more!"* | Lola (Year 7) |
| Eye-opening and inspiring | *"Explorinative"* | Rosline (Year 7) |
| Silence and resistance | *"That's about it"* | Aisha (Year 7) |

**"New things are very exciting": Girls and their growing media contexts**

The girls' media contexts reflect the overarching media landscape as we know it: there is constant growth and expansion. This was recognised by the girls themselves as well as their educators and parents. For example, Whippet stated, *"More media is going to be coming as you get older."* This aligned with much of what was said during interviews with the educators and parents. While the ongoing evolution of media was not always perceived favourably by the educators and parents, it was clear that the girls' perceptions were generally very positive. Many of the girls spoke with enthusiasm about the ways in which their media contexts were expanding. This included technological expansion and a growth of available content.

As regards the technological expansion, the majority of the girls are experiencing heightened access to new forms of technology. The girls in Years 3 – 6/7 are participating in the iPad program, with all of those in Year 4 and above owning an iPad of their own. Examples of how the iPad program is being received by the girls is provided in Table 8.3.

Table 8.3: Girls' reflections on the iPad program

| Student | Year | Reflection |
|---|---|---|
| Lily | 4 | *"It's pretty cool. My favourite thing is that sometimes we get free time and we can play Minecraft and enjoy ourselves. And it's really cool to learn stuff on the iPads because they're touchable."* |
| Michelle | 5 | *"It's quite fun. I use my iPad a lot in school.* |
| Summer | 5 | *"I reckon it's a good way to learn."* |
| Sam | 5 | *"I feel happy when I'm using it. I really like them."* |
| Whippet | 7 | *"That's really good, I reckon, 'cause you learn a lot and it's just a different way of learning - it's a more modern way of learning."* |

As is evident above, many of the girls believe the iPads to be a great educational platform. Furthermore, they see the iPads as possessing great learning potential – perhaps to the extent that iPads are superior to and ought to supersede traditional learning methods. For example, Michelle reflected:

> It's better than like doing normal writing down because here you can just type onto it and draw on it. I have videos where I can look at them and learn about fractions or other things. So it helps you a lot.

In addition to her comments shown in Table 8.2, Whippet stated, *"It's, like, really good because you can find things out faster than going through a book or something. It's just a faster way of finding stuff out. So you can get it done."* It was Lily's belief that the iPad program was helping her further develop her maths skills. She said, *"The education apps really are helpful when we're trying to learn about math. We can go on a math app and do stuff on there, like we do our times tables."*

There were many other ways in which the girls' media contexts were expanding. The girls in Years 5 – 6/7 had all either recently acquired mobile phones or were looking forward to getting one soon. This provided a gateway to social media, which many of these girls were very interested in. They discussed Facebook and Skype in particular, and it was evident that these formed a significant component of their social lives.

Furthermore, all of the girls were experiencing an acceleration of media content. This included films, television shows, music, magazines, apps, and games. This could seemingly be attributed to three factors: (1) An increase in the devices/platforms available; (2) More permissiveness from parents as the girls grow older; and/or (3) Heightened motivation on part of the girls to seek out media content. Here, the influence of the chronosystem is distinctly evident – the passage of time is altering these girls' media contexts and how they engage with said media.

For example, both Michelle and Summer have recently experienced an increase in the devices/platforms available to them. They now have access to their own iPads and laptops. Summer has also recently been provided with her own television and DVD player which are located in her bedroom. In tandem with this, their parents have recently become more permissive and have allowed their daughters to access a wider variety of television shows, films, and music. Summer explained:

> *My mum gave me her old computer a couple of weeks ago. So I'm just getting used to computers. I like to go on YouTube and listen to music. I like YouTube because you don't have to pay for the songs, you can just go on there and watch them and listen to them for free. She said I can use the computer however I like.*

The girls are very motivated to make the most of this and enjoy their expanded media contexts. Michelle reflected on her television viewing habits, stating, *"Well, it's exciting to watch new ones. And I like watching old ones 'cause when you see one that's really funny*

*you want to watch it again. So I do that a lot."* Summer, however, was dismissive of old viewing content and was more interested in seeking out new content. She said:

> *I don't like watching the same things over and over again. I guess I don't mind watching them twice or three times; just not, like, ten million times. I like watching new things most of the time. New things are very exciting.*

The sense of excitement that Summer described was quite commonly expressed amongst the girls. In fact, there were a whole host of feelings that the girls associated with their media contexts. These emotional bonds are explored in the following section.

**"I don't feel alone": Girls' emotional bonds with media**
As I spoke to the girls' educators and parents, it became evident that they viewed media as something the girls used to pass time, unwind, and entertain themselves. While many of the girls did express an interest in using media for these purposes, their relationship with media extended beyond this into something much more emotive and intimate.

For example, Rosline repeatedly positioned media as her companion. While she was animated and outwardly confident for the majority of our time together, there were times when she grew quieter and spoke very secretively about her overtly emotional bond with media. She discussed the sense of companionship she feels whilst watching films, explaining, *"I don't feel alone. I have company."* This was true for Rosline whether she was watching on her own or watching with friends, and it was true for other girls as well. Tuscany felt a similar sense of comradery with her favourite media. One example of this was the bond she shared with the characters on *Home & Away:*

> *On* Home & Away*, you feel connected to the characters. You really care about them. I've been with them since the start - well, not since the start, but since I was born - so you really feel for them. You cry when they die or when they get married... yeah.*

As well as experiencing comradery with characters and/or the people portraying them, Tuscany also found comfort in music. She reflected on the potential of music to help her get through difficult situations:

> *Music is like... you can relate to any kind of song. Like if you're going through something bad, like when something happens at school, you can just listen to music*

*and sometimes it will get you through. Any song, maybe, but like a sad song can help you relate to it and you might feel better. And sometimes if you just need a break you can put your headphones on and listen to music and rock out or whatever.*

There were a range of other emotions associated with media (see Figure 8.12) which the girls shared with a sense of passion. Michelle and Summer returned again and again to their feelings of excitement, Tuscany and Rosline repeatedly professed their 'love' for media, and after discussing a whole slew of emotions which she associated with media, Whippet condensed this into a single statement: *"It makes me feel good."* Aisha made a similar statement, but went one step further and asserted, *"I feel like I'm kind of in control."* I find Aisha's assertion particularly noteworthy – the sense of empowerment she feels is one which ought to be recognised and celebrated.

Not only were girls bonded to media, but they used media as a way to bond. For some girls, including Lily, Kat, and Tuscany, the bonds they sought were with characters and celebrities. For others, it was with their peers. Rosline explained that her favourite way to watch TV or films was with her family or friends:

> *We always cuddle up and enjoy them. And we make compliments at the end, like, 'Oh my god, that movie was so funny! Can you believe how that girl did that and how that boy did that?! And how they did <u>that</u>?!' Then mum tells us to turn the TV down and I have to tell her, 'Mum, the TV's off! We're talking about the movie because it's so interesting!'.*

Michelle engaged in similar activities with her friends: *"My friends and I, we talk about media a lot. We talk about what apps are popular and what websites we like and what shows we watch, and stuff like that."* Over time, this shared interest in media has evolved into a passion for media creation; excitedly, Michelle explained, *"Last year me and my friends made a gymnastics video with funny gymnastics."* She spoke very fondly of this experience and expressed a desire to continue working on similar projects. This sense of curiosity was very common amongst the girls and will be explored in more depth in the following sub-section. A summative mind-map of girls' emotional responses to media is provided in Figure 8.12.
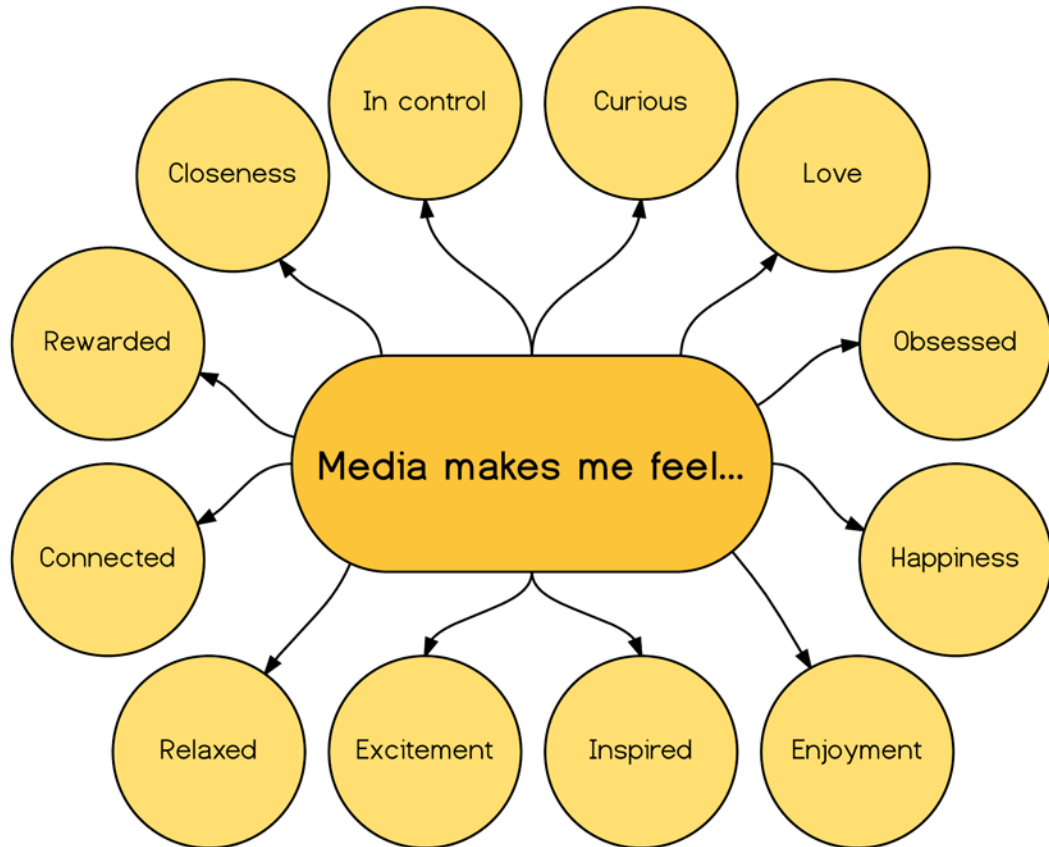
Figure 8.12: Emotions associated with media as told by the girls

**"I want to know more!": Girls' curiosities about their growing media contexts**

The girls collectively shared an immense sense of curiosity regarding their media contexts, both in terms of what they comprised and what existed beyond them. Lola's enthusiastic statement of *"I want to know more!"* was illustrative of the entire group's feelings towards media. This sub-section will detail what curiosities the girls possessed as well as where these may lead.

The girls' curiosities were many and varied. They bore relation to the girls' personal media contexts and their classroom contexts, as what media the girls were engaging with and what media education they had experienced seemed to provoke certain curiosities. For example, Jacqueline's emphasis on expository writing and advertising held significant appeal for Aisha. She was incredibly intrigued by the advertising embedded in media. After reflecting on her learning thus far, she stated, *"I want to know why they do what they do. 'Cause I can understand certain parts but I don't understand other parts."* She was keen to discuss examples of what she did and didn't understand, explaining that she can understand why models are shown as pristine *("I can understand the makeup and why they put that on")* but not why certain models are repeatedly present *("They always seem to use blonde-haired*

190

*people. Why?”).* Aisha commented, *“Some of them look realistic but then others don't. Like they use real people but it’s not like realistic.”* Realism in media and advertising was something Aisha seemed fascinated with, and she wasn’t the only one. Lola was similarly perturbed by the realism (or lack-there-of) in her media and the ads within, claiming irritably:

> *Some of them can be really fake. Like, I don't understand why they get like people.... like sometimes they get famous people to do ads. Like, if you're wearing this then you'll be like that person. It's a bit weird. Cause you know, like that person would... maybe she wears it or he wears it in real life but in that ad they're being paid to do that, they're not volunteering to put that on, and you know.*

Other areas that proved particularly interesting to Lola were marketing techniques such as using colour to incite viewer appeal. Enthusiastically, she said, *“Apparently red and yellow make you feel hungry! But I want to know why and that kind of stuff, and how colours effect ads and that sort of stuff.”*

This was not the only aspect of media that intrigued Lola. She was curious about the intricacies of the ratings system and film production in general, stating that she loves movies and wishes she could learn more about them, stating, *“I want to know more about like behind-the-scenes and stuff.”* This was an area which incited great curiosity amongst the girls, many of whom wanted to learn more about behind-the-scenes and several of whom possessed ambitions to enter different media professions. As previously discussed, Lily and Hayley were very eager about their industry ambitions. Lily would like to enter the television industry and establish a career as an actress or voice actress. Of this, she said:

> *When I grow up I want to be a voice actress. When I watch MLP, I really like the voices. I can do some of their voices! I really want to do the voices when I'm older ‘cause it just sounds so fun. They have these voice actress panels where they sit down and talk about their characters and um, what they're like. And I'm going to get into it! I really want to do that.*

Citing similar interests, Hayley stated eagerly, *“I’d like to know what it would be like to go on TV.”* She further expressed some nervousness about this but returned again and again to the idea of being on TV. She had ideas for what her role would be, musing, *“I would be a happy character. Although I would be a bit shy and a bit nervous, being watched by everyone. I would tell people to be kind to one another.”*

This was another central dimension to the girls' curiosity: they all had extensive ideas for creating their own media. What was interesting was how their ideas contrasted with their existing interests. Many of the girls are fans of shows and films that feature girls and women as highly successful (e.g. *Soul Surfer*), entertainers (e.g. *iCarly, High School Musical, Victorious*), or supernatural beings (e.g. *Harry Potter, Wizards of Waverley Place*). However, these narratives were not ones they wished to pursue when mapping out ideas for their own films, television shows, and other media content. Tuscany voiced a desire to see stories which were more relatable, stating, *"That might be really important... stories that girls like me can relate to."* After expressing that she often doesn't see girls who she can identify with in media, Rosline suggested:

> *I want to see a story about an ordinary life. Like, a girl who... hmm. They should go to somebody and say act like an ordinary day and just film that. Except! Oh. Except for when you're nude [laughs]! They don't have to video that part [laughs]. But I want to watch someone just be a person like in their ordinary day life. Like a student. They could just make scenes up where the characters say what they want to say.*

Summer's interests in learning more about media were also very personal. She explained:

> *I want to learn about different movies and different websites and stuff. I'd like to learn about, like, different kinds of things to use for expression and stuff and different things to help me with writing songs and poems and stuff.*

This was a passion of Summer's – speaking elatedly about her creative ambitions, she stated:

> *I've got ten songs that I've written, but I've never shown them to mum or dad or anything. I like singing and dancing too! They're usually about what I feel about and sometimes if I'm feeling angry I write a sad song, and sometimes if I'm feeling happy I make a jazzy or country style song.*

After discussing her love for magazines and music, Sam went on to describe what content she would aim for if she were in charge:

> *How to stop bullying. Firstly, you should never give up on yourself because that happens a lot... even to a couple of my friends. And they get sad and it's hard. I*

*mean, like, they start to think that they're useless because people tease them and say mean things. I want to tell them to learn the power of tuning out. So just kind of be happy and learn to tune out.*

This was clearly something with deep personal relevance for Sam and her circle of friends, which was something many of the girls apparently wanted to make more prevalent in media. Michelle expressed a desire to communicate to her fellow girls that, *"That it's okay to write down your feelings, that you can say stuff... like if someone's being mean to you. You just don't listen to them."* She then expanded on this, describing a potential plot line which involved girls rallying together as a gang. According to Michelle, the message embedded in all of this was, *"That... you don't have to be too afraid to do what boys do. Cos these girls, they're really adventurous and they're not afraid. I would want them to have confidence to do lots of stuff."*

Returning to Lola's fascination with advertising embedded in media, she voiced further frustrations by saying, *"It's, like, not new information. I think they could, like, do it in a different way."* Although each girl phrased it differently, this was a sentiment prevalent throughout the group – *"I think they could do it in a different way"* is a statement definitive of these girls and their passion for building upon, expanding, and reinventing their media contexts.

As well as the multitude of curiosities the girls possessed regarding media, it soon became evident that this was accompanied by an active desire to learn more. The majority of the girls had very specific interests and were keen to share them, thereby giving an indication of how their curiosity and fascination with media might be encouraged to grow and evolve. The girls' learning aspirations as regards media were many and varied, and could potentially be viewed as opportunities for growth. Ultimately, it was apparent that the girls wanted to see a fusion of their media contexts with their educational contexts.

**"Explorinative": Media as eye-opening and inspiring**

*"Explorinative"* was a term coined by Rosline during our interview. We were discussing Seaglass Primary's iPad program at the time and she explained that learning with the iPads felt *"explorinative"*. Then, very proudly, she announced, *"I just made up that word!"* Rosline perceives the iPads as simultaneously explorative and imaginative tools that enhance her learning, which is reminiscent of her feelings regarding media overall. During the final moments of our first interview, she reflected, *"I love media because you can explore."* This was another statement which was definitive of the girls' collective feelings towards media. It

was also reminiscent of sentiments expressed by their educators and parents, who believed media to be a portal of sorts to different contexts, experiences, and ways of living.

Media was often assessed by the girls as inspiring. This was strongly related to their favourite characters and celebrities seen in television, film, and/or music videos. Whippet was very keen to discuss her heroine Bethany Hamilton and her biopic *Soul Surfer,* which has given Whippet extensive insight into the world of surfing. Regarding this, Whippet reflected:

> *Bethany Hamilton is, like, my idol. I love her. She inspires me because she never gave up on something that she loves and she's got a best friend that helped her and she made her dreams come true because she keeps trying and she never gives up.*

Meanwhile, Michelle reflected on her love of the Irwin family's franchises and what she has gained from watching them:

> *I like how [Steve Irwin] said how you don't have to be afraid of these animals; it's how you treat them. He does really dangerous things and he taught you how to fight off a crocodile and things like that. Bindi and Steve are two of my heroes. She's really adventurous. She knows a lot about animals. I want to meet her and chat to her about stuff. Like how she's going without a dad. I was sad when she lost her dad.*

Tuscany also expressed that she looks to media for insight and guidance. In addition to what was discussed in her illustrative case study, Tuscany discussed the part that magazines play. She explained:

> *I like the real and important stories. Like... when I say important, I don't really mean important [laughs]. Like, boys and something interesting, like if something's happened to someone. Hearing other people's stories. And also see what people like and see the clothes and fashion. They mean a lot to me. I get ideas there. It helps me sort out situations and stuff.*

Essentially, it became apparent that many of the girls were inspired by media and enjoyed its *"explorinative"* capacities. This included seeking out insight from films and TV shows, connecting with heroes and heroines, and finding out more about the world that exists beyond their immediate realities.

**"That's about it": Silence and resistance from home and school**

When talking with the girls about their school and their families, I asked them to reflect on the following:

- What media education they were receiving
- Whether their educators talked to them about media
- Whether their parents talked to them about media

We discussed examples of how this might take shape (e.g. "Your mum might ask you about what you were watching on YouTube, or your dad might want to talk about the movie you watched"). However, despite my extensive questioning and prompting, the answer remained the same: the girls said that they are not taught about media and it does not form a conversation piece at school or at home. Some of this aligns with what was reported by the staff and parents – they too admitted that media education is limited in existence at Seaglass Primary, and some parents reported that they didn't talk to their daughters about media. But as I spoke to the girls, they were much more candid in their assessments. When asked if their educators or parents discuss media with them, they frequently answered 'no'. Some girls attested that their educators and parents talk about some things, but that this is limited and/or irrelevant. One example of this is the following exchange with Aisha:

> **Researcher:** *Do your parents talk to you about the types of media you use?*
> **Aisha:** *Not really. Say I want to watch a movie... there might be an ad for a movie and I'll ask if I can watch it. They'll say no. I'll ask why, what's it about, and they'll say, "We can't really explain it to you cause it's not something you can watch". That's about it.*
> **Researcher:** *So they don't really tell you the reasons?*
> **Aisha:** *They just say like, "It's not appropriate".*

Several girls were asked variations of these questions as the issue arose naturally. When asked whether their parent(s) talk to them about media, or discuss issues with them, the responses were fairly uniform:

> **Lily:** *No, not usually.*
> **Lola:** *Not really.*
> **Rosline:** *[My mum says] what I'm allowed to do, what I'm not allowed to do... basically those sorts of things. Sometimes some of the things about what I'm allowed*

*to do just goes like that over me* (gestures above head) *but the things I'm not allowed to do go like that to me* (gestures hand directly at forehead).

When asked similar questions concerning their principal and teacher(s), the same kind of responses were seen:

> **Lily:** *Sometimes [they teach me]. They've taught me about iPads. Um, but in general... not much about media.*
> **Lola:** *Not really. Not really, no.*

This limited dialogue seemed incongruent to me given that media is abundant in the lives of these girls. They awake to posters of celebrities on their bedroom walls (see Figure 8.13), they listen to pop music on the way to school, they engage with new media as a tool for education and socialisation throughout their school day, and they return home to watch television, browse YouTube, read magazines, and more. While some girls have a more distant relationship with media than others, it is still evident that media are readily present in their lives. Its presence is a vocal one – media speak to these girls in multiple respects: Abigail looks to media for insight about the world around her; Lily transforms her viewership into responsive creatorship; Rosline's media is *"explorinative"*; and Tuscany seeks out and sustains strong emotional bonds with media. Clearly, media mean something to these girls. Therefore, it seems somewhat aberrant that the girls' families and school – by and large – are not conversing with them thoroughly about media.

This silence could arguably be attributed to the predominant viewpoint shared by the staff and parents, which is that the girls use media for entertainment and enjoyment, and that they are excited by media due to most of it being embedded in appealing devices (e.g. laptops, iPads, iPods, etc.). While this does indeed form a component of the girls' relationships with media, it certainly isn't the sum of it. The girls' relationships with media are many and varied, and comprise of a range of important components. During my time with the staff and parents, it was not apparent that they recognised the other components at play which have been addressed throughout this chapter so far. These include: the girls' emotional bonds with media, the girls' avid interest in learning more about media, and the extent to which girls are invested in media. There were even some girls who confessed to being reluctant or unwilling to share certain aspects of their relationships with media with their parents, teachers, or peers. Summer, Lily, and Tuscany all opened up about 'secret' media behaviours (all of which were quite innocuous). As previously discussed, Summer privately enjoys writing and performing songs that are expressive and reflective. Lily's passion for *MLP* and the

196

subsequent creation of her own YouTube channel are only known to her immediate family and myself; Lily would prefer that her educators and peers remain none the wiser. And lastly, Tuscany confided several media-related preferences and preoccupations which her peers and mother were not aware of. This could possibly be demonstrative of these girls' desiring some privacy or trying to pursue a sense of independence or ownership of self. However, I would argue that it could potentially be attributed to the limited degree to which the educators and parents appreciate the girls' bonds with media and the relative silence that exists here.



Figure 8.13: Lola's bedroom (photo by Lola)

## Discussion

In the previous two findings chapters, three key findings were identified and discussed. The first key finding focused on the variant media education at Seaglass Primary School; the second concerned the alignment between educators, parents, and some sections of the academic literature on this subject matter; and the third looked at conflicting portrayals of femininity in the girls' most favoured media. Now that the findings associated with the girls' lived experiences of media have been explored, a fourth and fifth key finding will be foregrounded and discussed.

**Key finding 4: Intimate, meaningful, and diverse connections**

It became apparent throughout the course of the study that many of the girls are engaged in very close and meaningful relationships with the media in their life. In fact, several of the girls were deeply committed to their favoured media. Take Lily and Tuscany for instance – Lily is highly engaged and responsive in her relationship with media, while Tuscany bears an intimate and passionate emotional connection to media and the people contained within (for example, Detective Olivia Benson from *SVU*).

What is particularly noteworthy here is the kinds of media with which Lily and Tuscany are bonding. While both girls were interested in new media, they also had a resounding sense of enthusiasm for traditional media. For example, Lily's defining passion at the time was the television series *My Little Pony,* while Tuscany enjoyed a broad range of television shows and films. There is a tendency in some sections of academic literature and within public discourse to construct screen media as transmissive and thus passive. For example, structural perspectives or cause/effect models tend to position audience members as passive recipients (Wilson, 2009). This "sender-receiver" model is argued to be reductive (Talbot, 2007, p. 7) or not reflective of today's individualised media landscape (Bennett & Inyengar, 2008), and, I would argue, dismissive. Concerns about this kind of model persist – for example, Giugni (2006, p. 208) contests the media effects paradigm due to its establishment in developmental psychology and its reliance on cause-and-effect. Regarding this, Giugni writes, "In this framework, children unthinkingly and passively 'soak up' messages from their environments which, in effect, produce their identities." This is a problematic conceptualisation of children and the relationships they form with elements of their environment – in this instance, media. In keeping with other authors (Bennett & Inyengar, 2008; Talbot, 2007; Wilson, 2009), and with my own conceptualisation, Giugni proposes that children ought to be viewed as active and agentic individuals with capacity for critical and discerning thought.

The lived experiences voiced by Lily and Tuscany advocate for this kind of view, wherein children are recognised as more than passive, sponge-like recipients. In fact, in sharing their stories, Lily and Tuscany have provided an illustration of how media users can be active and agentic when viewing screen media. This kind of engagement can involve anticipation and projection (Wilson, 2009). For Lily and Tuscany, it also involved bonding with those shown on screen – for example, take Tuscany's bonds with Olivia Benson from *SVU*, Hermione Granger from *Harry Potter,* or Spencer Hastings from *Pretty Little Liars.* Tuscany seems to have formed parasocial relationships with these female characters. Theran, Newberg and Gleason's (2010) investigation of parasocial relationships was focused on involvement, emotional intensity, and attachment, all of which Tuscany describes experiencing with her

favourite characters. Theran et al. (2010) describe the benefits of parasocial relationships in terms of the viewer finding safety, comfort, and enjoyment, which also aligns with Tuscany's experiences and perspectives regarding her bonds with these characters. Meanwhile, Lily certainly showed a capacity for agency by entering into creative endeavours after viewing episodes of *My Little Pony.* As discussed previously, Lily's creative endeavours include her scripting, filming, and sharing her own episodes of *My Little Pony* – all of which was self-guided.

Based on the evidence provided throughout this chapter, and with regard to the identification of this fourth key finding, I wish to advocate for the value of being attentive towards children and their perspectives and experiences. Firstly, members of the media – be they developers, presenters, or performers – may benefit from being mindful of girls like Lily and Tuscany. Secondly, educators and parents could benefit from developing an awareness and appreciation for the nature of this relationship, and how very much this means to the girls involved. Specifically, a child-centric sense of mindfulness would be beneficial; as has been discussed previously, attention is often given to adult perspectives and voices, whilst children are relatively unheard. However, there may be a barrier to this awareness and appreciation – and that is the differing perspectives of educators and parents, which I wish to explore again in my identification and discussion of the fifth key finding of this study.

**Key finding 5: Disparate perspectives regarding media**

The fifth key finding of my study relates to the various perspectives expressed by the adults and children engaged in the research. Previously, I have discussed the alignment between the educators' and parents' points of view, which also connected to the literature – thus indicating a sense of continuity of perspective between adults. However, this continuity did not extend to the girls engaged in the study. In fact, as the study progressed, it became extremely evident that the perspectives possessed by the adult participants and child participants were disparate. While there were some similarities, the disparities were numerous and more pronounced. These inconsistences were often related to issues such as the nature of the relationship between girls and media – for example, how or why the girls engage with media.

Through my interactions with the girls, it gradually became evident that a strong dialogue exists between many of the girls and their favoured media. This was an interactive process where media 'talks' to the girls (i.e. conveying imagery and ideas), the girls 'listen' (i.e. paying attention to the messages presented), and then they talk back (e.g. reflecting and/or responding). However, many of the parents construed the relationship as passive with media

'talking' and the girls merely 'receiving'. This aligns with how several of the educators conceptualised the relationship and with how the relationship is often depicted in public discourse and in some of the literature (e.g. Hepburn, 1998; Wilson, 2009), which conflicts with alternate models which construct children as active and agentic (e.g. Giugni, 2006).

As to perspectives regarding media itself, the educators unitedly perceived media as 'important', as did the girls' parents. The girls themselves also recognised the importance of media, but a key distinction must be made. The importance described by the adults was societal and cultural – they saw media as a significant and powerful entity. Looking to my conceptual framework, it would seem that they are describing media as it exists at the level of the macrosystem. Meanwhile, the girls' sense of importance was a very personal and intimate one. They described media as important *to them,* rather than in a societal or cultural sense. With further regard to my conceptual framework, the girls are describing media as it exists within the microsystem. The adults' sense of importance was a broad one, while the girls' was more intimate.

This represents a conceptual disparity that should be attended to. I will return to a noteworthy comment made by Elizabeth, the Year 3 teacher:

> *You need to have the support of the family, because if they're not in agreeance with the way we're doing things at school then there are going to be contradictions. You see things from your parents' perspective for a long time. So, we don't want that contradiction happening, obviously, and that's why we try and work with partnership with the school and families.*

Elizabeth's emphasis seems to be placed on finding continuity between educators and parents – yet, it would seem that that already exists as regards how media is conceptualised. It is the perspectives of the students which are incongruent in their alignment to those of the educators and parents. This is potentially detrimental, especially when one considers Seaglass Primary's interest in further developing media education at school and home. If media education is to exist at school and at home with the sense of continuity endorsed by the educators, then that sense of continuity must exist between the educators, parents, and the girls.

This brings me to the issue of media literacy education. Much has been written about the potential for this kind of initiative to equip students with critical thinking and consciousness that will help them negotiate their relationships with media (e.g. Farley & Durham, 2009;

Scheibe & Rogow, 2012). At Seaglass Primary, media literacy education was unevenly apparent – that is, it occurred only at the discretion of individual classroom educators and lacked a systematic approach at the whole-school level. The principal, Ryan, voiced interest in media literacy education and named it as a future priority for the school. This was avidly endorsed by his staff. To accomplish this goal, Seaglass Primary will need a systematic approach that recognises the importance of media. Based on the preferences expressed by the girls, focus ought to pull towards the visual, thus embracing the "visual proclivity" of their students (Metros, 2008, p. 107). Regarding this, Metros (2008) recommends that educators embrace the opportunity to teach about sight and sound, alongside traditional literacies.

Furthermore, there are limitations to how the girls and their parents are communicating about media. Many of the parents stated that they do talk to their daughters about media (although several conceded they do not), while most of the girls asserted that either:

- Their parents do not talk to them enough; or,
- Their parents do not talk to them at all; or,
- Their parents do talk to them, but what they have to say is not relevant.

The divisions here are worrying as they may hinder the parents' ability to mediate their daughters' relationships with media. It potentially represents a breakdown in communication which may be hazardous. It also provokes certain questions:

- The parents felt a certain generational disconnect with today's media landscape. Is this a driving force behind their silence?
- The educators and parents perceive media as powerful and pervasive, and their children as passive. They see value in media education but are not presently pursuing it. What are the implications of this?

From my discussions with the parents, I would posit that this may be attributable to a sense of generational disconnect. As was discussed in Chapter Six, many of the parents feel at odds with the contemporary media landscape. This stands in stark contrast to their daughters' familiarity and adept capabilities with media. This disconnect may also be reinforced by the aforementioned contrasting perspectives, where the parents see the relationship as passive while the girls see and live the relationship as interactive.

A further question which needs to be asked is: What will this mean for the girls as they continue to grow up in media-rich environments? It is often argued that children –

particularly girls – require guidance and support from their parents in order to negotiate the current media landscape. However, if their parents feel disconnected from this landscape and if they do not fully appreciate the complexities of their daughters' bonds with media, is this guidance and support not compromised?

If we are to believe the girls' assertions that they are not spoken to enough, or at all, or in a relatable way, then perhaps the following recommendation should be made: that parents prioritise initiating conversations with their children about media, during which credence is given to the children's perspectives and experiences. This may facilitate a deeper understanding of the ways in which their children engage with media and, therefore, how they can best provide guidance and support. This goes beyond the recommendation of the APA Task Force, which was:

> … the notion is that having parents comment on appropriate and inappropriate content while watching TV with their children can alter the influence of the messages… co-viewing and active discussions with parents may decrease the influence of viewing sexualized images. (APA, 2007, p. 37).

Regarding this recommendation, Lerum and Dworkin (2009) point out that 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' are subjective terms which are not clearly defined by the Task Force, which is a valid point. I would also contend that the conversation between parents and children must extend beyond the dichotomy 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' to recognise a spectrum of meanings which are contextual and, again, subjective.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter has focused on exploring the girls' media contexts and how they see and experience them. It was established that the girls attribute varying importance to the media in their lives; three illustrative case studies were provided and focused on Hayley (limited importance), Lily (moderate importance), and Tuscany (high importance). One of the major findings is that media matters in the lives of these girls. Regardless of where they sit on the spectrum, they are engaging with media on a daily basis for a multitude of purposes. Media entertain them, educate them, support them, and inspire them. The girls perceive media multi-dimensionally: as a resource, a companion, a gateway, and more. A very strong relationship has been forged between this group of girls and the media in their lives. As such, media are talking loudly to the girls and they are listening (and sometimes talking back). However, their educators and parents are comparatively quiet.

Ultimately, a thorough exploration of these girls' lived worlds and how media exists within them reveals a range of experiences. Some of these experiences are critically important to the girls' emerging identities and how they see themselves. Furthermore, the perspectives and experiences related to me by the girls are of substantial significance to educators and other stakeholders in the girls' lives. This will also be addressed in Chapter Nine. A flowchart which summarises the unifying themes is shown in Figure 8.14. Two key findings were foregrounded and discussed – Key Finding 4 explored the intimate, meaningful, and diverse connections that exist between girls and media, while Key Finding 5 looked at the disparate perspectives regarding media as concerns the girls, their educators, and their parents.
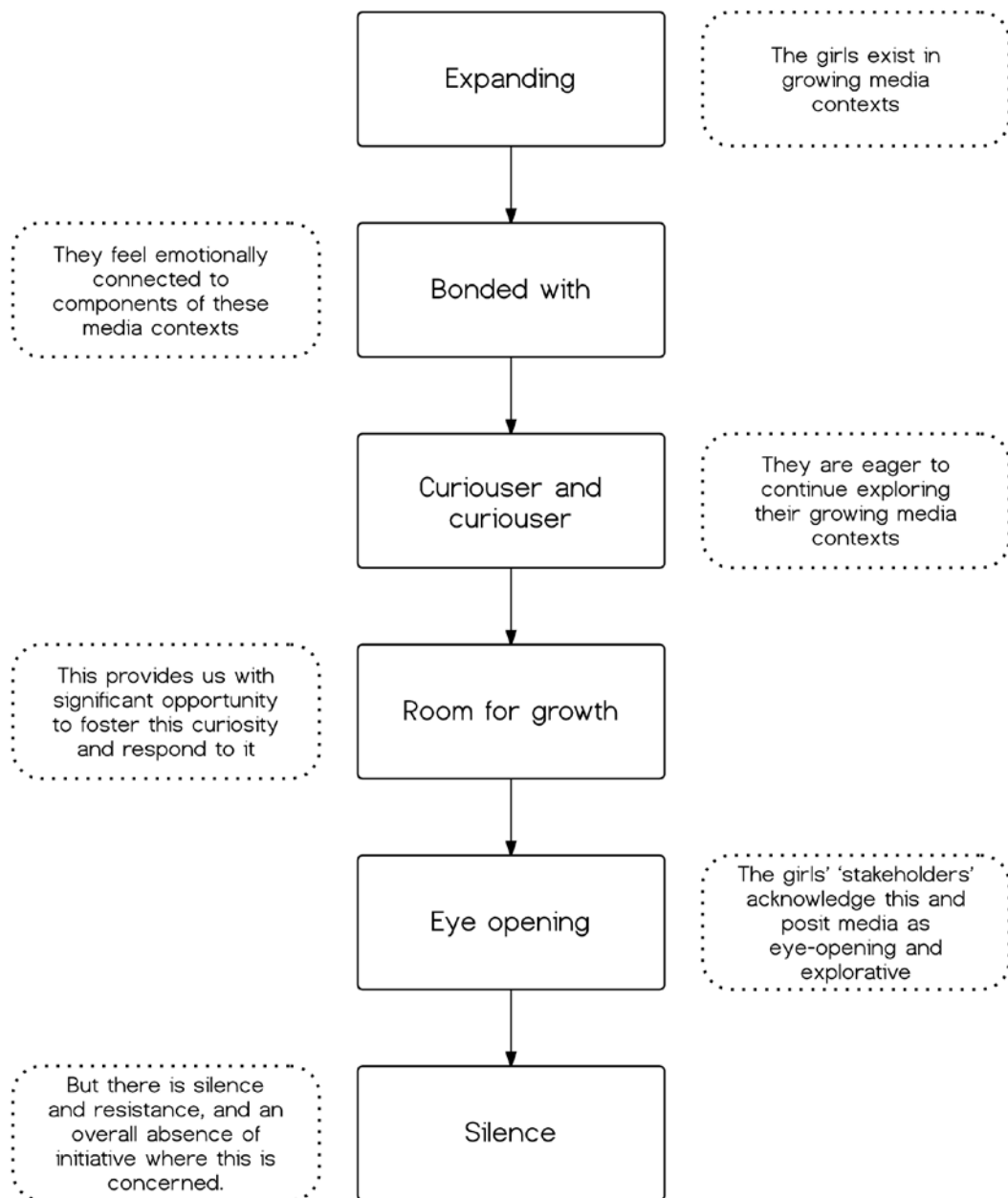
```
                    ┌─────────────────┐      ┌ · · · · · · · · · · · ┐
                    │                 │        The girls exist in
                    │    Expanding    │        growing media
                    │                 │        contexts
                    └────────┬────────┘      └ · · · · · · · · · · · ┘
                             │
┌ · · · · · · · · · ┐ ┌──────▼──────────┐
  They feel emotionally │                 │
  connected to          │   Bonded with   │
  components of these    │                 │
  media contexts       └────────┬────────┘
└ · · · · · · · · · ┘          │
                             │
                    ┌────────▼────────┐      ┌ · · · · · · · · · · · ┐
                    │                 │        They are eager to
                    │  Curiouser and  │        continue exploring
                    │    curiouser    │        their growing media
                    │                 │        contexts
                    └────────┬────────┘      └ · · · · · · · · · · · ┘
                             │
┌ · · · · · · · · · ┐ ┌──────▼──────────┐
  This provides us with │                 │
  significant opportunity│ Room for growth │
  to foster this curiosity│                │
  and respond to it     └────────┬────────┘
└ · · · · · · · · · ┘          │
                             │
                    ┌────────▼────────┐      ┌ · · · · · · · · · · · ┐
                    │                 │        The girls' 'stakeholders'
                    │   Eye opening   │        acknowledge this and
                    │                 │        posit media as
                    └────────┬────────┘        eye-opening and
                             │                 explorative
                             │               └ · · · · · · · · · · · ┘
┌ · · · · · · · · · ┐ ┌──────▼──────────┐
  But there is silence   │                 │
  and resistance, and an │     Silence     │
  overall absence of     │                 │
  initiative where this is└─────────────────┘
  concerned.
└ · · · · · · · · · ┘
```

Figure 8.15: The unifying themes regarding the girls' experiences and perspectives

# *Chapter Nine*

# *Conclusion*

---

## Chapter Introduction

The previous three chapters presented and discussed the findings of the research. Chapter Six focused on two of the girls' interpersonal contexts – school and home – with an emphasis on the perspectives of educators and parents. Chapter Seven focused on their media contexts in terms of accessibility, engagement, and the representation/communication of femininity. Chapter Eight then proceeded to elicit the girls' personal perspectives and lived experiences with media. This chapter will now conclude my thesis by reviewing the following elements: the research problem; the scope of the study; the research objectives and questions; the key findings; the methodology and context of the study; and, the limitations. It will also include the conceptual, methodological, and practical contributions of the study; recommendations; and, lastly, a concluding statement.
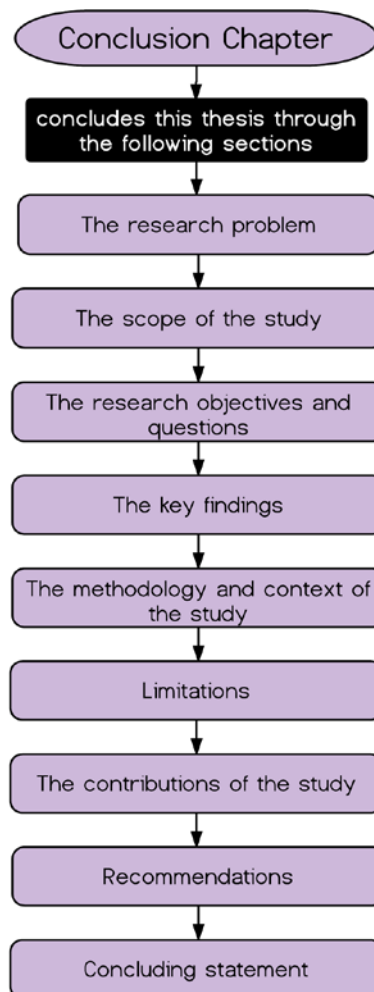


Figure 9.1: The content and structure of Chapter Nine

## The research problem

The omnipresence of media in contemporary Western society presents us with opportunities and challenges. Concerns are raised regarding the prevalence and potential influence of media, often with an emphasis on how children might be impacted. The intersection between girls and media is especially controversial due to how girls and women are portrayed in media, with concerns voiced regarding under-representation, stereotyping, idealisation, objectification, and sexualisation. These issues are potentially linked to serious consequences regarding health and wellbeing, which include impeded self-image, low self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, and attempts at body modification via disordered eating practices or plastic surgery. Given the severity of these issues, further research ought to be considered crucial. The majority of research to date focuses on adolescent girls or women in early adulthood with limited emphasis on the lived experiences and perspectives of participants. There is also a relative lack of research focusing on younger girls – for example, girls in their early or middle childhood years. My assertion is that this area of research would benefit from studying young girls in a manner which is child-centric and participatory, as this is an essential step in evolving our knowledge.

## The scope of the study

The research in this area is diverse and examines a range of different issues, including studies which report on the nature of media, the use of media, the potential influence of media, or ways of contending with media within educational contexts. This study had a specific focus – I sought to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of a small cohort of girls aged between 7 and 13 years, with consideration also given to the representation and communication of femininity in their most favoured media products, as well as the perspectives of their educators and parents.

## The research objectives and questions

As I commenced this study with the research problem and the intended scope in mind, I proposed a number of objectives which were aligned to research questions (see Figure 1.1). I will now use these objectives and questions to frame a reflection regarding what knowledge emerged during the course of the study.

The central research objective and its six sub-objectives were accomplished, as is summarised in Table 9.1. Speaking broadly regarding all of the objectives, I would attribute their achievement to the comprehensive approach to data generation which involved three groups of participants – students, parents, and educators – and various means of generating data (e.g. interviews, media analyses, questionnaires) over the course of a full school year.

Table 9.1: Addressing the achievement of the objectives

| Objectives | Achievement |
|---|---|
| *To engage in a holistic examination of the relationship forged between young girls and their preferred media.* | *I engaged in this holistic examination by working with students, educators, and parents from Seaglass Primary School as well as with media artefacts, all with an emphasis on exploring the relationship between the girls in question and their favoured media.* |
| 1. To establish the types of media with which girls are regularly engaging; | Through questionnaires and interviews, data was generated regarding girls' media engagement. |
| 2. To examine the content of this media in terms of the messages and ideals presented; | A social semiotic approach was utilised to explore the representation and communication of femininity. |
| 3. To explore varying perspectives from stakeholders in the girls' lives; | The stakeholders involved were the girls' classroom teachers, school principal, and parent(s). The educators were engaged in interviews; the parents provided questionnaire responses and also engaged in interviews. |
| 4. To develop a greater understanding of how girls perceive media; and, | Through comprehensive data generation over the course of a full school year (2013), I was able to explore the girls' perceptions of the media with which they were engaged. |
| 5. To give voice to girls' experiences and perspectives regarding the media in their lives. | As this study was child-centric, participatory, and feminist in nature, the girls and their views and experiences were made a distinct priority. Member-checking was employed to ensure the girls themselves were content and comfortable with how their stories were going to be told. |

Furthermore, answers were sourced for all of the research questions. Much like with the objectives, the comprehensive generation of data contributed to how answers were sourced for the questions. It is crucial that I recognise the role of the participants – they were central to this process by engaging willingly, thoughtfully, and meaningfully throughout the study, and in doing so, they contributed extensive data that fed into the questions. In the sub-sections to follow, I will provide concise answers to the research questions which align with the in-depth presentation and discussion of the findings which were provided throughout Chapters 6, 7, and 8.

**Central Question: What are the individual and collective lived experiences of girls aged 7-13 in their personal media contexts?**

Regarding the girls' individual lived experiences, these were varied and nuanced. Each girl had her own experiences and perspectives to share, and she had her own sense of importance which she attributed to the media in her life. A spectrum of importance emerged, as did three

illustrative case studies: Hayley, Lily, and Tuscany. Looking to their collective lived experiences, there were several shared between the girls which led to the establishment of unifying themes. What emerged was that the girls see media as important, meaningful, enjoyable, and, to use the term Rosline cleverly and creatively coined, *'explorinative'*.

**Sub-Question 1: What history do girls have with the media, including past and present consumption?**

It was broadly evident that the girls all have extensive histories with media. Most have been engaged with media since birth by watching television (many beginning as babies) and engaging with a variety of devices, such as tablets, gaming systems, MP3 players, and so on. As they have grown up, the girls' media environments have continued to expand. During the time of data generation, the girls were enrolled at Seaglass Primary, which has an emphasis on teaching with digital technologies and provided access to a variety of media devices. Furthermore, many of the girls recently had been granted greater access to different devices (e.g. their iPads, due to this being a compulsory booklist item at Seaglass Primary) and content (e.g. being allowed to watch PG or M content due to reaching a certain age).

There was a vast array of content with which the girls were engaging, spanning a range of different genres including film, television, web content, magazines, social media, and more. Notably, there were some genres which were favoured over others. For the girls who were engaged in this study, magazines and music videos were particularly important. These types of media had a daily presence in their lives and were considered enjoyable, educative, and meaningful.

**Sub-Question 2: What is the nature of the media girls are accessing?**

Samples of the girls' most favoured music videos and magazines were examined via a social semiotic analysis which focused on the representation and communication of femininity. *Total Girl,* the Australian magazine aimed at 'tween' girls, was analysed, as were the following music videos: *22* (Taylor Swift), *Roar* (Katy Perry), *Work B\*\*ch* (Britney Spears), *Salute* (Little Mix), and *Wrecking Ball* (Miley Cyrus). Throughout these samples, femininity was portrayed diversely on a behavioural and symbolic level, but aesthetically it was largely homogenous with clear correspondence to hegemonic ideals – for example, many of the girls or women depicted were thin, white, and conventionally attractive.

**Sub-Question 3: What role do schools and families play?**

The girls' educators and parents played a role in mediating the girls' relationship with media. This was mostly related to monitoring of media use – for example, regulating the girls'

internet access, setting restrictions on use of devices, or implementing rules regarding film/television ratings. The educators and parents also shared their perspectives regarding the girls, media, and the relationship shared there. One key issue that came to light was the sense of disparity and disconnect between perspectives – for example, the girls' perspectives contrasted considerably with the perspectives of their parents and educators. I would argue that this may be hindering the educators' and parents' attempts at mediation.

**Sub-Question 4: How do girls perceive, understand, and relate to media content?**

The girls possessed enthusiasm for and commitment to media. They perceived it as a personal resource with diverse applications in their daily lives. Media served several purposes in their lives: for education, for family entertainment, and for personal enjoyment and meaning. It was a very personal resource to them with which they engaged curiously (e.g. Lola inquiring about marketing techniques), emotionally (e.g. Tuscany's emotional bonds to certain characters and/or celebrities), socially (e.g. Rosline and Michelle discussing media content with their friends), and responsively (e.g. Lily creating her own *My Little Pony*-related content). The girls were very familiar with and fond towards media.

**Sub-Question 5: What do girls have to say about their experiences and perspectives regarding media?**

The girls had much to share in terms of their experiences and perspectives. For example, some girls expressed curiosity about the inner workings of media (e.g. Aisha and Lola's curiosities regarding advertising strategies). Tuscany was very keen to share how media inspired her and provided her with role-models. Lily enthusiastically discussed her engagement in media creation through her own YouTube channel. There were many more experiences and perspectives described by the girls, all of which were valuable in evolving an understanding of their relationships with media.

<div align="center">

**The key findings**

</div>

There were a variety of findings that emerged from the study, five of which were considered key, and were therefore foregrounded and discussed in-depth in the preceding chapters, as shown in Table 9.2. Here, I will summarise the key findings. Firstly, it emerged that media education was inconsistent at Seaglass Primary School with considerable variation throughout the school context. Secondly, there was a sense of continuity between the perspectives of the educators and parents, which also tied in with portions of the literature and with perspectives expressed in public discourse. Thirdly, through the analysis of media it

was discovered that femininity was thematically diverse but aesthetically static. Fourthly, as the girls shared their experiences and perspectives, it became evident that they were engaged in intimate, meaningful, and diverse relationships with media. Finally, the perspectives of the children contrasted sharply with those of the adults, which provoked a sense of discontinuity and incongruence.

Table 9.2: Identification of key findings and associated chapters

| Finding | Chapter |
|---|---|
| Key finding 1: Variant media education at Seaglass Primary School | 6 |
| Key finding 2: The alignment between educator and parent perspectives | 6 |
| Key finding 3: Diverse portrayals of femininity | 7 |
| Key finding 4: Intimate, meaningful, and diverse connections | 8 |
| Key finding 5: Disparate perspectives regarding media | 8 |

**The methodology and context of the study**

The study applied a mixed research methodology with feminist phenomenological and social semiotic elements. A participatory and child-centric approach was pursued, with priority given to eliciting the voices of young girls. The participants were students, parents, and educators from a small Western Australian primary school with a religious emphasis. Data were generated through an assembly of questionnaires, multiple interviews with different participants across different contexts including school and home, student-guided/documented tours of the girls' home environments, and an analysis of media. This data generation was longitudinal as it was undertaken over the course of a full school year in 2013. A full account of the study's methodology and context is provided in Chapter Four, with further contextual information provided in Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight.

**Limitations**

There were several limitations to this study which were methodological in nature. Firstly, the small sample was sourced from a small population to begin with – that being one private primary school with relatively low enrolments, located within a smaller city within Western Australia. This was a fitting approach given that phenomenology was a major component of the methodology – phenomenological studies typically involve small samples of participants (Creswell, 2013). However, the size of the sample is a limitation as this meant only a few participants to contribute to the research. Interviewing more participants might have revealed different perspectives or experiences – this is something to which future research could attend.

Secondly, the sample was not necessarily representative due to its niche focus. This was intentional in some ways (e.g. the students who were invited to participate were all young girls) and unintentional in others (e.g. the participants were all white and able-bodied). While my sample featured socioeconomic, religious, and familial diversity, it lacked racial and cultural diversity. From a feminist perspective – particularly an intersectional one – it is vital that this lack of diversity within the sample is acknowledged (Gines, 2011). It is also crucial that future research attends to this, as eliciting voices from more diverse participants is a valuable step in growing our knowledge. Furthermore, it is possible that engaging with different participants would have generated different knowledge – for example, engaging with girls from Indigenous communities, or girls with diverse abilities, or a sample of young boys could have altered the trajectory of the study and the knowledge which emerged from it.

Thirdly, data were primarily generated through self-report measures such as questionnaires and interviews. Because self-report measures are contingent on the perceptions of participants, it is contested that they could result in biased data, and so concerns abound regarding their validity and rigor (Haeffel & Howard, 2010). Furthermore, the questionnaires included open-ended qualitative items. This approach is uncommon as questionnaires are more often closed and quantitative in nature, and can present complications (Lewis, 2015). That being said, self-report measures were essential to this study as it was focused on hearing the perspectives of the participants themselves, whilst being situated in an area of research that embraces subjectivities (Creswell, 2013; Jun, 2008; Merleau-Ponty, 2002; Sharkey, 2001). Seeking 'objective' data would not have been appropriate given the nature of the study. As Finlay (2014, p. 125) states, "To think that it is possible to go into some totally presupposition-less space of 'pure objectivity' is a fallacy perpetuated by natural science". Rather, multiple sources of data were sought to create a comprehensive image of the research context, its participants, and their perspectives and experiences. Trustworthiness measures were also employed – for example, member-checking to ensure that the participants were comfortable with accounts of their contributions to the research (see Table 4.9).

Fourthly, the media analysis focused on music videos and magazines due to these being most favoured by the girls. That said, the girls were engaged with a wide variety of media including film, television, social media, and more. The lack of examination of these other types of media is a limitation, as there may have been insight to gain from such an examination. For example, some of the girls were entering into the world of social media –

how was femininity represented and communicated in those realms? This is certainly a valid question, however, it was not addressed in this study as social media was not among the girls' *most* favoured media at this stage in their lives.

Fifthly, my own researcher identity was instrumental in how the study was designed and carried out. In approaching these issues from a participatory worldview and feminist lens, I have created a specific framework for understanding. There are other worldviews and theoretical lenses which could be utilised, and which might affect the design or implementation of the research. Furthermore, I am an educational researcher with an interest in school contexts, students, educators, and pedagogies. Approaching the issues from an educational stance stands in contrast to health-based research or psychological research. There is value to these other disciplines and the kinds of knowledge which they can generate – for example, insight into the potential health outcomes for those engaging with media.

Finally, broad generalisation was not an aim – rather, the study sought to generate context-specific knowledge regarding girls' relationships with media. Deep, detailed, and meaningful understandings were desired – hence, it was ideal to work closely and extensively with a smaller group. This facilitated a strong sense of rapport with the participants, an evolving familiarity with the context, and ultimately, a thorough appreciation for the intricacies of the participants' varied perspectives and experiences. Although broad generalisation cannot be achieved with a study of this nature, meaningful knowledge has been attained which has relevance to many. In particular, this can translate into recommendations for researchers in this area, educators, parents, and girls – of which there are several. These will be addressed later in this chapter.

## The contributions of the study

This study has made a number of contributions which will be of value to the research community – particularly educational researchers, or researchers otherwise engaged with children, and especially those with research interests focused on girls and/or media. I will explore these contributions by outlining my evaluation of the study's conceptual, methodological, and practical value. These contributions are contextualised by addressing linkages to existing literature.

### Conceptual contribution

This study represents an educationally focused research project that adopts a holistic and contextual perspective by looking at the interconnected contexts of school, home, and media – all of which contribute greatly to how children learn and develop. I also assumed a

participatory worldview and a feminist theoretical lens – the fusion of which facilitated an emphatically child-centric approach to research. To date, research in this area has been predominantly adult-centric with little focus or voice given to children and their perspectives and lived experiences. There is great value to child-centric research, particularly from an educational stance. Research with children can deepen our understanding of what it means to work with young children and how we can enhance educational practice to better serve children (Castle, 2012). For example, prioritising the girls' voices revealed discontinuities between the perceptions of the adults and the children in the Seaglass context.

To frame the research, I developed a conceptual framework which indicated how media were connected to the girls, their contexts, and their development. It emphasised the girls' agency as individuals, placed them at the heart of this issue, and rejected dominant discourses of child/media passivity (Wilson, 2009) by constructing the contexts as interconnected and mutually influential (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This conceptual framework undoubtedly helped to build strong working relationships with the girls, who professed that they appreciated being so involved in the research process and having the opportunity to share their points of view. As previously discussed, the direct and active involvement of young girls has been lacking in the literature to date (Granatiko & Haytko, 2013). In keeping with several authors of feminist persuasions and/or who are focused on children's rights, I chose to conceptualise girls as important and agentic (Bartky, 1990; Gines, 2011; Letherby, 2003; Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2006).

Another key feature of the conceptual framework was how media were positioned. Often, media are seen as existing at the macrosystem and/or exosystem. This view of media as a powerful, external entity ties in with the perspectives voiced by the educators and parents. This traditional perspective is presented in Figure 9.2, while an alternate view is presented in Figure 9.3. In keeping with this, my assertion was that media exist throughout the systems and have a cross-contextual presence – even at the microsystem in its most personal form. This way of conceptualising media ended up being confirmed through my interactions with the girls, who saw media in a very personal light. When their educators and parents did recognise media as a personal resource, they associated this with education or entertainment. This interpretation is simplistic and not thoroughly representative of the girls' own perspectives and experiences, wherein they saw media as their companion and/or as a source of comfort, inspiration, 'explorination', and so forth. This is reminiscent of assertions made by authors such as Bennett and Iyengar (2008) and Czerski (2012), who reject traditional conceptualisations of media.
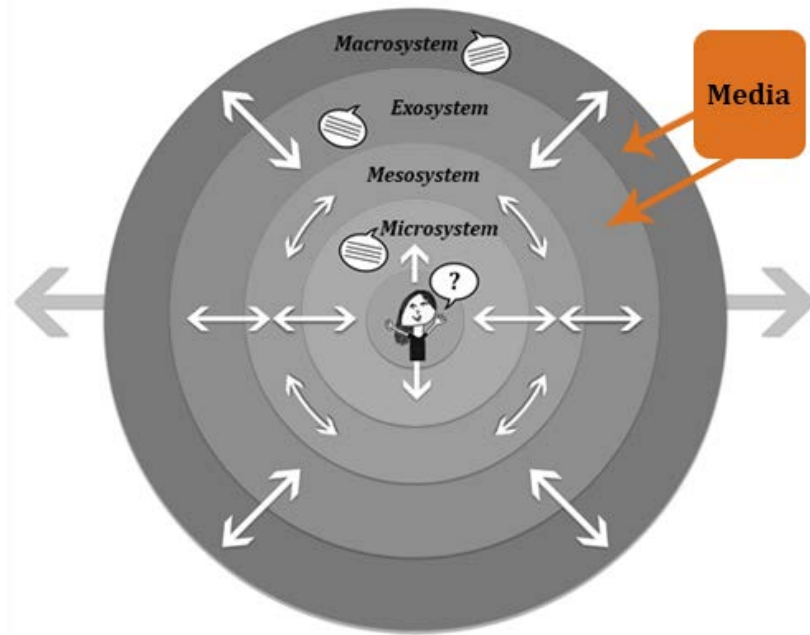
Figure 9.2: The traditional perspective regarding the positioning of media
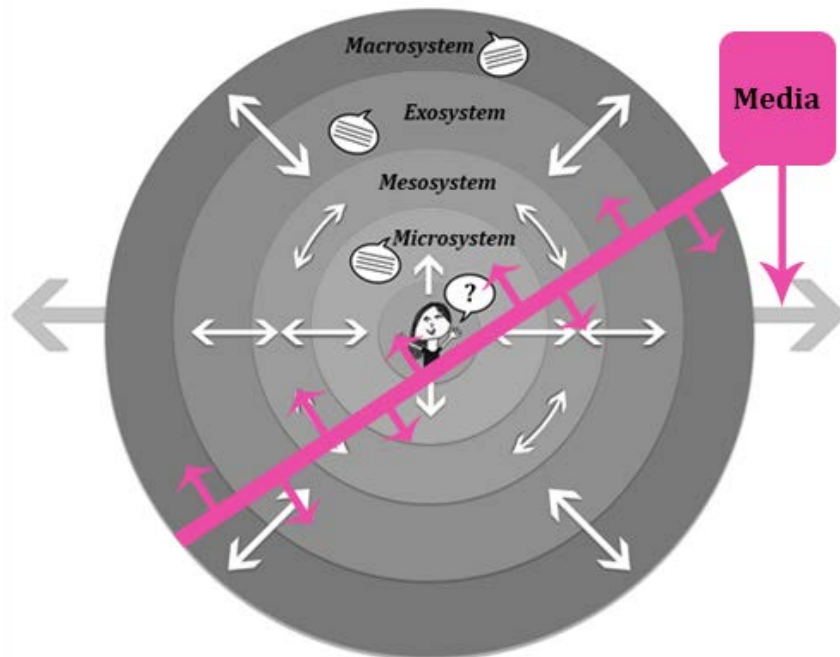


Figure 9.3: The cross-contextual presence of media

Therefore, this study makes a conceptual contribution by proposing a framework which recognises the pervasiveness of media throughout all systems. By recognising media's cross-contextual presence, the complex nature of media is revealed and reinforced. The framework acknowledges media's overarching presence at the macrosystem and exosystem, thus recognising its relationship to social and cultural ideologies. This is certainly of value as it permits examination of mass media and of the dominant ideas embedded within media, or

the dominant ideas which media may help to create and/or perpetuate. The framework also permits more context-specific understandings through its positioning of media within microsystems and mesosystems – for example, how media exist within school, family, or community contexts. Lastly, recognising media's placement within an individual's personal context is of value, as it allows us to narrow our focus to what media may mean to one person. By narrowing our focus in this way, we can explore the relationships between individuals and their media, and the specific perspectives and experiences that go with this.

**Methodological contribution**

The study made a substantial methodological contribution by pursuing a mixed research design that blended feminist phenomenological and social semiotic elements. This methodological approach contributed to the contextually-focused nature of the study and also supported the worldview and theory which defined my own researcher identity and, thus, the research. This approach contrasts with those taken by authors in the exiting body of literature, where their methodologies have been wholly or predominantly quantitative (e.g. Davalos, Davalos & Layton, 2007; Smith & Choueiti, 2011; Sypeck, Gray & Ahrens, 2003), or have been insufficiently attentive to the experiences and perspectives of children (Granatiko & Haytko, 2013). Through my methodology, I sought to bridge gaps in the literature and generate different kinds of understanding about these important issues.

The phenomenological elements were deemed fitting as they facilitated a return to the core issue – girls' experiences with media – and permitted an exploration of experiential meanings (Finlay, 2012). The study's longitudinal nature allowed sound working relationships to evolve between myself and the participants, which in turn contributed to the generation of detailed and rich data. In particular, conducting multiple interviews with the girls was highly advantageous as it allowed the girls to share their perspectives and experiences in-depth. By conducting school-based and home-based interviews, I was afforded the opportunity to interact with the girls in different settings and grow a more thorough understanding of their identities and contexts. The home tours, which were led and photographed by the girls, reinforced the child-centric nature of the study and engaged the girls as active participants in the research process (Merewether & Fleet, 2014; Steele & Browne, 1995).

The social semiotic approach to the analysis of media was of value as many studies in this area have pursued content analysis (e.g. Collins, 2011; Smith & Choueiti, 2010). Content analyses tend to ignore the contexts within which media are situated (Williams, 2003), whereas social semiotics takes an emphatically contextual approach (van Leeuwen, 2005). It

is also argued that content analysis is primarily focused on counting (Williams, 2003) and that it may conflate prevalence with significance (Rose, 2012; Russell, 1999). By taking a social semiotic approach, I was able to explore issues of how the music videos and magazines were used by the girls, how visual resourcing tactics were employed, and how meaning was made and conveyed. In doing so, I achieved in-depth and contextualised insight that would not have been possible through quantitative means.

Trustworthiness was a major emphasis throughout the study. The three sets of criteria set out by Creswell (2008) – including Lincoln's (1995) philosophical criteria, Creswell's (1998) procedural criteria, and Richardson's (2000) participatory and advocacy criteria – provided a means for comprehensive and meaningful reflection and evaluation (see Table 4.8). By engaging with these three sets of criteria, I was confident in the accuracy, credibility, and trustworthiness of my research.

The methodological approach was also valuable as it permitted a personalised, context-specific, and child-centric exploration of the given issues. As stated above, child-centric research is lacking in this area and this is concerning. Adult voices are most often heard and, therefore, adult meanings abound. It ought to be considered essential that we evolve this area of knowledge by hearing what children have to say and understanding their points of view. In summary, the methodological approach that I selected is of value to this field as it permitted the evolution of important knowledge regarding girls', their worlds, and their views – all told by the girls themselves, giving them the voice they deserve.

**Practical contribution**

Looking to the study's practical contribution, knowledge has been generated regarding girls' personal relationships with media and their perspectives regarding what they know and what they would like to learn. This is important knowledge that will expand the existing body of literature. Within the existing literature, a wealth of knowledge exists regarding the nature of media as an entity, as well as how girls and women tend to be portrayed, and also the potential outcomes of girls and women engaging with media. That said, this knowledge is not without gaps and must continue to evolve. My study intended to bridge several key gaps, which have been discussed in terms of the conceptual and methodological contributions, but which ultimately lead to knowledge and skills that are practically relevant.

Firstly, and very significantly, emphasis was placed on young girls – a population who are under-represented in the literature to date. Not only do these girls have every right to share their experiences and perspectives, but the developmental significance of their age bracket

deserves recognotion. Girls in the early years are emerging across the developmental dimensions (Neaum, 2010), while girls in the middle childhood stages are developing a more concrete sense of self (Ormrod, 2011). Once girls enter into early adolescence, they develop a heightened sense of self-awareness and self-consciousness (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2013). The existing literature establishes the issues that young girls may face when engaging with media, such as appearance anxiety (Hamilton, 2008; Hutchinson & Calland, 2011; Urla & Swedlund, 2000), body size stereotyping (Harriger et al., 2010), and skewed perceptions of who they are (Gordon, 2008) or what it means to be a woman (Ward & Harrison, 2005). Thus, it is critical that we obtain greater insight into this population and their relationships with media. My study's sample spanned early childhood through early adolescence and involved two girls in the early years, four in the middle childhood years, five who were pre-adolescent, and two who had just entered into adolescence (see Table 4.4, p. 76).  In this sense, a substantial practical contribution is made by establishing insight that can equip researchers, educators, and families.

Secondly, and perhaps most significantly, I wish to foreground the potential practical contribution of the girls themselves. The girls shared a wide range of passions and curiosities regarding media, including:

- Desiring to know the intricacies of advertising including why certain choices are made and the underlying rationale;
- An interest in the behind-the-scenes aspects of screen productions; and/or
- Creating their own content which is relatable and meaningful

This is critical and valuable knowledge that could inform future dialogues between students, educators, and parents. In fact, these curiosities could be translated into inquiry-based learning experiences which actively engage students and position them as directors in their learning journey (Volkert, 2012). For example – Lola was intrigued by marketing and the use of certain techniques. This curiosity could transform into an inquiry-based learning experience where Lola has agency over her own learning. Furthermore, I see great potential in the passion for content creation shared among girls like Lily and Summer. This is a promising avenue which could prove engaging and motivational, as well as having immense capacity for developing critical and reflective thinking in students.

By acknowledging girls' bonds with media as well as what intrigues them and captures their attention, we can consciously facilitate relevant and meaningful learning experiences. There also exists the potential for us to grow our relationships with girls by engaging in balanced

conversations about their relationships with media, which recognise the girls' perspectives and experiences as valid and valuable. This kind of approach, which humanises and prioritises girls, will improve our chances of guiding and supporting these girls as they continue forth in their interactions with media.

## Recommendations

I will now identify a series of recommendations which I consider to be valuable and significant. As previously discussed in Chapter Five, which focused on my ethical approach and its feminist underpinnings, the ultimate goal of feminist ethics is to facilitate meaningful, positive change. I refer to the assertion by Brabreck and Brabreck (2009, p. 50): "This means that feminist ethical researchers must use knowledge and the process of generating knowledge as tools to bring about individual, familial, communal, educational, institutional, legal, and social change." Hence, my recommendations have emerged from the knowledge which I have attained throughout the course of this study, with consideration given to the implications and applications of this knowledge, and with an emphasis on facilitating meaningful, positive change for my participants, their context, and others like them. Therefore, I will provide recommendations for researchers, educators, parents, and girls. These recommendations are summarised in Table 9.3. In the sub-sections to follow, I will elaborate on each recommendation with reference to how they emerged and why they are worth pursuing.

Table 9.3: Summary of recommendations

| Audience | Intent | | Recommendation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Researchers | To guide future studies in this area | 1 | Researchers in this area of inquiry should prioritise greater diversity in sampling |
| | | 2 | Researchers in this area of inquiry should continue the investigation of child/adult perspectives |
| | | 3 | Researchers in this area of inquiry should pursue child-centric research which privileges children's voices |
| Educators | To guide future teaching and learning in our schools | 4 | Educators should work collaboratively to develop a whole-school plan for media education |
| | | 5 | Educators should prioritise collaboration and communication between educators, parents, and children |
| Parents | To guide parent/child | 6 | Parents should be actively attentive to the experiences, perspectives, and voices of their children |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | interactions | | |
| Girls | To guide, support, and encourage girls | 7 | Girls should speak to their experiences and perspectives |

*Recommendation 1: Researchers in this area of inquiry should prioritise greater diversity in sampling*

The need for greater diversity in sampling is commonly supported in the literature (Ata et al., 2007; Gordon, 2008; Grabe & Hyde, 2009; Tiggemann & Miller, 2010; Ward, 2003). The voices of girls from different races, cultures, contexts, and/or abilities are of immense value – especially when one views this from an intersectional feminist angle, where the inclusion of marginalised voices is considered essential (Gines, 2011). Future research must attend to this with fervour. Ways of accomplishing this would be to specifically seek out the perspectives of these girls – for example, the question could become: *What are the perspectives and lived experiences of girls with diverse abilities with media?* This goes back to the issues that arose from the analysis of media – given that the majority of girls and women depicted were thin, able-bodied, conventionally beautiful, etc., it would be worthwhile to explore the responses of girls who do not belong to these categories.

*Recommendation 2: Researchers in this area of inquiry should continue the investigation of child/adult perspectives*

As has been mentioned previously, there was a sense of incongruence that arose when comparing and contrasting the perspectives of the adult participants and the child participants. This sense of incongruence is intriguing and merits further investigation. Future research should explore the levels of awareness possessed by the different parties – that is, are students, educators and parents aware that their perspectives differ? What does this mean to them? Asking such questions would represent a strong initial step in reconciling these disparities. This is not to say that such disparities should not exist or that any party is right or wrong – but in order to achieve a sense of continuity, it would be worthwhile to work towards a form of resolution. This may take the shape of recognition and appreciation – for example, enabling educators and parents to understand that their students/children feel differently and the reasons behind this. Such an understanding could potentially facilitate better communication between these parties, which would benefit attempts at prevention/intervention – this idea is further addressed in Recommendations 5 and 6.

*Recommendation 3: Researchers in this area of inquiry should pursue child-centric research which privileges children's voices*

Something which became profoundly evident throughout the study was how much the girls valued being listened to. This was made apparent by the girls again and again, primarily during the ongoing reflections which I facilitated as part of the ethics of the study. For Michelle, this was unprecedented; she stated, *"I've never been able to talk to people about how I feel about media and what things I really like."* Whippet shared similar thoughts and summarised her reflection by saying, *"It was really good just to say how I feel."* Tuscany was also appreciative of the opportunity to speak her mind – regarding this, she reflected, *"I loved it... it was cool to, like, express things. Like, for your study, for everyone to know about us. Because it is good to know."*

Hence, future studies should focus on continuing to pursue child-centric research. Such research would do well to correspond to criteria sourced from participatory/feminist writings (e.g. Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2006) and, perhaps most importantly, the United Nations' Conventions on the Rights of the Child [CRC] (e.g. Beazley, 2011; Doek, 2014). These sources can assist in creating a research context that partners children in the research process, engages them, and encourages them to share their views. Achieving this is of immense value to researchers – for instance, Doek writes:

> Including children's perspectives may help get an accurate picture of their activities and experiences and capture important aspects of their lives (…). For all people working with or for children and aiming at the promotion of their wellbeing, ongoing awareness and the effective implementation of the rights of the child remain a daily challenge. (Doek, 2014, p. 214).

Hence, for researchers invested in inquiring about children's lives in order to better understand them and subsequently enhance them, eliciting children's voices should be considered key. It is insufficient to view these issues through an adult-centric lens. Fortunately, there is evidence of a growing emphasis on child-centricity, particularly in this area. One pertinent example is Tsaliki's (2015) qualitative research with focus groups of girls aged 10-12, wherein Tsaliki consciously resisted moral panic over child media use and pursued a positive account of this relationship from the perspectives of the girls themselves. Regarding her intentions, Tsaliki writes, "I want to challenge the prevailing views and assumptions about the incendiary effects of sexualised and commercialised culture on pre-teenage girls" (p. 505). Assuming a similar perspective, Jackson and Vares (2015, p. 481) comment that much of the body of literature on sexualised media has a tendency to portray

girls as "naïve and damaged victims". Their identification of the need to explore girls' perspectives was addressed in their study focusing on pre-teen girls' views of sexualised media, through the use of video diaries with 71 participants aged 10-13 from New Zealand. In a similar vein, McGladrey (2015) argues for the value of eliciting data from girls themselves, rather than relying on adult-centric assumptions. She makes this important assertion:

> In considering these directions for future research, it is clear that girls' studies scholarship can no longer afford to speak for (rather than with) girls of all ages, backgrounds, and sexual orientations. As experts in girl culture, girls must serve as co-researchers in studies employing ethnographic methods and facilitating collaborative learning environments to elicit girls' perspectives on their own terms, instead of situating them within adults' idealized expectations or worst fears. To proceed with girls' studies in any other manner would position as mute, passive objects those very girls whose subjectivities our research projects strive to illuminate and amplify. (McGladrey, 2015, pp. 185-186).

This statement resonates with me and aligns with what I discovered through the course of this study. Research in this area would do well to continue pursuing child-centric research that places distinct emphasis on the value of children's contributions. By directing more attention to the perspectives and experiences of children, as voiced by the children themselves, we can enhance our understanding of these issues and develop meaningful strategies for future practice – in terms of education, research, parenting, and more. This is also an important step in recognising children and affording them ownership and agency. Once again, this aligns with the CRC – particularly in terms of Articles 12 and 13 (Beazley et al., 2011, p. 161). Ultimately, the continued pursuit of child-centric research is something which I would emphatically recommend.

### *Recommendation 4: Educators should work collaboratively to develop a whole-school plan for media education*

The first key finding of this study focused on the variant nature of media education at Seaglass Primary School, which is potentially problematic. My recommendation to the educators at Seaglass, as well as educators in similar contexts and circumstances, would be to develop a whole-school plan for media education which could be applied consistently throughout each and every classroom. While there would inevitably be some variance based on the individual classroom context and its cohort, a whole-school plan would help to ensure a sense of continuity, which could enhance the educational outcomes for students. Whole-

school plans are supported for their systematic and logical approach (Hunt, Barrios, & Telljohann, 2015), for being carefully and collaboratively developed (Whitton, Barker, Nosworthy, Sinclair & Nanlohy, 2010), and for building coherence (Witt, 2012). Rather than suggesting a "one-size-fits-all curriculum", what I would recommend is a planning approach which connects the school, its classrooms, and all members of the school community (Dempsey & Arthur-Kelly, 2007, p. 135). Such an approach could achieve authentic media education where learners are supported as part of a strong community (Dempsey & Arthur-Kelly, 2007). Groundwater-Smith, Mitchell, and Mockler (2007, p. 12) delineate a number of key elements which ought to factor into a whole-school approach – some of which I perceive as particularly important in relation to media education in the Seaglass context (see Table 9.4). I would also recommend that other school contexts be attentive to these elements if they are attempting to develop and implement a whole-school media plan, or perhaps if they wish to review their existing plan.

Table 9.4: Key elements needed for a whole-school approach to media education

| Elements | Examples |
| --- | --- |
| Leadership and management | The school principal plays a pivotal role in the leadership and management of a school. Therefore, is recommended that the principal take responsibility for leading and managing the development and implementation of the whole-school plan. |
| Giving students a voice | An emphasis on student voice is essential and ought to play a key part in the whole-school approach to media education. This recommendation is made with the intention to involve students in the process and give them agency over their own learning. |
| Partnerships with parents/carers and local communities | The creation and maintenance of partnerships is already a core feature of Seaglass Primary School, and it will serve the school community well to sustain these partnerships throughout the development and implementation of their whole-school media plan. This recommendation is also applicable to other school contexts and their educators; by engaging in partnerships, the whole-school plan for media education can benefit from broad support that will hopefully span across contexts. |

The development a whole-school plan for media education would be beneficial to a context such as Seaglass Primary. Not only would this offer a resolution to the issue of inconsistent teaching practices from classroom to classroom, but it would help to make media education a distinct priority, which is in keeping with the perspectives voiced by the educators during

their interviews, as well as recommendations made throughout the literature (Durham, 2009; Farley, 2009; Hobbs, 2011; Scheibe & Rogow, 2012; Streitmalter, 2004).

### *Recommendation 5: Educators should prioritise collaboration and communication between educators, parents, and children*

In my previous recommendation to educators, I have indicated the importance of persisting with partnerships. The creation and maintenance of partnerships is something that the educators at Seaglass seem to do well, based on positive commentary from the educators and parents throughout their interviews. Such partnerships are thoroughly supported in educational literature as being rewarding (Whitton et al., 2010), important in creating belonging and engagement (Bowes, Grace & Hodge, 2012), and as having the potential to enhance student achievement (Parkay, 2013). It is imperative that these partnerships involve collaboration and communication (Bowes et al., 2012), a point which was endorsed by Seaglass' educators and parents.

That being said, there is an issue. The second key finding of this study reported on the alignment of adult perspectives, where a sense of continuity was evident between the educators and parents. The fifth key finding indicated that the girls' perspectives did not align with those of the adults; while there were some commonalities, there were many noteworthy disparities. Furthermore, communication between the children and adults was perceived differently – for example, while some of the parents claimed to talk to their daughters about media, the girls claimed that their parents either didn't talk to them enough, or at all, or in a way which was relatable. This seems to suggest a breakdown in communication which could prove hazardous to the partnerships that the educators and parents of Seaglass strive to build and sustain. Therefore, my recommendation is that the students of Seaglass should be recognised as important people in these partnerships. Furthermore, they should be actively engaged in the process of collaboration and communication. By further developing the school's emphasis on partnerships to fully include children, this could enrich the school climate and benefit all involved.

### *Recommendation 6: Parents should be actively attentive to the experiences, perspectives, and voices of their children*

This recommendation ties in with the previous one, wherein I recommended that educators should prioritise collaboration and communication between all members of the school community – children included. This sixth recommendation, which I make to parents, is exclusively focused on the family context and the relationships shared between parents (or guardians/carers) and children.

It is important that adults recognise that children have their own point of view and are capable of making valuable contributions (Smith & Taylor, 2000). Creating a greater sense of equity in parent/child relationships has huge potential for empowering children and enhancing their sense of agency (Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2006). In order to create this sense of equity, parents are encouraged to prioritise actively listening to children and taking them seriously as individuals (Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2006). Hence, my recommendation to parents is that they be attentive to their children's experiences, perspectives, and voices. By recognising their children in this way, parents can facilitate equitable and meaningful dialogue about media, the roles that media play, and their meaning in our lives. This kind of discussion could create opportunities for parents to provide any necessary guidance and support, as well as enriching the perspectives and understanding of parents and children alike.

### *Recommendation 7: Girls should speak to their experiences and perspectives*

Given this study's emphasis on child-centricity and the elicitation of girls' voices, it seems fitting to conclude my recommendations with one directed at young girls. This seventh recommendation is specifically targeted at the value of girls' voices. In my elaboration on the third recommendation, which called for a continued pursuit of child-centric studies, I discussed how the girls engaged in this study appreciated the opportunity to share their stories. The stories that the girls chose to share with me were many and varied, reflecting their own individuality as well as the diversity of their relationships with media. There were many common threads which became evident, indicating the immediacy and intimacy of media in these girls' lives at the time of the study. It was a privilege to share in the research journey with these girls and hear all of their stories in their own words. By contributing their voices, these girls have helped to evolve our understanding of what it means to them to engage with media.

Therefore, my recommendation to girls is that they speak up and share their voices, their views, and their stories with those around them. While I do acknowledge that this is easier said than done, and that it perhaps is not possible for all girls depending on their circumstances, I wish to advocate for the value of their voices nonetheless. Furthermore, the other recommendations which I have provided will hopefully create contexts in which girls feel empowered and encouraged to speak up. Whether they choose to share with family, friends, educators, or others, their stories are well worth telling and ought to be heard and appreciated.

**Concluding statement**

This thesis has provided an account of a study which focused on the relationships forged between young girls (aged 7-13) and media. A holistic and contextually-specific approach was assumed, with students, parents, and educators from a small Western Australian primary school engaged as participants. To frame the research, a conceptual framework was developed – this framework represented a fusion of Bronfenbrennian theory and feminist theory, wherein girls were placed at the heart and made a priority. Through the development of this framework, emphasis was placed on the centricity of children and the elicitation of their voices.

The overarching methodology was mixed research with an integration of feminist phenomenology and social semiotics. Data were generated via interviews, questionnaires, an analysis of relevant media, and student-guided/documented home tours. What emerged was an understanding of the diversity of relationships forged between girls and media and the variety of perspectives possessed by the different participants. This knowledge facilitated a number of recommendations for researchers in this area of inquiry, educators, parents, and girls. A number of important contributions have been made conceptually, methodologically, and practically. These contributions bridge several key gaps in the existing literature, such as the limited focus on young girls and the tendency to privilege adult voices.

Ultimately, this thesis has contributed valuable knowledge regarding how girls engage with media and the nature of the media with which they engage. It has also offered additional insight into the merits of child-centric research and why this is an endeavour which we should continue to pursue fervently. The knowledge attained throughout the course of this study will assist researchers, educators, families, and the wider community as we move forward in our attempts to guide and support girls in their interactions with media. Most significantly, this study represents a source of insight which can help to evolve our understanding and appreciation of young girls' perspectives, experiences, and voices – all of which are of immense value.

# *References*

Aapola, S., Gonick, M., & Harris, A. (2005). *Young femininity: Girlhood, power, and social change.* U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan.

Abidor, J. (2014). Spencer Hastings [Image]. Retrieved from http://tvbuzz.beamly.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2014/10/Spencer.jpg

Ackerley, B. & True, J. (2010). Back to the future: Feminist theory, activism, and doing feminist research in an age of globalisation. *Women's Studies International Forum, 33*, pp. 464 – 472. doi: 10.1016/j.wsif.2010.06.004

Adams St. Pierre, E. (2000). Poststructural feminism in education: An overview. *Qualitative Studies in Education, 13*(5), 477-515. doi: 10.1080/09518390050156422

Advertising enters the virtual world: Opportunities have been exploited to the full. (2011). *Strategic Direction, 27*(2), 18-21. doi: 10.110802580541111103936

Akhter, N. & Naheed, F. (2014). Perceptions of educated women about the role of media in women empowerment. *European Scientific Journal, 10*(31), 280-291.

Allan, B. (2010). *Supporting research students.* London, U.K.: Facet Publishing.

Allen, K. & Mendick, H. (2013). Young people's uses of celebrity: Class, gender and 'improper' celebrity. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 34*(1), 77-93. doi: 10.1080/01596306.2012.698865

American Psychological Association. (2007). *Report of the APA task force on the sexualisation of girls: Executive summary.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Anand, S., & Krosnick, J. A. (2005). Demographic predictors of media use among infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. *American Behavioral Scientist, 48*(5), 539-561. doi: 10.1177/0002764204271512

Andsager, J. L. (2014). Research directions in social media and body image. *Sex Roles, 71*(11), 407-413. doi: 10.1007/s11199-014-0430-4

Anfara, V. (2008). Theoretical frameworks. In L. M. Given (Ed.), *The SAGE Encyclopaedia of qualitative research methods* (pp. 870-874). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE. doi: http://dx.doi.org.dbgw.lis.curtin.edu.au/10.4135/9781412963909.n453

Arnkil, H. (1995). Foreword. In H. Arnkil & E. Hämäläinen (Eds.), *Aspects of colour* (pp. 7-9). Helsinki, Finland: University of Art and Design Helsinki.

Arts, K. (2014). Twenty-five years of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: Achievements and challenges. *Netherlands International Law Review, 61*(3), 267-303. doi: 10.1017/S0165070X14001272

Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., Sorensen, C., & Razavieh, A. (2009). *Introduction to research in education* (8th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Ata, R. N., Ludden, A. B., & Lally, M. M. (2007). The effects of gender and family, friend, and media influences on eating behaviors and body image during adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 36*, 1024–1037. doi:10.1007/s10964-006-9159-x.

Aubrey, J. S. (2010). Looking good versus feeling good: an investigation of media frames of health advice and their effects on women's body-related self-perceptions. *Sex Roles, 63*(1-2), 50-63. doi: 10.1007/s11199-010-9768-4

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2009). *Children's participation in cultural and leisure activities* (No. 4901.0). Canberra, ACT: Author.

Australian Communications and Media Authority. (2010). Trends in media use by children and young people: Insights from the Kaiser Family Foundation's Generation M2 2009 (USA), and results from the ACMA's 'Media and communications in Australian families 2007' [Report]. Retrieved from http://www.acma.gov.au/webwr/_assets/main/lib310665/trends_in_media_use_by_c hildren_and_young_people.pdf

Australian Curriculum, Assessment, and Reporting Authority. (2013). *Guide to understanding 2013: Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage (ICSEA) values* [Fact sheet]. Retrieved from http://www.acara.edu.au/verve/_resources/Guide_to_understanding_2013_ICSEA_v alues.pdf

Ayeroff, J. (2000). Foreword. In S. Reiss & N. Feineman (Eds.), *Thirty frames per second: The visionary art of the music video* (pp. 7). New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, Inc.

Bailey, R. (2011). Letting children be children: Report of an independent review of the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood (Information Report 2011). London, UK: Crown.

Balcetis, E., Cole, S., Chelberg, M.B., & Alicke, M. (2013). Searching out the ideal: Awareness of ideal body standards predicts lower global self-esteem in women. *Self and Identity, 12*(1), 99-113. doi: 10.1080/15298868.2011.639549

Barker, E. T., & Galambos, N. L. (2003). Body dissatisfaction of adolescent girls and boys: Risk and resource factors. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, *23*, 141-165. doi: 10.1177/0272431603023002002

Barnes, A. (2011). A sociological analysis of my identity formation and the creation of my personal feminine ideal. *Human Architecture, 9*(2), 65-76.

Barriga, C. A., Shapiro, M. A., & Jhaveri, R. (2008). Media context, female body size and perceived realism. *Sex Roles, 60*(1-2), 128-141. doi: 10.1007/s11199-008-9482-7

Bartky, S. L. (1990). *Femininity and domination: Studies in the phenomenology of oppression.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Beasley, C. (1999). *What is feminism?* St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin.

Beasley, C. (2006). Responding to challenges. In L. Burns (Ed.), *Feminist alliances.* New York, USA: Editions Ropodi B. V.

Beazley, H., Bessell, S., Ennew, J. & Waterson, R. (2011). How are the human rights of children related to research methodology? In In A. Invernizzi & J. Williams (Eds.), *The human rights of children: From visions to implementation* (pp. 159-178). Surrey, England: Ashgate.

Bell, B. T., & Dittmar, H. (2011). Does media type matter? The role of identification in adolescent girls' media consumption and the impact of different thin-ideal media on body image. *Sex Roles, 65*(7-8), 478-490. doi: 10.1007/s11199-011-9964-x

Bennett, W. L. & Iyengar, S. (2008). A new era of minimal effects? The changing foundations of political communication. *Journal of Communication, 58,* 707-731. doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.2008.00410.x

Bennett, W. L. & Iyengar, S. (2010). The shifting foundations of political communication: Responding to a defense of the media effects paradigm. *Journal of Communication, 60,* 35-39. doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.2009.01471.x

Bergman, M. M. (2008). *Advances in mixed methods research.* London: SAGE. doi: http://dx.doi.org.dbgw.lis.curtin.edu.au/10.4135/9780857024329.d3

Bergsma, L. J. & Carney, M. E. (2008). Effectiveness of health-promoting media literacy education: a systematic review. *Health Education Research, 23*(3), 522-542. doi: 10.1093/her/cym084

Berns, R. M. (2012). *Child, family, school, community: Socialization and support* (9th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Bissell, K. L. (2004). What do these messages really mean? Sports media exposure, sports participation, and body image distortion in women between the ages of 18 and 75. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, 81*(1), 108-123.

Bleicher, S. (2005). *Contemporary colour: Theory and use.* Clifton Park, NY: Thomson Delmar Learning.

Bordo, S. (1991). "Material girl": The effacements of postmodern culture. In L. Goldstein (Ed.), *The female body* (pp. 106-130). U.S.A.: The University of Michigan Press.

Bowes, J., Grace, R., & Hodge, K. (2012). *Children, families, and communities: Contexts and consequences* (4th ed.). South Melbourne, Victoria: Oxford University Press.

Boyd, E. R. & Montcrieff-Boyd, J. (2011). Swimsuit issues: promoting positive body image in young women's magazines. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia, 22*(2), 102-106.

Brabreck, M. & Brabreck, K. (2009). Feminist perspectives on research ethics. In D. Mertens, & P. Ginsberg (Eds.), *The handbook of social research ethics.* (pp. 39-54). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: http://dx.doi.org.dbgw.lis.curtin.edu.au/10.4135/9781483348971.n3

Breen, M. J. (2007). Mass media and new media technologies. In E. Devereux (Ed.), *Media studies: Key issues and debates* (pp. 55-77). London, U.K.: SAGE.

Brierley, S. (2002). *The advertising handbook* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Breines, J. G., Crocker, J., & Garcia, J. A. (2008). Self-objectification and well-being in women's daily lives. *Pers Soc Psychol Bull, 34*(5), 583-598. doi: 10.1177/0146167207313727

BritneySpearsVEVO. (2013, October 1). *Britney Spears – Work B\*\*ch* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pt8VYOfr8To

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design.* Cambridge, Massachussetts: Harvard University Press.

Brooks, K. (2008). *Consuming innocence: Popular culture and our children.* Queensland, Australia: University of Queensland Press.

Browning Cole, E. & Coultrap-McQuin, S. (1992). Towards a feminist conception of moral life. In E. Browning Cole and S. Coultrap McQuin (Eds.), *Explorations in feminist ethics* (p. 1-11). Indiana, U.S.A.: Indiana University Press.

Buysse, J. A. M. & Embser-Herbert, M. S. (2004). Constructions of gender in sport: An analysis of intercollegiate media guide cover photographs. *Gender & Society, 18*(1), 66-81. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/

Calogero, R. M., Tantleff-Dunn, S., & Thompson, J. K. (2011). *Self-objectification in women: Causes, consequences and counteractions.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Cameron, R. (2014). The emerging use of mixed methods in educational research. In M. Baguley, A. Jasman and Y. Findlay (Eds.), *Meanings and motivations in education research.* Oxford, UK: Routledge.

Carey, R. N., Donaghue, N., & Broderick, P. (2010). 'What you look like is such a big factor': Girls' own reflections about the appearance culture in an all-girls' school. *Feminism & Psychology, 21*(3), 299-316. doi: 10.1177/0959353510369893

Carley-Baxter, L. (2008). Interviewer. In P. J. Lavrakas (Ed.), *Encyclopaedia of survey research methods* (pp. 364-367). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Castle, K. (2012). *Early childhood teacher research: From questions to results.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Cemalcilar, Z. (2010). Schools as socialisation contexts: Understanding the impact of school climate factors on students' sense of school belonging. *Applied Psychology, 59*(2), 243-272. doi: 10.1111/j.1464-0597.2009.00389.x

Chan, K., Tufte, B., Cappello, G., & Williams, R. B. (2011). Tween girls' perception of gender roles and gender identities: a qualitative study. *Young Consumers: Insight and Ideas for Responsible Marketers, 12*(1), 66-81. doi: 10.1108/17473611111114795

Chan-Olmsted, S. M., Cho, M., & Lee, S. (2013). User perceptions of social media: A comparative study of perceived characteristics and user profiles by social media. *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies, 3*(4), 149-178.

Choma, B. L., Foster, M. D., & Radford, E. (2007). Use of objectification theory to examine the effects of a media literacy intervention on women. *Sex Roles, 56*(9-10), 581-590. doi: 10.1007/s11199-007-9200-x

Choma, B. L., Visser, B. A., Pozzebon, J. A., Bogaert, A. F., Busseri, M. A., & Sadava, S. W. (2010). Self-objectification, self-esteem, and gender: Testing a moderated mediation model. *Sex Roles, 63,* 645-656. doi: 10.1007/s11199-010-9829-8

Christakis, D. A., & Zimmerman, F. J. (2009). Young children and media: Limitations of current knowledge and future directions for research. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(8), 1177-1185. doi: 10.1177/0002764209331540

Christman, J. (1995). Feminism and autonomy. In D. E. Bushnell (Ed.), *"Nagging" questions: feminist ethics in everyday life.* Maryland, USA: Rowman & Littlefield.

Clark, A. (2010). Young children as protagonists and the role of participatory, visual methods in engaging multiple perspectives. *American Journal of Contemporary Psychology, 46*(1-2), 115-123. doi: 10.1007/s10464-010-9332-y

Clark, L., & Tiggemann, M. (2007). Sociocultural influences and body image in 9 to 12-year-old girls: The role of appearance schemas. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology, 36*(1), 76-86. doi: 10.1080/15374410709336570

Cole, E., & Henderson Daniel, J. (2005). Afterword. In E. Cole & J. Henderson Daniel (Eds.), *Featuring females: Feminist analyses of media* (pp. 211-213). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Collins, R. L. (2011). Content analysis of gender roles in media: Where are we now and where should we go? *Sex Roles, 64*(3-4), 290-298. doi: 10.1007/s11199-010-9929-5

Collins, R. L., Elliott, M. N., Berry, S. H., Kanouse, D. E., Kunkel, D., Hunter, S. B., & Miu, A. (2004). Watching sex on television predicts adolescent initiation of sexual behavior. *Pediatrics, 114*(3), e280-289. doi: 10.1542/peds.2003-1065-L

Common Sense Media. (2013). *Zero to eight: Children's media use in America 2013.* Retrieved from https://www.commonsensemedia.org/research/zero-to-eight-childrens-media-use-in-america-2013

Common Sense Media. (2015). The Common Sense census: Media use by tweens and teens. Retrieved from https://www.commonsensemedia.org/research/the-common-sense-census-media-use-by-tweens-and-teens

Comstock, G., & Scharrer, E. (2007). *Media and the American child.* Burlington, MA: Academic Press.

Creswell, J. W. (2008). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education.

Creswell, J. W. (2010). *When should I choose a mixed methods approach?* [Online video]. Available from http://srmo.sagepub.com.dbgw.lis.curtin.edu.au/view/when-should-i-choose-a-mixed-methods-approach/SAGE.xml

Creswell, J. W. & Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Croteau, D., & Hoynes, W. (2007). The media industry: Structure, strategy and debates. In E. Devereux (Ed.), *Media studies: Key issues and debates* (pp. 32-54). London, U.K.: SAGE.

Czerski, P. (2012). *We, the web kids.* Retrieved January 3rd, 2014, from http://pastebin.com/0xXV8k7k

Danaher, T. & Briod, M. (2005). Phenomenological Approaches to Research with Children. In S. Greene & D. Hogan (Eds.), *Researching Children's Experience: Approaches and Methods* (pp. 218-234). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Daniels, E. A. (2009). Sex objects, athletes, and sexy athletes: How media representations of women athletes can impact adolescent girls and college women. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 24*(4), 399-422. doi: 10.1177/0743558409336748

Daniels, E. A. & Wartena, H. (2011). Athlete or sex symbol: What boys think of media representations of female athletes. *Sex Roles, 65*(7-8), 566-579. doi: 10.1007/s11199-011-9959-7

Davalos, D. B., Davalos, R. A., & Layton, H. S. (2007). III. Content analysis of magazine headlines: Changes over three decades? *Feminism & Psychology, 17*(2), 250-258. doi: 10.1177/0959353507076559

Davidson, T., McConville, M., Hammond, J., Tew, J., Hayslip, P., & Fleming, M. (1987). Older women. In K. Davies, J. Dickey & T. Stratford (Eds.), *Out of focus: Writings on women and the media* (pp. 27-37). London, U.K.: The Women's Press Limited.

Davies, K., Dickey, J., & Stratford, T. (1987a). Foreword. In K. Davies, J. Dickey & T. Stratford (Eds.), *Out of focus: Writings on women and the media* (pp. viii-ix). London, U.K.: The Women's Press Limited.

Davies, K., Dickey, J., & Stratford, T. (1987b). Age: Introduction. In K. Davies, J. Dickey & T. Stratford (Eds.), *Out of focus: Writings on women and the media* (pp. viii-ix). London, U.K.: The Women's Press Limited.

de Beauvoir, S. (1952). *The second sex.* New York, USA: Knopf.

Dempsey, I. & Arthur-Kelly, M. (2007). *Maximising learning outcomes in diverse classrooms.* South Melbourne, Victoria: Thomson.

Derenne, J. L. & Beresin, E. V. (2006). Body image, media, and eating disorders. *Academic Psychiatry, 30*(3), 257-261.

Dickey, J. (1987). Women for sale: The construction of advertising images. In K. Davies, J. Dickey & T. Stratford (Eds.), *Out of focus: Writings on women and the media* (pp. 74-77). London, U.K.: The Women's Press Limited.

Dirse, Z. (2013). Gender in cinematography: Female gaze (eye) behind the camera. *Journal of Research in Gender Studies, 3*(1), 15-29.

Dobson, M. (2013a). *Girls and the media: A review of the literature.* Poster session presented at the meeting of the Australasian Human Development Association, Surfers Paradise, QLD.

Dobson, M. (2013b). *Girls and the media: A review of the literature.* Paper presented at the meeting of the Western Australian Institute for Educational Research, Fremantle, WA.

Dobson, M. (2013c). *Girls and the media: Reviewing the literature and exploring the perspectives of educators.* Paper presented at the meeting of the Early Childhood Education and Care Research Symposium, Mount Lawley, WA.

Dobson, M. (2013d). *Girls and the media: Reviewing the literature and exploring the perspectives of educators.* Paper presented at the meeting of the Curtin Humanities Graduate Research Conference, Bentley, WA.

Dobson, M. (2014). *Picture perfect: A visual social semiotic analysis of a pre-adolescent focused magazine's depictions of femininity.* Paper presented at the meeting of the Western Australian Institute for Educational Research, Fremantle, WA.

Dobson, M. (2015a). *"I couldn't survive in my life without media": Girls' perspectives and lived experiences in their own media worlds.* Paper presented at the meeting of the Australasian Human Development Association, Wellington, NZ.

Dobson, M. (2015b). *All about us: Exploring the lived experiences of three young girls with media.* Paper presented at the meeting of the Early Childhood Education and Care Research Symposium, Mount Lawley, WA.

Dobson, M. (2015c). *Girls versus grown-ups: Exploring the disparities between the perspectives and lived experiences of children and adults with media.* Paper presented at the meeting of the Western Australian Institute for Educational Research, Fremantle, WA.

Dobson, M. (2015d). *"All about us": Exploring young girls' relationships with media through student-guided and documented home tours.* Paper presented at the meeting of the Australian Association for Research in Education, Fremantle, WA.

Doek, J. E. (2014). Child wellbeing: Children's rights perspective. In A. Ben-Arieh, F. Casas, I. Frønes & J. E. Korbin (Eds.), *Handbook of child well-being: Theories, methods, and policies in global perspective* (pp. 187-217). Netherlands: Springer.

Dohnt, H. K. & Tiggemann, M. (2006). Body image concerns in young girls: The role of peers and media prior to adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 35*(2), 135-145. doi: 10.1007/s10964-005-9020-7

Dorak, F. (2011). Self-esteem and body image of Turkish adolescent girls. *Social Behaviour and Personality, 39*(4), 553-562. doi: 10.2224/sbp.2011.39.4.553

Dovidio, J., Hewstone, M. & Glick, P. (2010). Prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination: theoretical and empirical overview. In J. F. DovidioM. Hewstone & P. Glick *The SAGE handbook of prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination* (pp. 3-28). London: SAGE Publications Ltd. doi: 10.4135/9781446200919.n1

Durham, M. G. (2009). *The Lolita effect: The media sexualisation of young girls and five keys to fixing it.* New York, NY: Peter Mayer Publishers.

Duschinsky, R. (2013a). Sexualization: A state of injury. *Theory & Psychology, 23*(3), 351-370. doi: 10.1177/0959354312469732

Duschinsky, R. (2013b). The emergence of sexualisation as a social problem: 1981-2010. *Social Politics, 20*(1), 137-156. doi: 10.1093/sp/jxs016

Egan, R.D. & Hawkes, G. (2008). Girls, sexuality and the strange carnalities of advertisements: Deconstructing the discourse of corporate paedophilia. *Australian Feminist Studies*, *23*(57), 307-322 . doi: 10.1080/08164640802233278

Einarsdottir, J. (2005). Playschool in pictures: Children's photographs as a research method. *Early Childhood Development and Care*, *17*(6), 523-541. doi: 10.1080/03004430500131320

Elshtain, J. B. (1991). Ethics in the women's movement. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 515*(1), 126-139.

Embree, L. (1998a). Realistic phenomenology. In *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy.* Taylor and Francis. doi:10.4324/9780415249126-DD075-1

Embree, L. (1998b). Constitutive phenomenology. In *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy.* Taylor and Francis. doi:10.4324/9780415249126-DD075-1

Emmel, N. (2013). *Sampling and choosing cases in qualitative research: A realist approach.* London, U.K.: SAGE.

Ey, L. (2014). The influence of music media on gender role and self-identity: Perceptions of children aged 6 and 10 years. *Children Australia, 39*(3), 147-160. doi:10.1017/cha.2014.17

Ey, L. (2015). Sexy culture, sexy kids: How can we guide our children? In K. Highfield, M. Sims & C. G. Cupit (Eds.), *Quality play and media in childhood education and care* (pp. 58-70). Australian Council on Children and the Media.

Fanpop. (n.d.). Lancôme's campaign featuring Emma Watson [Image]. Retrieved from http://www.fanpop.com/clubs/emma-watson/images/29452611/title/lancome-maqui-blanc-miracle-photo

Farley, M. (2009). Media glamourising of prostitution and other sexually exploitive cultural practices that harm children. In M. Tankard Reist (Ed.), *Getting real: Challenging the sexualisation of girls* (1st Ed., pp. 119 – 129). North Melbourne, Victoria: Spinifex Press.

Ferguson, C. J., Winegard, B., & Winegard, B. M. (2011). Who is the fairest one of all? How evolution guides peer and media influences on female body dissatisfaction. *Review of General Psychology, 15*(1), 11 – 28. doi: 10.1037a0022607

Ferguson, C. J. (2012). Positive female role-models eliminate negative effects of sexually violent media. *Journal of Communication, 62,* 888-899. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01666.x

Finlay, L. (2009). Debating phenomenological research methods. *Phenomenology & Practice, 3*(1), 6-25.

Finlay, L. (2014). Engaging phenomenological analysis. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 11*(2), 121-141. doi: 10.1080/14780887.2013.807899

Flick, U. (2007a). *Managing quality in qualitative research.* London, England: SAGE.

Flick, U. (2007b). *Designing qualitative research.* London, England: SAGE.

Fraenkel, J. R. & Wallen, N. E. (2009). *How to design and evaluate research in education* (7th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Fredrickson, B. L. & Roberts, T. A. (1997). Objectification theory: Toward understanding women's lived experiences and mental health risks. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 21*, 173-206.

Freeman, M. (2011). The value and values of children's rights. In A. Invernizzi & J. Williams (Eds.), *The human rights of children: From visions to implementation* (pp. 21 – 36). Surrey, England: Ashgate.

Fuller, M. & Goffey, A. (2012). *Evil media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Gale, J. (2011). Sexualisation of children and young teens. *Educating Young Children: Learning & Teaching in the Early Childhood Years, 17*(2), 21-23.

Gamble, S. (2001). Editor's introduction. In S. Gamble (Ed.), *The Routledge companion to feminism and postfeminism* (pp. vii – xi). London, UK: Routledge.

Garrett, R. & Wrench, A. (2012). 'Society has taught us to judge': Cultures of the body in teacher education. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 40*(2), 111-126. doi: 10.1080/1359866X.2012.669826

Gerbner, G. (1998). Cultivation analysis: An overview. *Mass Communication and Society, 1*(3-4), 175-194. doi: 10.1080/15205436.1998.9677855

Gilbert, S. C., Keery, H., & Thompson, J. K. (2005). The media's role in body image and eating disorders. In E. Cole & J. Henderson Daniel (Eds.), *Featuring females: Feminist analyses of media* (pp. 41-56). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Gill, R. (2008). Empowerment/sexism: Figuring female sexual agency in contemporary advertising. *Feminism & Psychology, 18*(1), 35-60. doi: 10.1177/0959353507084950

Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development.* Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press.

Gines, K. T. (2011). Black feminism and intersectional analyses: A defense of intersectionality. *Philosophy Today, 55*, 275-284.

Giugni, M. (2006). The power and the passion: Popular culture and pedagogy. In A. Fleet, C. Patterson, & J. Roberson (Eds.), *Insights: Behind early childhood pedagogical documentation* (pp. 205-224). Mount Victoria, NSW: Pademelon Press.

Goldman, R. (2013). *Reading ads socially.* Retrieved from http://CURTIN.eblib.com.au/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=240243

Goodman, J. R., & Walsh-Childers, K. (2004). Sculpting the female breast: How college women negotiate the media's ideal breast image. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, 81*(3), 657-674.

Gordon, M. K. (2008). Media contributions to African American girls' focus on beauty and appearance: Exploring the consequences of sexual objectification. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 32*(3), 245-256.

Grabe, S. & Hyde, J. S. (2009). Body objectification, MTV, and psychological outcomes among female adolescents. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 39*(12), 2840–2858. doi: 10.1111/j.1559-1816.2009.00552.x

Granatino, R. & Hayko, D. L. (2013). Body image, confidence, and media influence: A study of middle school adolescents. *The Journal of Applied Business Research, 29*(1), 45-50.

Gray, C. & MacBlain, S. (2012). *Learning theories in childhood.* London, U.K.: SAGE.

Greene, J. C. (2007a). *Mixed methods in social inquiry.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Greene, J. C. (2007b). Engaging critical issues in social inquiry by mixing methods. *American Behavioural Scientist, 56*(6), 755-773. doi:10.1177/0002764211433794

Greene, J. & Caracelli, V. (1997). Defining and describing the paradigm issue in mixed-method evaluation. *New Directions for Evaluation*, *74*, 5–17. doi: 10.1002/ev.1068

Greer, G. (1972). *The female eunuch.* New York, USA: McGraw-Hill.

Greer, G. (1999). *The whole woman.* London, UK: Transworld Publishers.

Griffiths, M. & Machin, D. (2003). Television and playground games as part of children's symbolic culture. *Social Semiotics, 13*(2), 147-160. doi: 10.1080/1035033032000152589

Grimaldo-Grigsby, D. (1991). Dilemmas of visibility: Contemporary women artists' representations of women's bodies. In L. Goldstein (Ed.), *The female body* (pp. 83-100). U.S.A.: The University of Michigan Press.

Gross, E. (1986). What is feminist theory? In C. Pateman & E. Gross (Eds.), *Feminist challenges: Social and political theory* (pp. 190-204). Sydney, NSW: Allen & Unwin.

Grosz, E. (2002). Feminist futures? *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, *21*(1), 13-20. doi: 10.2307/4149212

Grove-White, A. (2001). No rules, only choices?: Repositioning the self within the fashion system in relation to expertise and meaning: A case study of colour and image consultancy. *Journal of Material Culture, 6*(2), 193-211. doi: 10.1177/135918350100600204

Guba, E. G. & Lincoln, Y. S. (2008). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research* (3rd ed.) (pp. 255-286).Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Guerin, F. & Hallas, R. (Eds.). (2007). *The image and the witness: Trauma, memory, and visual culture.* London, U.K.: Wallflower Press.

Gunter, B. (2002). *Media sex: What are the issues?* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Haboush, A., Warren, C. S., & Benuto, L. (2011). Beauty, ethnicity, and age: Does internalization of mainstream media ideals influence attitudes towards older adults? *Sex Roles, 66*(9-10), 668-676. doi: 10.1007/s11199-011-0102-6

Haeffel, G. J. & Howard, G. S. (2010). Self-report: Psychology's four-letter word. *American Journal of Psychology, 123*(2), 181-188.

Haiken, E. (1997). *Venus envy: A history of cosmetic surgery.* Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press.

Halcomb, E. J., Andrew, S., & Brannen, J. (2009). Introduction to mixed methods research for nursing and health sciences. In S. Andrew & E. J. Halcomb (Eds.), *Mixed methods research for nursing and the health sciences* (pp. 3-12). West Sussex, U. K.: Wiley-Blackwell.

Hamilton, M. (2008). *What's happening to our girls?* Camberwell, Vic: Penguin Group.

Hannam, J. (2007). *Feminism.* Harlow, UK: Pearson Education.

Harper, B., & Tiggemann, M. (2008). The effect of thin ideal media images on women's self-objectification, mood, and body image. *Sex Roles, 58*(9-10), 649-657.

Harriger, J. A., Calogero, R. M., Witherington, D. C., & Ellen Smith, J. (2010). Body size stereotyping and internalization of the thin ideal in preschool girls. *Sex Roles, 63,* 609-620. doi: 10.1007/s11199-010-9868-1

Harris, A. L. (2011). Media and technology in adolescent sexual education and safety. *JOGNN: Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic & Neonatal Nursing, 40*(2), 235-242. doi:10.1111/j.1552-6909.2011.01218.x

Harris, J. & Clayton, B. (2002). Femininity, masculinity, and physicality in the British tabloid press: The case of Anna Kournikova. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 37*(3-4), 397-415.

Harrison, K. (2000). Television viewing, fat stereotyping, body shape standards, and eating disorder symptomatology in grade school children. *Communication Research, 27*(5), 617-640. doi: 10.1177/009365000027005003

Harrison, K. (2003). Televison viewers' ideal body proportions: The case of the curvaceously thin woman. *Sex Roles, 48*(5/6), 255-264.

Harrison, K. & Hefner, V. (2006). Media exposure, current and future body ideals, and disordered eating among preadolescent girls: A longitudinal panel study. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 35*(2), 146-156. doi: 10.1007/s10964-005-9008-3

Hartas, D. (Ed.). (2010). *Educational research and inquiry: Qualitative and quantitative approaches.* London, UK: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Hartsock, N. (1981). Fundamental feminism: Process and perspective. In N. Benevento (Ed.), *Building feminist theory: Essays from QUEST* (pp. 32 – 43). New York, NY: Longman.

Hatton, E. & Trautner, M. N. (2011). Equal opportunity objectification? The sexualization of men and women on the cover of Rolling Stone. *Sexuality & Culture, 15*(3), 256-278. doi:10.1007/s12119-011-9093-2

Havens, T. & Lotz, A. D. (2012). *Understanding media industries.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Hawks-Ladds, T. (2015, November 11). Where are the women?: Gender inequality in Hollywood. *The Berkeley Beacon.* Retrieved from http://www.berkeleybeacon.com/

Hazlehurst, N. (2009). The right of children to be children. In M. Tankard Reist (Ed.), *Getting real: Challenging the sexualisation of girls* (1st ed., pp. 1-4). North Melbourne, Victoria: Spinifex Press.

Hepburn, M. A. (1998). The power of electronic media in the socialization of young Americans: Implications for Social Studies education. *The Social Studies, 89*(2), 71-76.

Herdt, G. (2009). *Moral panics, sex panics.* New York, NY: New York University Press.

Heron, J. & Reason, P. (1997). A participatory inquiry paradigm. *Qualitative Inquiry, 3*(3), 274-294.

Hobbs, R. (2011). *Digital and media literacy: Connecting culture and classroom.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Holbert, R. L., Garrett, R. K., & Gleason, L. S. (2010). A new era of minimal effects? A response to Bennett and Iyengar. *Journal of Communication, 60,* 15–34. doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.2009.01470.x

Holland, J., Blair, M. & Sheldon, S. (Eds.) (1995). *Debates and issues in feminist research and pedagogy: A reader.* UK: The Open University.

Horn, T. S., Newton, J. H., & Evers, J. (2011). Gender conceptualizations in female high school seniors: Relationships with global self-worth and multiple measures of body image. *Sex Roles, 65*(5-6), 383-396. doi: 10.1007/s11199-011-0028-z

Hooks, B. (2000). *Feminist theory: From margin to centre* (2nd ed.). London, UK: Gloria Watkins.

Hoyt, M. & Kennedy, C. L. (2008). Leadership and adolescent girls: A qualitative study of leadership development. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 42*(3-4), 203 – 19.

Hunt, P., Barrios, L., & Telljohann, S. K. (2015). A whole school approach: Collaborative development of school health policies, processes, and practices. *Journal of School Health, 85*(11), 802-809. doi: 10.1111/josh.12305

Hust, S. J. T. & Brown, J. D. (2008). Gender, media use, and effects. In S. L. Calvert & B. J. Wilson (Eds.), *The handbook of children, media, and development* (pp. 98-120). Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell.

Hutchinson, N. & Calland, C. (2011). *Body image in the primary school* (1st ed.): Routledge.

Hypable. (2012). Character profiles: Hermione Granger [Image]. Retrieved from http://static2.hypable.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/HermioneGranger.jpg?9f5c9e

Impett, E. A., Sorsoli, L., Schooler, D., Henson, J. M., & Tolman, D. L. (2008). Girls' relationship authenticity and self-esteem across adolescence. *Developmental Psychology, 44*(3), 722-733. doi: 10.1037/0012-1649.44.3.722

Jacobs Brumberg, J. (1997). The body project: An intimate history of American girls. New York, NY: Random House.

Jackson, S. & Vares, T. (2015). 'Too many bad role models for us girls': Girls, female pop celebrities and 'sexualisation'. *Sexualities, 18*(4), 480-498. doi: 10.117/1363460714550905

Jewitt, C. & Oyama, R. (2001). Visual meaning: A social semiotic approach. In T. Van Leeuwen & C. Jewitt (Eds.), *Handbook of visual analysis* (pp. 134-156). London, U.K.: SAGE.

Jhally, S. (2002). Image-based culture: Advertising and popular culture. In K. Askew & R. R. Wilk (Eds.), *The anthropology of media: A reader* (pp. 327-336). Malden, Massachussets: Blackwell Publishers.

Johnson, R. B., Onwuegbuzie, A. J. & Turner, L. A. (2007). Toward a definition of mixed methods research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 1*(2), 112-133. doi: 10.1177/1558689806298224

Jordan, A. B. (2005). Learning to use books and television: An exploratory study in the ecological perspective. *The American Behavioural Scientist, 48*(5), 523-538.

Jun, J. S. (2008). Existential phenomenology. In R. Thorpe & R. Holt (Eds.), *The SAGE dictionary of qualitative management research* (pp. 94-96). London, U.K.: SAGE.

Jutel, A. (2005). Weighing health: The moral burden of obesity. *Social Semiotics, 15*(2), 113-125. doi: 10.1080/10350330500154717

KaiserGames. (2013). Amanda True Make Up – Screenshot [image]. Retrieved from https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/amanda-true-make-up-kaisergames/id739668583?mt=8

KatyPerryVEVO. (2013, September 5). *Katy Perry - Roar (Official)* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CevxZvSJLk8

Kezar, A. & Dee, J. R. (2011). Conducting multi-paradigm inquiry in the study of higher education organisation and governance: Transforming research perspectives on colleges and universities. In J. C. Smart & M. B. Paulsen (Eds.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (Vol. 26, pp. 265 - 316). Springer.

Kidd, J. (2016). *Representation*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Kilbourne, J. (2010). *Killing us softly 4: Advertising's image of women* [Streaming video]. Toronto, Canada: Media Education Foundation. Retrieved from http://www.mediaed.org/cgi-bin/commerce.cgi?preadd=action&key=241#filmmaker-about

Kim, J. H. & Lennon, S. J. (2007). Mass media and self-esteem, body image, and eating disorder tendencies. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal, 25*(1), 3-23. doi: 10.1177/0887302x06296873

Kindlon, D. (2006). *Alpha girls.* New York, NY: Rodale.

Kjaersgaard, K. S. (2005). Aging to perfection or perfectly aged? The image of women growing older on television. In E. Cole & J. Henderson Daniel (Eds.), *Featuring females: Feminist analyses of media* (pp. 199-210). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Klaczynski, P. A., Goold, K. W., & Mudry, J. J. (2004). Culture, obesity stereotypes, self-esteem, and the "thin ideal": A social identity perspective. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 33*(4), 307-317.

Kline, G. (2000). Exercise: Easy for you to say! *Healthy Weight Journal, 14*(6), 93-94. Retrieved from http://proquest.umi.com

Kotarba, J. & Held, M. (2006). Professional female football players: Tackling like a girl? In D. Waskul & P. Vannini (Eds.), *Body/embodiment: Symbolic interaction and the sociology of the body* (pp. 153 - 163). Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing.

Krahé, B. & Krause, C. (2010). Presenting thin media models affects women's choice of diet or normal snacks. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 34*, 349 - 355. doi: 10.1111/j.1471-6402.2010.01580.x

Kress, G. (2009). *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication.* Retrieved from http://link.library.curtin.edu.au/p?pid=CUR_ALMA51105958980001951

Kress, G. & van Leeuwen, T. (1996). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design* Retrieved from http://www.eblib.com

L'Engle, K. L., Brown, J. D., & Kenneavy, K. (2006). The mass media are an important context for adolescents' sexual behavior. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 38*(3), 186-192. doi: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2005.03.020

Lamb, S., & Peterson, Z. D. (2012). Adolescent girls' sexual empowerment: Two feminists explore the concept. *Sex Roles, 66*(11-12), 703-712. doi: 10.1007/s11199-011-9995-3

Lauzen, M. M. (2012). It's a man's (celluloid) world: On-screen representations of female characters in the top 100 films of 2011. Retrieved from

http://www.wif.org/images/repository/pdf/other/2011-its-a-mans-world-exec-summ.pdf

Lauzen, M. M. (2015a). Women and the big picture: Behind-the-scenes employment on the top 700 films of 2014. Retrieved from http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/research.html

Lauzen, M. M. (2015b). Boxed in: Portrayals of female characters and employment of behind-the-scenes women in 2014-15 prime-time television. Retrieved from http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/research.html

Lawler, M. & Nixon, E. (2011). Body dissatisfaction among adolescent boys and girls: The effects of body mass, peer appearance culture and internalization of appearance ideals. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 40*, 59-71.

Leedy, P.D. & Ormrod, J. E. (2013). *Practical research: Planning and design.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Lerner, G. (1979). *The majority finds its past: Placing women in history.* North Carolina, USA: The University of North Carolina Press.

Lerum, K. & Dworkin, S. L. (2009). "Bad girls rule": An interdisciplinary feminist commentary on the report of the APA task force on the sexualization of girls. *Journal of Sex Research*, *46*(4), 250–63. doi: 10.1080/00224490903079542

Letherby, G. (2003). *Feminist research in theory and practice.* Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.

Levine, M. P. (2000). Mass media and body image: A brief review of the research. *Healthy Weight Journal, 14*(6), 84-85, 95.

Levine, M. P. & Murnen, S. K. (2009). "Everybody knows that mass media are/are not [pick one] a cause of eating disorders": A critical review of evidence for a causal link between media, negative body image, and disordered eating in females. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 28*(1), 9-42.

Levy, A. (2005). *Female chauvinist pigs: Women and the rise of raunch culture.* New York, USA: Schwartz Publishing.

Lewis, D. C., Medvedev, K. & Seponski, D. M. (2011). Awakening to the desires of older women: Deconstructing ageism within fashion magazines. *Journal of Aging Studies, 25*(2), 101-109. doi: 10.1016/j.jaging.2010.08.016

Lewis, J. (2015). *Dealing with qualitative questionnaire data: studying an online Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) support group.* London, United Kingdom: SAGE. doi: 10.4135/9781473938045

littlemixVEVO. (2014, May 1). *Little Mix – Salute* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kjpa0SMOug0

Logan, R. K. (2010). *Understanding new media: Extending Marshall McLuhan*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.

Lopez, K. A. & Willis, D. G. (2004). Descriptive versus interpretive phenomenology: Their contributions to nursing knowledge. *Qualitative Health Research, 14*(5), 726-735. doi: 10.1177/1049732304263638

López-Guimerà, G., Levine, M. P., Sánchez-carracedo, D., & Fauquet, J. (2010). Influence of mass media on body image and eating disordered attitudes and behaviors in females: A review of effects and processes. *Media Psychology, 13*(4), 387-416. doi: 10.1080/15213269.2010.525737

Lumby, C. & Albury, K. (2010). Too much? Too young? The sexualisation of children debate in Australia. *Media International Australia, 135,* 141-152.

Lykke, N. (2010). *Feminist studies: A guide to intersectional theory, methodology and writing.* Retrieved from http://reader.eblib.com.au.dbgw.lis.curtin.edu.au/

Mac Naughton, G., Rolfe, S. A., & Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2010). *Doing early childhood research: International perspectives on theory and practice* (2nd ed.). Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.

Machin, D. (2010). *Analysing popular music: Image, sound and text.* London, U.K.: SAGE Publications.

Mager, J. & Helgeson, J. G. (2010). Fifty years of advertising images: Some changing perspectives on role portrayals along with enduring consistencies. *Sex Roles, 64*(3-4), 238-252. doi: 10.1007/s11199-010-9782-6

Maguire, E. (2008). *Princesses and porn stars.* Melbourne, Victoria: The Text Publishing Company.

Malkin, A. R., Wornian, K., & Chrisler, J. C. (1999). Women and weight: Gendered messages on magazine covers. *Sex Roles, 40*(7), 647-655. doi:10.1023/A:1018848332464.

Maor, M. (2014). Stories that matter: subverting the before-and-after weight-loss narrative. *Social Semiotics, 24*(1), 88-105. doi: 10.1080/10350330.2013.827359

Markey, C. N. & Markey, P. M. (2009). Correlates of young women's interest in obtaining cosmetic surgery. *Sex Roles, 61*(3), 158-166. doi: 10.1007/s11199-009-9625-5

Martins, N., & Harrison, K. (2012). Racial and gender differences in the relationship between children's television use and self-esteem: A longitudinal panel study. *Communication Research, 39*(3), 338-357. doi: 10.1177/0093650211401376

Mayfield, A. (2008). *What is social media?* [eBook]. Retrieved from http://ebooksoneverything.com/marketing/WhatisSocialMedia.pdf

McDevitt, T. M. & Ormrod, J. E. (2013). *Child development and education* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

McGladrey, M. (2015). Lolita is in the eye of the beholder: Amplifying preadolescent girls' voices in conversations about sexualization, objectification, and performativity. *Feminist Formations, 27*(2), 165-190. doi: 10.1353/ff.2015.0012

McHale, S. M., Dotterer, A., & Kim, J. (2009). An ecological perspective on the media and youth development. *American Behavioural Scientist, 52*(8), pp. 1186-1203. doi: 10.1177/0002764209331541

McLean, C. (2006). Questionnaire. In Jupp, V. (Ed.), *The SAGE dictionary of social research methods* (pp. 253-254). London, U.K.: SAGE.

Mehita, I. (2012). *Consumer culture and the media: Magazines in the public eye.* London, U.K: Palgrave MacMillan.

Merewether, J. & Fleet, A. (2014). Seeking children's perspectives: A respectful layered research approach. *Early Child Development and Care, 184*(6), 897-914.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (2002). *Phenomenology of perception.* Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge Classics.

Merriam, S. B. & Tisdell, E.J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Messner, M. A. & Cooky, C. (2010). Gender in televised sports news and highlight shows: 1989 – 2009. Retrieved from https://dornsifecms.usc.edu/assets/sites/80/docs/tvsports.pdf

Metros, S. E. (2008). The educator's role in preparing visually literate learners. *Theory Into Practice, 47,* 102-109. doi: 10.1080/00405840801992264

MileyCyrusVEVO. (2013, September 9). *Miley Cyrus – Wrecking Ball* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=My2FRPA3Gf8

Millett, K. (1969). *Sexual politics.* London, UK: Rupert Hart-Davis.

Miner-Rubino, K., Twenge, J. M., & Fredrickson, B. L. (2002). Trait self-objectification in women: Affective and personality correlates. *Journal of Research in Personality, 36*(2), 147-172. doi:10.1006/jrpe.2001.2343

Minett, P. (2010). *Child care and development.* Abingdon, Oxon: Hodder Education.

Mitchell, W. J. T. (Ed.). (1980). *The language of images*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Mittal, S. (2005). *Children and media* (Vol. 3). Adarsh Nagar, Delhi: Isha Books.

Monaco, J. (2009). *How to read a film: Movies, media, and beyond* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Moore, E. S. (2004). Children and the changing world of advertising. *Journal of Business Ethics, 52*(2), 161-167.

Morgan, D. (1998). Practical strategies for combining qualitative and quantitative methods: Applications to health research. *Qualitative Health Research, 8*(3), pp. 362 – 376. doi: 10.1177/104973239800800307

Moriarty, C. M., & Harrison, K. (2008). Television exposure and disordered eating among children: A longitudinal panel study. *Journal of Communication, 58*(2), 361-381. doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.2008.00389.x

Morry, M. M. & Staska, S. L. (2001). Magazine exposure: Internalisation, self-objectification, eating attitudes, and body satisfaction in male and female university students. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science, 33*(4), 269-279.

Morse, J. M. & Cheek, J. (2014). Making room for qualitatively-driven mixed-method research. *Qualitative Health Research, 24*(1), 3-5. doi: 10.1177/1049732313513656

Moyer-Gusé, E., & Riddle, K. (2009). *The media's impact on children: A handbook for parents, educators and policymakers.* Editorial Aresta.

Muir, A. R. (1989). The status of women working in film and television. In L. Gamman & M. Marshment (Eds.), *The female gaze: Women as viewers of popular culture.* (pp. 143-144). Seattle, WA: Real Comet Press.

Murray, S. (2005). (Un/Be)Coming out? Rethinking fat politics. *Social Semiotics, 15*(2), 153-163. doi: 10.1080/10350330500154667

NBC. (2014). Mariska Hargitay: Law and Order SVU [Image]. Retrieved from http://www.eonline.com/eol_images/Entire_Site/201408/rs_560x415-140108073647-1024.Mariska-Hargity-Law-And-Order-SVU.jl.010814_copy.jpg

Neaum, S. (2010). *Child development for Early Childhood studies.* Exeter, U.K.: Learning Matters.

Newman, L. (2009). The psychological and developmental impact of sexualisation on children. In M. Tankard Reist (Ed.), *Getting real: Challenging the sexualisation of girls* (1st ed., pp. 75 – 84). North Melbourne, Vic: Spinifex Press.

Newton, J. & Parfitt, A. (2011). Striving for mutuality in research relationships: The value of participatory action research principles. In A. Franklin & P. Blyton (Eds.), *Researching sustainability: A guide to social science methods, practice, and engagement* (pp. 71-88). Abingdon, Oxon: Earthscan.

Nind, M. (2011). *What is participatory research?* [Online video]. Available from http://srmo.sagepub.com.dbgw.lis.curtin.edu.au/view/what-is-participatory-research/SAGE.xml

Nulman, E. (2014). Representation of women in the age of globalized film. *Journal of Research in Gender Studies, 4*(2), 898-918.

O'Leary, Z. (2007). *The social science jargon buster.* London, U.K.: SAGE. doi: http://dx.doi.org.dbgw.lis.curtin.edu.au/10.4135/9780857020147.n92

Odine, M. (2013). Role of social media in the empowerment of Arab women. *Global Media Journal, 12*(22), 1-30.

Olesen, V. L. (2008). Early millenial feminist qualitative research: Challenges and contours. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 311-370). Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE.

Orbach, S. (2009). *Bodies.* London, UK: Profile Books.

Ormrod, J.E. (2011). *Educational psychology: Developing learners* (7th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Overstreet, N.M., Quinn, D.M., & Marsh, K.M. (2015). Objectification in virtual romantic contexts: Perceived discrepancies between self and partner ideals differentially affect body consciousness in women and men. *Sex Roles, 73*(9), 442-452. doi: 10.1007/s11199-015-0533-6

Park, S. Y. (2005). The influence of presumed media influence on women's desire to be thin. *Communication Research, 32*(5), 594-614. doi: 10.1177/0093650205279350

Parkay, F. W. (2013). *Becoming a teacher* (9th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, London: SAGE.

Perry, C. & Rao, S. (2007). Action research for enterprise research. In D. Hine & D. Carson (Eds.), *Innovative methodologies in enterprise research* (pp. 124 – 136). Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Piran, N. (2000). Media impact on body image. *Healthy Weight Journal, 14*(6), 81, 90.

Piran, N., Levine, M. P., & Irving, L. M. (2000). GO GIRLS! Media literacy, activism, and advocacy project. *Healthy Weight Journal, 14*(6), 89 - 90.

Ponterotto, D. (2014). Trivializing the female body: A cross-cultural analysis of the representation of women in sports journalism. *Journal of International Women's Studies, 15*(2), 94-111.

Punch, K. F. (2009). *Introduction to research methods in education.* London, U.K.: SAGE.

Puvia, E. & Vaes, J. (2012). Being a body: Women's appearance related self-views and their dehumanization of sexually objectified female targets. *Sex Roles, 68*(7-8), 484-495. doi: 10.1007/s11199-012-0255-y

Qvarsell, B. (2000). Children's use of media as transformed experience: Educological and psychological dimensions. In B. Van den Bergh & J. Van den Bergh (Eds.), *Children & media: Multidisciplinary approaches* (pp. 33-47). Leuven-Apeldoorn: Garant.

Railton, D. & Watson, P. (2011). *Music video and the politics of representation*. Edinburgh, U.K.: Edinburgh University Press.

Rambo, C., Presley, S. R., & Mynatt, D. (2006). Claiming the bodies of exotic dancers. In D. Waskul & P. Vannini (Eds.), *Body/embodiment: symbolic interaction and the sociology of the body.* Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing.

Reasoner, R. W. (1982). *Building self-esteem.* Palo Alto, California: Consulting Psychologists Press.

Rees, R., Oliver, K., Woodman, J., & Thomas, J. (2011). The views of young children in the UK about obesity, body size, shape and weight: a systematic review. *BMC Public Health, 11,* 188. doi: 10.1186/1471-2458-11-188

Rideout, V. J., Foehr, L. G., & Roberts, D. F. (2010). *Generation M²: Media in the lives of 8- to 18-year-olds.* Menlo Park, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation.

Robinson, T., Callister, M., Magoffin, D., & Moore, J. (2007). The portrayal of older characters in Disney animated films. *Journal of Aging Studies*, *21*(3), 203-213. doi: 10.1016/j.jaging.2006.10.001

Robinson, K. H. & Jones Díaz, C. J. (2006). *Diversity and difference in Early Childhood Education: Issues for theory and practice.* Berkshire, England: Open University Press.

Rodan, D., Ellis, K., & Lebeck, P. (2014). *Disability, obesity, and ageing: Popular media identifications.* Retrieved from http://www.eblib.com

Roe, K. (2000). Introduction. In B. Van den Bergh & J. Van den Bergh (Eds.), *Children & media: Multidisciplinary approaches* (pp. 1-8). Leuven-Apeldoorn: Garant.

Rolnik, A. M., Engeln-Maddox, R., & Miller, S. A. (2010). Here's looking at you: Self-objectification, body image disturbance, and sorority rush. *Sex Roles, 63*(1-2), 6-17. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11199-010-9745-y

Rose, G. (2012). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials* (3rd ed.). London, U.K.: SAGE.

Russell, H. (1999). Television: Signs on the box. In I. Parker (Ed.), *Critical textwork: An introduction to varieties of discourse and analysis* (pp. 92-102). Buckingham, U.K.: Open University Press.

Sandelowski, M. (2014). Unmixing mixed-methods research. *Research in Nursing & Health*, *37*(1), 3–8. doi: 10.1002/nur.21570

Scharrer, E. & Ramasubramanian, S. (2015). Intervening in the media's influence on stereotypes of race and ethnicity: The role of media literacy education. *Journal of Social Issues, 71*(1), 171-185. doi: 10.1111/josi.12103

Scheibe, C. & Rogow, F. (2012). *The teacher's guide to media literacy: Critical thinking in a multimedia world.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin/SAGE.

Schwandt, T. A. (2007). *The SAGE dictionary of qualitative inquiry* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE. doi: 10.4135/9781412986281

Semali, L. (2003). Ways with visual languages: Making the case for critical media literacy. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues, and Ideas, 76*(6), 271-277. doi: 10.1080/00098650309602018

Sharkey, P. (2001). Hermeneutic phenomenology. In R. Barnacle (Ed.), *Phenomenology* (pp. 16-37). Melbourne, VIC: RMIT Publishing.

Shroff, H. & Thompson, J. K. (2006). The tripartite influence model of body image and eating disturbance: A replication with adolescent girls. *Body Image, 2*, 17–23. doi:10.1016/j. bodyim.2005.10.004.

Shuker, R. (2008). *Understanding popular music culture* (3rd ed.). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Sides-Moore, L. & Tochkov, K. (2011). The thinner the better? Competitiveness, depression and body image among college student women. *College Student Journal, 45*(2), 439-448. Retrieved from http://proquest.umi.com

Singh, J. V., Singh, N., Dixit, S., Agarwal, G. G., & Kant, S. (2011). A study on consciousness of adolescent girls about their body image. *Indian Journal of Community Medicine, 36*(3), 197. doi: 10.4103/0970-0218.86520

Singhal, A. & Rogers, E. M. (1999). *Entertainment-education: A communication strategy for social change.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Slater, A. & Tiggemann, M. (2015). Media exposure, extracurricular activities, and appearance-related comments as predictors of female adolescents' self-objectification. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 39*(3), 375-389. doi: 10.1177/0361684314554606

Smith, S. L. & Choueiti, M. (2011). *Gender inequality in cinematic content? A look at females on screen & behind-the-camera in top-grossing 2008 films.* Los Angeles, CA: Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism.

Smith, S. L., Pieper, K. M., Granados, A., & Choueiti, M. (2010). Assessing gender-related portrayals in top-grossing G-rated films. *Sex Roles, 62*(3)*,* 774-786. doi: 10.1007/s11199-009-9736-z

Smith, A. B. & Taylor, N. J. (2000). Introduction. In A. B. Smith, N. J. Taylor, and M. M. Gollop (Eds.), *Children's voices: Research, policy, and practice* (pp. ix-xiii). Auckland, New Zealand: Pearson Education New Zealand.

Smith, A. B. & Taylor, N. J. (2000). The socio-cultural context of childhood: Balancing dependency and agency. In A. B. Smith, N. J. Taylor, and M. M. Gollop (Eds.), *Children's voices: Research, policy, and practice* (pp. 1-17). Auckland, New Zealand: Pearson Education New Zealand.

Standing Committee on Environment, Communications & the Arts. (2008). *Sexualisation of children in the contemporary media.* Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia.

Stanley, L. & Wise, S. (1993). *Breaking out again: Feminist ontology and epistemology* (2nd ed.). London, UK: Routledge.

Steele, J. R. & Brown, J. D. (1995). Adolescent room culture: Studying media in the context of everyday life. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 24*(5), 551-576

Strasburger, V. C. (2010). Children, adolescents, and the media: Seven key issues. *Pediatric Annals, 39*(9), 556-64. doi: 10.3928/00904481-20100825-06

Strasburger, V. C., Wilson, B. J. & Jordan, A. B. (2009). *Children, adolescents and the media.* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Strasburger, V. C., Jordan, A. B. & Donnerstein, E. (2010). Health effects of media on children and adolescents. *Pediatrics, 125*(4), 756-767. doi: 10.1542/peds.2009-2563

Streitmalter, R. (2004). *Sex sells! The media's journey from repression to obsession.* USA: Westview Press.

Strelan, P., Mehaffey, S. J., & Tiggemann, M. (2003). Self-objectification and esteem in young women: The mediating role of reasons for exercise. *Sex Roles, 48*(1), 89-95.

Stringer, P. & Hourani, R. B. (2013). Home-school relationships: A school management perspective. *Educational Research for Policy & Practice, 12,* 149-174. doi: 10.1007/s10671-012-9134-0

Swami, V., Coles, R., Wilson, E., Salem, N., Wyrozumska, K., & Furnham, A. (2010). Oppressive beliefs at play: associations among beauty ideals and practices and individual differences in sexism, objectification of others, and media exposure. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 34*(3), 365-379. doi:10.1111/j.1471-6402.2010.01582.x

Sypeck, M. F., Gray, J. J., & Ahrens, A. H. (2004). No longer just a pretty face: Fashion magazines' depictions of ideal female beauty from 1959 to 1999. *International Journal of Eating Disorders, 36*(3), 342-347. doi: 10.1002/eat.20039

Talbot, M. (2007). *Media discourse: Representation and interaction.* Edinburgh, U.K.: Edinburgh University Press.

Tandon, N. (2008). *Feminism: A paradigm shift.* New Dehli, India: Atlantic.

Tankard Reist, M. (2009). The pornification of girlhood: We haven't come a long way baby. In M. Tankard Reist (Ed.), *Getting real: Challenging the sexualisation of girls* (1st ed., pp. 5 – 39). North Melbourne, Vic: Spinifex Press.

Taylor, N. L. (2010). "Guys, she's humongous!": Gender and weight-based teasing in adolescence. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 26*(2), 178-199. doi: 10.1177/0743558410371128

TaylorSwiftVEVO. (2013, March 13). *Taylor Swift – 22* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgFeZr5ptV8

Theran, S., Newberg, E. M. & Gleason, T. R. (2010). Adolescent girls' parasocial interactions with media figures. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology, 171*(3), 270-277. doi: 10.1080/00221325.2010.483700

Thompson, K. (2010). Because looks can be deceiving: Media alarm and the sexualisation of childhood - do we know what we mean? *Journal of Gender Studies, 19*(4), 395-400. doi: 10.1080/09589236.2010.533492

Tiggemann, M. & Boundy, M. (2008). Effect of environment and appearance compliment on college women's self-objectification, mood, body shame, and cognitive performance. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *32*(4), 399-405.

Tiggemann, M. & Miller, J. (2010). The internet and adolescent girls' weight satisfaction and drive for thinness. *Sex Roles, 63*(1-2), 79-90. doi: 10.1007/s11199-010-9789-z

Tiggemann, M., Polivy, J., & Hargreaves, D. (2009). The processing of thin ideals in fashion magazines: A source of social comparison or fantasy? *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 28*(1), 73-93.

Tolman, D. L. (1994). Doing desire: Adolescent girls' struggles for/with sexuality. *Gender and Society, 8*(3), 324-342.

Tolman, D. L. (2002). *Dilemmas of desire: Teenage girls talk about sexuality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Tolman, D. L. (2012). Female adolescents, sexual empowerment and desire: A missing discourse of gender inequity. *Sex Roles, 66*(11-12), 746-757. doi: 10.1007/s11199-012-0122-x

Tong, R. (1989). *Feminist thought: A comprehensive introduction.* London, UK: Routledge.

Total Girl. (n.d.). About Total Girl magazine. Retrieved 22nd June 2014, 2014, from http://www.totalgirl.com.au/about

Total Girl. (2013a). *February 2013 issue.* Everleigh, NSW: Pacific Magazines.

Total Girl. (2013b). *April 2013 issue.* Everleigh, NSW: Pacific Magazines.

Total Girl. (2013c). *June 2013 issue.* Everleigh, NSW: Pacific Magazines.

Total Girl. (2013d). *August 2013 issue.* Everleigh, NSW: Pacific Magazines.

Total Girl. (2013e). *October 2013 issue.* Everleigh, NSW: Pacific Magazines.

Total Girl. (2013f). *December 2013 issue.* Everleigh, NSW: Pacific Magazines.

Tsaliki, L. (2015). Popular culture and moral panics about 'children at risk': Revisiting the sexualisation-of-young-girls debate. *Sex Education, 15*(5), 500-514. doi: 10.1080/14681811.2015.1022893

Urla, J. & Swedlund, A. C. (2000). The anthropometry of Barbie: Unsettling ideals of the feminine body in popular culture. In L. Schiebinger (Ed.), *Oxford readings in*

feminism: Feminism and the body (pp. 397-428). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

van Heeswijk, A. (2011). OBJECT: Challenging 'sex-object culture'. In M. Tankard Reist & A. Bray (Eds.), *Big Porn Inc.* (pp. 274-280). North Melbourne, Vic: Spinifex Press.

van Leeuwen, T. (2005). *Introducing social semiotics.* Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Vize, A. (2008). Consumer kids: Understanding advertising in the Primary classroom. *Screen Education, 52,* 76-80.

Volkert, D. (2012). Inquiry based learning. *Nevada RNformation, 21*(3), 15.

Walker, R. & Solvason, C. (2014). *Success with your early years research project.* London, U.K.: SAGE.

Walter, N. (2010). *Living dolls: The return of sexism.* London, UK: Virago.

Ward, L.M. (2003). Understanding the role of entertainment media in the sexual socialization of American youth: A review of empirical research. *Developmental Review, 23*(3), 347-388. doi: 10.1016/s0273-2297(03)00013-3

Ward, L.M. & Harrison, K. (2005). The impact of media use on girls' beliefs about gender roles, their bodies, and sexual relationships: A research synthesis. In E. Cole & J. Henderson Daniel (Eds.), *Featuring females: Feminist analyses of media.* Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Ward, L.M., Day, K.M., & Epstein, M. (2006). Uncommonly good: Exploring how mass media may be a positive influence on young women's sexual health and development. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development, 112,* 57-70. doi: 10.1002/cd.162

Weisner, T. S. (2014). Culture, context, and child well-being. In A. Ben-Arieh, F. Casas, I. Frønes & J. E. Korbin (Eds.), *Handbook of child well-being: Theories, methods, and policies in global perspective* (pp. 87-103). Netherlands: Springer.

Whitton, D., Barker, K., Nosworthy, M., Sinclair, C., & Nanlohy, P. (2010). *Learning for teaching; teaching for learning* (2nd ed.). South Melbourne, Victoria: Cengage Learning.

Wiles, R. (2013). *What are qualitative research ethics?* London, U.K.: Bloomsbury Academic.

Wilksch, S. M., Tiggemann, M., & Wade, T. D. (2006). Impact of interactive school-based media literacy lessons for reducing internalization of media ideals in young adolescent girls and boys. *International Journal of Eating Disorders, 39*(5), 385-393. doi: 10.1002/eat.20237

Williams, K. (2003). *Understanding media theory*. London, U.K.: Hodder Arnold.

Willis, J. W. (2007). *Foundations of qualitative research: Interpretive and critical approaches.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Wilson, T. (2009). *Understanding media users: From theory to practice.* United Kingdom: John Wiley & Sons.

Witt, C. (2012). Adolescent literacy and the benefits of whole school planning. *Literacy Learning: The Middle Years, 20*(2), 34-38.

Wolf, N. (1991). *The beauty myth.* New York, NY: William Morrow & Company.

Women's Monitoring Network. (1987). Women as sex objects. In K. Davies, J. Dickey & T. Stratford (Eds.), *Out of focus: Writings on women and the media* (pp. 70-72). London, U.K.: The Women's Press Limited.

Woolfolk, A. & Margetts, K. (2013). *Educational psychology* (3rd ed.). Frenchs Forest, NSW: Pearson Australia.

Wright, P. J. (2009). Sexual socialization messages in mainstream entertainment mass media: A review and synthesis. *Sexuality & Culture, 13*(4), 181-200. doi: 10.1007/s12119-009-9050-5

Zuckerman, D. & Dubowitz, N. (2005). Clash of cultures: Women and girls on TV and in real life. In E. Cole & J. Henderson Daniel (Eds.), *Featuring females: Feminist analyses of media* (pp. 59-69). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Zurbriggen, E. L., Collins, R. L., Lamb, S., Roberts, T.A., Tolman, D. L., Ward, L. M., & Blake, J. (2007). *Report of the APA task force on the sexualization of girls: Executive summary.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Zurbriggen, E. L., Ramsey, L. R., & Jaworski, B. K. (2011). Self- and partner-objectification in romantic relationships: Associations with media consumption and relationship satisfaction. *Sex Roles, 64*(7-8), 449-462. doi: 10.1007/s11199-011-9933-4

# Table of Appendices

# Appendix A: Theories and models used to inform this study

Table 3.4 summaries the theories and models used to inform this study. All of the theories and models shown in Table 3.4 have contributed to my developing understanding of the extensive issues related to my research topic, but not all are directly involved in my conceptual framework.

Table 3.4: Previous media-related theories/models and their relation to my research.

| Theory/Model | Focus | Relation to my research |
|---|---|---|
| Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) | Situates the individual within an interrelated, ever-evolving set of systems that are influential over one's development. | Used to frame my understanding of a child's world and the interrelated influential systems within that world. |
| Bartky's 'divided consciousness' (Bartky, 1990) | Offers a way of reconciling the inherent vulnerabilities of children in a media-rich environment while still respecting their potential for resilience. | Contributed to my understanding of my research paradigm and its philosophies. Critically shaped my perception of my participants. |
| Objectification Theory (OT) (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) | Explicates the psychological/experiential consequences for women experiencing objectification. Predominant in literature on body image and eating pathology. | Demonstrates potential risks of the media with which young girls are engaging, and was a key influence in working towards determining my research topic. |
| Tripartite Influence Model (TIM) (Menzel et al., 2011) | An etiological model that recognises a trio of interrelated forces that shape girls' growth, identity, development, and behaviour. | Partially contributed to the development of my conceptual model. Enhanced my understanding of how different groups influence girls' upbringing. |
| Hepburn's Socialisation Model (Hepburn, 1998) | Proposed as a model that might work in the electronic age; seems to posit children as mere recipients of socialisation, rather than actively being involved in the process and interacting with systems/forces. | My model is similar to Hepburn's differs in that it portrays children as interactive individuals with agency. |
| Framing Theory (Aubrey, 2010) | Analyses the salience of elements in media and the associated implications. Popular in literature regarding media influence. | Contributed to my conceptualisation of media. Shaped my understanding of the nature of media texts and how they are constructed. |
| Appearance Schemas (e.g. Clark & Tiggemann, 2007) | A dimension of self-schemas focusing on the construction/perception of appearance. Relevant in literature regarding body dissatisfaction. | While not directly applicable to the present study, this has guided my thinking in terms of the study's conceptual nature. |

**Appendix B: Questionnaire items for students**

1.         What does the word 'media' mean to you?

2.         Which of the following do you have?

3.         What TV shows do you watch? Name as many as you can think of.

4.         Do you have a TV in your bedroom?

5.         Name your top three favourite TV shows…

6.         Do you surf the internet? Tick yes or no.

7.         Where do you surf the internet?

8.         Do you have a computer in your bedroom? Tick yes or no.

9.         What websites do you like to visit?

10.       What are some of your favourite movies?

11.       Do you read magazines?

12.       If you read magazines, what are your favourite magazines to read?

13.       Do you listen to the radio?

14.       If you do listen to the radio, what stations do you listen to?

15.       When do you listen to the radio?

16.       Which is your favourite way to listen to music?

17.       What are some of your favourite songs, bands, or singers?

## Appendix C: Questionnaire items for parents

1.      At what age did your child start watching TV?

2.      Is your child allowed to browse the internet?

3.      If you answered yes to Question 2, at what age did your child start using the internet?

4.      Do you have a computer with internet access at home?

5.      Do you monitor your child's internet use? If so, how?

6.      How much time does your child spend watching TV per day?

7.      How much time does your child spend online per day?

8.      Which of the following does your child have in her bedroom?

9.      If you answered that your daughter does have other electronic media devices in her bedroom, please list what they are:

10.     Do you discuss your child's favourite movies, TV shows, magazines or websites with her?

11.     If you have any further comments regarding your daughter's media use, please write them in the space below:

**Appendix D: Set questions for educator interviews**

1. What is your role at Seaglass Primary?

2. How long have you been an educator?

3. Can you tell me about your class group?

4. What role do media play in the lives of your students?

5. Do you teach about media in your classroom?

6. Are there any issues that I will need to be aware of?

**Appendix E: Set questions for school-based student interviews**

1. Tell me a bit about yourself (followed by conversation between researcher and participant)

2. Do you remember what my project is about? (followed by reminder about the aims and nature of the study)

3. How do you feel about helping with the project?

4. Are you happy to continue with our conversation today?

5. Do you have any questions? (followed by a reminder that the student can ask questions at any given time)

6. What does the word 'media' mean to you?

7. What are your favourite media?

8. Do you learn about media at school? At home?

9. What do you learn about media?

10. How does media / [a specific type of media] make you feel? What does it mean to you?

**Appendix F: Set questions for the student-guided/documented home tours**

1. Do you remember what my project is about? (followed by reminder about the aims and nature of the study)
2. How do you feel about helping with the project?
3. Are you happy to continue with our conversation today?
4. Do you have any questions? (followed by a reminder that the student can ask questions at any given time)
5. Can you tell me about your home and your family?
6. What does [example] mean to you?

**Appendix G: Set questions for parent interviews**

1. What can you tell me about your daughter? How would you describe her?
2. What role does media play in her life?
3. Do you speak to her about media? How so?
4. How do you feel about her relationship with media?
5. Do you have anything else which you would like to share?

## Appendix H: Template for email issued to school principals

**Subject:** Research enquiry
**Message:**

Dear [name],

My name is Madeleine Dobson and I'm currently a Doctoral candidate at Curtin University. My supervisor, Dr. Susan Beltman, has encouraged me to contact you regarding my research.

I have previously completed a Bachelor of Education with First Class Honours, where my research focused on children's literature in relation to children's self-esteem. I also have provisional registration as a teacher in Western Australia. My current study focuses on girls and the media with an interest in girls' experiences with and perspectives on media. I recently received Ethics approval from Curtin (HR116/2012) and am looking to begin conducting research in a school (ideally beginning in Term 2, 2013). I would love the opportunity to work with the girls at [school name], so I was wondering if you and your school might have any interest in my project? I have attached a summary of my study to this email which provides more information about my project.

Any help with this would be greatly appreciated. Dr. Beltman and myself are happy to provide further information if need be, or would gladly arrange to visit your school to discuss the project in more detail. Our contact details are listed below.

Kind regards,

Madeleine Dobson
[Contact details]

Dr. Susan Beltman
[Contact details]

**Information letter**

Dear [Principal Name],

I am conducting a research project that seeks to examine the lived experiences of girls engaging with contemporary media. The study aims to:

•       Develop an understanding of girls' current media consumption (i.e. what media they use, how they access it etc);

•       Explore and analyse the content of media girls are engaging with; and

•       Establish individual and collective lived experiences of girls engaging with the media.

The study is divided into five phases:

1)      Interviews with school community members.

2)      Questionnaires issued to students and their parents.

3)      A content analysis of media products.

4)      Semi-structured interviews with students.

5)      Home tours with students and interviews with their families.

Phases 1, 3, and 5 need the cooperation of the school and its staff. All scheduling will be negotiated with an emphasis on ensuring minimal disruption to students' learning, their classroom, and the wider school community.

The benefits of your school participating in this study are that you will be contributing to ongoing research into the health and wellbeing of girls in contemporary society, particularly with regard to their engagement with media products. The anticipated results of the study will increase understanding of how young girls access and perceive media, and may help guide future curriculum and learning experiences intended to provide children with meaningful knowledge and skills to deal with the current media climate. Your students and their parents may also find the results of this study meaningful and useful.

Confidentiality of participants and information disclosed will be maintained at all times. Pseudonyms will be used and any personal identifying information will not form part of the reported data or any publications arising from the research.  The data will be stored securely in password-protected electronic files, and hard copies of data will be filed in a lock-box. All data will be destroyed after a five-year period has passed.

This information sheet is for your records. Please find attached a consent form. If you have any questions concerning this study, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor, Dr Susan Beltman. Our contact details are listed below.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Madeleine Dobson          [ contact details ]

Dr Susan Beltman          [ contact details ]

This study has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number HR 116/2012). The Committee is comprised of members of the public, academics, lawyers, doctors and pastoral carers. If needed, verification of approval can be obtained either by writing to the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee, c/- Office of Research and Development, Curtin University, GPO Box U1987, Perth, 6845, or by telephoning 9266 2784 or by emailing hrec@curtin.edu.au.

**Consent form**

•       I have read this document and understand the aims, procedures and risks of the project, as described within it.

•       I understand that participation in this project is completely voluntary.

•       I am willing to become involved with this project.

•       I understand that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time.

•       I give permission for the contribution that I make to this research to be published in a journal, provided that neither I, nor the school, are identified in any way.

•       I understand that a summary of the findings from the research will be made available to me upon its completion.

Principal's name (printed): _____

Principal's signature: _____

Date: _____

## Appendix J: Information letter and consent form for educator interviews

**Information letter**

Dear [educator name],

I am conducting a research project that seeks to establish the experiences of young girls engaging with contemporary media. The study aims to:

- Develop an understanding of girls' current media consumption (i.e. what media they use, how they access it, and how often);
- Explore and analyse the content of media girls are engaging with; and
- Establish individual and collective lived experiences of girls engaging with the media.

The study is divided into five phases which include:

1) Interviews with school community members.
2) Questionnaires issued to students aged 7 - 11 and their parents.
3) A content analysis of media products.
4) Semi-structured interviews with 25 students.
5) Home tours with 5 students and interviews with their families.

Phases 1, 3, and 5 would involve the cooperation of the school and its staff. All scheduling will be negotiated with the principal and the classroom teachers with an emphasis on ensuring minimal disruption to students' learning, their classroom, and the wider school community. The benefits of participation in this study are that you will be contributing to ongoing research into the health and wellbeing of girls in contemporary society, particularly with regard to their engagement with media products. The anticipated results of the study will increase understanding of how young girls access and perceive media, and may help guide future curriculum and learning experiences intended to provide children with meaningful knowledge and skills to deal with the current media climate. Your students and their parents may also find the anticipated results of this study meaningful and useful.

Privacy and confidentiality of information about participants and disclosed by participants will be maintained at all times. Pseudonyms will be used and any personal identifying information will not form part of the reported data. The data will be stored securely by myself and my supervisors, Dr. Susan Beltman and Professor Rob Cavanagh. Electronic data will be stored securely in encrypted, password-protected files, and any hard copies of data will be filed in a lock-box. All data will be destroyed after a five-year period has passed.

This information sheet is for you to keep for your records. Please find attached a consent form, which you can return to either my supervisor or myself. If you have any questions concerning this study,

please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor to discuss them. Our contact details are listed below.

Thankyou for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Madeleine Dobson            [ contact details ]

Dr Susan Beltman            [ contact details ]

This study has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number HR 116/2012). The Committee is comprised of members of the public, academics, lawyers, doctors and pastoral carers. If needed, verification of approval can be obtained either by writing to the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee, c/- Office of Research and Development, Curtin University, GPO Box U1987, Perth, 6845, or by telephoning 9266 2784 or by emailing hrec@curtin.edu.au.

**Consent form**

•        I have read this document and understand the aims, procedures and risks of the project, as described within it.

•        I understand that participation in this project is completely voluntary.

•        I am willing to become involved with this project.

•        I understand that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time.

•        I give permission for the contribution that I make to this research to be published in a journal, provided that neither I, nor the school, are identified in any way.

•        I understand that a summary of the findings from the research will be made available to me upon its completion.

Teacher's name (printed): _____

Teacher's signature: _____

Date: _____

## Appendix K: Information letter and consent form for student questionnaires

**Information letter**

Hello _____

My name is Maddie. I have a project you might like to help me with.

The project is about the media and you. I'd like to sit down with you and talk about TV, movies, and websites that you like. We might read some magazines or watch some video clips together. We'll talk about what you think about different kinds of media.

I'll be visiting your school and working with some of your classmates and teachers. I was wondering if you would like to work with me on this project for the next term.

If you want to stop at any time, that's OK. Just let me, your parents, or your teacher know.

Your parents, or the person who looks after you, might have talked with you about helping with my project. If you have any questions, you can check with them, or with your teacher.

If you would like to help with the project, please circle YES on the next page.

If you don't want to help with the project, that's OK! Just circle NO on the next page.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Miss Madeleine Dobson
Doctoral Candidate
Curtin University

**Consent form**

This consent form is to be completed by the child.

- I know I have a choice whether or not I want to do this project

264

- I know I can stop whenever I want

- I know that I need to circle YES on this page before I can help with the project

If you would like to be a part of this project, circle YES.

YES

NO

I would like to help

with the project

I do not want to help

with the project

Your name: _____

Today's date: _____

Please return Page 2 to your teacher and ask your parents to keep Page 1 somewhere safe.

# Appendix L: Information letter and consent form for parent questionnaires

**Information letter**

Dear Parent/Guardian,

You are invited to allow your child to participate in this research project, which is being conducted as part of a Doctoral degree at Curtin University.

The purpose of this study is to explore what it's like for young girls to live in the current media climate, with an emphasis on how the media represents girls and women. If you allow your child to participate in this project, she will be asked to complete a questionnaire about her media use. She may also be invited to take part in interviews with the researcher later on, at which point you will receive a second information letter and consent form. These interviews may be subject to audio/video recording and/or digital photography.

Any information or details about your child and their school will be kept entirely confidential and will only be used for the purposes of this project. Your child and their school will not be identified in any written assignment or presentation. All data collected throughout the course of the study will be kept securely by the researcher and her supervisor, and will be destroyed after five years.

Participation in this project is voluntary. If you choose to allow your child to participate, you are free to withdraw her from further participation at any time without giving a reason and with no negative consequences. You are also free to ask for any information that identifies your child to be withdrawn from the project.

If you have any questions or require any additional information, my contact details are listed below. You can also contact my supervisor, Sue Beltman, with any queries if you wish.

Kind regards,

Madeleine Dobson          [ contact details ]
Dr Susan Beltman          [ contact details ]

This study has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number HR 116/2012). The Committee is comprised of members of the public, academics, lawyers, doctors and pastoral carers. If needed, verification of approval can be obtained either by writing to the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee, c/- Office of Research and Development, Curtin University, GPO Box U1987, Perth, 6845, or by telephoning 9266 2784 or by emailing hrec@curtin.edu.au.

**Consent form**

By signing this consent form, I confirm that…

• I have read this document and I understand the aims, procedures, and risks of the study.

• I have discussed this project with my child and they have agreed to participate.

• I understand participation in this project is voluntary.

• I understand that this project involves the collection of data including work samples, interview transcripts, audio-visual materials and questionnaires.

• I understand my child's anonymity will be maintained and that any data collected will be securely stored by the researcher and her supervisor.

• I understand that I am free to withdraw my child from further participation at any time.


I freely agree myself and my child may participate in this study.


Signed: _____ Dated: _____

Parent/guardian name: _____

Child's name: _____

Child's date of birth: _____


Please return Page 2 to your child's classroom teacher along with your child's signed consent form, and retain Page 1 for your records.

## Appendix M: Information letter and consent form for school-based student interviews (for students)

**Information letter**

Hello _____

My name is Maddie. Recently, you completed a questionnaire for me. I have another project you might like to help me with.

The project is about the media and you. I'd like to sit down with you and talk about TV, movies, and websites that you like. We might read some magazines or watch some video clips together. We'll talk about what you think about different kinds of media.

I'll be visiting your school and working with some of your classmates and teachers. I was wondering if you would like to work with me on this project for the next term.

If you want to stop at any time, that's OK. Just let me, your parents, or your teacher know.

Your parents, or the person who looks after you, might have talked with you about helping with my project. If you have any questions, you can check with them, or with your teacher.
If you would like to help with the project, please circle YES on the next page.

If you don't want to help with the project, that's OK! Just circle NO on the next page.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Miss Madeleine Dobson
Doctoral Candidate
Curtin University

**Consent form**

This consent form is to be completed by the child.

- I know I have a choice whether or not I want to do this project
- I know I can stop whenever I want
- I know I will be looking at magazines and video clips and talking about what I think of them
- I know that I need to circle YES on this page before I can help with the project

If you would like to be a part of this project, circle YES.

# YES                                      NO

I would like to help                I do not want to help

with the project                     with the project

Your name: _____

Today's date: _____

Please return Page 2 to your teacher and ask your parents to keep Page 1 somewhere safe.

**Appendix N: Information letter and consent form for school-based student interviews
(for parents)**

**Information letter**

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Recently, you gave consent for your daughter to participate in a questionnaire as part of a research project being conducted for a Doctoral degree at Curtin University. You are now invited to allow your daughter to take part in the next phase of the research project, which involves interviews.

The purpose of the study is to explore what it's like for young girls to live in the current media climate, with an emphasis on how the media represents girls and women. If you allow your child to participate in the next phase of the project, she may be invited to take part in interviews with the researcher. These interviews may be subject to audio/video recording and/or digital photography, and will focus on her media use, including how she understands and perceives media.

Any information or details about your child and their school will be kept entirely confidential and will only be used for the purposes of this project. Your child and their school will not be identified in any written assignment or presentation. All data collected throughout the course of the study will be kept securely by the researcher and her supervisor, and will be destroyed after five years.

Participation in this project is voluntary. If you choose to allow your child to participate, you are free to withdraw her from further participation at any time without giving a reason and with no negative consequences. You are also free to ask for any information that identifies your child to be withdrawn from the project.

If you have any questions or require any additional information, my contact details are listed below. You can also contact my supervisor, Sue Beltman, with any queries if you wish.

Kind regards,

Madeleine Dobson          [ contact details ]
Dr Susan Beltman          [ contact details ]

**Consent form**

By signing this consent form, I identify that…

• I have read this document and I understand the aims, procedures, and risks of the study.

• I have discussed this project with my child and they have agreed to participate.

• I understand participation in this project is voluntary.

• I recognise that this project involves the collection of data via interviews, including work samples, interview transcripts, audio-visual materials and questionnaires.

• I understand my child's anonymity will be maintained and that any data collected will be securely stored by the researcher and her supervisor.

• I understand that I am free to withdraw my child from further participation at any time.

I freely agree my child may participate in this study.

Signed: _____ Dated: _____

Parent/guardian name: _____

Child's name: _____

Child's date of birth: _____

Please return Page 2 to your child's classroom teacher along with your child's signed consent form, and retain Page 1 for your records.

**Information letter**

Hello [student name],

My name is Maddie. We've been working on a project together and I have another task you might like to help me with.

The project we've been working on is about the media and you. This time, I'd like to visit your home and talk to you and your parent(s) about your house. I might like you and your parent(s) to give me a tour and describe different rooms of the house, including your bedroom. I was wondering if you would like to work with me on this part of the project.

If you want to stop at any time, that's OK. Just let me, your parents, or your teacher know.

Your parents, or the person who looks after you, might have talked with you about helping with my project. If you have any questions, you can check with them, or with your teacher.

If you would like to help with the project, please circle YES on the next page.

If you don't want to help with the project, that's OK! Just circle NO on the next page.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Miss Madeleine Dobson
Doctoral Candidate
Curtin University

**Consent form**

This consent form is to be completed by the child.

• I know I have a choice whether or not I want to do this project

• I know I can stop whenever I want

- I know Maddie will be visiting my house

- I know I will be talking about my house and my bedroom

- I know that I need to circle YES on this page before I can help with the project

If you would like to be a part of this project, circle YES.

# YES

I would like to help

with the project

# NO

I do not want to help

with the project

Your name: _____

Today's date: _____

Please return Page 2 to your teacher and ask your parents to keep Page 1 somewhere safe.

## Appendix P: Information letter and consent form for home-based student interviews and parent interviews (for parents)

### Information letter

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Recently, you gave consent for your daughter to participate in a questionnaire and some interviews as part of a research project being conducted for a Doctoral degree at Curtin University. You are now invited to allow your daughter to take part in the next phase of the research project, which involves the researcher visiting your home for a tour.

The purpose of the overall study is to explore what it's like for young girls to live in the current media climate, with an emphasis on how the media represents girls and women. If you allow your child to participate in this next phase of the project, I will contact you regarding visiting you and your child at home for a brief tour. During the tour, I'd like you to talk about your media environment at home. The home tour will be audio recorded and, if you are comfortable with it, I might like to take some photographs.

Any information or details about your family, your child's school, and your residence will be kept entirely confidential and will only be used for the purposes of this project. Your family and residence will not be identified in any written assignment or presentation. All data collected throughout the course of the study will be kept securely by the researcher and her supervisor, and will be destroyed after five years.

Participation in this project is voluntary. If you choose to allow your child to participate, you are free to withdraw her from further participation at any time without giving a reason and with no negative consequences. You are also free to ask for any information that identifies your child to be withdrawn from the project.

If you have any questions or require any additional information, my contact details are listed below. You can also contact my supervisor, Sue Beltman, with any queries if you wish.

Kind regards,

Madeleine Dobson          [ contact details ]
Dr Susan Beltman          [ contact details ]

This study has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number HR 116/2012). The Committee is comprised of members of the public, academics, lawyers, doctors and pastoral carers. If needed, verification

of approval can be obtained either by writing to the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee, c/- Office of Research and Development, Curtin University, GPO Box U1987, Perth, 6845, or by telephoning 9266 2784 or by emailing hrec@curtin.edu.au.

## Consent form

By signing this consent form, I identify that…

• I have read this document and I understand the aims, procedures, and risks of the study.

• I have discussed this project with my child and they have agreed to participate.

• I understand participation in this project is voluntary.

• I recognise that this phase of the project involves the collection of data via audio recorded interviews.

• I recognise that any photography of the home tour will only occur at my own discretion.

• I understand my child's anonymity will be maintained and that any data collected will be securely stored by the researcher and her supervisor.

• I understand that I am free to withdraw my child from further participation at any time.

I freely agree my child and I will participate in this study.

Signed: _____ Dated: _____

Parent/guardian name: _____

Child's name: _____

Child's date of birth: _____

Please return Page 2 to your child's classroom teacher along with your child's signed consent form, and retain Page 1 for your records.

**Appendix Q: Adverse events management protocol**

Given that the study's subject matter is potentially sensitive and that the key participants involved are of a young age and therefore potentially vulnerable, the researcher has developed the following protocol. This will be kept on hand during interviews with child participants and will be referred to if any participants shown signs of distress or discomfort.

**Protocol for immediate situations**

•      At first sign or verbal indication of distress or discomfort, stop the interview and ask the child if they are feeling okay. At this point, it may be pertinent to remind the child they are free to withdraw from the interview with no negative consequences.

•      If the child is amenable, discuss what has upset them so that the researcher has as much information as possible and can navigate the situation effectively.

•      Where appropriate, return the child to their class and inform the classroom teacher of the situation so that they are aware and can continue to monitor the child. If it is inappropriate to return the child to their class, the front office will be first contact.

•      Notify the classroom teacher, school principal, the child's parents/guardians, and any other relevant members of the school community (e.g. school nurse, school psychologist, Education Assistants).

**Protocol for long-term situations**

At the onset of the study when information letters and consent forms are issued, an additional sheet with further information about the potentially sensitive nature of the study will be attached to letters going out to the principal, classroom teachers, and parents/guardians. This sheet provides resources for staff and parents/guardians to utilise in the long-term, such as helplines and websites. Space has also been left on the sheet to fill in the local GP servicing the area of the selected school. The school and families will also be advised that they can contact the researcher, her supervisor, or the HREC concerning any issues that arise following the conclusion of the study.

## Appendix R: Adverse events management protocol – list of resources

A key priority for the researcher conducting this study is the health and wellbeing of the students involved. The study does deal with some issues that may be sensitive, such as self-image. If you have any concerns, this sheet provides important contacts who can offer advice and support.

Researcher: Madeleine Dobson [contact details]
Supervisor: Dr. Susan Beltman [contact details]

**Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee**
9266 2784
hrec@curtin.edu.au

**Youth Beyond Blue**
1300 224 636
www.youthbeyondblue.org.au
bb@beyondblue.org.au

**The Butterfly Foundation**
1800 334 673
www.thebutterflyfoundation.org.au

**Kids Helpline**
1800 551 800
http://www.kidshelp.com.au/

**Body Image Resources**
http://www.youth.gov.au/bodyImage/resources/Pages/Resources.aspx

**Your local GP**
(Phone number)
(Address)

**Health Direct (24hrs)**
1800 022 222