

Constructing Ideas of Femininity

**A Contextual Exploration of
Young Girls' Advertising Experiences**

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This thesis is dedicated to my beloved son Guido, and my partner Iqbal.

It is also in loving memory of my sister in law – Giorgia - who so tragically and unexpectedly passed away and who will be deeply missed.

Abstract

The research explores how pre-adolescent girls interact with representations of femininity in advertising messages, through an in-depth, mixed-methods and mainly qualitative approach with a purposive sample of primary school girls (age 8-11).

The study evolves through three major stages: preliminary, main and follow-up. In the preliminary stage, the use of questionnaire, group sessions and projective techniques provided standardised information about girls' life context, body image, personality, media habits and their embodiment of femininity (N=37). In the main stage, two rounds of peer-to-peer phenomenological interviews prompted by adverts elicitation were used to gain insight into girls' response and interaction with adverts (N=31 first round; N=21 second round). In the final stage 16 participants took part in follow-up interviews, for clarification and amplification of themes emerging from the analysis.

The phenomenological interviewing provides insights into girls' reception of adverts in their own terms and their own words, while the contextualisation of participants' advertising experiences is able to illuminate on contextual factors affecting girls' critical abilities towards ideals of femininity presented in advertising and other media.

Through a process of triangulation and systematic focused comparison, the analysis reveals how girls' response to idealised portrayals of femininity in adverts is deeply intertwined with their broader media consumption. The main emerging results indicate that there is a fundamental difference in the way different sub-groups of girls perceive and respond to representations of femininity in adverts and media. In particular, by grouping the girls according to their lower or higher embodiment of stereotypical femininity, the analysis suggests a correspondence between girls' stance towards femininity portrayals in adverts and their actual embodiment of femininity.

From the context of a group of girls who consistently displayed higher critical skills, positive body image and a more fluid and diverse embodiment of femininity, the analysis seems also to suggest a 'protective' or 'buffering' influence exerted by certain contextual factors which are mainly located within the family.

The original contribution to knowledge of the study is not in providing definite conclusions about advertising effects, but a valid basis to comprehend participants' interaction and negotiation with different media's portrayals of femininity in view of their particular world and frame of reference.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 CONTEXT

The present study is an exploration of young girls' advertising experiences: as such, its primary aim is to look at femininity portrayals in adverts through the eyes of pre-adolescent girls.

The last twenty-five years have seen significant developments in both neuropsychology and media technologies (i.e. Internet and the World Wide Web) leading to a much more ubiquitous, sophisticated and pervasive application of advertising compared to previous years (Nairn and Fine, 2008). Current children' exposure to media, with the widespread diffusion of portable Internet- connected devices such as mobile phones, pocket computers, I-pods and -pads and the proliferation of thousands of applications, videogames, social media and digital TV channels, is hardly comparable to even ten years ago: marketers can effectively reach children anywhere, at any moment, through an ever widening array of channels.

Demographic and social-economic changes have made the household and lifestyle of children radically different: thus, more research is needed to understand whether children's social, emotional and cognitive abilities have been affected by these changes (Livingstone, 2008, 2009). Equally, the whole context of advertising and children has drastically changed, but it remains unclear whether the higher sophistication and pervasiveness of current advertising applications has caused a shift in the nature of boundary between advertising and children. New research is needed to provide insight into how children perceive and interact with current marketing messages, possibly through more holistic approaches (Livingstone, 2007) which consider the synergy between different media and the contextual factors interplaying with media consumption.

Furthermore, in the last thirty years the debate around girls' representation in the media has attracted growing attention: the main concern revolves around the seemingly overwhelming presence of images and messages reinforcing to girls the importance of being sexy and beautiful. Marketers have been increasingly criticised for forcing rigid gender stereotypes onto children and worries around the so-called "sexualisation" of young girls are widespread all over the western world (AAP, 1999; Ofcom 2007; Bailey, 2011). The current debates ultimately encompass old arguments regarding children's agency and the ethicality of advertising to children, with new and urgent questions brought to the fore following the rapid developments spurred on by the digital revolution in marketing and media.

These discussions have been often the subject of sensationalised media coverage and are increasingly at the centre of the current agenda for government and regulators in both the UK and the Western world (Buckingham, Willett, Bragg & Russell, 2010), calling for new empirical studies to inform public policy and shed some light on the effects of marketing communications on children's acquired values and role models.

1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

It is also useful to consider both the personal, practical and intellectual rationale for the study. On a personal level, the curiosity felt for the topic of enquiry is connected to deep emotional issues (namely, the researcher's own past, with her personal struggle with body image issues and eating disorders), so that the PhD journey is lived as a process of discovery which is therapeutically beneficial for the researcher. There is a yearning to discover how young girls perceive and respond to femininity represented in adverts and how they are influenced by them. There is also a vivid interest in how gender - and in particular femininity - is constructed: what aspects of gender become salient for girls at this crucial stage of their development, how femininity represented in media and adverts is perceived by them and how girls' perception and meaning construction from these images/messages mediate with their context, ultimately influencing their way to be girls in the everyday life.

Additionally, the research responds to a desire to improve the well-being of young girls, by producing insights which could inform interventions: this is visible in the

study's attempt to locate potential contextual factors making some girls more resilient and critical towards stereotypical or hyper-sexualised portrayals of femininity in media and marketing messages. It is also wished that the results from this study will inspire more researchers to explore the world of young girls with qualitative and participatory methods and equally inspire marketers, advertisers and media producers to envision a future with less rigid gender stereotypes and a widespread of ethical consciousness in marketing to both 'tween' and older girls. This sentiment was well expressed by Pollay (1986:33) thirty years ago, when he commented on the necessity of establishing a new direction in marketing and consumer behaviour research which would finally address "questions meaningful to the larger community of scholars and citizens". In this sense, the present investigation – with its interdisciplinary approach and *biologist's* perspective (Tucker, 1974) – will probably appear as an "unconventional marketing study":

"Critical enquiry does not require researchers to believe that advertising will be absolved of all charges as much as it requires having faith that the institutions of advertising have some potential for self-correction and a capacity for moral action in the light of new knowledge. Let us hope that marketing and advertising scholars have this faith and carry out the needed research. (...) Failure to initiate this research would suggest that academics are servants to marketing practice rather than scholars of it. Intellectual detachment suggests that we should study the consumer in the marketing environment as the biologist studies the fish. As suggested by Tucker (1974), all too often our perspective has been exclusively that of the fisherman."

Pollay 1986:34

1.3 AIMS OF THE STUDY

This study wishes to explore how young girls (age 8-11) construct meanings from current advertising messages, with specific reference to ideals of femininity presented through these adverts.

The following research questions are addressed:

- 1) How do young girls perceive and interpret ideals of femininity portrayed in current advertising images?
- 2) In which ways can advertising generate negative feelings in young girls, (i.e. frustration, inadequacy, self-loathing)?

3) Are there specific factors enabling young girls to critically respond to the stereotyped representations of girlhood promoted by most marketers?

The overall aim is to put young girls' advertising experiences into context - taking into account their personality and femininity embodiment, their relationships within the family, their wider media consumption, their interests and hobbies, their experiences and life projects – in order to unveil the complex interplay of factors mediating participants' interactions with media and advertising messages.

1.4 NATURE OF THE STUDY

The research is a context-rich and in-depth exploration of advertising experiences and used a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods for both data gathering and analysis, using a small sample (n=37) of British primary school girls (age 8-11).

The ontological stance underpinning the study is one of a critical realist, while the epistemological orientation draws from symbolic interactionism and a constructivist view of knowledge. In the literature review as in the analysis and discussion of the findings, the thesis adopts a broadly interdisciplinary and interpretative approach.

The use of multiple methods to investigate girls' experiences, their personality and their world, allow the benefits of triangulation from multiple data sources (Denzin, 1978, 1989) and a full contextualisation of their advertising experiences.

Overall, the research design comprises three major stages: preliminary, main and follow-up, with each stage informing the subsequent one.

In the preliminary stage, the use of a questionnaire, group sessions and projective techniques provided standardised information about participants' life context, body image, personality, media habits and their embodiment of femininity (n=37).

In the main stage, two rounds of peer-to-peer interviews prompted by adverts' elicitation were used to gain insight into girls' response and interaction with adverts (n=31 first round; n=21 second round).

In the final stage the sample was further narrowed, with the selection of 16 participants who took part in follow-up interviews, for clarification and amplification

of themes emerging from the analysis. Complementary insights coming from participant observation, informal chats with teachers and parents, fieldwork notes and a research diary were also integrated in the final analysis.

1.5 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Figure 1.1 illustrates the structure of the thesis.

Thesis Structure

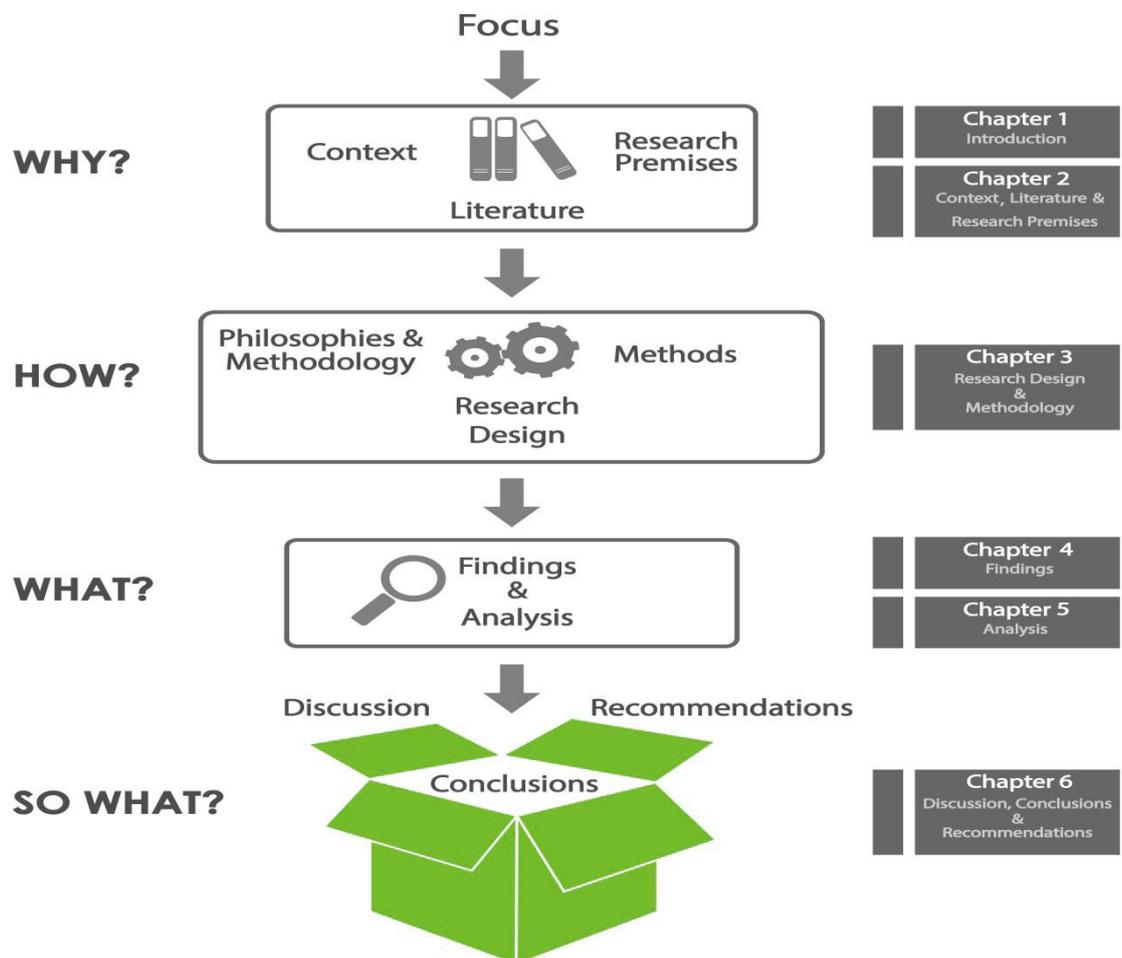


Figure 1.1- Thesis Structure

The literature is presented in Chapters 2. The focus of the literature review is threefold and highly interdisciplinary, in order to:

- describe the state of the art of the field by providing an overview of past research on advertising to children from different disciplines of study, including a series of particularly important investigations which have inspired the present research;
- describe the economic, socio-cultural and political context with discussion on the main debates and regulations on advertising to children;
- present the main theoretical premises of the research, so as to adequately frame the research design.

Chapter 3 describes the conceptual framework, philosophies, methodologies and methods constituting the research design, with further discussion with regards to methodological limitations of the study and the application of self-reflexivity during the research process.

Chapter 4 presents the initial findings in a descriptive way, with some preliminary analysis applied to the data. The presentation of the findings is structured chronologically according to the different stages and methods of the project (e.g. questionnaire, projective techniques, group sessions, adverts-elicited interviews and follow-up interviews).

The main analysis work is presented in chapter 5: here the analysis is structured according to the three research questions which the exploration set out to answer.

Chapter 6 – the final chapter of the thesis – starts with a discussion of the main results from the analysis in the light of relevant literature, followed by a consideration of the main learnings from the project.

The thesis ends by providing recommendations for marketers, discussing future research directions and interventions, and tidying the main insights from the study into a number of important conclusions.

Chapter 2 – Context, Literature & Research Premises

Thesis Structure

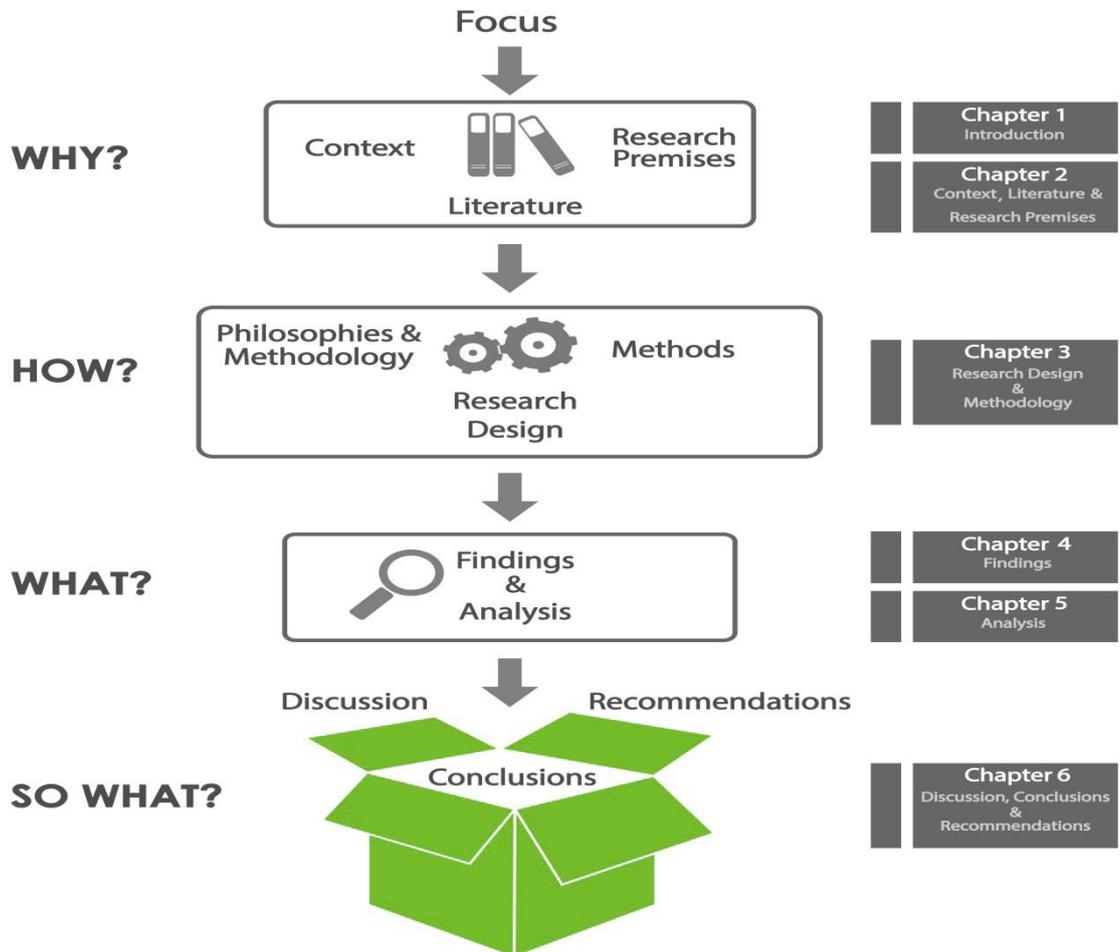


Figure 2.1 – Thesis Structure

2.1 INTRODUCTION – AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

Given the focus of this study on young girls’ interaction with femininity as represented in adverts (and media more broadly), the enquiry cuts across complex topics, such as media and marketing effects, pre-adolescence, gender identity, body image and self-esteem. These themes have been the object of investigation across a wide range of disciplines such as consumer behaviour/marketing, psychology, sociology, the broader area of gender and girls’ studies, feminist studies, media and communication, health studies and cultural studies. The reviewing of a diverse

amount of research - on topics more or less closely related to the themes investigated in this study - suggests that some discipline seems to favour a prevalent method of enquiry (e.g. psychology studies tend to be quantitative, with experimental and correlational designs, while gender/girls and cultural studies tend to prefer more qualitative, interpretative or narrative approaches) while others are more diversified in their approach (e.g. marketing, advertising and consumer behaviour). Figure 2.2a illustrates this pattern:

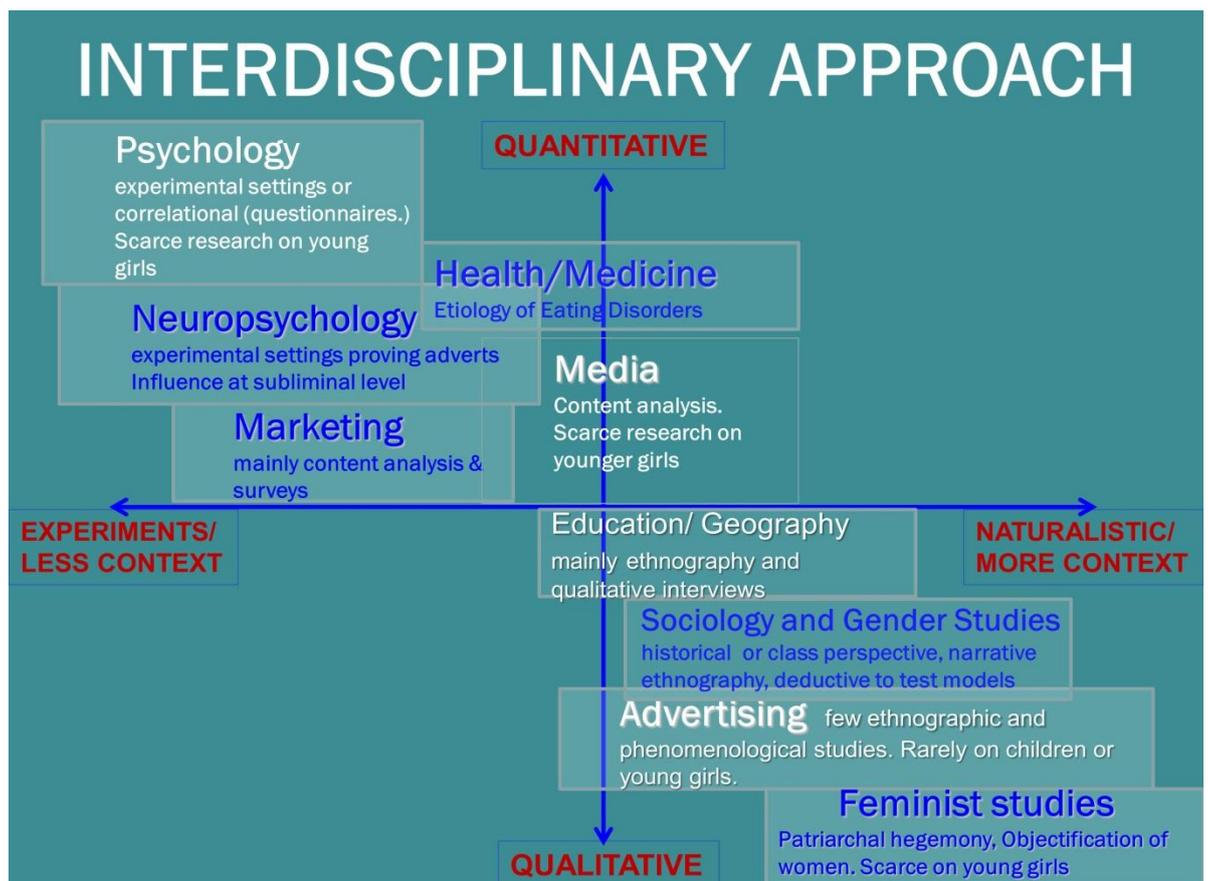


Figure 2.2 – Prevalent methods of enquiry found in different disciplines

Focusing on reviewing only marketing and advertising studies would hardly offer a comprehensive picture of the state of the art on the subject, particularly if one considers that the research questions do intersect with relevant areas of studies such as the ones related to media influences, body image, pre-adolescent self-esteem and gender. For this reason, the approach taken by the literature review is an interdisciplinary one. It is also considered important to provide contextual information to frame the research in the current socio-economic context, citing government plans, regulations at national and international level, and the main

political and public debates. The approach chosen in this chapter is a thematic one, where literature and context intertwine in a discursive manner. A third section (Part III) named “Research premises” presents some key studies and theories which constitute the frame of reference for this study and will be presented/discussed in a separate chapter. Figure 2.2b represents a map of the main themes reviewed by the three main sections of this review.

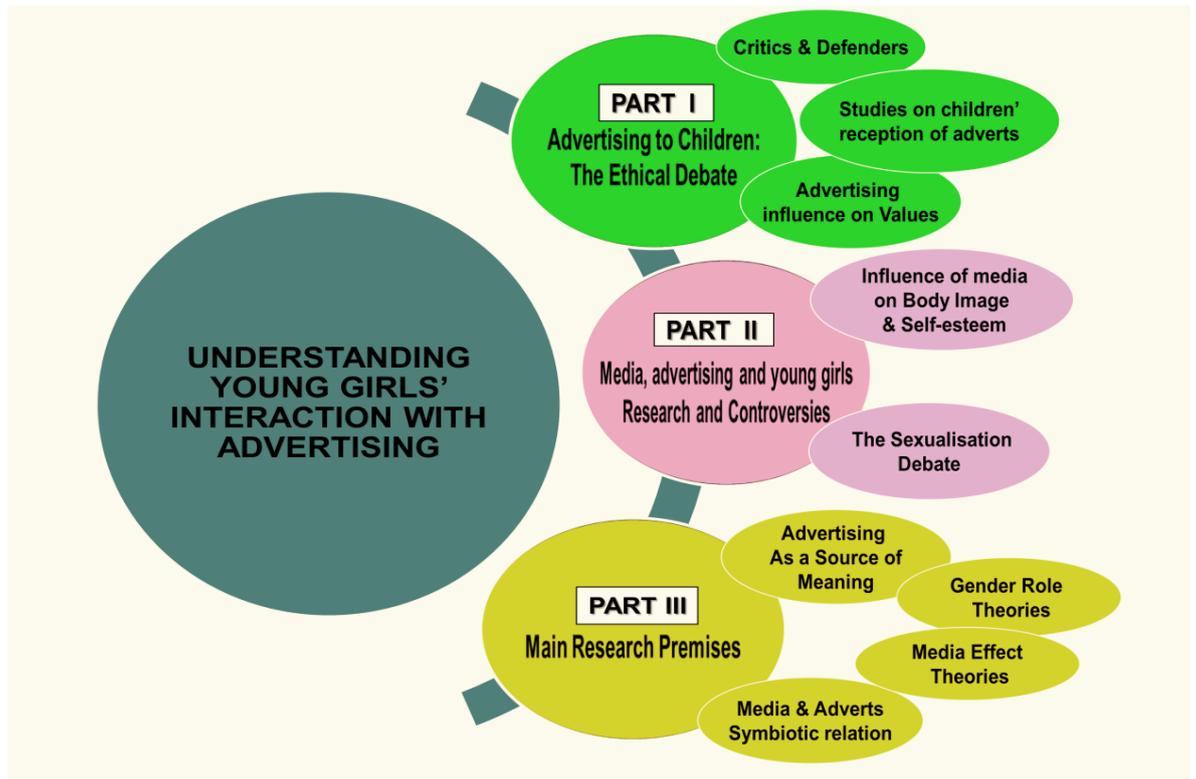


Figure 2.3 – Mapping Literature Review

PART I

ADVERTISING TO CHILDREN AND THE ETHICAL DEBATE

2.2 ADVERTISING TO CHILDREN: AN OVERVIEW

Considering the variety of disciplines investigating advertising reception, it is deemed important to firstly give a general overview of what has been done so far in the wider research area investigating media and advertising directed at children and its impact. The literature review will start broadly and then narrow its focus to some of the most important and inspiring studies in the field.

Starting in the 1960s in the United States, the debate around the ethicality of advertising to children was already a highly controversial one. The increasing exposure of children to media content brought about by widespread television viewing in the 1960s combined with children's limited cognitive abilities, raised questions regarding the potential risks of exploitation by companies marketing their products. A new body of research investigating the effects of marketing messages to children was urgently needed to guide public policy and inform public debate around the issues.

Research in this field started in US in the 1970s by psychologists (see for example Blatt, Spencer and Ward, 1972; Ward, Reale, and Levinson, 1972): this first body of work provided evidence of the inability of children to understand the persuasive intent behind advertising and resulted in the US Federal Trade Commission banning all television advertising to young children under the age of eight (ban which was subsequently lifted in the 1980s). Since then, researchers have investigated a wide variety of aspects relating to advertising to children, producing a body of knowledge spanning more than 40 years.

The main focus of earlier research was firmly placed on locating the "when" of children's ability to understand advertising. In 1999, Roedder John after a meta-analysis of the marketing and media literature on children's reception of adverts noted that:

Over 25 years of research on the topic of children's understanding and knowledge of advertising have produced an impressive picture of how children view advertising at different ages. We know when children learn to distinguish commercials from television programs, when they discern the persuasive intent of advertising, when they perceive bias and deception in advertising, when they understand the purpose for specific advertising tactics and techniques, and when they use or do not use this knowledge as a cognitive defence against advertising. We are also aware of many of the factors, such as age-related cognitive abilities and family environment, that contribute to these developmental trends

Roedder John 1999:22

Using Jean Piaget (1937)'s theory, Roedder-John's framework identified the main shifts in children's understanding of basic economic concepts through a cognitive development stages- based perspective (with the identification of three main stages, namely the *perceptual stage* (3 to 7 years), the *analytical stage* (7 to 11 years), and the *learned stage* (11 to 16 years) (Roedder John, 1999). However, her model of children's development as consumers has been criticised for conceptualising the

three stages of development in rigid age-based categories (Livingstone, 2009; Gunter and Furnham, 1998), for conceiving socialization itself as a fundamentally solitary cognitive construction and for its exclusive focus on logical skills, while overlooking the influence of narrative as another major mode in human thought (Bruner, 1986).

One consequence of relying on Piaget was to universalise ages (in years) as stages (of cognitive development). Coincidentally, this fitted the evidence obtained during the twentieth century dominance of mass television advertising, but it does not fit the diversity of the twenty-first century media environment. The theoretical shift to a more social analysis usefully permits recognition of the complex and variable relations between children and their social/mediated contexts. Today, as Nairn and Fine (2008a: 448) observe, no 'magic age' or 'developmental milestone' at which children can resist persuasion should be expected, both because there is no universal relation between understanding and age and because persuasion occurs, in one way or another, across the age range. Thus the key question becomes, who can resist which type of persuasion under what circumstances?

Livingstone, 2009:3

De La Ville and Tartas (2010) noted that the oversight was probably due to the Roedder John's exclusive focus on consumer research papers published in marketing and communication journals, therefore excluding studies from the psychology and child development field.

Another strand of research (Adler, 1980; Gardner and Sheppard, 1989; Smith and Atkin, 2003; Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski and Eron, 2003; Schor, 2004; Wartella, Vandewater and Rideout, 2005; Strasburger, 2001, 2006) has started to look into the many ways advertising influences children's values, health, behaviour and wellbeing. Given the findings of this research there seems to be little doubt regarding the influence of values and role models promoted by contemporary advertising on children's minds. For instance, a vast body of research in the field of psychology - typically correlational or experimental studies (for a recent example of longitudinal study see Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski and Eron, 2003) - has supported a strong association between children watching violent media content and being aggressive. These studies have sparked much alarm regarding unsuitable material that is accessible by children and the effect of media content on children.

Content analysis - mainly from the field of media and marketing - represent another important strand of research which has analysed both advertising and media's content aimed at children (Thompson and Yokota, 2001; Merskin, 2002; Byrd-Bredbenner, 2002; Pine and Nash, 2002; Ji and Laczniak, 2007; Millwood, Hargrave

and Livingstone, 2007; Maher, Herbst, Childs and Finn, 2008; Fabrianesi, Jones and Reid, 2008) showing a worrying incidence of materialistic values, gender or racial stereotyping (Griffiths, 2002; Maher et al., 2008; Merskin, 2002), unhealthy eating (Byrd-Bredbenner, 2002) and shallow or inappropriate role models (Fabrianesi et al., 2008) promoted to the younger audience. Assertions have also been made that advertising can be linked to childhood obesity (Zimmerman and Bell, 2010) and to be damaging the parent-child relationship (Linnet, 2000; Buijzen and Valkenburg, 2003), due to the so-called “pester power” commonly experienced by parents (for different findings see Nash and Basini, 2012).

2.2.1 UK Regulations

The recent bans on children’s advertising (PPU, 2010) which have been implemented in countries such as Greece (ban on TV toys advertising between 7 a.m. and 10 p.m. and total ban on advertising of war toys since 1994), Sweden (complete ban on TV adverts for children under 12, since 1991) and Norway (complete ban on TV children advertising since 1994) have left more parents and regulators wondering whether a similar restriction in their own country would be a safer way to go in the interest of protecting younger minds.

In the UK, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) is the independent watchdog of advertising across all media (including press, billboards, TV, radio, cinema, internet, email and mobile SMS, sales promotions and direct marketing). Its role is to ensure that adverts are ‘legal, decent, honest and truthful’ by applying the Advertising Codes and liaising with regulatory bodies such as Ofcom (ASA, 2014).

Apart from a complete ban on food advertising containing high fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) during children programs, the restrictions on children’s adverts are fairly unspecific and vaguely applied: ITC (Independent Television Commission)’s rules (a new code was issued in 2002) set limits on ads that “might result in harm to children physically, mentally or morally” or “might take advantage of the natural credulity and sense of loyalty of children”; also, against the so-called *nag factor*, adverts should not “exhort children to purchase or to ask their parents or others to make enquiries or purchases”. There are other rules on food advertising, health, hygiene, safety and

decency and some restrictions on transmission time for alcohol, medicines and slimming products (ITC, Rules on Advertisements to Children, 2002). However, rules on their own are less than effective: the main problem seems to be the absence of an effective system to prevent or correct advertisers' misconduct as there are no fines or obligations for corrective advertisements. Recently, criticism has been aimed at the ITC for not carrying out systematic monitoring and for ineffective sanctions (PPU, 2010); there is also the problem of enforcing national regulations on TV channels transmitting from foreign countries or indeed on the Internet. The recent growth of new media formats, digital outlets and channels has made the task of regulating and enforcing rules more and more difficult.

Such debate is increasingly at the centre of the current agenda for government and regulators in both UK (Ofcom, 2007) and rest of the Western world (AAP 1999, 2002) calling for research designed to inform public policy, able to prove or disprove the negative effects of marketing communications on children's acquired values and role models.

2.3 THE ETHICAL DEBATE: CRITICS AND DEFENDERS

Childhood has become a marketing opportunity worth £99 billion in the UK and £350 million is spent in the UK each year on persuading children to consume (Piachaud, 2007).

Marketers have been heavily criticised for promoting negative values and unsuitable role models to children (see for example Levin and Kilbourne, 2008 on children sexualisation; Leonhardt and Kerwin, 1997 on "marketing getting too far"; Roper and Shah, 2007 on how branding affects disadvantaged children; Kunkel and Roberts, 1991 on values portrayed by children's TV ads; or the comprehensive review of Buijzen and Valkenburg, 2003 on the negative effects of adverts on children's materialism and child-parent conflict).

In the UK, the Mother's Union launched the "Bye Buy Childhood" campaign (2010) – with the production of a report on the commercialization of childhood, which contains a review of the latest literature and collected the opinions and experiences

of 1000 parents. The campaign wished to raise awareness of the issue and push for changes in how marketing to children is regulated. The following extract summarises their concerns:

Our research has found that the majority of parents agree that media content and advertising seen by children can be harmful to them. In particular, parents feel that media content and advertising makes children more sexually aware at a younger age than they would have been otherwise, and that it makes them feel that they have to act older than they really want to. Parents are also concerned that films and video games with sexualised and violent themes are too accessible to children and that the 9pm watershed is not adhered to. Parents believe that responsibility for media content and advertising that children are exposed to should lie with regulatory bodies, along with media companies, government and parents themselves, but that for films and video games in particular regulatory bodies do not do enough to protect children. There is more divided opinion over whether advertising in general aimed at children is age appropriate or well regulated.

Bye Buy Childhood report, Mother's Union, 2010:3

Advertisers have defended their position by summoning "commercial free speech" (Earnshaw, 2001) or pointing at the violent or overly sexually explicit content of rap/hip-hop music and video games (Tylee, 2006), arguing that adverts are rather simply a reflection of society, which would explain why they spend millions in research to spot trends and desires in order to construct effective ads (White, 2000). This view is supported by some scholars - Holbrook, 1987; see also Schudson (1993) in his book *The uneasy persuasion* - while Pollay (1985) has strongly argued against this point, referring to advertising as a *distorted mirror*, selectively reinforcing only a limited set of values, notably those values deemed as more easily commercialised and responded to by consumers (due to his comprehensive research and his focus on values, a separate section is dedicated to Pollay's discussion and analysis).

There is much debate regarding the ability of children to process advertising messages currently aimed at them, with one part of the argument concerning the different ages at which children become capable of understanding the advertiser's intent (Ward, 1972; Macklin, 1985, 1987; Blosser and Roberts (1985), Roedder, 1981, 1999). Most literature seems to agree (Levin, Petros and Petrella, 1982; Young, 1990) that it is not until 8 years of age that children begin to understand the selling purpose of an advertisement. Nairn and Fine (2008) have called for an urgent update of this age-centred debate, as new psychology and neuroscience findings seem to support the notion of *implicit affective associations*, whereby advertising is able to influence judgment at an unconscious level. Recently, neuroscientists (Rizzolatti and

Arbib, 1998) have also discovered a specialised set of “mirror neurons” in the brain that appear to explain why humans are able to learn complex behaviours so easily (see Blackeslee, 2006 for a non-technical discussion of these neurons). These findings provide a biological foundation for understanding humans as naturally ‘hardwired’ to imitate and replicate behaviour.

Available literature appears to show a clear separation between behaviourists and industry critics, on the one side, who see children as vulnerable /passive receivers being unfairly exploited by the current bombardment of advertising and media’s messages (Bjurstrom,1995; Leonhardt and Kerwin,1997; Grossman,1999; Dibb, 1993; Dalmeny et al., 2003) and researchers on the other side who, reasoning mainly on the basis of cognitive psychology, regard children as more sophisticated and discerning viewers capable of detaching themselves from the messages they are exposed to or able to learn from these messages in a creative way (Young, 1990; Ritson and Elliot, 1995; O’Donohue and Tynan, 1998; O’Donohue, 1994; Bartholomew and O’Donohue, 2003; Lawlor and Prothero, 2007). This second group of experts – although mainly marketing academics - tend to advocate the positive side of advertising, as an important part of the consumer socialisation process, which can help educate children as current and future consumers (Ward, 1974). Thus, there is a broad range of views and supporting research regarding either the fairness or unfairness of advertising aimed at children, with a large division between pro- and anti- advertisers, and the same division can be found in the discussion of media’s effects on children (Buckingham, 1997; Davies, Buckingham and Kelley 2000; Strasburger 2001, 2006); this is hardly surprising considering how delicate and controversial this area of study has always been and because at its heart lies the question of children’s agency (Livingstone, 2007).

The prevalent means of investigating advertising effects on children, in the marketing, media and psychology literature, has tended to privilege positivistic and quantitative approach, while O’Sullivan (2005) advocates the need for “a more fully-articulated picture of childhood” which should be informed by qualitative marketing research:

Convictions rather than evidence dominate this controversy. Fundamental to the position of either side are very different views not only of advertising, but of childhood itself. (...) qualitative marketing research has an important role to play in establishing a more fully-articulated picture of childhood than has been acknowledged heretofore.

O’Sullivan, 2005:372

2.3.1 The changing landscape

The last thirty years have witnessed a dramatic change in the social and media landscape. The time each child spends with media has changed, along with the household structure and roles within the family, the way parents interact with their children and the control they can exert over their media uses (Horst, 2010; Jenkins, 2006; Livingstone, 2003). As a result of these changes, children's ways to filter advertising may be different as compared to the pre-digital era (Stoltman, 1999).

Crucially also, in the recent years advertising has changed and evolved considerably, becoming not only more sophisticated in its subtle messages, but somewhat wider in its intent.

Advertisements today are not so much about the products but rather about the character of the consumers and how they should feel when they use or possess the advertised product.

PPU, 2010:1

Messages to children are about the happiness, social status or success linked to the possession or consumption of a certain product. Advertising focuses increasingly on *identity*, it promotes certain values and a particular lifestyle to children. In Schor (2004)'s words, advertising affects not just *what* children want to buy, but *who* they think they are. Thus, unintended consequences of advertising exposure can go as far as a child's unhappiness and negative self-perceptions (Smith and Atkin, 2003).

Children's culture has become increasingly enmeshed with media and consumer culture, so much that it has become impossible to discern one from the other. As Buckingham (1993) noted:

Childhood became inextricably entwined with consumer culture. Children's social and cultural needs are unavoidably expressed and defined through their relationships with material commodities and through the commercially produced media texts that permeate their lives.

Buckingham 1993:166

The *digital revolution* has caused radical changes in the advertising landscape, with new media formats and a proliferation of cutting-edge marketing techniques, such as *advergames* (adverts concealed within games), viral marketing, product placements,

user engagement strategies, emotion marketing, brand advocacy, behavioural targeting, social networking applications, spin-off merchandising, cross-media promotions and embedded commercial content (see Calvert, 2008; Chester and Montgomery, 2007; Fielder et al, 2007). For instance, Nairn (2008) performed assessments of the commercial content of UK's favourite children websites through website observation and qualitative data collection from children and parents, concluding that:

A great deal of advertising is poorly labelled and deceptively integrated into content. Most sites visited by children are created for an adult audience which means 25 percent of adverts were for dating, gambling, loans, surgery and age-restricted products. There was also evidence of pester power, dubious "free" offers and incitement to make impulse purchases using mobile phone credit.

Nairn 2008:239

Critics of children's adverts worry over the "dramatic step-change in the extent of commercial exposure" (Mayo and Nairn, 2009) and over the growing incidence of interaction between media and adverts, with their synergy reaching unprecedented levels of sophistication and strength, through the consolidation of "highly integrated, multimedia enterprises" (Stoltman, 1999).

As the media can isolate and shape children's preferences for certain toys through TV and movie characters (who often become children's role models), promoting certain life styles and subcultures at different ages, advertising proves to be particularly effective when these preferences are then fed back to young viewers through adverts. Children's preferences are thus formed by the media and then reinforced through advertising: a dynamic leading to a *double reinforcement* of values (PPU, 2010) (the symbiotic relationship between media and advertising is further discussed in PART III). Mayo and Nairn – in their book *Consumer Kids- How big business is grooming our children for profit* (2009:52) - argue how the current marketing pressure on children is "like a battle plan designed to hit every part of a child's life" and set to create unhappy, insecure, image-fixated, self-obsessed and materialistic individuals.

In sum, it is possible that the significant advances in both neuropsychology and media technologies bolster a much more ubiquitous, sophisticated and pervasive application of advertising compared to thirty- twenty years ago (Nairn and Fine, 2008). Current children's exposure to media (with the widespread diffusion of Internet, online games,

social networking sites, digital TV channels all widely accessible through an increasingly affordable range of portable digital devices) is hardly comparable to even ten years ago: not only can marketers reach children anywhere, at almost any moment, through an ever widening array of channels, but young people themselves are much more media-savvy, in the sense of being constantly connected through their gadgets, creating or customising their media contents and sharing it with their peers. Jenkins (2006:282) coined the term “convergence culture” produced by the new media ecology as the “technological, industrial, cultural and social changes in the ways media circulates within our culture”. The same author introduced the notion of “participatory media cultures” (Jenkins, 2007) to conceptualize the types of engagement possible through new media that “cannot be confined to production or consumption or watching”. In the past, parents were the instructors and guides, able to guide and control their children’s consumption of media and their acquisition of knowledge, while today parents are often left behind as far as their competence with new media technologies is concerned (Horst, 2008). As Katz (1997) noted, the internet has provided children with opportunities to escape parental and adult control, finally able to create their own autonomous communities and culture. All these changes allow for much more freedom of access, interactivity and actualised creativity on the part of children and new research is needed to grasp the full extent of these changes in influencing their way to perceive and interact with media and on their lives and identity construction.

2.4 STUDIES ON CHILDREN’S RECEPTION OF ADVERTS

Most of the studies investigating advertising effects on children’s lives or children’s reception of advertising/media have been produced from the fields of psychology, media studies and marketing with a strong preference for positivistic and quantitative approaches in order to quantify, measure /prove the existence of certain effects on children’s desires, behaviour or wellbeing or indeed to identify the exact ages at which children become able to understand the selling intent of adverts. While recognising the value of such studies for having provided an understanding of important aspects relative to advertising processing - together with identifying the potential negative consequences of advertising and media exposure - the cognitive, emotional, social and behavioural influence of advertising on children’s lives remain

controversial. Perhaps more importantly, most studies in this field are quantitative in nature, therefore providing important insights in terms of statistical effects, but hardly offering a child-centric perspective: in reading these researches there is no sense of experiencing children's perceptions of adverts or entering children's worlds, including learning more about their context. There were exceptions: a sparse number of studies that inspired the researcher either through their approaches (mostly in-depth, multi-method and qualitative in nature), theoretical frameworks or conceptualization of childhood; studies which were able to give a vivid picture of children's interactions and a clear sense of their world. As it will be seen, these studies served as "guidance" for the main direction and assumptions of this project.

One such a study is the work of Fox (1996) with children in Missouri's schools. During two years of fieldwork, Fox observed and interviewed more than 200 secondary schools students, gaining a very detailed picture of their understanding and interaction with adverts and providing evidence of the profuse effects over their buying behaviour and brands preference. The researcher immediately warned his readers about caution in generalising his findings due to the particular setting of his research: these schools are a particular type of hyper-commercialised schools in United States. Being sponsored by Channel One News means that, as a part of their financial deal, they had to show a daily dose of news and advertising to their pupils. Children in these schools are regularly exposed to advertising in between their lessons and Fox is aware of the fact that advertising effects are likely to be greatly intensified by the constant, collective exposure in a "closed" setting (for a critical appraisal of the negative consequences of Channel One broadcasting in American schools, see the interesting 2003's documentary *Captive Audience: Advertising invade the classroom*, produced by the Media Education Foundation).

What happens when kids are held captive to an endless stream of MTV-like television commercials? Armed with a tape recorder, Roy F. Fox, a language and literacy researcher, spent two years interviewing over 200 students in rural Missouri schools. Why? Because more than eight million students in 40% of America's schools, every day, watch TV commercials as part of Channel One's news broadcast. Students read commercials far more often than they read "Romeo and Juliet." These ads now constitute America's only national curriculum.

Fox 1996: cover

In his book "Harvesting Minds", Fox (1996) presented countless conversations with the students, providing fascinating accounts of how these young minds

enthusiastically *embraced* adverts, integrating adverts' messages, jingles, brands and values into their personal and social life.

Throughout this study, kids wholeheartedly embraced commercials. They enthusiastically accepted and assumed the most positive motives about commercials. (...) When kids embraced commercials, they bypassed analysis entirely.

Fox 1996:79

Another inspiring research on children reception of adverts comes from Ritson and Elliott (1999), with their ethnographic study exploring the social uses of advertising among sixth-form students. Their attention to the social context in which advertising is consumed and reproduced provides a rich account of how young people use the messages and slogans from adverts to facilitate peer interaction and group belonging. Their article starts with a critique of the way advertising has been usually studied, mainly through experimental research which looked at how individuals respond to adverts in isolation and *out of the social and cultural context* in which the individual is immersed:

At the center of the great majority of theories in advertising research stands a lonely individual, cut off from the social contexts in which he or she, you and I, actually reside. This prevalence of the solitary subject within advertising research is exemplified in the theoretical treatment of the term "context" within consumer research. (...) Clearly within an epistemological orientation that emphasizes context-free theories (...) the tendency in advertising research has been to study the viewer in abstract, acontextual settings where findings could be held up to the logical empiricist criterion of generalizability.

Ritson and Elliott 1999:260-261

Stirred by the approaches of other disciplines which draw from a reader-response theory's perspective, these authors propose to study advertising through qualitative methods able to fully take into account the social context of the viewers as an antidote to the "methodological individualism" (O'Shaughnessy, 1992:150) of advertising theory. Adopting the position of "participant as observer" (Denzin, 1978:164), the researcher used a quasi-ethnographic approach (observation alternated by impromptu, open-ended interviews) spending a period of six weeks in each of the six schools selected (in the North West of England), observing and interacting with sixth-form students (age 16-18). The students were advised that the researcher was there to gain insights about their opinions on advertising. The data – consisting of observational notes and tape-recorded interviews, was then analysed through a thematic approach. With extensive reporting *verbatim* of the conversations between

teenagers, the research captures the reader and demonstrates vividly how advertising serves a social function, which is particularly evident in the life of teenagers, as this age group is naturally a “hyper-socialised” group, where there is a strong need to fit in and to understand/participate in banter and jokes:

The sixth formers who claimed that they sat with their faces pressed against the television switching from channel to channel in search of a particular ad had not suddenly developed an unusual, irrational obsession with consumer culture or product purchase. They were merely displaying a postmodern manifestation of an age-old teenage phenomenon: the need to fit in.

Ritson and Elliott 1999:266

Their analysis evidences also how during conversations about media and adverts, individuals inevitably use their comments to position themselves relatively to others in the conversation (Buckingham, 1993:73), rendering explicit their opinions, likes and dislikes with regard to a particular topic; what Mick and Buhl (1992, p. 333) called *eisegesis* (describing how the interpretation of a particular advert can communicate an individual’s viewpoint to others).

A third study capturing the researcher’s imagination is that of Bartholomew and O’Donohoe (2003): their approach used photo-diaries, individual interviews and small friendship group discussions to seek a child’s eye view of adverts. Similarly to the previous case, the researchers suggest moving beyond experimental studies, to produce full and rich accounts of children’s worlds - inspired by reader-response and literacy studies on media - and advocate the use of qualitative approaches which consider the meaning-based nature of advertising. In agreement with Buckingham (1993, 2000) they suggest a move from a view of the child from a “lacking” perspective - the defenceless child lacking the sophistication and maturity to understand advertising intent (commonly drawn from the widely used Piaget’s theory of child development). Instead, they refer to Erikson’s (1950, 1987) psycho-social model of child development which considers the social and cultural context as a natural building ground of individual identity. In their research, Bartholomew and O’Donohoe (2003) use an “ice-breaker”, providing children (age 10-12) with a disposable camera to take picture of their bedroom and their favourite things, activities and people. They then visited their home to collect the camera, which provided an opportunity to see their informants’ surrounding and also meet their

parents. The pictures taken by the children were then used to construct interviewing through advert-elicitation, with individual interviews lasting from 30-45 minutes to one hour. The method provided the researchers with “a window on the children's everyday lives” (Bartholomew and O’Donohoe, 2003) including their “bedroom culture” (Brown et al. 1994) so crucial to their developing identity. They then arranged focus groups in small friendship groups in order to explore children's understanding of advertising regulations and intent, asking children to compile a list of favourite and disliked adverts. In another session they asked children to construct their own adverts. Their analysis identified three dimensions of power shaping children’s experiences of advertising: mastering, controlling and criticizing.

Overall, the mixing of methods of picture elicitation, interviews, group discussion and the other tasks involving participants proved particularly informative and achieved a socially-contextualised picture of children’s own views, uses and relationship with advertising.

Exploring children's understanding of advertising from their vantage point made visible their ability to play a number of roles in dealing with it. Three main roles - ad masters, ad controllers and ad critics - were identified, and within these the children played many parts. They emerged as meaning masters, style masters, and performance masters; as ad avoiders and independent consumers; and as precocious planners, tactical technicians, and reality questioners.

Bartholomew and O’Donohoe, 2003:451

The aspect of consumer socialization (children as competent and independent consumers) was already described by Buckingham (1993) in his observation of children who were actively seeking out pre-Christmas adverts to gather ideas for Christmas gifts. Earlier observational research conducted by Reid and Frazer (1980a, 1980b) showed also how children use adverts for social communication and for advancing their literacy skills (e.g. drawing others into conversations and activities, seeking help from parents or siblings to interpret more complex messages, using adverts jingles to avoid parental demands).

A final inspiring study, underpinned by similar assumptions, is the study of Lawlor and Prothero (2007):

Notwithstanding the various levels of advertising literacy that are seen to exist, its relevance to this research lies in the fact that it requires the researcher to put to one side the stimulus-organism-response (SOR)

approach which arguably has informed many of the extant studies on children and advertising. The latter have tended to ask “what does advertising do to children?” or more specifically “do children understand the advertiser’s perspective?” (...). This research takes a different approach by asking “how do children read advertising?”

Lawlor and Prothero 2007:1207

The researchers used a “child-centric” approach (Banister and Booth, 2005) in two Irish primary schools, conducting a total of seven focus group discussions and 26 individual interviews with a total of 52 boys and girls (age 7-9). The use of advert-elicitation proved useful to gather children’s opinions about the adverts, while other tasks (such as asking for liked/disliked adverts) gathered a feeling of children’s preferences and the annoying aspects of adverts from their own perspective. As in the previous examples, this study was able to provide realistic and truthful accounts of children advertising experiences in their own world and within their own frame of reference, with the analysis ultimately confirming the value of advertising as a social device, well beyond its commercial dimension.

This finding was particularly evident in the children’s unsolicited discussions on public service announcements relating to road safety and anti-smoking messages. It was also reinforced at the end of the interviews where the children were shown a number of advertisements, one of which included a McDonald’s advertisement for safety in the home. This concept of advertising assisting the viewer by offering non-commercial information in terms of personal health and safety therefore offers a new dimension to the commercially informative function

Lawlor and Prothero 2007:1211

Taken as a whole, all these studies seem to suggest that the sophistication of children in understanding and manipulating meanings from advertising, and the true meaning of advertising in their lives, are revealed more clearly when one looks at them not in isolation or in laboratory experiments, but through more naturalistic settings and within their own world of social interactions. In all the cases reported above, the approaches used were able to obtain a picture made of rich and realistic accounts of children’s experiences of adverts, proving also that they do indeed have a “considerable command of advertising content and concepts” (Bartholomew and O’Donohoe, 2003) and that they see advertising as a natural, mostly enjoyable (or easily avoidable when it is not so) and socializing part of their life.

The present research has taken direct inspiration from these studies.

2.5 ADVERTISING'S INFLUENCE ON VALUES: THE "DISTORTED MIRROR"

In answer to the concern expressed by scholars from many disciplinary fields regarding the (actual or potential) effects of aggregated advertising on both culture and people's values, Richard Pollay (1985, 1986, 1987) has investigated specifically the role of values in advertising, through a systematic content analysis of American advertisements (magazines and TV's). In one such study (1985), Pollay analysed 2,000 advertisements - randomly selected from 1900-1980's mainstream U.S. magazines - for values manifested. In order to do this, he delineated an inventory of values (through a variation of Rokeach's original list (1973) of terminal and instrumental values) and developed a methodology to reliably measure the values manifested in adverts. Surprisingly, the hierarchy of values seems to have remained quite stable over the eight decades of time considered. More importantly, the results of such pioneering work shows that advertising -far from being a simple reflection of current society and culture's values as most defenders of the industry advocate - does not reflect the current and prevalent societal values of the population, but instead consistently reinforces only certain values at the expense of others (i.e. practicality, newness, cheapness, health, sexiness, vanity, family, youth, uniqueness and wisdom among the main ones). In other words, the "mirror" hypothesis (advertising as passive reflector of societal values, playing no significant role in reinforcing certain values) is not supported. This is demonstrated by Pollay's comparison between the values found in adverts and data from population's value profile from the same year (Rokeach, 1979a) showing a negative correlation. Pollay tried also to find a correlation between the values manifested in adverts and the ones relative to other particular segments of population (i.e. middle class women, the more affluent or the more youthful), finding again no significant correlation between them. From these results, Pollay (1985) concluded that advertising could be more accurately defined as a "distorted mirror", emphasizing a short list of values (probably values deemed as more easily commercialised, dramatized, visualised, linked to products and more reliably responded to by the targeted population) which does not correspond with the list of values most dearly held by the population. Also, given the high correlation found between the frequency of values utilised in magazines and TV's adverts, the results coming from magazine data can be indicative not only of printed adverts, but all advertisements diffused by other media. At this

point Pollay (1985) started to question the effect of aggregated advertising on the values hierarchy of the population: he suggests that advertising as a pervasive, persuasive and increasingly sophisticated device which selectively reinforces the same values over a long period of time, could ultimately cause changes in the citizens values hierarchy. He effectively formulated the metaphor of advertising as a raindrop:

The effect of the aggregate totality of commercial persuasion may be consequential even when individual ads have limited power to convert behaviour, just as a flood has far more power than a rain drop.

Pollay 1985:67

This hypothesis would be supported by studies (Rockeach 1979a, 1979b, Rockeach and Grube, 1979) showing that the importance of certain values can be altered by experimental manipulations. However, Pollay (1985:70) admits that little empirical work has been done “to demonstrate the causal linkage between the character of advertising and the nature of social change”. As a future research endeavour to prove or disprove this causal linkage, he suggests a systematic comparison between values portrayed in advertising and the social values’ profile of population. Following this study Pollay wrote *The Distorted Mirror: Reflections on the Unintended Consequences of Advertising* (1986), a comprehensive review of the work of several major humanities and social science scholars regarding the social and cultural consequences of advertising (undoubtedly a thought-provoking read teeming with philosophical views, but beyond the scope of this review). The paper has been heavily criticized by Holbrook (1987), who dismisses Pollay’s arguments as purely ideological and ‘unsupported by empirical evidence’.

2.6 THE GAP: SUITABLE APPROACHES FOR NEW RESEARCH

Although the relationship between media exposure and risk behavior among youth is established at a population level, the specific psychological and social mechanisms mediating the adverse effects of media on youth remain poorly understood.

Becker 2004:533

After reviewing much literature on the topic, a pivotal question remains unanswered: is advertising a fun and enriching experience or a malicious disturbance in children’s environment? Is it fair play? From the review, what seems clear is the necessity to go beyond positivist experimental research (O’Sullivan, 2005) or media content analyses

(Carlson, 2005), by focusing more on how children actually perceive, engage and react to advertising and media messages (Ritson and Elliot, 1995, 1999) and perhaps, given that most research in the field is either quantitative or qualitative, with a triangulation (in the terms effectively described by Denzin, 1978) of data gathered through both quantitative and qualitative methods (Carlson, 2005). Otherwise, as O’Sullivan (2005) contends:

the complexity of what children are, and the role which television advertising plays in their lives, risks being lost in the quest for positive, empirical, scientific proof to back up arguments being conducted by adults on their behalf.

O’Sullivan 2005:377

More importantly, there appears to be a need for a more holistic approach, able to put media and advertising’s influences on children *into context* (Livingstone, 2007), by exploring and identifying the different factors – for instance parental mediation (Carlson and Grossbart, 1988; Yusof, Amin, Haneef and Noon, 2002), poverty (Roper and Shah, 2007), low or high IQ, media literacy (Unesco, 2008) - playing a key role in the child’s progressive acquisition of meanings, values and role models.

PART II

MEDIA, ADVERTISING AND YOUNG GIRLS

2.7 THE ALARM SURROUNDING GIRLS’ REPRESENTATION IN THE MEDIA

The last twenty years have seen the debate around girls’ representation in the media receiving growing attention, with a plethora of books, successfully targeted to parents and educators, addressing the problem of an increasing pressure on girls (as young as primary school) to fit into stereotypical and limited views of femininity.

Most of these books are written by academics (Durham, 2009; Wolf, 1999; Lamb and Brown, 2006; Douglas, 1994), journalists (Levi, 2005), writers (Walter, 2010), psychologists (Phipper, 1997), former magazine’s editors (Tebbel, 2000; Kilbourne, 1999) and cultural critics (Bordo, 1993; Mc Robbie, 1999) who base their conclusions on professional experience, solid statistics (namely the increasing incidence of eating disorders and sexually transmitted diseases among younger girls) and published academic research. The main alarm revolves around the seemingly overwhelming

presence of images and messages reinforcing to girls the importance of being sexy and beautiful:

The image of girls and girlhood that is being packaged and sold isn't pretty in pink. It is stereotypical, demeaning, limiting, and alarming. Girls are besieged by images in the media that encourage accessorizing over academics; sex appeal over sports; fashion over friendship.

Lamb and Brown 2006: cover

These messages are ubiquitous, coming from magazines, TV, movies, popular shows, invasive pop-up and banners online, social networking sites, radio, billboards, mobile phones, music videos, not to mention the pervasive celebrity culture (Fiske, 1992) impregnating most media environments and relentlessly directed to younger and younger audiences; they surround girls' every day step from kindergarten to womanhood. Other concepts and versions of femininity seem rarely emphasised, despite empirical data suggesting that this is not what children really want (Gotz, 2007, 2008). For instance, Gotz (2007, 2008) tracked gender representation in almost twenty thousand children's TV shows from 24 countries and found that gender stereotypes and hyper-sexualised female characters are still extremely prevalent within kids' television. The same research reveals that these stereotypes are far from what kids actually prefer: most girls in the study actually identified with "assertive and resourceful female leads that are in control of their lives and find their own solutions to problems" (Gotz, 2008).

2.8 ADVERTISING EFFECTS ON BODY IMAGE

A growing number of experimental studies from the field of psychology suggest that advertising and the mass media may play an important part in creating and reinforcing a preoccupation with physical attractiveness starting from a very young age (Donht and Tiggemann, 2006; Martin and Gentry, 1997; Martin and Kennedy, 1993; Myers and Biocca, 1992; Richins, 1991; Tiggerman and Pennington, 1990; Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson and Kelly 1986; Downs and Harrison, 1985) together with raising expectations regarding the acceptable level of physical attractiveness (Richins, 1991; Wilson, 1985; Peterson, 1987; Tan, 1979), what is commonly referred to as body image disturbances.

Body image involves our perception, imagination, emotions, and physical sensations of and about our bodies. It's not static, but ever-changing; sensitive to changes in mood, environment, and physical experience. It is not based on fact. It is psychological in nature, and much more influenced by self-esteem than by actual physical attractiveness as judged by others. It is not inborn, but learned. This learning occurs in the family and among peers, but these only reinforce what is learned and expected culturally.

Lightstone 1991:1

The evidence indicates that the imagery surrounding fatness and slimness on television and through other media has become part of the cultural background and it is particularly influential in determining children's beliefs regarding acceptable and admirable body sizes (Grogan, 2005; Field et al., 1999).

Perhaps one of the most important studies evidencing the effect of media on girls' body image comes from the work of Becker (2004) on adolescent ethnic Fijian girls in rural Fiji. This region of the island provided one of the best case studies in history, as it was completely television-free. The researcher collected data from 30 secondary school girls through semi-structured interviews in 1998, 3 years after the television was introduced to the region. Before television, traditional Fijian culture used to emphasise a robust body shape and notions of identity based on family and community, while three years after the introduction of television broadcasting, girls' eating behaviours and attitudes about their bodies had dramatically shifted with increased rates of disordered eating.

A previously described cross-sectional, two wave study demonstrates a dramatic increase in indicators of disorder eating during the 3 years following the introduction of broadcast television with western programming to this community, a period which was also of rapid social and economic transition. Narrative data were analyzed for content relating to response to television and mechanisms that mediate self and body image (...) Study respondents indicated (...) the beginnings of weight and body shape preoccupation, purging behavior to control weight, and body disparagement.

Becker 2004:534

But at what age do girls start criticising their bodies? In earlier investigations, Tiggerman and Pennington (1990) reported evidence that girls as young as nine years old report body dissatisfaction. In their work with Australian 15 years old adolescents and 9 years old children, their respondents consistently favoured thinner body silhouettes as their ideal body shapes (thinner than their perceived body size), suggesting that body dissatisfaction is the normal experience of girls in Western culture from age 9 upwards. Chernin (1983) noted that pre-adolescent girls usually

replicate the conversation of older women, expressing routine judgments over their own appearance, body dissatisfaction and anxiety over weight gain.

More recent studies have provided evidence of a much earlier preference for thinner body shapes in children. Davidson, Thill, and Lash (2002), in their study examining children's body shape preferences in the first and fifth grade, found that children as young as six years old showed already a preference for a thinner body type. Children's desire for thinness from age 4-6 has been similarly documented by a growing number of studies (Ambrosi-Randic, 2000; Davison, Markey, and Birch, 2000; Dohnt and Tiggemann, 2004, 2005; Poudevigne, O'Connor, Laing, Wilson, Modlesky, and Lewis, 2003). Crucially also, research suggests that beauty ideals are established in childhood to then stay with individuals until adulthood (Cash and Pruzinsky, 2004). Dohnt and Tiggemann (2006) investigated the influence of peer and media in the development of body satisfaction and self-esteem, completing interviews with a sample of 97 girls, 5-8 years of age (the first interview one year apart from the second). Their analysis concluded that:

the watching of appearance- focused television programs was temporally antecedent to appearance satisfaction. (...) girls' desire for thinness was found to temporally precede low self-esteem. Thus, as early as school entry, girls appear to already live in a culture in which peers and the media transmit the thin ideal in a way that negatively influences the development of body image and self-esteem.

Dohnt and Tiggemann 2006:929

The findings from Hill and Pallin (1998) in their quantitative study with 8-years old (n=176) children support the view that young girls are drawn to weight control to improve their self-worth. The same study found also a strong correlation between self-endorsed dieting and negative self-perception. Thompson and Stice (2001) concluded that internalization of the thin ideal is a causal risk factor in body image and eating disturbances, suggesting that, crucially, further research should be looking at the *contextual factors* promoting internalization:

(...) self-endorsed dieting was more strongly correlated with negative self-perception. Work conducted independently in our labs over the past decade has included scale development, correlational studies, prospective risk-factor studies, randomized experiments, and randomized prevention trials. Findings collectively suggest that internalization is a causal risk factor for body-image and eating disturbances, and that it appears to operate in conjunction with other established risk factors for these outcomes, including dieting and negative affect. Future research is needed to examine the specific familial, peer, and media influences that promote internalization.

Thompson and Stice, 2001:181

Aiming to produce a more contingent view of women's advertising experiences, Hogg and Fragou (2003) investigated how the different facets of the social comparison process effectively impact women's consumption of advertising. Their research on young women (n=48, between 18-24 years old) draws on social comparison theory (Rosemberg, 1979) and the notion of 'active social comparer' (Wood, 1989) which recognises the active role of individuals in selecting their own "comparison other", with the objectives of exploring

how young women use advertisements in their pursuit of goals for social comparison, and whether or not their self-perception, body imagery and level of self-esteem varied depending upon the goal for social comparison in the consumption of advertising imagery

Hogg and Fragou 2003:757

Three different aspects – self-evaluation, self-enhancement and self-improvement – were considered. The authors carefully selected ten printed adverts from popular upmarket glossy magazines which were then sorted into three sets of advertisings with the help of four independent judges: each set of adverts had to be ideally linked to one of the three goals of social comparison. Following Martin and Gentry (1997), the goals and motives were manipulated by giving instructions to the participants regarding the way they should view each set of advertisements. Fieldwork consisted of six focus groups (with eight participants in each group) where "women were encouraged to talk about their reaction to the stimuli and about how they compared themselves to the models in the advertisements" (Hogg and Fragou, 2003: 757). The results from this study indicate that the goal of self-improvement – where the models are the same age and so can be considered as "comparison other" by the participants – is the one actually generating the most negative effects in terms of lowering of self-esteem and body image. Conversely, results for the other two goals were more encouraging: in the self-evaluative goal for instance, looking at the images "did not seem to have any long-term effect on the self-feelings of these women"(Hogg and Fraug, 2003:759); results which appear in line with previous findings - see Martin and Kennedy, (1994:370) with female preadolescents and adolescent or Hogg, Bruce and Hough (1999:462) studies of older women - indicating that girls/women tend to discount the idealized beauty images of advertising models on the basis of being unrealistic so that the model is not considered a "comparison other" (in the final chapter, this aspect will be further discussed in relation to girls' responses in this study). Within the self-enhancement aspect (for this goal, participants were shown

images of advertising portraying non-idealised beauty) self-perceptions of physical attractiveness actually increased after exposure to advertisement. Self-improvement on the other hand, seemed to be the goal with most negative repercussions (as opposed to previous theory by Wood (1989) and Martin and Gentry (1997):

When the social comparison goal was self-improvement, then self-perceptions of physical attractiveness seemed to drop after exposure to idealized advertising stimuli. These young adult women made upward comparisons in order to improve themselves, and these social comparisons were often viewed as threatening to their self-esteem, rather than as inspiring.

Hogg and Fragou 2003: 760

Another body of research has focused on the origins and consequences of self-objectification, with some documenting the phenomenon in adolescent and preadolescent girls (McConnell, 2001; Slater and Tiggemann, 2002). Well before adolescence and still in primary school, young girls learn to see themselves as objects to be looked at - what McKinley and Hide (1996) defined as OBC, *Objectified Body Consciousness*. Fredrickson and Roberts (1998)'s experiment with college students shows how powerful self-objectification is in negatively disrupting the thinking process, thus affecting intellectual and academic abilities. The experiment consisted in asking two groups of students (who were alone in a dressing room) to evaluate either a swimsuit or a sweater. While waiting for 10 minutes wearing the garment, the participants were asked to complete a math test. The group of girls wearing the swimsuit performed significantly worse than the other group, while no difference was found for the two groups of men performing the same experiment. This study provides valid evidence of how constant attention to physical appearance effectively depletes the resources available for other mental and physical activities. Other experiments have shown similar levels of intellectual impairment occurring among African-American, Latina and Asian-American young women (Hebl et al., 2004), and not limited to mathematics but extending to other cognitive domains, such as logical reasoning and spatial skills (Gapinski et al., 2003). To assess effects on physical performance, another study (Van den Berg et al., 2007) involved white and African-American girls (ages 10 to 17 years) who were asked to throw a softball as hard as they could against a gymnasium wall. The results from the experiment show that a higher level of girls' self-objectification and concern over own body' appearance

predicted poorer motor performance on the softball throw. Thus, the study indicates that self-objectification limits also the form and effectiveness of girls' physical movements.

Not only is self-objectification likely to affect mental and physical performance, but it is also an increasingly common phenomenon: Ringrose (2010) in her exploration of British teenage girls' online behaviour on social networking sites found that self-objectification appears somewhat normalised among teens, with girls often posting sexually explicit pictures of themselves along with self-regulating messages containing sexist and demeaning language. The evidence regarding negative consequences associated with self-objectification is overall exhaustive and pointing in the same direction, as a substantial number of studies in the field of health/eating disorders and psychology (Abramson and Valene, 1991; Durkin and Paxton, 2002; Harrison, 2000; Hofschire and Greenberg, 2001; Mills, Polivy, Herman and Tiggemann, 2002; Stice, Schupak-Neuberg, Shaw and Stein, 1994; Thomsen, Weber and Brown, 2002; Ward, 2004) found that self-objectification is associated with negative mental-health problems in adolescent girls, such as depression, eating disorders and lower self-esteem.

What is less clear, in this abundant body of correlational studies, is the direction of causality regarding the consumption of sexualized /objectifying media content: for instance if a study finds that adolescent girls who objectify their bodies more have much lower self-esteem and access more sexualized content, the findings could be interpreted as: a) the lowering of self-esteem arising in adolescence increases girls' vulnerability with regard to cultural messages promising popularity and social acceptance through the attainment of an idealised "sexy" look and as a result they are likely to self-select and access more sexualised media content; or b) the drop in self-esteem is the result of how receptive girls are to this type of cultural messages and girls that watch more will suffer more effects. In both cases, the link between the consumption of media material that objectifies the female body and the lowering of self-esteem is recognised, but the direction of causality is difficult to ascertain. Another dimension lacking in these studies is the attention to the context in which the respondents are immersed, which could have allowed the detection of contextual factors facilitating (reinforcing) or impeding (buffering) media effects.

2.9 THE SEXUALISATION DEBATE

The past ten years have seen the debate around the so-called “sexualisation” of children in the Western world being addressed through government commissioning of specific reports (i.e. APA, 2007; Australian Parliament Report, 2008; Papadopulous, 2010) with the task of examining the theoretical, psychological and clinical implications and evidence on the so called *sexualisation* of girls by media and other cultural messages and their impact on girls.

In study after study, findings have indicated that women more often than men are portrayed in a sexual manner (e.g., dressed in revealing clothing, with bodily postures or facial expressions that imply sexual readiness) and are objectified (e.g., used as a decorative object, or as body parts rather than a whole person). In addition, a narrow (and unrealistic) standard of physical beauty is heavily emphasized. These are the models of femininity presented for young girls to study and emulate.

APA, 2007:2

In the UK, within its strategy to tackle Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG), the UK Home Office commissioned a review into the “sexualisation” of young people (Papadopulous, 2010). Key recommendations include media and digital literacy classes, school campaigns promoting positive role models and challenging gender stereotyping, media awards that promote diverse, aspirational , non-sexualised portrayals of children, introduction of a system of rating symbols for photographs to show the extent to which they have been altered (Photoshop retouches) and Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education as statutory in the school’s curriculum (the program includes teaching about advertising, body image and violence against women/girls). However, many academics have criticised the report as being “one-sided and intellectually suspect” (Smith, 2010):

I had no great hopes for Linda Papadopoulos’ Sexualisation of Young People Review and it didn’t disappoint. (...) Purposed for government and emerging from within a particular strand of governmentality, there was never any doubt that the report would be one-sided and intellectually suspect. There is little in its litany of complaints and accusations about media effects that audience researchers have not read before - but as with the two similar reports published in the US (APA Report) and Australia (Parliament Report), Papadopoulos’ review is likely to become a standard citation for future work into the production and consumption of media with sexual themes.

Smith 2010:175

Similarly, the APA report (2007) has been criticised by some feminist scholars for being one-sided and for reproducing anxieties typical of the “danger” side (as opposed to the “pleasure” side; see for instance *the missing discourse of girls’ sexual desire* in Tolman, 1994:1) of the sexual debate (see Lerum and Dworki, 2009):

We address these concerns (...) by critiquing five components of the APA report: (a) an over-determined, negative impact of sexualization on girls and women; (b) a negation of a large and important feminist literature on media, consumer culture, gender, and the body; (c) a lack of integration with earlier pro-desire feminist psychology scholarship; (d) a conflation of objectification, sexual objectification, and sexualization; (e) an under-emphasis on girls' and women's sexual agency and resistance; and (f) an under-emphasis on sexual health and rights.

Lerum and Dworkin 2009:253

Drawing from similar assumptions, some experts refer to the children sexualisation's alarm as a moral panic:

The public debate around 'sexualisation' is often based in anxiety and sometimes simplistic binaries of innocence versus sexuality. But the complexities of girls' lives deserve to be given space.

Holford, Renold and Ringrose, 2011:1

Other scholars have focused on reporting the positive changes happening with regard to the emancipation of girls. For instance, Harvard's psychologist Dan Kindlon (2006:7) has focused on exposing how the new generation of adolescent girls are in fact "reaping the full benefits of the women's movement" and maturing with a new sense of possibility and psychological emancipation. While it is not within the object of this study to speculate on the merit of both sides of this debate, it is recognised that often the ideological and moral assumptions about sexuality and girls' sexual agency weigh heavily on the conclusions and that there is a urgent necessity to look at young girls' interactions with advertising and media *through their very eyes* and within their life worlds.

2.10 TWEENAGE GIRLS LEARNING FEMININITY

Consciously or unconsciously, both girls and boys learn how to *do femininity* or *do masculinity* through their constant exposure to, engagement with, and consumption of media

Phoenix 1997: 3

"Tweenage" (roughly defined between age 8 and 11) is recognised as a crucial time for young people's gender performance - for making sense of masculinities and femininities (Davison and Frank, 2006; Harter, 1999). This explains the focus of the current project on girls of this age cohort.

Harvard's psychologist Kindlon (2006) effectively reminds how the phase of girls' puberty has been historically characterised as a process of *gender intensification*:

Girlhood was over. There was a new set of rules and increased pressure on girls to conform to phallogocentric cultural expectations of what it is to be a woman, pressures which were thought to lead girls to adopt personality characteristics deemed appropriate for their gender. This process was called *gender intensification*. The aspects of gender that get intensified are, from the feminist point of view, mostly unhealthy. Girls are supposed to become self-sacrificing, sexy, and submissive.

Kindlon 2006:77

Recent research exploring the link among media, schooling, and young people's embodiment issues, seems to suggest that girls internalise meanings centred on slenderness, limited muscularity, and lack of forceful actions, skilfulness and athleticism (Azzarito, 2009), but undoubtedly more research is needed in this area in order to fully comprehend the complex interlink of factors at play in this process.

One of the most fascinating studies on "becoming girls" is the recent research by Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz (2009) from the field of sociology, where the authors investigate the shifting and often contradictory discursive practices involved in young girls' construction of their (gendered) identities. The research drawn from a post-modern view of subjective identity as multiple and socially constructed, and the notion of discourses as complex and unstable - simultaneously instruments and effects of power (Foucault 1990:100). Their findings demonstrate how the embodiment of girlhood is a "cultural production", rather than a natural one (Currie et al., 2009). The vivid accounts of girls' lives reported in their captivating book show how young girls are constantly negotiating ideals of femininity in an on-going struggle to define themselves - their motto ultimately being "be yourself" - among a myriad of contrasting media messages reinforcing on one hand the "girl power" culture and, on the other hand, restraining rules about "conventional femininity" (Currie et al., 2009) in terms of both behaviour and appearance expected, and the adherence to increasingly unrealistic beauty standards. A process also adeptly described by Hancock (1989) in her book "The Girl Within":

Female roles impinge; stereotypes take over. A young girl projecting herself into the future can't help but feel caught by contradictory imperatives (...) Self-confidence yields to self-consciousness as a girl judges herself as others judge her - against an impossible feminine ideal. To match that ideal, she must stash away a great many parts of herself. She gives up being childlike in order to be ladylike. She loses her self-possession; she loses her sense of self as subject; she senses that she is now "other" and becomes object in a male world.

Hancock 1989: 22

2.11 MAIN IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH DIRECTION

As shown by the literature reviewed in Part I and II, the area of advertising to children is a complex and multi-disciplinary area of study, by its nature intersecting with other important areas of enquiry, such as gender and identity construction, media effects on self-esteem, behaviour and body image, just to name a few. The multidisciplinary field is often characterised by contrasting assumptions and/or research methodologies which make difficult the construction of a unitary picture or coming to definite conclusions about advertising effects. Nevertheless, with regard to a productive direction for future enquiries (and for the present study), a few agreed positions can be established on the basis of the literature reviewed in this thesis:

- the necessity to look at how children actually interact with adverts in various environments and social settings;
- an appreciation of the insights that naturalistic settings and descriptive accounts can bring (as opposed to experiments or correlational studies);
- the need to consider the wider multi-media environment in which children live and the self-selective nature of modern media consumption;
- an emphasis on the active role of children in constructing meanings from media content, along with their capacity as media content creators;
- the need for more child-centric research;
- overall, a call for more holistic and context-rich approaches, able to offer a more complete picture of children's lives and as such allowing a contextualisation of children's advertising experiences.

PART III

RESEARCH PREMISES

2.12 INTRODUCTION

The complexity of media effects in the context of children's worlds cut across many theories, constructs, overlapping themes and approaches/methodologies which have been applied and explored by different scholars and within different disciplines to explain media influences on adult and children lives. The variety of perspectives and approaches confronted through an interdisciplinary literature review can be so

startling, that it becomes paramount to clearly articulate the main premises and assumptions behind the present study.

This chapter will present and critically explore a number of key theoretical concepts and perspectives which collectively constitute the research frame of reference and theoretical framework underpinning the present exploration.

2.13 ADVERTISING AS A SOURCE OF MEANING

One of the main premises of this research sees advertising as an important cultural and social product, a meaning-transfer conduit through which particular meanings can be taken from the culturally constituted world and invested into products, in line with the meaning-based model proposed by cultural anthropologist McCracken (1987).

Unlike the traditional information-processing model so widely used in experimental consumer research, this model formulates a view of the advertising-consumer interaction which takes into account the cultural context in which the consumer lives and the individual cultural project in which one is involved.

The starting point of this model posits that the consumer is an individual in a cultural context constantly engaged in a cultural project. This project is a never ending process by which the individual constructs his ideas of the self, the family, status, nation and the world; it entails choosing and selecting alternative key notions from a range of sources (family, peers, institutions, media and advertising) and its ultimate objective is the construction of an harmonious life: a consistent set of visions by which organise one's existence. For this reason new projects are undertaken and old ones abandoned as the individual progresses through his/her life (ultimately due to aging and changes in the world around, calling for new concepts to be enacted, refined and integrated into one's life). Giddens (1991: 53) talks about the "reflexive project of the self" in similar terms, as each individual's identity is thoughtfully constructed and revised through constant adjustments based on experience and interaction with social and media environment.

During the 1980s, consumer behaviour research has directed renewed attention to the subjective and emotional aspects of consumption (Belk 1988; Hirschman and

Holbrook, 1982; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) showing how consumer goods are essential to the life projects as an important source of meanings with which we construct our lives (see for instance the studies of Myers, 1985; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988 on special and favourite possessions; on the concept of product meaning see Friedman, 1986; Hirschman 1980; McCracken, 1986; Fournier, 1991). However, products do not inherently carry meanings: it is mainly through advertising that meanings are transferred from the culturally constituted world to the products. Thus, to use Mc Cracken words, advertising is where culture does its “die-casting” by offering modern culture

an area of play, experimentation and innovation with which to fashion new cultural meanings and reorganise and reassign old ones

McCracken, 1987:123

Also important is to note that, although advertising contributes through this process to the circulation of meanings, it is ultimately the consumer who - in a perpetual search for meanings in order to construct new versions of the self, the family, the community - completes the meaning transfer process.

Modern consumers...are searching out meaning there. They are looking for something they can use in their construction of new versions of the self, of the family, of a community. They are looking for meaning (...), concepts of what it is to be a man or a woman, concepts of what it is to be middle aged, concepts of what it is to be a parent, concept of what a child is and what a child is becoming, concepts of what it is to be a member of a community and a country

McCracken, 1987:124

The consumer is therefore the "final agent of transference" (McCracken, 1987): within this perspective, the cultural context in which the consumer is immersed and the cultural project in which the consumer is engaged are two factors playing a deciding role. They determine *how* the individual will interpret, react, construct, use and manipulate meanings from adverts.

Ritson & Elliott (1999) further expanded McCracken's model by including the *advertising rituals* and *metaphor* (see appendix 20 for more details and a visual representation of their model), in doing so emphasising the use of advertising as a cultural product in itself, completely disjointed from the product/service advertised.

Although some information-based models include a generic "social influences" box to suggest some cultural influences on the individual's processing of adverts, the nature of the relationship is seldom specified, thus failing to explore or define its exact role. There is also no mention of the individual life projects: this complexity is completely ignored (Mick and Buhl, 1992). For this reason the information-based model cannot explain how the individual mind participates in the manufacturing of meanings started by advertising. Similarly, it cannot explain what the individual makes of these meanings and how these meanings affect the individual's life projects; therefore their role in the construction of self and extended self (Belk, 1988) remains obscure.

We must look at advertising more thoroughly through the consumer's eyes.

Mick and Buhl 1992:317

Similarly, Mick and Buhl (1992) advocate a meaning-based orientation stressing the subjectivity of advertising experiences as influenced and contained within the boundaries of consumer's history (past, current and projected) and socio-cultural milieu. They noted that most meaning-based advertising studies are interpretative analyses of adverts without actual consumer data and that their research (1992) was the first attempt to develop a theoretical model with empirical consumers' data, gathered through phenomenological interviewing of three brothers (using brothers as respondents was intentional, as it ensured that they had the same socio-economic and family/values background).

The *life-story method* used by Mick and Buhl in their project was able to contextualise and elucidate respondents' advertising experiences in the light of their history, identity themes (Holland, 1973) and life projects. Despite the three brothers sharing the same socio-cultural background, the study provides a remarkably clear picture of how the same adverts are interpreted very differently by each brother, carrying different meanings depending on the subject's individual history (past experiences and transformational or epiphany life events which in turn create particular identity themes) and current projects.

Their proposed meaning-based model of advertising experiences is shown in Figure 2.4. The diagram shows how the meaning of adverts is constructed by each consumer

on the basis of their personal history and life world (i.e. past and current life theme and projects): these constitute the “lens” through which consumers make sense of an advert, therefore attributing certain meanings to it (ad connotation) to then re-circulating these meanings (lived experience of adverts) through expressed desires, behaviours and in their identity construction.

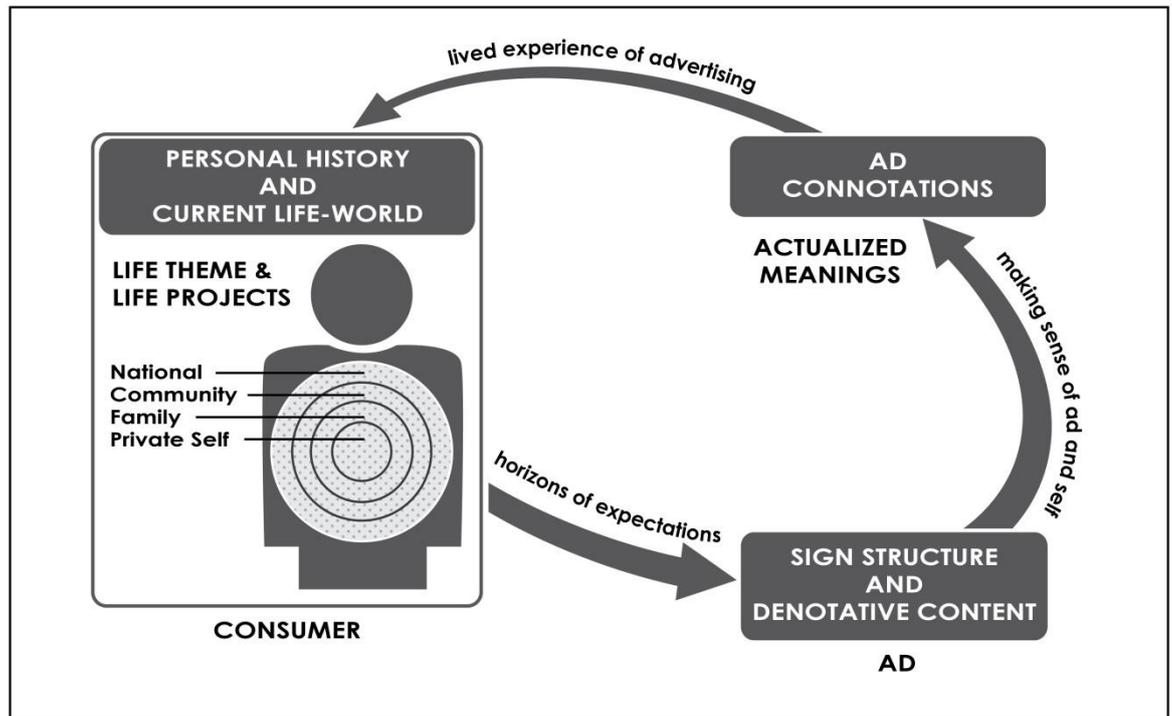


Figure 2.4 - A Meaning-based Model of Advertising Consumption

Reproduced from original -Source: Mick, D.G. & Buhl, C. (1992) Journal of Consumer Research, 19(Dec)

2.14 MEDIA & ADVERTISING: A SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP

Mass media vehicles sort reality into meaningful social categories that provide a frame of reference from which consumers interpret their daily lives

Hirschman and Thompson 1997:44

Prior research has shown (Faber and O'Guinn 1988; McCracken 1987, 1988; Nichter and Nichter 1991; Scott 1993a,b) the importance of media as a source of values, ideas and symbols from where individuals create a frame of reference to interpret their own experiences.

Thus, one key premise of this research is to consider the wider media consumption as a frame of reference to better understand the interpretation that young girls will derive from advertising and their use of the meanings derived from adverts in the construction of their own gender identity.

Following the notion of advertising as a source of meaning and of consumers as active agents searching for meaning (McCracken, 1987), it has been found that the meaning they will derive from advertisements will depend on their particular perspective - identity themes and life projects as represented in Mick and Buhl's model (1992a) - experiences and frames of reference.

Parts of these frames of reference are the media surrounding the individual, with its many incessant messages and images about the good life, the celebrities' world, conveying its ideals and its aesthetic standards.

Hirschman and Thompson argue that

such interpretive frames of reference are essential to understanding what consumers do with advertisements

Hirschman and Thompson, 1997:41

With this in mind they criticise the custom of much advertising research to study advertising in isolation from news and entertainment media and they stress the importance of studying media and advertising as closely related elements, intertwined in a symbiotic relationship in which

media enhance the effectiveness of some advertising by portraying certain product/brand assortments as more desirable than others and, more generally, by providing subtle yet pervasive instructions on how to be a consumer.

Hirschman and Thompson, 1997:43

2.15 MAIN MEDIA EFFECT THEORIES

Over the past century, the question of how mass media and media culture affect the audience's thinking and behavior has been investigated by various disciplines (e.g. media studies, communication theory, psychology and sociology). As seen in the

previous discussion about advertising's effects, the question of media effects is still hotly debated today; the evidence produced so far by research has been often contradictory so that there is still not indisputable evidence regarding how different audiences will react to a particular media message (Livingstone, 2007). In addition, the scientific debate is regularly clouded by ideological arguments with some audience theory calling for more restrictions and others for less regulation.

In this section, the aim is to briefly delineate the main theories about media effects on audiences (so-called "audience theories"), each theory representing a different way to deconstruct the relationship between audience and message.

2.15.1 The Hypodermic Needle Model

This theory from the 1920s – also called *Magic Bullet* theory - was advanced in the very early stages of mass media development, when radio and cinema were less than two decades old; thus, it was the first attempt to explicate how audiences were influenced by mass media communication.

The term itself "hypodermic needle" conveys a very basic and unidirectional model, suggesting that audiences passively receive the information transmitted by media, without attempting to manipulate or challenge the data. One of the main assumptions of this theory is that messages from media are simply "absorbed" into the mass consciousness of the audience, without being mediated by their individual intellect, experiences or beliefs (DeFleur, 1989).

The assumption implies that the frame of reference of each individual does not play any role in the processing of media content and that media messages can easily manipulate and shape audience's behavior (Berger, 1995). The theory was not based on empirical evidence and was particularly popular during the First World War and its aftermath (e.g. governments propaganda), although it is still applied in many instance of moral panics today, particularly in news articles (e.g. children "sexualisation").

2.15.2 *The Two-Step Flow Model*

As the mass media became more widespread and an essential element in the life of societies, the Hypodermic model quickly proved too basic for media researchers: a more sophisticated model was needed to effectively explain the relationship between audience and message. Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) came up with a model which explains the process of information flowing from the media to the mass audience, not as a direct process, but as mediated by opinion leaders. The model was based on the results obtained from a study of Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1944) investigating voters' decision-making processes during a presidential election campaign, with results published in a famous paper called *The People's Choice*. The findings suggested that media information did not flow directly from the message to the mass audience /voters, but was filtered through opinion leaders. In other words, the voters mediated the information received from the media with the opinions and thoughts of the leaders, whose expressed opinions and ideas became the primary influencers in the voters' decision.

The model clearly reduces the power of the media as a direct influencer of people's behaviour by attributing more power to the social dynamics existing between opinion leaders and followers. The model is sometimes referred to as *limited effect paradigm* and it can be an effective model to explain how people are influenced by leaders in making complex decisions and why certain media campaigns fail to change audience's attitudes and behavior.

The two-step flow theory was further expanded into a *multi-step flow theory* of mass communication or *diffusion of innovation theory* (Rogers, 1995). However, critics of both these models (Deutschmann and Danielson, 1960; Miller and Reese, 1982; Lin, 1971; Muis, 1983; Robinson, 1976; Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971), have provided ample evidence of several instances where media information flows directly to mass audience without being mediated by opinion leaders.

2.15.3 *Uses & Gratifications Model*

Rather than being concerned with the effect of media consumption, the Uses and Gratifications theory (Blumler and Katz, 1974) focuses on what people do with the

media and what are their different motivations for using/accessing a certain media. The theory is positivistic in nature and the audience is seen as active, in the sense of selecting and choosing their content and media program. Blumler and Katz (1974) postulated that individuals might choose and use a media message for the following purposes:

- Diversion - escape from everyday problems and routine.
- Personal Relationships - using the media for emotional and other interaction (e.g. substituting soap operas for family life)
- Personal Identity - finding yourself reflected in texts, learning behaviour and values from texts
- Surveillance - Information which could be useful for living (e.g. weather reports, financial news, holiday bargains)

With more research and new media formats entering the scene, the list of Uses and Gratifications has been further extended throughout the years. For example in a recent study about instant messaging and online chats Leung (2001) identified the following Uses and Gratifications:

- | | |
|------------------|----------------|
| 1. Relaxation | 5. Affection |
| 2. Entertainment | 6. Sociability |
| 3. Fashion | 7. Escape |
| 4. Inclusion | |

Uses & Gratifications theory provides a useful framework to understand what people do with the media, how they select a particular media and why. It is still used widely today by researchers, especially to investigate the motivations of users with new media formats.

2.15.4 Reception Theory

Stuart Hall (1980) extended the concept of an active audience still further, suggesting that it is all about the viewers/readers' perception and that this perception will

depend on their individual cultural background (e.g. gender, class, age, ethnicity) and life experiences. Through emphasising the reader's reception of a media text, reception theory places the viewer in the position of "decoding" the media message.

This theory represents an ideal fit for the aim of this study (analysing how young girls from a similar background and age perceive and respond to advertising messages) and will therefore provide the theoretical basis of understanding of our findings. For this reason, it will be discussed in more detail in the analysis and discussion chapters.

2.15.5 Cultivation theory

Cultivation theory (Gerbner and Gross, 1976) is a social theory which focused on the long-term effects of television. It originated from a major research project called "Cultural Indicators", consisting of a series of large-scale projects aiming to identify and track the cultivated effects of TV on viewers. The project was founded on the concern that violent TV programming would negatively affect American viewers.

Television is a medium of the socialization of most people into standardized roles and behaviors. Its function is in a word, "enculturation"

Gerbner, Gross, Morgan and Signorielli 1986:175

The theory's primary proposition is that

the more time people spend "living" in the television world, the more likely they are to believe social reality portrayed on television.

Cohen and Weimann 2000:99

The researchers concluded that a "cultivation effect" occurs after prolonged, long-term exposure to television. Such an effect would create misperceptions in viewers regarding the world around them (e.g. a viewer watching violent programming regularly over a number of years would develop the belief that the world is more dangerous or violent than it actually is, perhaps developing aggressive attitudes in response to this belief). As a positivistic theory, it assumes the existence of objective reality. To this day, cultivation theory remains one of the most popular theories in mass communication research (Bryant and Miron, 2004). One major application of

this theory is in longitudinal studies of children exposure to television genres with violent content (see for example the extensive review by Anderson et. al, 2003).

2.15.6 *Phenomenistic or Reinforcement Theory*

Based on reviewing past research in the field of media effects, Klapper (1957; 1960) formulated a *phenomenistic* theory, where he argued that “media rarely have any

direct effects and are relatively powerless when compared with other social and psychological factors such as social status, group membership, strongly held attitudes, education and so forth” (Baran and Davis, 2014).

The theory is commonly referred to as *reinforcement theory*, as one of its main assertions is that the primary influence of media is to reinforce – rather than change - existing attitudes and behaviours.

Instead of disrupting society and creating unexpected social change, media generally serve as agents of the status quo, giving people more reasons to go on believing and acting as they already do.

Baran and Davis 2014:164

The main generalisations of Klapper’s theory - as explained by Klapper himself in his first book about the theory (1957:457) - are:

1. Mass communication ordinarily does not serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effects, but rather functions among and through a nexus of mediating factors and influences.
2. These mediating factors are such that they typically render mass communication a contributory agent, but not as the sole cause in a process of reinforcing the existing conditions (media are more likely to reinforce than to change).
3. When - in certain exceptional cases - mass communication does function in the service of change , one of the two following conditions is likely to exist:
 - the mediating factors will be found to be inoperative and the effect of the media will be found to be direct;or

- the mediating factors, which normally favour reinforcement, will be found to be impelling toward change.

Klapper did not exclude that media could have direct effects on audience, admitting that in “certain residual situations” mass communication could produce direct effects, or “directly and of itself to serve certain psychophysical functions” (1957: 458).

The main criticism about the theory argues that its postulates are outdated due to the more pervasive nature of media today as compared to the 1960s (with people’s exposure to media considerably increased) and for the concomitant decreased importance of the “mediating factors/influences” as the church, the family and other institutions, such as school or government, began to lose their prominent position in people's socialization and therefore in limiting media effects (Baran and Davis, 2014). Empirical Research so far seems to confirm Klapper’s generalisations in that the role of media in society is primarily to reinforce existing social trends and only rarely initiate social change.

2.16 UNDERSTANDING GENDER

When we divide the world into two groups, males and females, we tend to consider all males similar, all females similar, and the two categories of “males” and “females” very different from each other. In real life, the characteristics of women and men tend to overlap. Unfortunately, however, gender polarization often creates an artificial gap between women and men and gender roles that are very difficult to change in time.

Crespi 2004: 1

Due to the focus of the present study on femininity, it is appropriate to review some of the main concepts about gender and to clarify this study’s main assumptions about how gender is constructed and developed. To begin with, the section will introduce a few definitions to clarify the main terminology commonly associated with gender, such as roles, identity, expression and typing.

- *Gender roles* are social expectations about behaviours considered appropriate for people of a given sex in a particular society (e.g. gendered patterns of dress and appearance, division of labour). Kessler and Kenna (1978: 11) recognised that “obviously, gender roles in our society are treated as ascribed roles” in the

sense that individuals of a given sex will be automatically assigned to the gender role ascribed to their sex (either female or male).

- *Gender identity* (Money, 1972) refers to an individual's self-identification with a particular sex. Normatively, it is expected that the gender identity matches the sex assigned at birth, but this is not always the case (e.g. transgender identities).
- *Gender expression* refers to the degree to which an individual's behaviour, dress, appearance, occupation and so forth conform to the prevailing gender roles. Thus, a person may be assigned female at birth, having typical female genitalia, and identify as female, but have a non-conforming masculine gender expression (e.g. so-called *tomboy*). Kessler and Kenna (1978:10), along with many other scholars, use the term *gender-role identity*.
- *Gender typing* is the process by which a child becomes aware of their gender and thus behaves accordingly by adopting values and attributes of members of the sex that they identify as their own (Shaffer, 2009)

Theories of gender role development – which address how children learn the appropriate behaviour associated with their gender – vary in their emphasis on biological versus environmental factors (e.g. essentialist theories versus social constructivist ones). Traditional gender theories made the assumption that dichotomous roles are a natural expression of the dichotomous nature of gender (Kessler and Kenna, 1978). In traditional gender roles masculinity is defined as being independent, assertive and aggressive (Eagly and Steffen, 1984), while femininity is defined as being nurturing sensitive and emotional (Slavkin and Stright, 2000; Bem, 1981).

The natural attitude encompasses a series of "un-questionable" axioms about gender, including the beliefs that there are two and only two genders; gender is invariant; genitals are the essential signs of gender; the male/female dichotomy is natural; being masculine or feminine is natural and not a matter of choice; all individuals can (and must) be classified as masculine or feminine - any deviation from such a classification being either a joke or a pathology. According to Garfinkel, the beliefs constituting the natural attitude are

"incorrigible" in that they are held with such conviction that it is nearly impossible to challenge their validity (1967:122-28).

Hawkesworth 1997:649

The table below summarises the traditional conceptualization of gender traits which translate in the cultural and social expectations placed on men and women:

MALE	FEMALE
Independent	Dependent
Rational	Irrational
Rough	Gentle
Brave	Cowardly
Insensitive	Sensitive
Aggressive	Placid
Competitive	Co-operative
Physical	Emotional
Disobedient	Obedient
Tough-skinned	Sensitive
Active	Passive
Assertive	Unassertive
Strong	Weak
Self-Confident	Self-critical
Uncaring	Caring
Noisy	Quiet
Rigid	Flexible

Table 2.1 – Traditional gender traits often associated with male/female
 Compiled from various sources (PlannedParenthood.org, Psychology.org, Gender.org)

The assumption of gender as dichotomy - also referred to as *gender binarism* (Card, 1994; Garber, 1997; Rosenblum, 2000) - has been repeatedly re-examined and challenged in the last thirty years by an increasing amount of gender research (particularly feminist, queer and transgender research; see for instance, Schnarch, 1992). As a result, a growing number of scholars have also come to criticise the division of humans into the two distinct categories of men and women (Fausto-Sterling 1993), viewing this construct both as problematic and as a self-fulfilling prophecy. There is also a growing body of empirical research, particularly in gender

and education (Davies, 1984; Davies 1989a, 1989b, 1993; Francis and Skelton, 2001), exploring gender as multiple and relational category (Renold, 2005).

Many gender theorists now recognize the plurality and diversity of masculinities and femininities *and* the pushes and pulls of the gender dualism which binds together sex/gender categories (e.g. masculinity with male, femininity with female) – thus how masculinity and femininity are co-constructed in opposition to each other.

Renold, 2005:3

Davies (1989b) argues that one part of the problem resides in the language and the bipolarity of words explaining gender:

Although biologist have now found that genetic, hormonal and genital sex are not necessarily linked, there is still a lot of popular science around that not only links them together, but further links brain structure and behaviour in the everyday world. One reason it has been easy for scientists to make such linkages is that our linguistic structure encourages it. We only have bipolar words, such as “boy” and “girl”, “male” and “female”, “man” and “woman”, to encompass genetic, hormonal, genital and social difference.(...) The language suggests two discrete categories, into which individual can be made to fit, but simple inspection of these categories shows that they are a conceptual shorthand rather than an adequate way of dividing people into genuine bipolar camps. The words are bipolar, the people are not.

Davies, 1989b:8/9

2.17 GENDER AS A PERFORMANCE

The ‘doing gender’ framework has become perhaps the most common perspective in contemporary sociological research. (...) Qualitative research has provided a great deal of evidence that women and men do gender, but do so dramatically differently across time, space, ethnicity, and social institution.

Risman and Davis 2013:735

During the eighties, the growing influence of symbolic interactionist perspective in research and in the analysis of gender started to emerge. West and Zimmerman in their 1987’s article conceptualise gender as something that people *do*, bringing the focus to the ways in which behaviours are prescribed, restrained, and monitored during social interaction. Although differing ontologically, their “doing gender” perspective is similar in its deconstructionist intent (Risman and Davis, 2013) to one of the most popular feminist theorizing in this direction: the *performativity of gender* proposed by feminist philosopher Judith Butler (1990). Reminiscent of the famous quote of Simone De Beauvoir (1974) “One is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman”, Butler (1989, 1990) developed the idea of gender as a performance, something that you *do*, rather than something that you *have*:

Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity, instituted through a stylized repetition of acts. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.

Butler, 1989:519

The “*performativity of gender*” for Butler has to do with *repetition of stylised acts*, very often the repetition of oppressive and painful gender norms (Butler, 1990). Similarly, Bartky (1991) - citing Foucault - writes:

We are born male or female, but not masculine or feminine. Femininity is an artifice, an achievement, ‘a mode of enacting and reenacting received gender norms, which surface as so many styles of the flesh’.

Bartky 1991:65

In this study, the concept of performativity is considered helpful as a way of thinking ‘outside the box’, challenging common hegemonic assumptions about gender to properly understand girls’ ongoing struggle and multiple negotiations in “doing gender” and becoming gendered, particularly in relation to media and adverts consumption.

2.18 SOCIAL COGNITIVE THEORY OF GENDER DEVELOPMENT

How does a child learn gender? This is a question that many theories have tried to address. While a comprehensive review of gender theories would be too lengthy and beyond the scope of this study, considering the focus of the present investigation on young girls’ femininity, the overall assumptions about gender development should be at least clarified.

On this regard, the postulates of Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) and Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) are useful to the perspective adopted within this study. *Social learning theory* (Bandura, 1977) posits that behaviour is learned from the environment through a process of observational learning: children constantly observe the behaviour of people around them and model their behaviour accordingly. Following this, a process of reinforcement (either positive or negative) takes place: those behaviours which are rewarded from the significant adults will be repeated (positive reinforcement), while the unrewarded or criticised behaviours will probably be abandoned (negative reinforcement). According to social learning theory, gender-identities and gender-role preferences develop through *direct tuition* (in the

earlier years of a child development, parents encourage gender-appropriate activities and discourage cross-gender ones) and *observational learning* (in later years, children develop their gender-typed characteristics from various same-sex models they encounter in society, particularly peers, teachers and the media).

Social learning theory was later expanded and became known as *Social Cognitive Theory* (Bandura, 1986), which offers a more holistic overview of human cognition in the context of social learning with a more active role of the child in the development of their gender.

Social cognitive theory emphasises the concept of *triadic reciprocity* between human behaviour, environmental factors and personal factors (namely cognitive, affective and biological ones), with *reciprocal determinism* said to be governing the causal relations between all these factors. This later work of Bandura (1986) recognises the central role of cognitive processes in human adaptation and change: that is, the capacity of individuals to self-organise, self-reflect and self-regulate, encapsulated by Bandura with the term *self-efficacy*. The theory clearly assumes an *agentic* perspective that views individuals as proactive, rather than simply as reactive organisms shaped by environmental forces or driven by inner impulses. In a later article, Bussey and Bandura (1999) applied the principles of SCT to propose a *Social cognitive theory of gender development and differentiation*.

The theory integrates psychological and sociostructural determinants within a unified conceptual structure. In this theoretical perspective, gender conceptions and roles are the product of a broad network of social influences operating interdependently in a variety of societal subsystems. Human evolution provides bodily structures and biological potentialities that permit a range of possibilities rather than dictate a fixed type of gender differentiation. People contribute to their self-development and bring about social changes that define and structure gender relationships through their agentic actions within the interrelated systems of influence.

Bussey and Bandura 1999:676

The holistic and agentic nature of the theory makes it an effective theoretical basis to comprehend how gender is developed. In other words, in this study the assumption is that there are innate (that is, biological/genetic) and environmental (that is, social/cultural) factors which influence how gender is going to develop in each individual case (what Bussey and Bandura effectively called “interrelated systems of influence”). However, ultimately each individual, through his/her experiences,

agentic actions and cognitive capabilities, actively shapes and develops his/her own gender. Our assumptions on the dynamics of development of gender role identity are effectively summarised in the words of Lippa (2002:143) – one of the most eminent scholars in the field of gender - in that “nature and nurture constitute the inseparable threads that weave together to form the complex tapestry known as gender”.

2.19 SUMMARY

To briefly summarise the main premises discussed in Part III of this chapter, figure 2.3 shows the key theories and concepts underpinning the study:

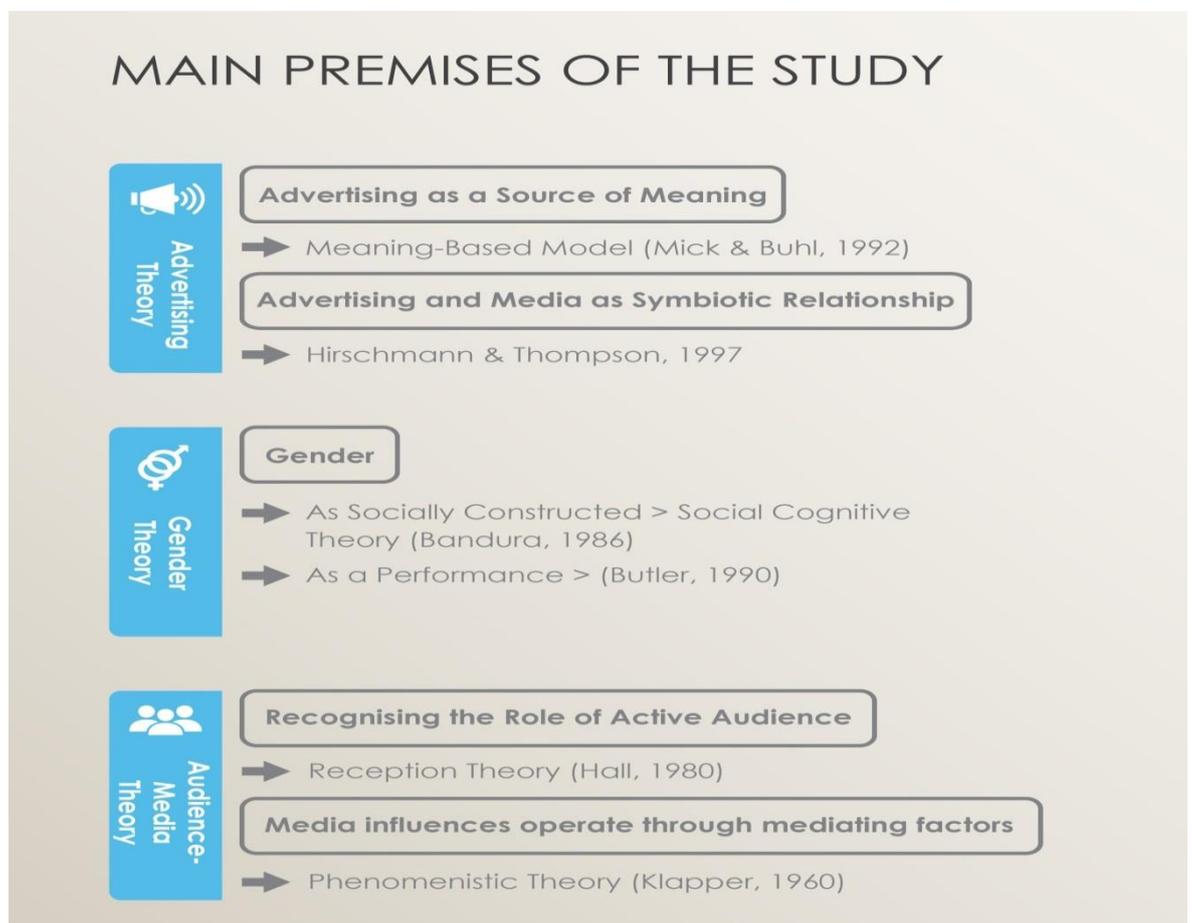


Figure 2.5 – Diagram of Research Premises

As seen in the review of the literature, several scholars have called for more empirical research to understand the contribution that advertising makes to the individual’s life project (e.g. Mick and Buhl, 1992), identity construction (e.g. McCracken 1987;

Livingstone, 2008, 2009), lifestyle and values (e.g. Pollay and Belk, 1985; Pollay 1986). In the light of these conceptual and theoretical premises underpinning the study, the aim is to perform a context-rich exploration into young girls' advertising experiences, in order to reveal differences in their perceptions, feelings and thoughts in response to the same adverts and to analyse these differences *in context*, in the light of girls' personality, media consumption, relationships with family and peers, gender typing, socio-economic background and life projects.

Chapter 3 – Research Design and Methodology

Thesis Structure

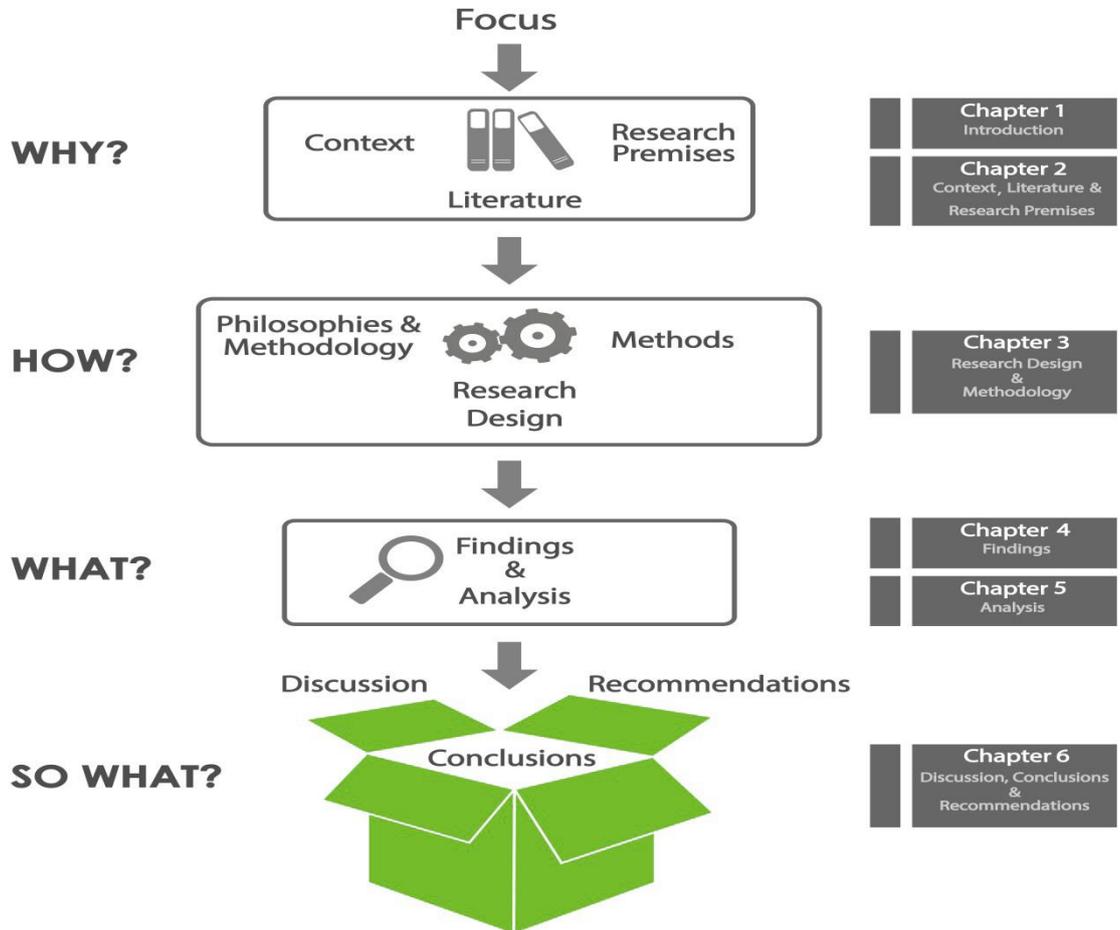


Figure 3.1- Thesis Structure

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will review and explain in detail the research methodology and design.

The chapter starts with a thorough discussion and justification of the choice of methodologies and methods applied to this study in the light of its main objectives and past researches in the field, followed by a description of the main instruments and tools employed, along with sampling strategy and modalities of data collection.

This section of the thesis also presents the main issues confronted with regard to the ethics of researching young people’s lives and experiences, continuing with a description and justification of the multiple methods of analysis/triangulation applied to the data. The delicate issue of researcher’s role throughout the research process will be also discussed, with a section dedicated to how self-reflexivity has been managed during the different stages. A final section offers reflections on the methodological limitations of the project.

Figure 3.2 below presents an overview of how the chapter has been structured:



Figure 3.2 – Chapter Structure

3.2 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study is to explore how young girls (age 8-11) construct meanings from current advertising messages, with close attention to their context and specific reference to ideals of femininity presented through these adverts and girls own embodiment of femininity.

The main challenge is to put young girls’ advertising experiences **into context** (taking into account their overall personality and embodiment of femininity, together with their cultural and social context) to find out how they interpret and interact with (i.e.

enacting or rejecting) different portrayals of femininity in current advertising messages. This is done in order to reach a deeper understanding of the processes generated by girls' exposure to/consumption of advertising within a framework that emphasises the interplay of underlying factors (i.e. family, relationships, interests, attitudes, media habits, parental mediation) in their life and personality.

The thesis addresses the following research questions:

- 1) How do young girls perceive and interpret ideals of femininity portrayed in current advertising images?
- 2) In which ways can advertising generate negative feelings in young girls (i.e. frustration, inadequacy, self-loathing)?
- 3) Are there specific factors enabling young girls to critically respond to the stereotyped representations of girlhood promoted by most marketers?

Figure 3.3 summarises the objectives and overarching aim of the study:

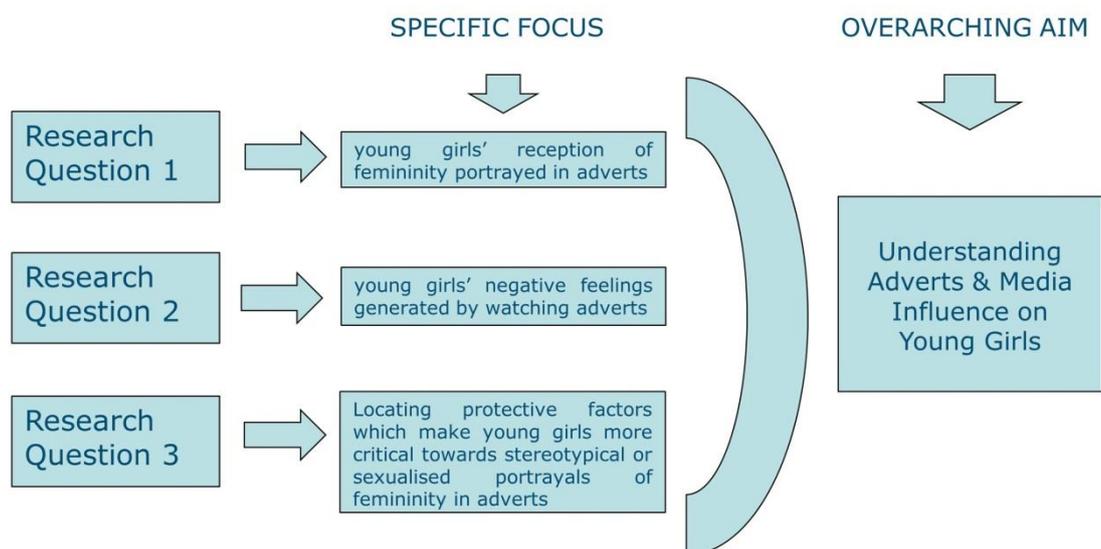


Figure 3.3 - Thesis aim and objectives

3.3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As already discussed in Chapter 2, one main premise of this research sees advertising as an important cultural and social product, a meaning-transfer conduit through which particular meanings can be taken from the culturally constituted world and invested into products, in line with the meaning-based model of advertising consumption proposed by cultural anthropologist Grant McCracken (1987) and further specified by Mick and Buhl (1992) in their in-depth phenomenological study of advertising experiences (see Figure 3.4 below). As noted earlier, advertising contributes by circulating meanings, but it is ultimately the consumer who - in a continuous search for meanings in order to construct new versions of the self, the family, the community - completes the meaning transfer process.

The consumer is therefore the "final agent of transference" (McCracken, 1987): within this perspective, the cultural context in which the consumer is immersed and the cultural project in which the consumer is engaged are two factors playing a deciding role: they constituted the "lens" through which any advert is viewed; they determine *how* the individual will interpret, respond, construct and use meanings from adverts.

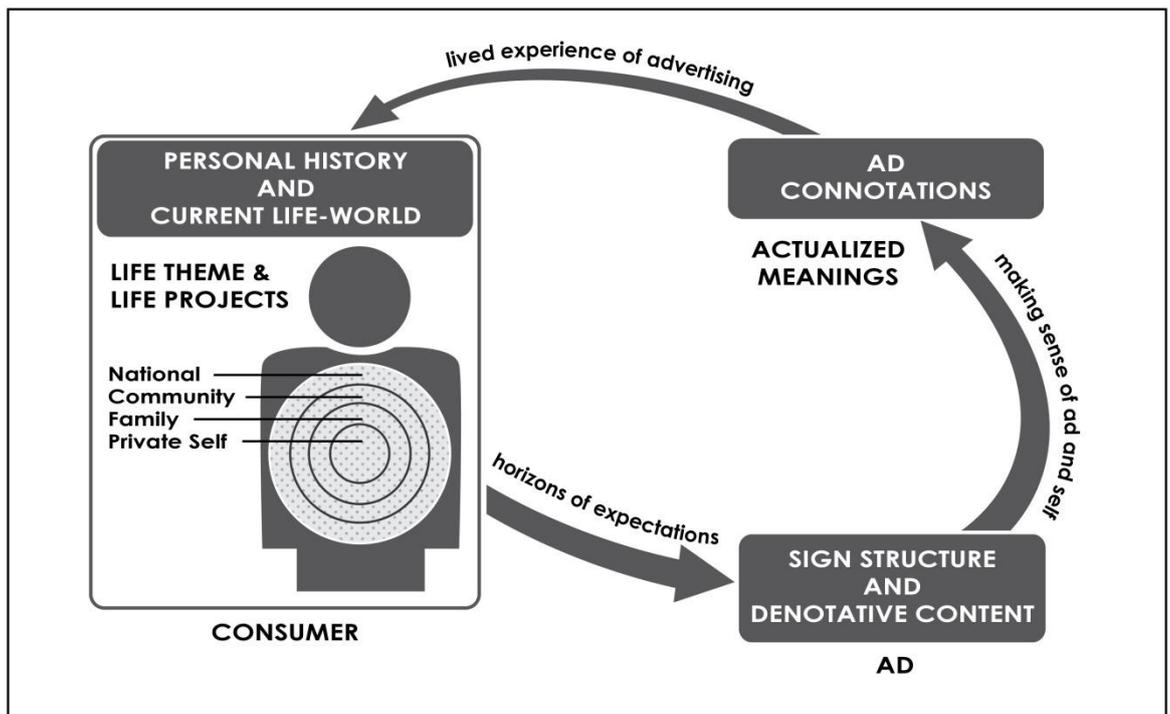


Figure 3.4 – A Meaning Based Model of Advertising Experiences
Reproduced from Original. Source: Mick, D.G. and Buhl, C. (1992) Vol.19

The meaning of any advert is thus intimately dependent on the interpretation of the reader, similarly to *reader-response criticism* in literacy theory. These ideas are clearly reminiscent of some of the media effects' theories already discussed in previous chapters (see section 2.15), particularly those emphasizing the active role of audience in selecting and constructing meaning from media content, such as Klapper's *reinforcement theory* (1960), Erving Goffman's *framing theory* (1974) and Stuart Hall's *reception theory* (1980).

It was George Herbert Mead (1934) – regarded as one of the founders of social psychology – who gave the first impetus to the notion of society as locus of sophisticated mutual conditioning, where humans' actions are based on the symbolic meanings assigned to a given situation – as opposed to the more simplistic stimulus-response conditioning advanced by behaviorists. Mead's teachings were formally conceptualised after his death by his student, Herbert Blumer, as *symbolic interactionism* (1969).

For symbolic interactionism the objective world has no reality for humans; only subjectively-defined objects have meanings and these meanings are not entities imposed on humans and learned by habituation (Herman and Reynolds, 1994). Humans are meaning-makers, not passive receivers. Meanings are constantly altered through a creative process, where individuals interact with these meanings and between themselves to form a perpetually flowing stock of shared symbols, which ultimately constitute human society as inherently social product. It is precisely the ability to create, perceive and manipulate 'symbols' that enables humans to do what animals cannot. Symbolic interactionism (along with phenomenology, hermeneutics and post-structuralism) laid the intellectual foundations for social constructivism, as a theory of knowledge in sociology and communication theory focusing on the development of jointly constructed understandings of the world between individuals. The epistemological stance of this study is thus a social constructivist one (Berger and Luckmann, 1966), which assumes that understanding, significance, and meaning are co-created in collaboration with other human beings. Knowledge is seen as a social product of a specifically situated society and therefore to properly study and understand the social product at hand it is necessary to contextualise the given description of reality.

With this premise in mind, the present study is attempting to look at adverts through the eyes of pre-adolescent girls using peer-to-peer interviewing with elicitation of views via adverts. The main analysis will then try to link participants' responses (that is, their lived experience of adverts, their way of experiencing and constructing meaning from adverts, including thoughts and feelings) with context-rich data acquired through the other stages (questionnaire, projective exercises, group sessions and follow-up interview) in order to contextualise young girls' advertising experiences.

The meaning-based approach emphasises the subjectivity of advertising experiences as influenced and contained within the boundaries of the consumer's history (past, current and projected) and socio-cultural milieu. Surprisingly, most meaning-based advertising studies are interpretative analyses of adverts without any tangible consumer data; Mick and Bull's research (1992) was the first attempt to incorporate a theoretical model with actual consumers' data (gathered through phenomenological interviewing of three brothers) and this study builds on a similar perspective.

Another premise of this research is to consider wider media consumption as a frame of reference to better understand the interpretation that young girls give to advertising and their use of the meanings derived from adverts in the construction of their own gender performances. In this regard, Hirschman and Thompson (1997) criticise the custom of much advertising research to study advertising in isolation from news and entertainment media; they conversely stress the importance of studying media and advertising as closely related elements, very much intertwined in a symbiotic relationship.

Figure 3.5 shows the conceptual framework underpinning the study, whereby the viewers' "lens" - and therefore the meaning and value of their advertising' experiences (or media's experiences in general) - are supposedly influenced by various "contextual factors", namely the individual's innate temperament, family interactions and values (i.e. living with parents, influence of older /younger siblings, parental mediation), the wider media consumption (i.e. TV, Internet, videogames, social networking, magazines), social interactions (i.e. influences from peers, school and community) and life themes/projects. For this reason the present study argues for a careful consideration of these contextual factors, so that the participants'

advertising experiences explored within the study can be placed into context, thus generating important clues on:

- the meaning and value of these “sample-experiences” in relation to girls’ gender identity construction;
- the relative interplay and influence (positive or negative; protective or aggravating) of the contextual factors on participants’
 - critical abilities in reading adverts and media messages on femininity
 - actual embodiment of femininity (stereotyped/counter-stereotyped).

The circular mode indicates the inter-relationship between adverts and viewers, as the meaning attributed to adverts – conveying values, desires, concepts and aspirations - become part of individuals’ life projects and identity construction, as well as being fed back into the shared culture.

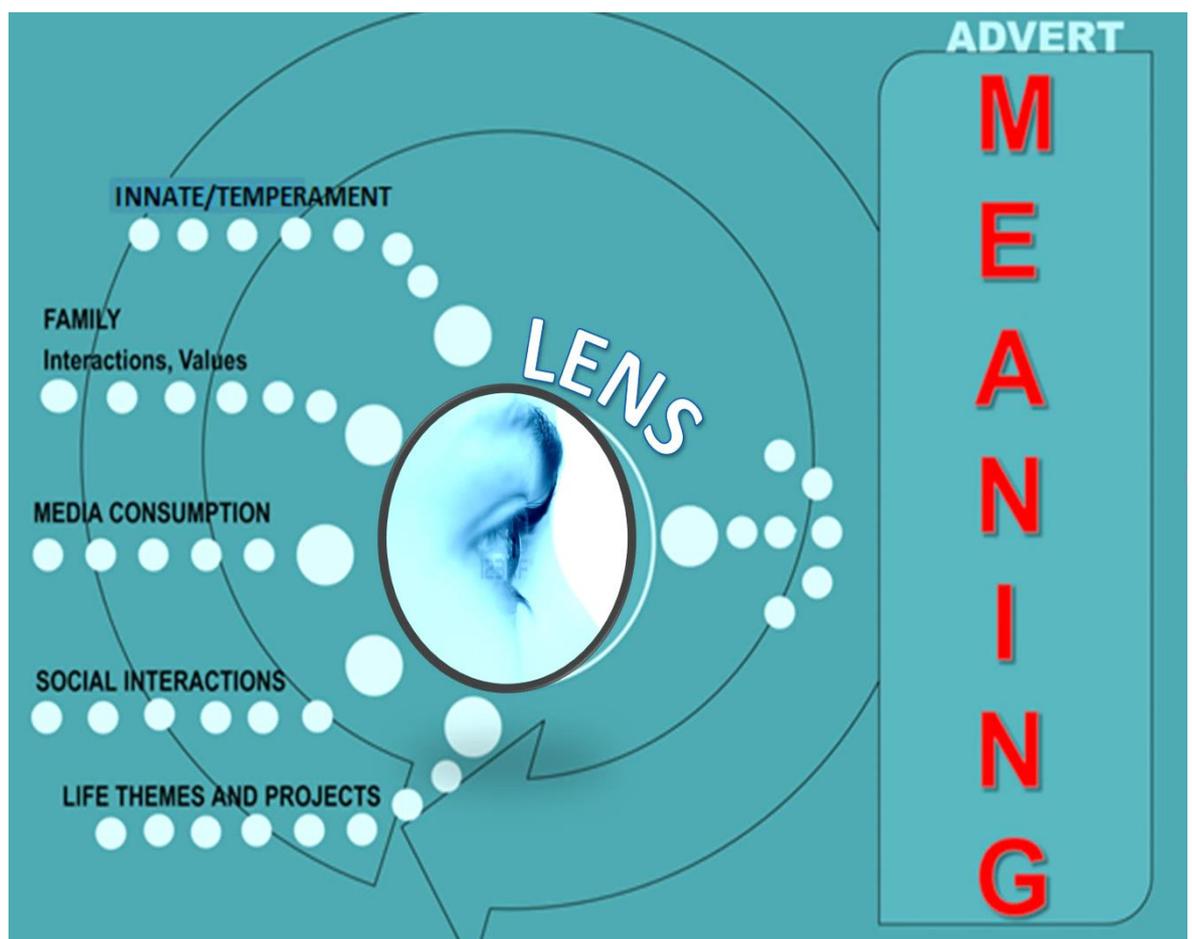


Figure 3.5 – Conceptual Framework

3.4 PHILOSOPHY AND METHODOLOGY

We cannot step aside and be “objective” about what we see and write. Our worlds flow from our own personal experiences, culture, history, and backgrounds...Ultimately, our writing is an interpretation by us of events, people, and activities, and it is only our interpretation. (...) Within this perspective, our writing can only be seen as a discourse, one with tentative conclusions, and one that will be constantly changing and evolving.

Creswell 2007:277

In social science as in the natural sciences it is never possible to completely escape one's interpretive framework as a researcher.

Grover, 2004:82

The present research clearly stands within an interpretative orientation, although the appropriateness of positivist claims in the context of social science is not here totally rejected, at least in the case of large sample studies. The view underpinning this study is towards a reconciliation of the “quant versus qual” argument (Bryman, 1988; Howe, 1998): that is, quantitative and qualitative should not be regarded as a dichotomy or totally separate (Guba, 1987, 1990), competing and incompatible paradigms (see Kuhn, 1970 on the ‘incommensurability of competing paradigms’); instead they should be seen as equally able to make major contributions to advancing knowledge, contributions which are different in nature but can well complement each other (Silverman, 2000).

It is felt that to apply the same rules imported and valid for the natural sciences to the social sciences seems at times an inconsistent exercise, particularly in the case of in depth, qualitative, small sample research. It is understood that the two worlds – natural and social - interrelate, but they are systems governed by different laws: while in the natural science there are physical phenomenon which strictly behave within the universal rules of physics, in the social science the rules are much more fluid and blurred, with different rules in each distinct cultural system or cultural community. Applying the discourse of objectivity to large sample studies of a population still makes sense, as researchers study and describe these systems in statistical terms and look to define relations between variables in terms of probability levels and effect size (Ellis, 2010). However, it should be remembered that these

measures still tell only part of the story and have their own limitations (Silverman, 2000), starting from the inherent subjectivity of any method's design and construction of research tools.

Moreover, while recognising the value of quantitative-based approaches and methods of research in testing theories and finding correlation between variables, it is still a dimension that does not address sufficiently the subjective experiences of participants, it does not provide enough details as to the *how* and *why* of a certain phenomenon: to this end, qualitative research comes to fill the gap.

Ontologically speaking, the researcher has always found the philosophical position of a *critical realist* (Bhaskar, 1998) as the most suitable to her *forma mentis*.

A critical realist believes that there is a reality independent of our thinking about it that science can study. Positivists were also realists. The difference is that the post-positivist critical realist recognizes that all observation is fallible and has error and that all theory is revisable. In other words, the critical realist is critical of our ability to know reality with certainty. Where the positivist believed that the goal of science was to uncover the truth (...) critical realist believes that the goal of science is to hold steadfastly to the goal of getting it right about reality, even though we can never achieve that goal! Because all measurement is fallible, the post-positivist emphasizes the importance of multiple measures and observations, each of which may possess different types of error, and the need to use triangulation across these multiple errorful sources to try to get a better bead on what's happening in reality

Trochim 2006:1

Summing up, it can be said that critical realism combines realist ontology with an interpretive epistemology (Archer, 1995): there is a world out there to be discovered and described, but researchers can never produce a completely objective picture of this world, as their data are always collected and analysed - at least in part - through researchers' own design of methods /tools and their interpretive framework.

Regarding issues of compatibility between social constructivism (see p. 58) and critical realism, Bhaskar (1993:186) has questioned suggestions that there is a conflict between realism and constructionism, followed by a number of realist thinkers who have equally argued that realism is compatible with moderate forms of social constructionism (see Joseph and Roberts, 2004:5; Mingers, 1999; Sayer, 2000:62-63; Sewell, 1992:12; Sismondo, 1996:2; Smith, 2010:119-122). A convincing argument is presented in Elder-Vass (2012)'s paper, which considers the case of Michel Foucault's discourse and how a realist causal account of its influence might be developed:

(...) social constructionism's potential is best realised by separating it from the anti-realist baggage it has often been expected to carry, and linking it instead to an explicitly realist ontology of the social world: the philosophy of critical realism (...) Although both realists and anti-realists have sometimes seen critical realism as being in conflict with social constructionism, there are good reasons for thinking that this is not the case. Or, to be more precise, there are good reasons to think that it is not in conflict with some varieties of constructionism. On the contrary, I will argue, a realist constructionism can be a more coherent and potentially a more valuable constructionism.

Elder-Vass 2012:9

There is, however, an enormous span of available perspectives and approaches within the realm of critical realism, and the challenge was to identify a "goodness of fit" between the research questions and the methodology and methods applied to the project, concurrently trying to satisfy questions on how to make a study of "consciousness" - insofar as analysing participants' perception and interpretation of adverts - fit into rigorous scientific criteria.

3.4.1 Objectivity and Authenticity

Two main questions were addressed during the planning stage and the subsequent choice of epistemology, methodology and research design are reflective of how these issues have been confronted:

- 1) How acceptable would the "objectivity" approach sound in a small sample, in-depth, qualitative study where the focus is on feelings, thoughts and personal stories (or can a study of consciousness be rigorously scientific)? In other words, how issues of validity and rigour are to be addressed in this context?
- 2) How is a researcher to open up the world she is exploring, making participants (the term "respondents" is deliberately avoided here) feel able to fully co-create meanings during the interview and research process?

After considering several alternative epistemologies and methodologies (Goulding, 2005; Creswell, 2007; Mason, 2002; Guba and Lincoln, 1982), the researcher realised that there were two main philosophies suitable to underpinning the study: *phenomenology* – due to the ability of this perspective to get at the *meaning* of human experience and as a tradition which prioritises the need to value the subjective

understandings of participants in the light of their life world – and *social constructivism* – which consider the importance of social interaction and the social context in the co-creation of subjective meanings. Regarding the compatibility of these two theoretical approaches, an effective answer about the “false dichotomy” between the two is provided by the words of Weiss (2011) - a scholar who, in her extensive work on the philosophy of the body/embodiment, regularly combines the insights of social constructionism with phenomenology:

There is a surprisingly pervasive misunderstanding about phenomenology that circulates among many poststructuralist continental thinkers and that is articulated by Pierre Bourdieu in *The Logic of Practice*. The claim is that phenomenology is a subjectivist philosophy, primarily concerned with the Husserlian project of providing an eidetic (essential) description of consciousness. Hence, the story goes, phenomenology is an ahistorical, apolitical, solipsistic approach that has nothing important to say regarding contemporary social and political issues. If one accepts this view, then there definitely seems to be a tension between social constructionism and phenomenology. Yet, this is a totally false dichotomy. Phenomenology, as Husserl first articulated it, is committed to describing (some aspect of) lived experience as accurately, comprehensively, and rigorously as possible without appealing to prejudices or presuppositions about that experience. Insofar as our understandings of the world, of others, and of ourselves both effect and are affected by our ongoing social interactions, it would be remiss of any phenomenology worthy of the name to ignore this constitutive aspect of lived experience. Indeed, if one artificially isolated a phenomenon from its social and political context, denying the influence of the latter, one would get a distorted view of the phenomenon as it actually presents itself in everyday life.

Weiss 2011:4-5

Traditional phenomenology has focused on subjective, practical, and social conditions of experience, addressing the meaning things have in our experience, particularly,

the significance of objects, events, tools, the flow of time, the self, and others, as these things arise and are experienced in our life-world (...)

Smith 2008:1

While phenomenological approaches can vary greatly in their applications across disciplines, the attention to the participants’ personal perceptions and to their lifeworld is one of the main components:

The approach is phenomenological in that it involves detailed examination of the participant’s lifeworld; it attempts to explore personal experience and is concerned with an individual’s personal perception or account of an object or event, as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself.

Smith and Osborn 2007:53

The focus is thus invariably on participants' subjective experience and on their life world, as the person's situation and their being with others (Finlay, 2002).

Phenomenology, as the study of consciousness, provides an opportunity to gain understanding of experiences through empathy, "coming to understand as the other" (Bentz and Shapiro, 1998). It is a

method of learning about another person by listening to their descriptions of what their subjective world is like for them, together with an attempt to understand this in their own terms as fully as possible, free of our preconceptions and interferences

Cohen and Daniels 2001:1

But the question still remained of how to practically achieve this "free of our preconceptions and interferences" stance: in other words, the practical duelling between subjectivity and objectivity was still impinging heavily in the researcher's mind.

An interesting point of reflection is offered by Velmans (2007:715), who argues against dualist or reductionist assumptions about "subjectivity versus objectivity and the privacy of experience versus the public nature of scientific observations" as both positions would not allow an adequate understanding of how studies of consciousness actually proceed. His re-examination of the conditions of intra-subjectivity and inter-subjective repeatability in the context of psychology studies suggest that a "reflexive understanding of these relationships should support a form of *critical phenomenology*" (my emphasis):

To the extent that observed entities and events are subject to similar perceptual and cognitive processing in different human beings, it is also reasonable to assume a degree of commonality in the way such things are experienced. Although each experience remains private, it may be a private experience that others share.

Velmans 2007:716

The passages above suggest that rather than adopting a dualist view (which does not resolve the "subjectivity versus objectivity" problem) one should re-think the relation between subjectivity and inter-subjectivity:

Each (private) observation or experience is necessarily subjective, in that it is always the observation or experience of a given observer, viewed and described from his or her individual perspective. However, once that experience is shared with another observer it can become inter-subjective. That is, through the sharing of a similar experience, subjective views and descriptions of that experience potentially converge, enabling inter-subjective agreement about what has been experienced.

Velmans, 2007:717

To conclude, the same author proposes to re-conceptualise “scientific objectivity” in more nuanced terms, by agreeing that science can be *objective* in the sense of reaching inter-subjective agreement about a particular phenomenon and where descriptions of observations or experiences are “dispassionate, accurate and truthful” and where scientific methods follow well specified and repeatable procedures. On the other hand, science can never be “objective” in the sense of being *observer-free* (Velmans, 2007). Similar positions are found in Husserl - one of the recognised founders of phenomenology as a philosophy of science (Fricke and Follesdal, 2012). Within this view, the present research strives for what Haraway (1988) so effectively called *situated knowledge*, whereby the aim is to provide faithful accounts of the real world and the researcher must actively acknowledge and make explicit his/her own perspective and positioning within the world (through a clear articulation of the philosophical underpinning of the study and self-reflexivity).

Focusing on the research questions, it was thought that to gain understanding of how advertising is experienced and meaning constructed from adverts would entail observing and talking with the girls during the actual “consumption” of the advert. To limit the scope of the enquiry it was decided to focus only on a certain kind of adverts: those which portray, or indirectly convey as a meaning, a particular version of femininity, to see how participants respond to these different representations of girlhood and how factors in their life and personality interplay with their responses. Guided through the broad assumptions of phenomenology, the research design stumbles upon a third element to be clarified: is the style of enquiry responding satisfactorily to the need for *authentic* research with children? Authentic research is that research able to give power and voice to child participants and which provides insight into their subjective worlds. As Grover (2004) suggested, exploring the interpretive framework of those being studied has *authenticity* since the research participants are by definition experts of their own perceptions, thoughts, feelings, their life and their needs. However, authenticity is not something automatically

achieved by simply interviewing and interacting with the participants. Issues of trust, power imbalance, respect and reciprocity can easily spoil the authenticity of children's reports. Contamination is another risk (saying the "right thing" is at times very tempting for children, especially in more "formal" type of environment, such in the case of being at school with a stranger researcher). Careful consideration had therefore to be given to the personal relational approach used by the researcher with participants during fieldwork: a feminist view was found much in line with the need of authenticity mentioned earlier, and it is believed the following excerpt from Sarantakos (2004) - citing Cook and Fonow (1990) - summarises the preferred approach for this enquiry:

Feminist researchers reject the artificial separation of the researcher and the researched, as well as the implied notion that such a separation produces more valid results. (...) Instead, they advocate a dialectic relationship between subject and object of research, a form of participatory research and a *conscious partiality*, that is, the 'researcher's understanding of the connectedness to the experiences of the research subject through partial identification

Sarantakos 1990:68

3.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

Considering the interpretative epistemological orientation of this study, the research approach is bound to assume multiple views of social realities, while the critical realist ontology advocates the application of multiple methods and triangulation (Denzin, 1989) between different data sources and methods of analysis. These considerations led to the choice of combining multiple (quantitative and qualitative) methods of data gathering/ analysis to answer the research questions, commonly referred to as mixed methods research.

We defined mixed-methods designs as those that include at least one quantitative method (designed to collect numbers) and one qualitative method (designed to collect words), where neither type of method is inherently linked to any particular inquiry paradigm

Greene et al. 1989:256

As Johnson et al. (2005:19) advise, this type of research "should be used when the contingencies suggest that it is likely to provide superior answers to a research question or set of research questions", while most experts on the subject (Tashakkori and Teddlie ,2003; Mason 2002; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2010; Hesse-Biber, 2010) stress the importance of carefully justifying and articulating the purpose of mixing

methods, together with presenting the work coherently and appropriately. Mixed methods projects can vary greatly in their designs, with marked differences as far as the level of interaction between methods, the relative priority of qualitative and quantitative components, the size of the sample, the timing or pacing of each method/component, the point of interface at which the 'qual' and 'quant' components are mixed in the research process (i.e. during data collection, interpretation or data analysis) and the epistemological assumptions of the research project.

An extensive review of mixed methods research (Hesse-Biber, 2010) seems to indicate that mixed-methods projects within an interpretative perspective often employ a quantitative component as auxiliary to a primary qualitative methodology, in order to understand the broader context and contextualise people's experiences. This strategy is similar to that adopted in the present study. The overall structure of the present research design has similarities to what Creswell and Plano Clark (2010) define as *explanatory sequential design*, where the collection and analysis of quantitative data is followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data. However, while the usual emphasis in this kind of design is to consider the quantitative component as primary (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2010), in this study the preliminary component (gathering contextual data) uses both quantitative and qualitative tools and it is seen as in the service of the qualitative/phenomenological component (as the aim is to contextualise participant's advertising experiences).

As far as the level of integration of different methods and data sets within the analysis, Greene and Caracelli (1997) notice that mixed-methods projects may vary greatly in this regard: mixing could be "nothing more than a side-by-side or sequential use of different methods" or "different methods are being fully integrated in a single analysis". Unlike many explanatory sequential designs – the present research design seeks a full integration of the methods at the level of analysis and explanation, with two data sets being integrated in the final stage of the analysis. However, it should be clarified that the purpose of triangulation (Webb et al., 1996; Denzin, 1989) in this study is seen within the frame of a critical realist's ontology:

The goal of multiple triangulation is a fully grounded interpretive research approach. Objective reality will never be captured. In-depth understanding, not validity, is sought in any interpretive study.

Denzin 1989: 246

Triangulation is seen to increase validity when multiple findings either confirm or confound each other (thus reducing the chances of inappropriate generalisations). A second argument for triangulation is that all methods have inherent biases and limitations, so use of only one method to assess a given phenomenon will inevitably yield biased and limited results.

Greene et al. 1989: 256

With reference to the small sample of this project, the term *mixed-method* should be interpreted with caution: a more accurate definition for the study would be perhaps an *integrated sequential explanatory design*, where the preliminary stage employs both qualitative and quantitative tools of data gathering and analysis and is designed to inform the main qualitative and “phenomenological” component of the study, in two ways:

- To allow the selection of a more diverse/talkative sample for the main stage
- To provide a “life-world” dataset to contextualise the phenomenological data

It is a design where the two components (preliminary and main) are carefully integrated in terms of ontological/epistemological assumptions (Mason, 2002), theoretical drive (Morse, 2003) and analysis. Figure 4.6 represents the research’s design in terms of integration of the different stages, while the diagram in Appendix 22 summarises the research process:

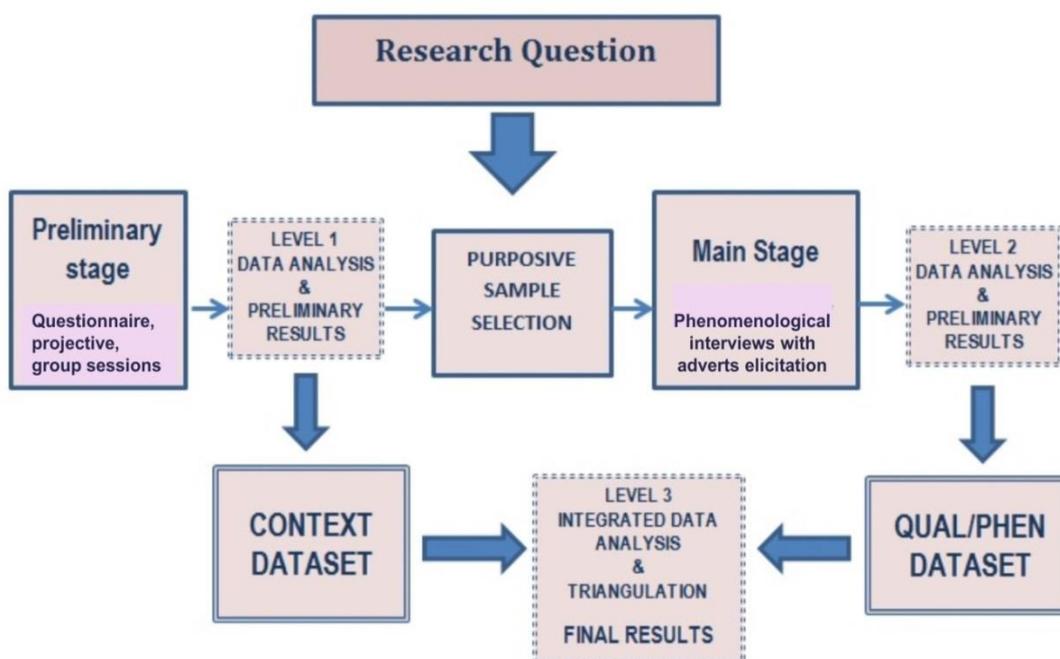


Figure 3.6 – Integrated Sequential Explanatory Design

3.5.1 Combining Quantitative and Qualitative Tools: *Justification and Integration*

The use of multiple methods as a research model represented by no means an unproblematic choice. The fact that the researcher was trained and had previous experience in both quantitative and qualitative methodologies was perhaps one of the elements that led to the non-exclusion of one kind of method over the other (quantitative or qualitative) from the very start of the research planning.

While the initial direction for the study was definitely towards an inductive logic of enquiry through an in-depth qualitative exploration of young girls' advertising experience, the thought of including quantitative elements (in both research tools and methods of analysis) was ultimately reflective of the impossibility of satisfactorily answering the last research questions using an exclusively qualitative method. The following extract from the research diary – a journal where the researcher collected her main reflections throughout the research process - show some of the main reflections at the planning stage of the project:

The use of phenomenological interviewing while watching particular adverts could well be an effective method to gauge the way girls experience the adverts. At this age I am not expecting hugely descriptive responses of what the girls feel, so I should be prepared to vague or one-word responses. The important thing here is not just to see how they respond to each advert but to understand the experience/s that led them to a particular response/feeling towards an advert. Their answers could be further explored through probing the girls in a "phenomenological direction", by asking to provide a more detailed description of the experience, inviting the girls to bring practical examples or bringing narratives from other similar experiences (e.g. adverts of the same type watched previously) or reflections from participants' life story (e.g. in the case of dislike for a particular advert/version of femininity one could investigate on where and when the feeling generate from, trying to contextualise participants answers). This method could provide an interesting window into their perceptions, thoughts and feelings regarding particular adverts. Each selected advert should represent a different version of femininity, so that girls' response to adverts could illuminate on their way to experience, not just the adverts themselves, but the different idealised femininities portrayed by these adverts (...)

While I am convinced that this sort of qualitative investigation can bring to light interesting elements regarding how these young girls perceive, construct and manipulate meanings from femininity portrayals in adverts, the method remains clearly inadequate to answering the third research questions. If my aim is to locate what I would call potential "protective" or "resiliency" factors in girls' life, I should be gathering systematic information about their life context (i.e. their family, media consumption, parental mediation, extra-curricular activities, but also their own attitudes towards stereotyped femininity and beauty, their aspirations and life projects), maybe through a questionnaire. Due to the young age of participants I should include a parallel questionnaire for their parents so to corroborate the main answers. It remains unclear whether a questionnaire at this age would be too much of a chore or some questions easily misinterpreted, so I should be thinking about alternative solutions to minimise bias in 1) my construction of the tool 2) their responses and 3) my interpretation of the responses (...)

In terms of analysis the information coming from phenomenological interviewing with adverts elicitation could be cross-analysed/ integrated with the quantitative data (context), but in order to do this I would have to reduce the data in some way and make the two data-sets comparable.

This will entail a quantification of their qualitative responses and perhaps the construction of indexes which could work as indicators for some of the important factors in their life context (e.g. consumption of sexualised material, embodiment of femininity). The process will ultimately require mixing qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis.

Research Diary, 10/8/2010

In addition, the most popular methodologies found in the literature and employed to investigate the topic of enquiry (mostly in the field of advertising/media/health/sociology and psychology) seem to point in the direction of missing elements regarding the context of participants' experiences, so that single-method research studies often fall short on the delivery of a more holistic picture of "situated knowledge" for the phenomenon in question. In this regard, a growing number of marketing scholars (Banister and Booth, 2005; Kerrane and Hogg, 2007; Lawlor and Prothero, 2007) propose that a variety of research techniques are usually needed in order to gather the opinions and experiences of children in consumer research. After reaching the decision of including quantitative elements in the qualitative research design, the perusal of the mixed-methods literature offered the researcher the chance to delve more deeply at the planning stage into the possible issues of integrating qualitative with quantitative methods: the many suggestions gathered from the experiences and mistakes of more experienced scholars served as guidelines and points of reflection during the actual implementation of the mixed-methods research design. Mason (2002:33), for example, suggests reflecting carefully on the reasons why one would embark on a mixed method design and she provides a list of possible reasons for integrating multiple methods in a research project: 1) to explore different parts of a process or phenomenon; 2) to answer different research questions with different methods/sources or 3) the same research question in different ways or from different angles; 4) to provide greater or lesser depth or breadth; 5) to seek to corroborate one source and method with another through some form of 'triangulation'; 6) to test different analyses, explanations or theories against each other. In this study the motives for using mixed method match the first five reasons listed by Mason (2002) and in line with Mason (2006:10) 's later suggestion on "the value of mixed-methods approaches for researching questions about social experience and lived realities":

I suggest that a 'qualitatively driven' approach to mixing methods offers enormous potential for generating new ways of understanding the complexities and contexts of social experience, and for enhancing our capacities for social explanation and generalization.

Mason, 2006: 10

Rossmann and Wilson (1985) consider that the purposes leading to a mixed method design may be *corroboration*, *expansion* or *initiation*. In this study the main purpose can be characterised as initiation, defined by Greene (2005) as the planned incarnation of Tom Cook's *empirical puzzle* (1985) and as the purpose representing

the most generative of the purpose for mixing, as it evokes paradox, contradiction, divergence – all in the service of fresh insights, new perspectives, original understanding (...) With initiation, different methods are implemented to assess various facets of the same complex phenomenon, much like complementarity, but the intended result is indeed divergence and dissonance.

Greene 2007:103

Bazeley (2004) effectively points out that the use of mixed-methods for initiation purposes requires often a fuller integration of methods (in contrast to the simpler component designs typically used for corroboration or expansion). On a positive note, Greene, Caracelli and Graham (1989) - following their review of 56 mixed methods studies - concluded:

Our own thinking to date suggests that the notion of mixing paradigms is problematic for designs with triangulation or complementary purposes, acceptable but still problematic for designs with a development or expansion intent, and actively encouraged for designs with initiation intent.

Greene et al.1989:271

The proliferation of mixed-methods research in recent years has prompted more academic discussion around theoretical issues and the practicality of mixing the two paradigms. Gorard (2007:1) points out that "mixing methods is wrong, not because methods should be kept separate but because they should not have been divided at the outset". Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) noted that before the advent of mixed methods researchers employed multiple methods for the benefits of triangulation without being restricted to any particular paradigm. Some scholars suggest dispensing with labels altogether, like Symonds and Gorard (2010) in their article "The death of mixed-methods":

Labels can be helpful in structuring our understanding of phenomena. But they are also restrictive when enforcing categorical differences. (...) A case is, therefore, made for removing paradigms altogether and for a rebirth of research from the ashes of mixed methods (...) We could use the word 'quantitative' to refer only to the activity of quantification, and 'qualitative' to describe that which is examined in depth – without being linked to a research paradigm.

Symonds and Gorard, 2010:15

Therefore, it is proposed here to focus on how the different techniques and methods used have been justified and integrated to effectively address the research questions, rather than getting caught in the dualism of *paradigms war* (Gage, 1989).

3.6 SAMPLING STRATEGY

A purposive, nested, maximum variation sample was deemed the most appropriate for the enquiry in order to develop a wider picture of the phenomenon. Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2004) define a sample as *nested* whenever sample members selected for one phase of the study constitute a subset of participants from another stage of the investigation.

The initial plan was to gain access to two different primary schools offering two types of social-economic background: the first school was in Leicester - a Church of England school - very familiar to the researcher, being the school attended by her son for several years; the second school was located in a suburb of Nottingham and access was kindly arranged through the help of the researcher's supervisor. Unfortunately, the first school decided to pull out at the very last minute due to a change of heart so that access was finally not granted. Initial panic ensued, but disappointment reverted into a state of calm resignation after discussing the occurrence with supervisors and colleagues and reflecting on the fact that – as one colleague put it - “perhaps it was all meant to be for the best”, as the withdrawing school was far too familiar to the researcher and most of the girls in the age group of interest would be her own son's friends or classmates. This would have probably caused bias in the participants' (and their parents') responses, rendering less valid and meaningful the comparison between the two schools (one familiar and locally available to the researcher, the other completely unknown and located in a different town).

The plan had to be flexible and re-adapt to the new conditions. There was definitely not time to arrange access to another school at that stage, so the researcher decided

to maximise the number of participants from the consenting school, by inviting all girls in Year 4, 5 and 6 classes (age 8-11) to participate in the project (as opposed to the initial plan which included only girls in Year 4). In retrospect, this has provided the project with a much richer and interesting data set than the one which would have been generated by focusing on a narrower age group (further details regarding initial contact and practical access to the school are discussed later on in this chapter - see “modalities of data collection” section).

Now having access to only one school of predominantly working class background, it was crucial to make the process of selection of participants as thorough and effective as possible in relation to the aims of the project. Data gathered through the preliminary stages (questionnaire, projective and group sessions) would provide information about the main characteristics of the sample and the context in which the girls live (i.e. media habits and preferences, family interactions and values, extracurricular activities, interests and hobbies, relations with peers, their personality, attitude towards beauty and the extent to which the girls embrace stereotyped femininity) in order to guide the selection of a *maximum variation sample* (List, 2004) for the phenomenological phase of the project.

The aim of this purposive heterogeneous sampling was to select a diverse sample from the pool of potential participants (that is, making sure to select very different girls), in order to gather a more complete view of the phenomenon, facilitate data saturation and possibly increase the *transferability* of findings (Guba and Lincoln, 1982) to similar settings and populations. Maximum variation was achieved looking at the following variables (see appendix 25 for more detailed information regarding participants' selection):

- age group
- embodiment of stereotyped femininity (through a “Stereotyped Femininity Index”, SFI - calculated from quantification of girls' responses to projective techniques)
- body image
- family (i.e. living with both parents or not; living with sibling or being only child)

Figure 4.7 summarises the sampling strategy showing how the sample has been narrowed throughout the different stages, together with an overview of the main methods used in each stage.

In appendix 25 the process of narrowing the sample can be seen in more details: for the first round of phenomenological interviews only 6 less talkative participants were excluded, while making sure that the sample still reflected the variety of the original sample in terms of age, SFI and body image. For the second round of phenomenological interviews, the researcher decided to include only the most talkative/productive participants, while also maximising variation in terms of age, SFI and body image.

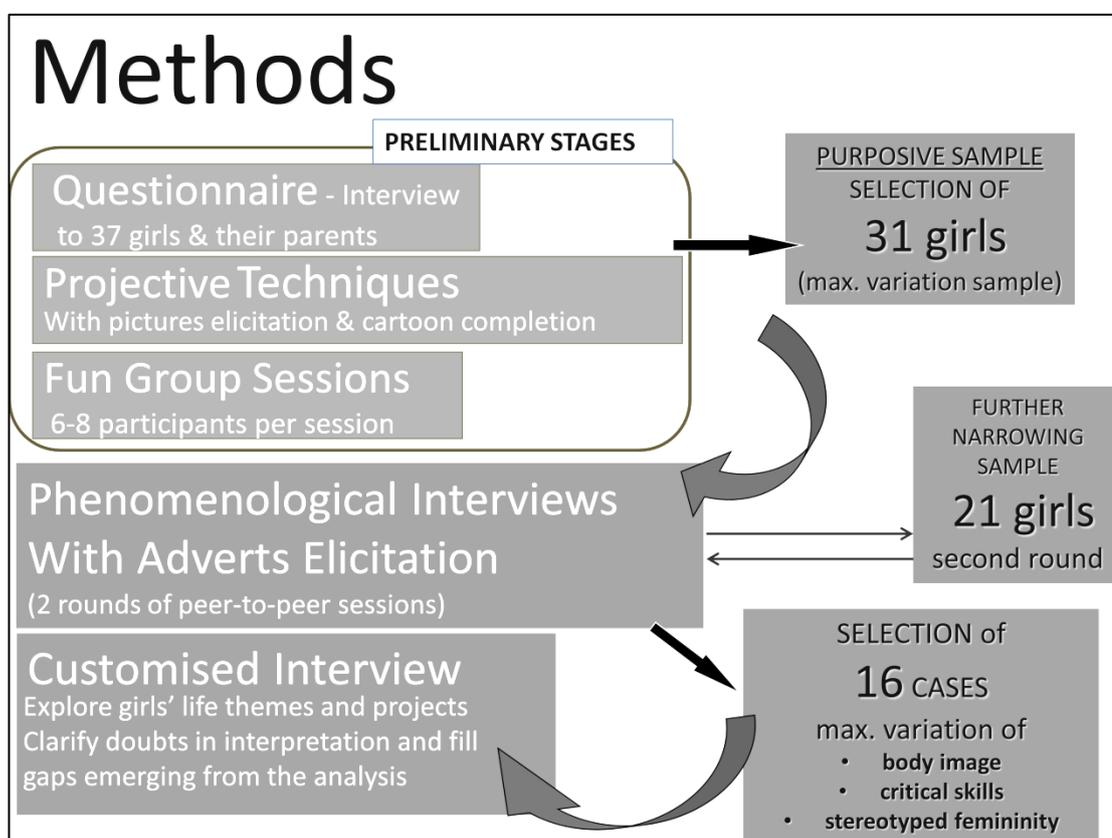


Figure 3.7 – Overview of methods and sampling strategy

It is worth clarifying that in the original plan it was thought possible to select just 12 girls (to include in the phenomenological stage) right after the initial analysis of data coming from the preliminary stage; however, this option appeared premature and too restrictive, with not enough information yet gathered regarding the ability of the girls

to express themselves when prompted by advert elicitation (the collection of rich data would heavily rely on such an ability).

Therefore it was decided to include a larger number of girls in the first selection (n=31) and then narrow down the sample (n=21 for the second round) according to the results of the first round of phenomenological interviews, by selecting a smaller number of “most productive and talkative” couples (with the sole exception of one girl, who wished to be interviewed on her own), concurrently assuring that the “maximum variation” principle of sample composition was maintained (see [appendix 22](#) for more details).

With the single exception of the girl mentioned above, it was also decided to interview the girls in pairs, commonly referred to as *peer-paired* or *friendship pairs interviewing* (Ireland, 2003) as this would not only save time but provide more interesting results due to the increased loquacity of the girls during couples’ interaction.

It is believed that this iterative process (going back and forward between field work and analysis with progressive narrowing of the sample to fewer representative cases) adds rigour and validity to the investigation, increasing the chance of *transferability* (Guba and Lincoln, 1982) of findings, at least to similar populations (i.e. British pre-adolescent girls, mainly of white, working class background).

3.6.1 The pre-adolescent child (age 8-11)

The pre-adolescent years are roughly defined between the age of 8-11 (Harter, 1977), although there is not agreement in the literature regarding a precise age, as the stage is often defined as the few years preceding puberty and ending with puberty.

It is a time of great cognitive and social development, where children become for the first time non-egocentric in both their thinking and communication. Children at this age show greater interest in interacting with a broader range of people and new motivations emerge to understand and communicate with others, including the starting of romantic interest developing between boys and girls (Calvert et al., 2003). Piaget (1924)’s theory of cognitive development names the years of development

between 7-11 years as a “period of concrete operations”. In this stage children are no longer strictly bound by perception and they acquire the cognitive ability to apply logic to concrete problems (Siegel, Coffey and Livingstone, 2004).

Development psychology (Harter, 1999; Walkerdine, 1988) agrees on certain social and psychological characteristics of pre-adolescent children, which are summarised below:

- Attention to the point of view of others
- Increasing importance of peers
- More sophisticated appreciation of humour
- Ability to follow more complex storylines
- Increased curiosity and sense of command
- Positive and energised attitude
- Acute interest in ranking and classifying
- Increased need for conformity with their peers
- Inability to deal with abstraction
- "Black or white" thinking
- Not yet experiencing the self-consciousness typical of adolescence
- Still relying more on parents for their emotional and social needs

In comparison with younger children, the pre-adolescent child has a much more realistic view of the world as she has now left the intensively emotional and imaginary world characteristic of the earlier years of childhood (Klein, 1991). This realistic view is often reflected in their aspirations for the future, which become more true-to-life than in previous years, with the child also more frequently thinking about the future and having a developed sense of understanding consequences of his/her actions. Pre-adolescents have usually developed a more mature and sensible attitude and a sense of intentionality, in the sense of desire and ability “to have an impact and to act upon that with persistence” (Goleman, 1996: 194).

Most importantly, children at this stage begin to empathise with the feeling of others and become capable of self-regulating their emotions, particularly negative emotions which could threaten their self-growth (Harter, 1999). Erikson (1959)'s *theory of psycho-social development* - one of the best-known theories of personality in

psychology – defines these years as *middle childhood*. The theory postulates that each individual goes through a set number of stages (with each stage building upon the previous one – what he termed the *epigenic principle*) in the development of his/her *ego identity* (that is, the conscious sense of self that humans develop through social interaction). Each stage is characterised by the acquisition and exercise of a basic virtue and each stage is terminated by a crisis. The middle childhood is characterised for Erikson by the development of the basic virtue of *competence* and the tension “industry versus inferiority”. Table 4.1 illustrates the different stages of psycho-social development of Erikson’s theory (in the table, middle childhood corresponds to the “School Age” phase of life):

Stage	Psychosocial Crisis	Basic Virtue	Age
1	Trust vs. mistrust	Hope	Infancy (0 to1 ½)
2	Autonomy vs. shame	Will	Early Childhood (1 ½ to3)
3	Initiative vs. guilt	Purpose	Play Age (3 to 5)
4	Industry vs. inferiority	Competency	School Age (5 to 12)
5	Ego identity vs. Role Confusion	Fidelity	Adolescence (12 to 18)
6	Intimacy vs. isolation	Love	Young Adult (18 to 40)
7	Generativity vs. stagnation	Care	Adult hood(40 to 65)
8	Ego integrity vs. despair	Wisdom	Maturity (65+)

Table 3.1 – Erickson’s Stages of psycho-social development.
Source: McLeod, S. A. (2008) - SimplyPsychology.org

3.6.2 The tween girls market

She wants to be anything but the age she is, always looking toward the future, is ambitious, opinionated, influential - and knows more about technology than you ever will. This is a group of digital natives who are on the cutting edge not only of technology but also media, trends, brands -and everything in between. She is 9 years old. She is a tween. And she has marketers in her sway.

Chaet - “The Tween Machine” 2012: blogpost

The *tweens* or *tweenagers*, as a target demographic for marketing roughly defined between 7 and 12 years of age (in other sources also 8-14 years old), constitutes quite a recent addition to market segmentation and a very profitable one. Towards the end

of the 1990s, marketers started to recognise the great buying power of teenagers' younger siblings and the tween girls responded with enthusiasm:

Not yet teenagers, but desperate to put away childish things and be taken seriously in their own right (...) suddenly, instead of pretending to be older than they were (prior to the tween phenomenon, these youngsters couldn't wait to become teenagers), tweens were being encouraged to revel in their youth and innocence, with "Too old for toys, too young for boys" their mantra.

Richman 2012:1

Astute clothing and cosmetic companies quickly jumped in, enjoying the fast profits of merchandise from cartoons and media series: a full tween industry has since then developed and it is growing every year (Siegel et al., 2004). The largest profits are reaped by the entertainment industry with TV series and movies like the *High School Musical* trilogy (seen by 225 million people around the world). Tweens have become adoring fans of Disney's manufactured stars such as singers and actresses Selena Gomez or Miley Cyrus. There is also a significant "Girls Power" culture produced for girls, including successful TV programs featuring female heroines such as *Powerpuff Girls*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Xena the Warrior Princess* and *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (Currie et al. 2009).

Tweens are avid and sophisticated media consumers:

More tween girls are accessing brands and playing games online than ever before, with UK monthly active users growing to 2.5 million. This is up 56 per cent year-on-year from 1.6 million. Data from Newzoo shows that in the US, UK and France, tween girls listed online gaming as their third favourite pastime, after browsing the internet and watching TV. A quarter of their time is spent gaming, according to the research.

Licenzing.biz 2012

In recent years the tween market for girls has literally exploded, with new fashion brands coming up and specific make-up lines and beauty products:

Cosmetics brands and wily entrepreneurs are cashing in on the growing trend for make-up for girls as young as seven. The tween market is exploding as beauty-savvy seven-to-12-year-olds are creating a demand for products beyond what they steal from their mothers' dressers. New lines such as Material Girl Beauty and Willa are actively targeting the pre-teen market with offerings that are distinctly different from more adult ranges

Wellman - Daily Mail, 6/2/2012

3.7 RESEARCH METHODS

The research design and choice of methods as it is presented in the following pages is the result of constant changes and adjustments throughout the research process. As Mason (2004) noted

Thinking qualitatively means rejecting the idea of a research design as single document which is an entire advance blueprint for a piece of research. It also means rejecting the idea of a priori strategic and design decisions, or that such decisions can and should be made only at the beginning of the research process. This is because qualitative research is characteristically exploratory, fluid and flexible, data-driven and context-sensitive. Given that, it would be both inimical and impossible to write an entire advance blueprint.

Mason, 2002:24

One of the main priorities for the study was the collection of context-rich data so that the phenomenological component of the study could be appropriately “contextualised”. In the choice of suitable methods to answer the research questions, a combination of quantitative and qualitative tools was thought appropriate.

Four main types of research methods were employed:

- **Questionnaire**
 - Participants’ questionnaire, completed by each girl during an half hour individual session (researcher-assisted activity)
 - Parents’ questionnaire, distributed to parents with the help of participants
- **Projective Techniques**
 - A range of projective exercises completed by participants during an half hour individual session (researcher-assisted activity)-
- **Group Sessions**
 - A total of 8 group sessions arranged at the start of the project (October-November 2011) with 6-8 participants. Session duration: 2 hours
- **Interviews**
 - Peer-to-peer phenomenological interviews prompted by adverts-elicitation
 - Follow-up interviews (16 completed individually – some at school and some online through Skype chat)

The above methods were complemented by three auxiliary methods:

- Observations during some P.E. classes and during breaks

- Informal chats with teachers and parents
- Performances: girls asked to be filmed while doing a performance of their choice, alone or in group. Six group sessions were arranged at the end of the project for this purpose. Their performances included drama, singing and role play.

The combination of these methods provide a large amount of rich data allowing exploration of girls’ own embodiment of femininity and life context, together with their thoughts, feelings and interactions with ideals of femininity in advertising and media, thus approaching the “puzzle” from several angles, with the opportunity to further question and analyse the findings through integration and triangulation of different data sources (Denzin, 1989). Figure 4.8 gives an overview of the variables or insights provided by each method:

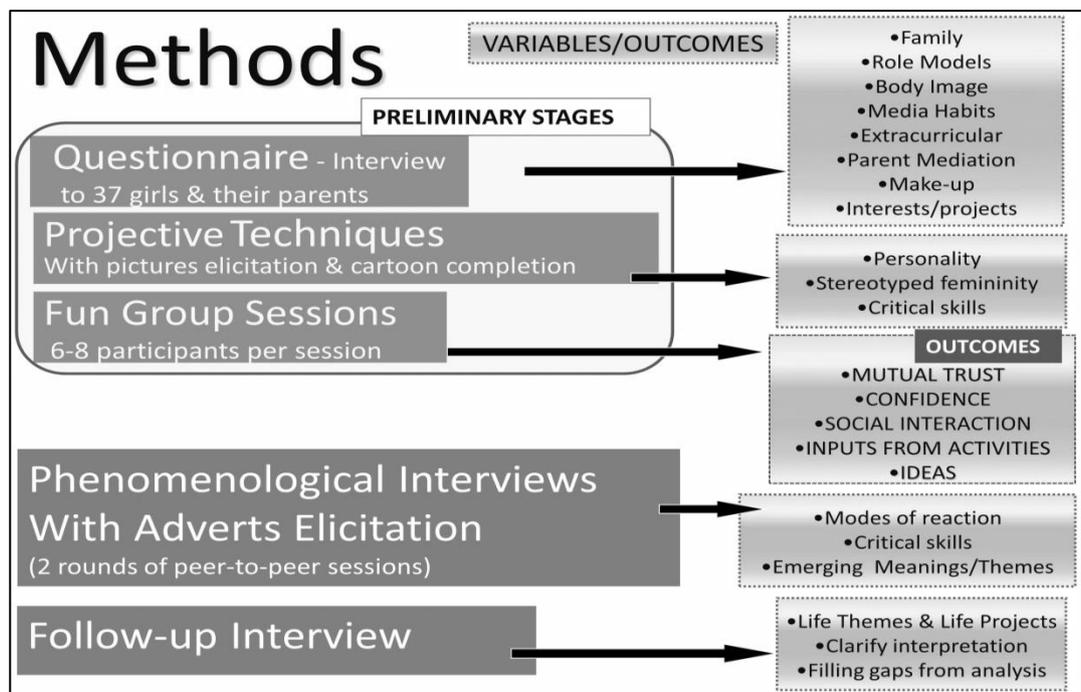


Figure 3.8 – Overview of the methods with variables and outcomes

3.7.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire (see Appendix 4) included a total of 28 questions on six pages, representing six distinct areas of enquiry, namely:

- 1) Family
- 2) TV

- 3) Internet
- 4) Magazines
- 5) Free time and beauty
- 6) Role models and growing up

The final part of the questionnaire included also the Children Body Image Scale by Truby and Paxton (2002) – which has been used successfully in several studies to gauge girls’ satisfaction with their body (see appendix 12).

After considering several options, it was decided in the end to administer the questionnaire in person through an individual interview - lasting approximately half - hour - to the 37 girls who had agreed to participate in the project. Although this decision weighed heavily against the time constraint of the project, the choice proved in retrospect to be very wise, as it was paramount to avoid misinterpretation (which could easily happen on both sides: girls could wrongly interpret a question and the researcher could wrongly read or misinterpret answers, particularly if misspelled) and build initial rapport with the girls.

A separate questionnaire (closely matching the questions and composition of the girls’ questionnaire) was sent to parents in order to corroborate the answers and thus increase internal validity, especially with regard to more ‘quantitative’ question such as the amount of television/internet/magazines accessed per week (see Appendix 5).

3.7.2 Exploring femininity through projective techniques

An important element the research wished to investigate was girls’ embodiment of femininity in their everyday life (i.e. stereotyped vs. counter-stereotyped).

After experimenting with Boldizar (1989)’s *Children’s Sex Role Inventory (CSRI)* with a group of six eight-years-old girls during the pilot study (which was conducted between September 2010 and January 2011 with six girls familiar to the researcher, attending the same class as her own son - Year 4), the researcher developed doubts regarding the effectiveness of the method to research the specific gender construct

within this young age group. This assessment was helped by the fact that the researcher knew the girls (their character and embodiment of femininity) and their parents fairly well. The test was administered personally so that some assistance could be provided in reading and understanding each item in the inventory. The main problems experienced are summarised below:

- the inventory appeared to be excessively long, too wordy to hold girls' genuine attention; their interest and involvement with the test seemed to decrease over time and it was difficult to keep them genuinely involved after the first 5 minutes;
- the meaning of some of the items were not clear to the girls and had to be explained by citing practical examples/situations;
- on many occasions the answers were uncertain, with the girl wishing to tick more than one choice; often the indecision would be between the two middle choices (2 = A little true of me and 3 = Mostly true of me), but sometimes the indecision would be between two extreme choices (i.e. 1 = "Not at all true of me" and 4 = "Very true of me");
- in several instances the girls seemed frustrated with the rigidity of the instrument and asked whether they could respond with phrases such as "it depends in which situation" or "it depends whom I am with" or "it depends if I am happy or sad", revealing a need for flexibility which clearly the inventory would not allow;
- most importantly, as the researcher knew particularly well the six participants taking part in the test - being these girls either daughters of close friends or her own son's friends and class mates - the results did not strike her as particularly illuminating with regard to the girls' actual embodiment of stereotypical vs counter-stereotypical femininity (e.g. one of these girls was known in the class as a beauty-conscious and make-up enthusiast, while her responses would not indicate a particularly marked tendency towards stereotypical femininity)
- another major concern was that the results turned out to be surprisingly similar for all the six girls (e.g. most girls tended to describe themselves as caring, generous, emphatic rather than not). This seemed to suggest the presence of social desirability bias - which is inherent to this kind of test - perhaps in this case heightened by the young age of the respondents. In other words, the differences in these girls' way of

expressing femininity and in their aspiration regarding certain types of femininity (which the researcher was well aware of through her long term familiarity with the girls and their family) were not detected by the test;

- more than the feminine /masculine character traits of the girls, the researcher was interested in the girls' daily practices or aspirations for certain expressions of femininity (for example their attitude towards make-up/ sports/beauty and their overall high/low investment in stereotypical /counter stereotypical activities); the test was not able to provide such an insight.

The choice to experiment with projective techniques comes from the researcher previous experience and fascination in working with various types of visual prompts (particularly picture-elicitation and *Thematic Apperception Tests* (Murray, 1993), which will be discussed in the next section) during earlier assignments in a market research company. The idea appeared to be an effective antidote to some of the girls' feedback regarding the test. At the end of the test the girls were all asked whether 1) they enjoyed the test 2) whether it was easy for them to respond to it and 3) how they would improve it. The most common criticism the girls referred to was their difficulty in understanding and applying the statements in the inventory to themselves or their everyday situations and the lack of flexibility (no 'double choices' allowed). Another common comment was that they found the test boring and overly long. Suggestions from the girls included using images, scenarios or drama to find out about their "way to be girl" or - as one girl put it - "talk to my parents, they know everything about me!"

It was therefore decided to experiment with visual prompts and projective techniques during the pilot study: the results from the six girls were validated by both girls and parents, showing a high level of consistency and reliability.

3.7.3 Projective Techniques

Projective techniques work because they get respondents to speak about something indirectly by —projecting their thoughts and ideas, by talking about other people, or objects or situations. They help respondents go beyond their rationale perceptions and opinions to explore their underlying thoughts and behaviours, revealing more deeply held motivators and values --and to articulate and express these points-of-view more fully.

Despite their past academic tradition (Rappaport, 1942; Haire 1950; Rogers and Beal, 1958; Rook, 1985) and the wide, unremitting use by professional marketing researchers (KS&R, 2009) the use of projective techniques appears to have considerably decreased - from the 1970s up to the early 1990s - within academic marketing research. A few notable exceptions – indicating perhaps a slow revival of these techniques in consumer research from the early 1990s - are the interesting study of Mick, DeMoss and Faber (1992) investigating the motivations and meanings of self-gifts; the research of Sherry, McGrath and Levy (1993) examining negativity and ambivalence in gift exchange; along with other studies investigating different facets of consumer behaviour (McGrath 1995; Belk, Ger and Askegaard 1997; Zinkhan, Conchan, Gupta and Geissler, 1999).

The extensive literature review (1988-2008) carried out by Soley (2010) shows that projective techniques are rarely used by US, UK and Australian-based researchers (while still popular with Asian and Eastern European researchers). In the same article, Soley produced a comprehensive review of the motives behind projective techniques' decline in popularity - namely a diffused criticism about the reliability and validity of the method by a number of quantitative researchers, such as Rothwell (1955), Luck, Wales and Taylor (1961), Kerlinger (1973) and Yoell (1974). The author (Soley, 2010: 346) concluded that more experimentation with these methods in academic marketing research should be warranted and that the lack of use is regrettable as they constitute "one of the few research methods that rely on visual stimuli" - and as such more appropriate than verbal stimuli in research with primary school children (McClelland et al., 1989):

Although advertising, communication and marketing scholars recognize the differences between verbal and visual communication, their research methods remain deeply rooted in the verbal tradition, relying on verbal instruments. This makes that approach very dated, almost a relic of a bygone era, given the increasingly visual nature of modern society.

Soley 2010: 346

The most frequently expressed methodological criticism of projective techniques is that they lack reliability and validity; for this reason it is highly recommended that

the examiner knows a great deal about the circumstances under which the test was administered, as well as a good deal about the subject in addition to his test responses

In this study the shortcomings of the method were compensated by exerting a great deal of caution in the modalities of collection and interpretation, with random re-testing of a few participants, triangulation with other data sources and participants own validation. Appendix 6 shows the main slides used during the projective session while additional details regarding the slides' construction will be provided in another section of this chapter.

3.7.4 Fun Group Sessions – Bonding time

Group sessions were chosen as complementary method for three main reasons:

- a) To gain insight into the dynamics of girls' interactions within an informal setting;
- b) To enable discussion on topics pertinent or adjacent to the research focus;
- c) As an opportunity to 'bond', enabling trust between researcher and participants.

The term "focus group" is here deliberately avoided as the group sessions were conceived rather as a "bonding time" rather than focussed discussions around a specific subject. To facilitate social interaction in a way that reflects the natural context of social life (Barbour and Kitzinger, 1999), the girls participating were often part of small friendship groups. Although most activities were organised around the topic of enquiry, the participants were free to choose and propose their own ideas and this was done intentionally to give them a sense of control (e.g. the researcher would propose a particular game or task, letting the girls decide whether to use post-it notes, drawings or video recording). For this reason every group session was different and provided different insights about the participants. It was decided to arrange sessions from the very start of the project in order to provide a relaxed space where the researcher and participants could get to know each other in reciprocal terms. A total of eight group sessions were arranged with 6-8 participants per group, typically including classmates or girls of similar age to facilitate the interaction. The sessions were from 90 minutes to two hours long and they always started with some music to break the ice along with plenty of snacks and refreshments. Video recording was only used at times, during role play games or particularly relevant discussions after asking girls' consent.

These gatherings were highly successful (to the extent that they quickly became a “favourite” among the girls) and made a startling difference in the way the participants open up and interacted with the researcher in the remaining time of the project; it is believed that this has added authenticity to the data gathered throughout the following sessions.

Most popular activities were “E.T. comes to earth...” (a game where girls were asked to contribute by sticking post-it notes on a large cardboard to advise the alien about the good and bad things of being a girl), cutting out magazines, drawing, role play and performances.

3.7.5 Interviews prompted by advert-elicitation

Since, in phenomenology one is more interested in the experiences of a respondent, therefore, it is not enough to know how a respondent judges something; the important thing is to know the experience/or experiences that led him to this judgment.

Rawat 2011:1

The approach used for the interviews was phenomenological, in the sense of being focused in understanding as fully as possible girls’ own experience of the adverts showed to them. To this end, the interviews were designed as unstructured and only guided by adverts’ elicitation. It was important to follow girls’ natural flow and interactions in commenting the adverts, without forcing too many questions upon them.

Participants were allowed to take the lead if they wish to, in the sense that they could take control of the laptop and choose/click on the advert that they preferred to watch from the list. In the first round the list contains 10 adverts and we would go through all the adverts in the order preferred by the girls. In the second round the adverts were suggested by participants (through the “bring me an advert” task, where the girls were asked to indicate at least one liked and one disliked advert). From the adverts suggested by participants a selection of the most relevant ones was made, producing a list of 15 adverts. The allocated time for the second adverts-elicited session (30 minutes) would typically allow the discussion of around 8 adverts, so the girls were prompted to choose from the list the adverts they preferred to watch.

The theme of femininity was consistently explored throughout the conversation, to gather girls' own experiences and ideas about particular representations of girlhood/womanhood. The interviews were focused on observing and extracting as many details as possible regarding girls' direct experience of the adverts, but also digging into their background experiences, eliciting as many concrete details as possible in order to better understand the context which led them to respond in certain ways (thus allowing contextualization of their advertising experiences).

The fact that the girls were interviewed in a "friendship couple" (girls were asked to choose their own companion for the interview) greatly facilitated the interaction and made the conversation around adverts considerably more authentic (especially when compared to the researcher's experience of individual interviews during the pilot study).

3.7.6 Follow-up Interviews

In the final stage of the project the researcher invited 16 girls to take part in follow-up interviews (which were all completed with each girl individually – some at school and some online through Skype chat). This set of interviews was highly structured, mainly for the purpose of clarifying aspects about participants' life that were not well-defined or themes emerging from the analysis that required expansion. Each interview would be for most part customised to each girl individually. In many interviews there was further investigation regarding past playing practice, shared play with brothers or sisters, time spent with family members, current life projects and aspirations. A final section of the interviews touched upon a number of common themes, such as the opinions of girls towards the beauty represented in adverts, interest in boyfriends and pressure to look beautiful.

3.8 TOOLS DESIGN AND PILOT STUDY

3.8.1 Questionnaire

In line with MRS guidance in designing the questionnaire care was taken to "avoid classification questions that are unnecessarily intrusive or are difficult for the child to answer" (1:10); similarly, content needed to be constructed as "sensitive to the

language, needs and feelings of the age group and their capabilities”, with language “as simple as possible to not be patronising” (2, 3:10). A pilot version of the questionnaire was tested with six girls and their parents who were familiar to the researcher. The girls were all between 8-9 years old.

3.8.2 Projective slides

In the construction of projective slides the researcher used royalty-free images publicly available through Google search. The images were selected to mostly reflect the gender, age and ethnic characteristic (white British) of the participants in order to facilitate identification. The eight slides were named A, B, C, D, E and 1,2,3. Their content and modalities are summarised in table 4.2, while the images for each slide are presented in Appendix 6.

SLIDE	CONTENT	MODALITIES
A	A collage of words and images of girls which emphasise skills and competence	Slide used in individual projective session. Participants were asked to choose between slide A or B (“which slide represent more how you are or how you want to be?”). In the case of extreme indecision between the two, participants were allowed to choose both
B	A collage of words and images of girls emphasising beauty, sexiness and popularity.	Same use modalities as in A.
C	A collage of images of girls engaging in stereotypical /neutral / counter-stereotypical activities.	Slide used in individual projective session. Participants were asked to mark with different colour pencils the images, depending on their feeling toward the type of activity portrayed (i.e. identification, aspiration or rejection).
D	A collage of adverts from Vogue or other fashion mags showing child models (looking approximately 9-10 years old) dressed up and groomed in clothes and make-up which are evidently adult style.	Slide used as a visual prompt during the advert-elicited interview.
E	A collage of images of videogames for girls (make-up & clothes) with the prompt: “Can you imagine if these games were made for boys?”	Slide used as a visual prompt for discussion during group session.
1	A picture of a girl watching TV, with the TV screen showing three pretty pre-adolescent girls dressed and groomed as beauty pageants.	Slide used in individual projective session. Participants were asked to guess what the girl in the picture was thinking (by writing inside the correspondent thinking bubble).
2	A picture of two pre-adolescent girls weighting and measuring themselves. The girls in the picture are visibly interacting but the slide is ambiguous as it is not clear whether they are preoccupied, curious or amused.	Slide used in individual projective session. Participants were asked to guess what the girls in the picture would be saying (by writing inside the correspondent speech bubbles). They were also asked whether they thought the girls in the picture were doing things seriously or simply playing a game, for fun.
3	A picture of a girl (9-11 years old) dressed in a princess costume. The girl is very pretty, while her facial expression seems quite serious or sad.	Slide used in individual projective session. Participants were asked to guess what the girl in the picture would be thinking (by writing inside the correspondent thinking bubble).

Table 3.2 - Table summarising projective slides content

3.8.3 Adverts Selection Criteria

A total of 84 adverts were recorded during programs specifically targeted at pre-adolescent girls from four popular children TV channels (Disney, Nickelodeon, CBBC and Cartoon Network). From this total, nine adverts were selected for the first round of adverts-elicited interviews. In the selection of the right adverts, the main criterion was to provide example of different representations of femininity and girlhood. Adverts used in the first round were specifically targeted at pre-adolescent girls or “tween market”, while adverts for the second round of interviews were suggested by the participants themselves and included adverts from You Tube and Internet channels, as well as adverts not specifically addressed to children (e.g. Weight Watchers). Considering the highly gender-stereotypical orientation of children’s marketing, it comes as no surprise that one of the main difficulties was to find adverts with counter-stereotypical content, where girls would act and express themselves in ways that contradict traditional gender roles. In fact, it turned out to be almost impossible to locate such representations in adverts targeted at tweens and the researcher realised soon enough that she had to work with what was available within the current advertising content.

3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN RESEARCHING CHILDREN

Due to the enhanced vulnerability of young respondents, research involving children presents several delicate issues which must be carefully considered, during both planning and throughout the practical implementation of the research plan.

Attentive consideration has been given to five main ethical issues: 1) informed consent, 2) power relations, 3) confidentiality, 4) reward and 5) potential harm and disclosure.

3.9.1 Informed consent

It is paramount to put the children in a position to fully understand what the research involves, the benefits and risks of participating in the research (Alderson and

Morrow, 2004; BERA, 2004) and making them able to decline participation- at any point of the research- if for any reason they do not feel comfortable with their role as respondents. The issue of reaching and maintaining children's informed consent throughout the research is a very sensitive matter and one which requires careful consideration, due to the different cognitive abilities of children and power differentials between adults and children (Mishna, Antle and Regher, 2004).

Following MRS guidelines, all participants and their parents/carers were approached prior to commencement of the fieldwork and given an Information Leaflet with an attached Informed Consent Form (rule B26, pg.5) explaining clearly the purpose of the study, what their participation involved (rule B28) and their rights with respect to non-participation (rule B32, pg.5) if they subsequently decided not to participate.

In order to ensure girls' understanding of what the research involved and allow them to interact personally with the researcher, four "presentation" sessions were organised at the very start of the project (four sessions were deemed necessary in order to avoid overcrowding, with a maximum of 12 people allowed in each session). Every session lasted approximately half hour: after a 15 minutes presentation, girls were encouraged to ask questions and clear out any doubt regarding their participation. At the start of the presentation session, girls were given an information leaflet made out of cartoon strips (see Appendix 1) explaining the main elements and implications of the research project in child-friendly terms. The presentation sessions turned out to be highly interactive with most girls expressing great curiosity and interest about the project, further confirmed by a high response rate (94%).

Both the girls and a parent/carer were asked to sign a separate written consent form (see appendices 2 -3) and their permission was sought to video record the interviews and some of the group sessions.

Teachers (as well as girls)' approval was also sought prior to any session to make sure the girls would not be taken away from important lessons or miss something they particularly enjoyed. No deception or covert observation of the participants was used.

3.9.2 Power relation

During research with children a particular important issue is that of a seemingly unavoidable “power differential” between researcher and participants:

When kids talk to researchers, they assume the adult is a kind of teacher and that the questions are, again, about getting right or wrong. Overcoming that mindset is crucial.

Roper 1989:20

In order to obtain honest answers from the children and ensure “active participation” (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998) it is therefore crucial to communicate beforehand and very clearly to children that there is no right or wrong answer and that the researcher is solely interested in their genuine views and feelings. With this in mind, the research design has tried to implement what Banister and Booth (2005) have defined as a “child-centric” approach. In every stage of the research process, the researcher has attempted to develop “a rapport with the children in their space and in their own terms” (Banister and Booth, 2005). It is suggested by the authors that

by shifting the research focus from a top-down perspective into one that embraces childhood as a culture in its own right, we can greet children within their own language...ultimately providing the context for a more fruitful and exciting data collection process.

Banister and Booth 2005:162

Therefore - and whenever possible considering the variety of methods used - letting the girls tell their own story in their own words has been the guiding motto behind the actual methods’ implementation.

Instrumental to this is also the researcher’s own reflection on his/her concept of childhood (Montgomery, 2009): the “tribal child” of James et al. (1998) better fits the researcher’s view of children. An equally fitting definition is that of Waksler (1991) whereby children are seen as having different competencies from adults, but not in a lacking sense; instead they are viewed as competent and active agents creating their autonomous subculture, as such the “best informant about their life” (Hardman, 1973). It should be noted that James et al. (1998) see a potential danger in this: in seeing the children as autonomous and competent individuals the tendency of the researcher might be to overlook the differences in social status between adult and

child with the result of not addressing adequately power relation issues; for this reason these issues have been reflected upon and discussed more extensively with other researchers and professionals during CFRC- “Listening to Children: Research and Consultation” training (University of Edinburgh) undertaken by the researcher in the six months preceding the start of the project .

More broadly, the researcher tends to agree with the view that there is no single concept of childhood: “instead, different versions of children can be found in different contexts” (Ritala-Koskinen, 1994) and that “researchers can discover more than one set of children meanings/voices” (Davis, 1998). In this regard, the importance of adopting a self-reflexive approach (see final paragraph of this chapter and the reflexive techniques suggested by Davis, 1998 and Komulainen, 2007) to prevent mistaken or tokenistic interpretations of children’s voices - influenced for instance by a researcher’s “personal prejudice, or the ethics, tools, roles and theories of their professional paradigm” (Davis, 1998:327) could not be emphasised enough.

3.9.3 Confidentiality

In order to ensure anonymity of all participants, the school collaborating will not be identified (only its catchment area and main characteristics are noted in the findings chapter) and participants are always referred through the use of pseudonyms.

The original tapes and transcripts of interviews and focus group discussions were handled only by the researcher, in line with data protection principles and the approved research protocol. Hard copies of research notes were kept in locked filing cabinets, and electronic files saved on a password protected computer.

All interviews, video recording and relative transcripts were coded and kept in a secure environment, with the material being securely anonymised and to be archived after project’s completion (faces on the videos have been blurred with the use of automated blurring software).

3.9.4 Reward

The research did not entail the provision of any payment or inducement to participants in the project, apart from little gifts (i.e. a novelty rubber or a glittery coloured pen) at the end of each session. In all cases compensation was not substantial or monetary and was simply representing a way to thank the girls for their time and effort, which was thought to be only fair considering their involvement in the project over the academic year (particularly with reference to the phenomenological and follow-up phases which were much more time and energy consuming). This was considered an ideal compromise to avoid unduly influencing the participants' decision in participating in the study, and to ensure their genuine interest in the research, whilst providing at the same time a little token of gratitude for their effort (see detailed audit trail for gift giving in appendix 21).

After project completion, all participants were given a "Certificate of Outstanding Contribution" stating their participation in the "The Girls Project" (this is how the project was known by participants during the year) completed with their full name and signed by the researcher. A copy of said certificate can be found in Appendix 18.

3.9.5 Potential Harm and Disclosure

The issue of potential harm is particularly critical when working with children.

Rule A10 of MRS guidelines reminds that:

... (researchers) must take all reasonable precautions to ensure that respondents are not harmed or adversely affected as a result of participating in a research project

Rule A10 MRS Guidelines

In terms of researching potentially sensitive subject matters with children, MRS guidance stress the importance of "special care" needed when interviewing children about "issues which could upset or worry the child" (point 1, pg.8) suggesting also that "steps are taken to ensure that the child is not worried, confused or misled by the questioning"(point 2, pg.8).

It is understood that due to the nature of the topic, the age of respondents (8-11 are transitory years between early childhood and the thrall of adolescence, usually

characterised by boundless ambitions and startling lucidity, but also by an intense search of one own identity and gender construction) and the methods used (in depth interviews, group sessions, adverts elicitation), the participants may come to reflect upon some delicate issues (regarding for instance their body image, self-concept, stress in the family or any particular traumatic event in their life) which could affect them emotionally. While it was clearly impossible to completely prevent and consider in advance all possible scenarios, it was essential for the researcher to carefully consider potential stressful situations which could arise from her direct interaction with the respondents in order to:

- 1) reduce the risk of occurrence by adopting a sensitive approach (i.e. following the lead of respondents and avoiding excessive probing over sensitive matters during interviewing) which could prevent upsetting;
- 2) be prepared to respond in the right way should such situations arise in order to minimise any distress on the respondent's part.

Apart from referring to general ethical guidelines - and in order to satisfy the stringent ethical approval process in place within academia - the researcher tried to practically envisage a number of case scenarios and possible situations alongside their relative reflections and proposed actions, particularly with reference to purposes 1) and 2) mentioned above. The attempt can be found in table "Risk of Harm & Disclosure" in Appendix 19. Similarly, the researcher had to be prepared to handle in an appropriate manner any delicate or potentially harmful information- for instance in the case of any child protection issue. As for Points 3 of guidance on interviews in MRS guidelines:

Any disclosure of a confidential nature which may be potentially harmful to the child must be dealt with in a sensitive and responsible manner

MRS Guidelines: 11

It is understood that the researcher's obligation towards the child to treat everything the child discloses as confidential must be limited in some cases, for example where there is a serious risk of imminent harm to the child or another person. In these and similar cases the information should be shared with the relevant officer in the school, who will be dealing with the information following the school's safety procedures.

Fortunately, the project ran smoothly from start to finish without the occurrence of any worrying or troubled incidents from the participants.

3.10 DATA COLLECTION MODALITIES

3.10.1 Managing access

The school participating in the study was first contacted through an email sent to the Head Teacher in September 2010. Following this request, a meeting was arranged the same week to discuss the research and its modalities in more details. After reaching agreement with the Head Teacher, the researcher organised a presentation session for every class so that the research could be explained to potential participants (Year, 4, 5 and 6). Following the presentation, each participant was given three documents to take home: a child-friendly information leaflet, a child consent form and a parent consent form (see respective copies of these documents in appendices 1-3).

Within two weeks most consent forms were returned to the school reception signed by the girls and their parents (success rate 94%), so that the researcher was able to start fieldwork in October 2010.

3.10.2 Recording interviews

All phenomenological interviews were video recorded with prior parental and girls' consent. The video recording was considered particularly important at this stage due to the vivacity of peer-to-peer interactions, to better grasp the essence of girls' responses to adverts and their co-construction of meanings during the interview.

Girls were also reminded that they could switch off the recording device at any time during the session or decide to be "out of view", with simply their voice being recorded. In fact, while most girls were eager to be filmed through the session, a minority of girls expressed the wish to have only their voice recorded or to take control of the recording device: in all instances they were allowed to do as they pleased, provided of course that this was done in a collaborating way, without excessive disruption of the session.

Some random activity and discussion during group sessions were also filmed. In these instances the recording was often initiated by participants, with the girls enthusiastically taking turns for being either in front or in charge of the camera.

3.10.3 Interviews location

All interviews were conducted at school (with the exception of a few ones during the follow-up stage, which were completed online through Skype chat). Some of the interviews conducted at school with the girls took place in a room called “sanctuary”, a large “play room” with plenty of toys and games of all sorts: this location - while at first it was thought not ideal as potential cause for distraction - proved instead very helpful in several occasions, as it provided a spontaneous opportunity to see the girls engaging with their favourite toys and a natural prompt for conversations around girls’ playing habits.

3.10.4 Research schedule

The fieldwork extended during the full academic year (starting in October 2010 and completed in July 2011) and it progressed between intervals to allow analysis to inform every following stage (preliminary, phenomenological, follow-up). A table summarising every session of fieldwork and visit to the school can be found in Appendix (Fieldwork Table, Appendix 21).

3.11 METHODS OF ANALYSIS

(...) data analysis is a process of *making meaning*. It is a creative process, not a mechanical one... your job is to actively create meaning out of your raw materials.

Esterberg 2002:148

The approach used for the analysis is very much an inductive one, which emphasises the importance of seeing a theory emerging from the data by avoiding pre-imposing a theoretical frame to the data from the outset. Similarly to the approach used in grounded theory studies (Charmaz, 2006), it was important to collect empirical data

and then work through them intuitively and iteratively by means of systematic and focused comparison, to see whether any pattern could be recognised within the data, while in the final stage the findings are interpreted in the light of established theories. According to the different research questions, a suitable method of analysis was employed.

ANALYSIS - RESEARCH QUESTION 1)

To answer the first research question: *How do young girls perceive and interpret ideals of femininity portrayed in current advertising images?*

a phenomenological approach was used during the analysis of advert-elicited interviews in order to fully arrive at the meanings and common themes of the experiences from the standing point of the participants.

Phenomenological understanding is distinctly existential, emotive, enactive, embodied, situational, and non-theoretic.

Van Manen 1997:347

Horizontalisation, phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation (Moustaka, 1994) were applied to the phenomenological data in the attempt to reach the essence and meaning of the experience. An excerpt from Hein and Austin (2001) effectively elucidates the process:

Any time a preconception or personal reaction surfaces, the researcher brackets it, sets it aside, and tries to comprehend the person's experience as it is for that person. In this process of *phenomenological reduction* the researcher tries to suspend his or her conceptions of any world other than the subjective world of the person who is being studied. Afterward, the researcher goes through and extracts major themes that are repeated again and again. Then the researcher may or may not discuss these themes with the "co-researcher" for verification or amplification. (...) Finally, the researchers look to see what common themes occur among the various participants in the study, or whether there are clusters of one kind of theme in one group and another kind of theme in another group.

Hein and Austin 2001:10

Phenomenological reduction aims to allow the identification of phenomenological categories of response (that is, the essence of girl's response). Once the phenomenological categories are identified, they are re-examined in the light of existing literature. The process includes finding a fitting theory – which was identified as Stuart Hall (1980)'s Reception Theory - and then 'translating' the

phenomenological categories into the alternative “positioning” categories formulated by Hall (1980) to allow to see theoretically-informed patterns in the data.

ANALYSIS – RESEARCH QUESTION 2

The second research question is: *In which ways can advertising generate negative feelings towards oneself in young girls (i.e. frustration, inadequacy, self-loathing)?*

To answer this question the study proceeded through a thematic analysis of the transcripts to highlight any kind of negative feeling generated by the adverts during phenomenological sessions.

ANALYSIS – RESEARCH QUESTION 3

The third research question is: *Are there specific factors enabling young girls to critically respond to the stereotyped representations of girlhood promoted by most marketers?*

Undoubtedly, this was for the researcher the burning question - surely the most complex to answer, but also the one which fed unremitting enthusiasm to the project. It was actually the main curiosity and rationale of the study from the very start:

What make some girls so grounded, so untouched by, so resilient to the constant media bombardment about being sexy and beautiful? And why, all the while, other girls are absorbing these messages like sponges and internalise them at the point of risking losing themselves completely in the search for pointless “appearance gains”?

Researcher Diary 23/6/2010

The starting point of this part of the analysis is the logical consideration that

if we live in a world of great causal complexity, then a common pattern will be for outcomes to result from different combinations of causal conditions.

Ragin 2000:103

The small sample of the study has allowed the collection of a richer and greater amount of information about participants’ personality and life context compared to

what it is usually allowed by larger sample quantitative studies. This breadth of contextual data serves the main purpose of the study, which is to contextualise young girls' advertising experiences, by bringing together in the analysis two distinct data sets (see diagram in fig.4.6, p.70): one data set (named "CONT", as short for "context") providing information about participants' life world and personality (e.g. family, media consumption, extra-curricular activities, stereotyped femininity index) and the other data set (named "PHEN", short for "phenomenological") representing girls' mode of responses (8 main categories of responses were identified through Analysis Part 1) and their actual perception of adverts

To effectively link up CONT and PHEN data sets, the analysis stems from the same principles of Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA; Ragin, 2000): every participant represents a case study with a different configuration of variables and the challenge is to make sense of a vast array of configurations in order to find patterns of complex causation between factors in the participants' life (causal conditions) and their way of making sense and responding to adverts (outcomes). From the question, the focus would lie naturally on locating "protective" factors leading to girls' greater resiliency towards media messages.

Because the contextual data ought to stay "in conversation" with the phenomenological data, the analysis of the two different datasets needed to be both ontologically and technically integrated (allowing the datasets to effectively "talk with each other"). While the imperative issue of ontological integration was discussed earlier in this chapter, for *technical* integration to happen it was crucial to apply different data reduction techniques in order to render the data comparable.

You will need to begin by asking whether data generated via different sources or methods take a similar or complementary form in a technical or organizational sense, so that they can be straightforwardly aggregated or grouped together, or made comparable in some way.

Mason 2002:34

The whole process of *technical integration* can be explained as follow:

- It starts with what the researcher would call "*binarisation*" of data: all quantitative and qualitative data, already organised and reduced through

previous coding, are transformed into quantitative binary variables. For example, the code COB - "Close Older Brother" - is recorded as 0 = NO (when absent) or 1 = YES (when present).

- Once all the variables are translated into binary form, they are then inputted in SPSS software in order for a more detailed statistical analysis to be performed. The analysis program conveniently allows export of the variables as a matrix or graphs (i.e. cross-tabulation chart), so that relations between certain variables of interest can be shown.
- *Mediating factors and negative case analysis*: a strong or obvious relation between two quantified binary variables can be weakened or strengthened by the presence of another variable, which can be called a "mediating factor". Specific instances can be revealed through negative case analysis: for example, in the case of participants showing an unusual relation between SMUG (level of stereotyped media content) and SFI (level of embodiment of stereotyped femininity) could be further explored by looking at mediating variables in their life (e.g. CFR "Close Father Relationship" or HPM "High Parents Mediation") which could act as *protective factors*, therefore weakening the usual positive correlation found between SMUG and SFI.
- *Sub-groups of participants*: by looking closely at sub-groups of participants presenting similar characteristics (e.g. a satisfied body image or a high stereotypical embodiment of femininity) the analysis can proceed through a systematic focused comparison (George, 1979) in order to locate important patterns in their way of perceiving, responding and manipulate meanings from adverts.
- *EGA "the extreme groups approach"* – this technique has been applied in various studies where the focus of the investigation is a continuous variable, to help the detection of causal patterns within configurations of contextual/life factors. Preacher et al. (2005), have published a comprehensive review and discussion of the method, concluding that this type of analysis is more

appropriate and useful within pilot and exploratory studies rather than in bigger scale quantitative studies. By focusing the attention on two “extreme” groups of participants – called *critical* and *uncritical*, (the term “extreme” refers not to the participants but to the particular outcome under investigation; in this case “critical response to adverts depicting stereotyped femininity” is the outcome of interest) the analysis aims to detect whether there is a pattern of particular factors in the CONT data set (participants’ personality and life context) linked to critical/uncritical response.

In some cases the direction of causality could never be certain (the notorious chicken and egg conundrum), but the detected relationship between variables can at least be acknowledged and tested further (for instance, the finding could indicate a link between the consumption of sexualised media content and a high investment into stereotyped femininity or body dissatisfaction, but it could be that girls who are more keen on stereotyped femininity or dissatisfied with their body - perhaps for reasons well beyond their consumption of media- tend to privilege sexualised media content as they are more attracted by it).

This is also why it was considered so important to gather as much information as possible about participants’ life context, especially with regard to family relationships: through a deeper knowledge of every case, the complex combinations of factors and their interaction in relation to a specific outcome can be acknowledged, studied and replicated by further investigations.

In other cases the relation between a particular response and a certain outcome can be acknowledged and relevant hypotheses, to be tested by future studies, formulated accordingly (for example in the case of a more critical attitude towards adverts by girls with a lower embodiment of stereotyped femininity).

3.12 LIMITATIONS

Several challenges and limitations were found in both the implementation of methods and the analysis process which can be summarised below:

- The context in which the girls watched the adverts was indeed different from the one they usually experience (i.e. at home, in the middle of programs). Being in school was not ideal as it put the participant in a particular state of mind.
- Phenomenological interviewing relies heavily on the ability to describe a particular experience verbally. With children, descriptions of experiences are often shorter and less detailed compared to adult accounts.
- Due to working with three different age groups, some adverts were considered not appropriate for the older group (age 11): this could have affected the level of interest and their response.
- While some peer-to-peer session worked extremely well, some interaction did not provide the same insights due to a leader-follower dynamic within the couple.
- While the interview was conceived as a dialogue yielding a co-creation of meanings, with some participants the process was a difficult one and the researcher could sense the power imbalance and the reticence of some girls to contradict statements or points of view unintentionally expressed by the researcher.
- The analysis is conducted by a single researcher. The use of an “interpretative group” (Thompson et al. 1989) would have helped the bracketing process (suspending of own beliefs and pre-conceptions) bringing a broader perspective to the analysis.
- Fieldwork extended over a full academic year. The age of participants -the fact that they are involved in a period of important transition, where their identity and ideas are constantly changing and taking new shapes – makes it difficult to produce a static snapshot of their preferences, feeling, thoughts, including their own embodiment of femininity. The analysis should try to consider the sudden changes and idiosyncratic accounts emerging from the actual data,

while recognising the impossibility of ensuring the constant update of old information gathered from the participants.

3.13 SELF-REFLEXIVITY

(...) no matter how many methodological guarantees we try to put in place in an attempt to produce objectivity, in research the subjective always intrudes.

Walkerdine et al. 2001:84

Self-reflexivity means the process of reflecting upon, examining critically and exploring analytically the nature of the research process (Fonow and Cook, 1991; Ribbens and Edwards, 1998). As Mason (2004) noted, the process involve self-scrutiny and the willingness/ability of the researcher to ask herself difficult or 'uncomfortable' questions:

Qualitative research should involve critical self-scrutiny by the researcher, or *active reflexivity*. This means that researcher should constantly take stock of their actions and their role in the research process, and subject these to the same critical scrutiny as the rest of their "data". This is based on the belief that a researcher cannot be neutral, or objective, or detached, from the knowledge and evidence they are generating. Instead, they should seek to understand their role in that process. Indeed, the very act of asking oneself difficult questions in the research process is part of reflexivity.

Mason 2002:7

A key feature of the process is for the researcher to make her own pre-conceptions and fantasies - often derived from her own previous experiences and feeling regarding a particular subject – known to herself.

The capacity to hear a story correctly requires the ability to pay attention to all aspects of one's experience (or counter-transference). For the researcher to actually hear what the interviewee is saying to her she needs to acknowledge her own fantasies. We often hear what we expect to hear or feel comfortable with and screen out the rest.

Walkerdine et al. 2001:89

The way reflexivity works throughout the project is a very personal and private process which is difficult to define, because every researcher will have his/her own way to deal with the fantasies, desires and fears experienced throughout the project.

We are always dealing with a process of *double inscription* whose articulation varies according to a range of social circumstances.

Cohen, 1999:11

Wolf (1996) warns about the dangers of making the researcher voice more central than that of participants. In addition, different disciplines vary in the modalities of applying and reporting reflexivity: in marketing studies for instance the reflexivity process is often not acknowledged as much as one would find in feminist studies.

Thus, in this study the challenge was to strike a balance between dealing with the researcher's inner reflections without undue bearing on participants accounts, in order to generate a more truthful account of participants experiences out of the self-reflexivity process. The approach adopted in this thesis goes in the direction of allowing the reader to understand where the researcher comes from (e.g. explaining the personal rationale for the study) without falling into too personal accounts which could deviate or distract from the focus of the research process.

Chapter 4 – Findings

Thesis Structure

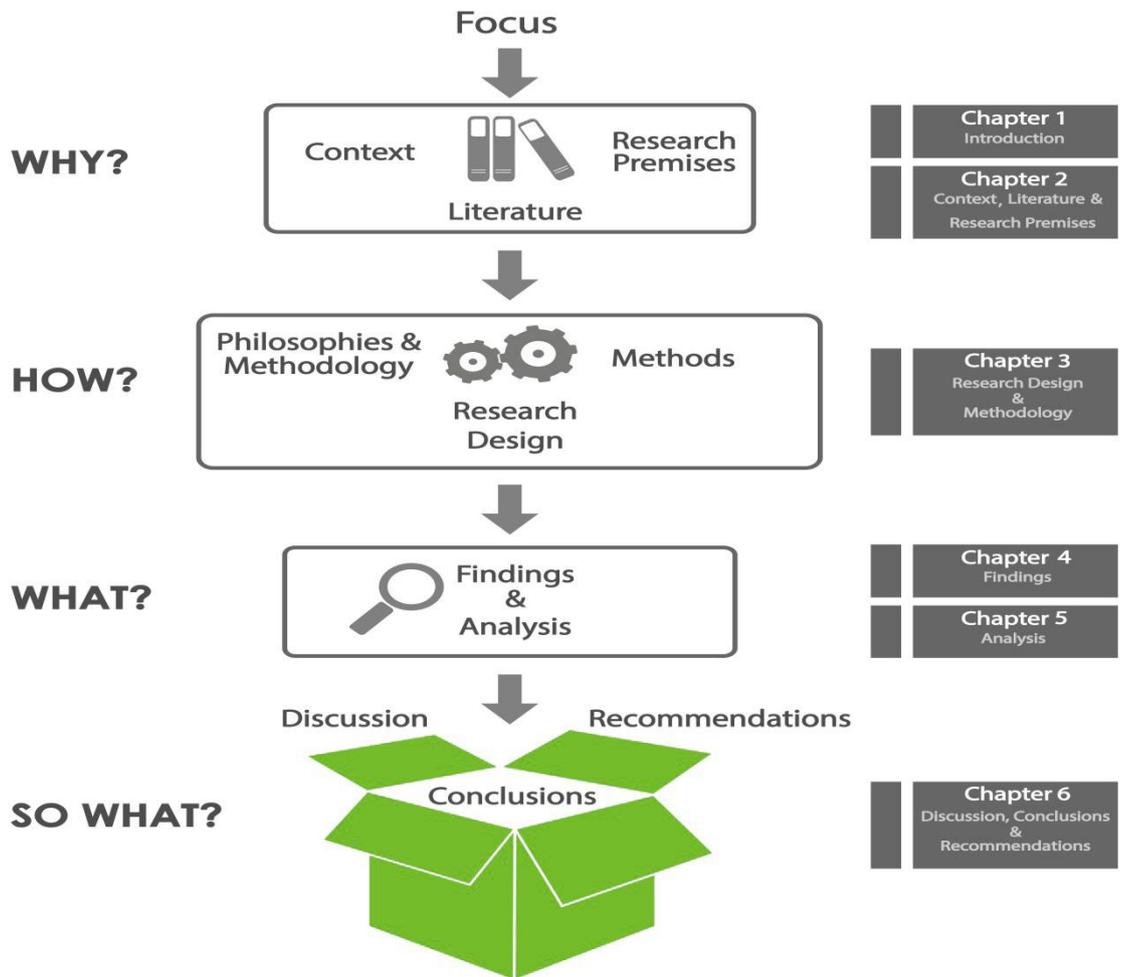


Figure 4.1 – Thesis Structure

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the main findings from the three stages of the project (preliminary, phenomenological and follow-up). Some of the more descriptive data will be discussed here in the light of literature, while data from the phenomenological and follow-up stages will be mainly integrated and discussed in the two final chapters.

The research comprised three stages which provide the structure for the presentation of findings in this chapter:

1) Preliminary stage – (descriptive data about the sample)

- Questionnaire
- Projective Techniques
- Group sessions

2) Phenomenological stage – (girls' response to adverts)

- Phenomenological Interviews through adverts elicitation

3) Follow-up stage – (validation and amplification of emerging themes and patterns)

- Follow-up Interviews

Whenever appropriate, these findings are integrated with additional insights coming from:

- participant observation (in the playground, during break time or PE classes);
- informal chats with teachers and parents;
- fieldwork notes and research diary;
- girls' performances (five groups "performance" sessions solicited by participants were organised at the end of the project, with the girls making a performance of their choice –alone or in group- in front of the camera).

Further analysis and discussion of the findings presented in this chapter will be the focus of the two final chapters. To facilitate linkage between the data presented in this section and the themes /patterns discussed in the analysis, some pre-analysis (coding, categories, grouping and cross tabulation) will be applied to key findings in this chapter.

Graphs and bar charts illustrate the main descriptive statistics about the sample: this is done to make the material more accessible and memorable, as the information about participants' personality and life context will be regularly referred to within the analysis and discussion chapters. The most relevant descriptive findings will be also compared with national surveys and reports on young girls to see how the results from the sample in this study compare with other published sources. Fictional names

and actual age in bracket (e.g. Jess, age 11) are used throughout. The ages of participants refer to their average age throughout the project.

4.1.1. The school participating in the study

The research was conducted in a comprehensive primary school in a suburb of Nottingham which is quite close to the city centre and whose resident population is predominantly of working class background, with most residents employed in the service industry (primarily public administration, education and health).

From the Annual Report of the Borough (Local Development Framework, 2011), the unemployment rate –despite a marked increase in the recent years - is still below the national average, as well as the percentage of working age residents who are qualified to NVQ4 or above (e.g. HND, degree, higher degree and equivalent). Deprivation in terms of education, skills and training is quite high compared with the national picture, with the borough’s 10 most deprived areas falling within the top 20 per cent most deprived nationally. According to 2010 population estimates, the 113,000 residents are mainly of White British heritage, with a proportion of 7.3% of “Black and other ethnic minority”, which is well below the national average. The catchment area of the school corresponds to a typical, not particularly deprived, predominantly white working class neighbourhood.

A recent school Ofsted report (2010) rated the school overall performance as “good”. The school size is smaller than average (158 pupils, mixed gender), with the vast majority of pupils of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils on free school meals is lower than the national average. The school holds the Healthy Schools, Artsmark and the Echo Schools Bronze awards. Pupils are taught in six classes, including three mixed-age classes for Year 4 and 5. The researcher noted her first impressions about the school in her diary:

“The Head teacher provides a firm guidance and she is always very involved in the school life. The teaching and the school office staff are caring and enthusiastic. The small size of the school seems to facilitate a good interaction between children and between families and school staff. The overall atmosphere seems to promote a friendly, informal but disciplined approach to learning.”

Research Diary, 23/10/11

A recent Ofsted report confirmed these intuitions:

The school provides an exceptionally caring and supportive environment in which staff know pupils very well as individuals and take care to ensure that all pupils thrive. (...) The school engagement with parents and carers is also outstanding.

Ofsted report, 2010

In terms of provision outside the main curriculum, the school offers a wide range of after-schools activities throughout the year, providing a good choice of extra-curricular activities for its pupils. One suggested improvement by Ofsted was to encourage pupils' multi-cultural awareness by increasing opportunities for contact with communities overseas, which was considered yet below average. As confirmed by the teachers and Head Teacher, all the girls participating in the study were well-adjusted to school life, with no behavioural problems or learning disabilities.

4.2 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FROM QUESTIONNAIRE

Standardised data from the questionnaire-guided interview provide descriptive statistic about the sample. Table 5.1 shows the composition of the sample from the preliminary stage by age/school year. Appendix 22 reports the average age of each participant throughout the project, with percentages for every age group.

		Year of school	
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Year 4 (age 8-9)	7	18.9
	Year 5 (age 9-10)	14	37.8
	Year 6 (age 10-11)	16	43.2
	Total	37	100.0

Table 4.1 - Composition of sample according to School Year

The questionnaire (see Appendix 4) included questions covering 7 main areas:

- 1) Family (family life, relationship with parents, sibling and extended family)
- 2) Media habits and preferences (TV, Internet and Magazines)
- 3) Extra-curricular activities and hobbies
- 4) Body image and attitude towards beauty

- 5) Growing up (dreams and aspirations)
- 6) Perception and attitude towards boys
- 7) Role Models and Celebrities

4.2.1 Family

The majority of participants live with both parents (64.9%), with the remaining mostly equally split between “only mum” and “mum and step dad”. There were only two exceptions: one girl living with her father and one living with mother and step mother. The majority of participants have one or more siblings (see table below) with just 5 participants being an only child. Almost 65% live with both parents, corresponding to the national average picture for the age group (USoc Survey -DWP, 2012). The average family household size is four, with two children per family, a figure which also reflects the national average (OfNC, 2012).

Living with parents			Siblings		
	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent
both parents	24	64.9	only child	5	13.5
only mum	6	16.2	with sister/s	9	24.3
only dad	1	2.7	with brother/s	9	24.3
mum & step dad	5	13.5	with brother/s & sister/s	14	37.8
mum & step mum	1	2.7	Total	37	100.0
Total	37	100.0			

Table 4.2 and 4.3 – Family Composition of sample

It was deemed relevant for this study to know about the girls’ relationship with the family: figures 4.2 and 4.3 below show that the vast majority of girls spend more time with their mother and a considerable portion (27%) wished to spend more time with their father. Mothers were named as the closest family member by the vast majority of girls (70.3%), data confirmed also by parents’ responses to the same question in their questionnaire (which in all cases was completed by mothers, with a 86.4% response rate. Five girls failed to return the parents questionnaire, despite several successive copies being given).

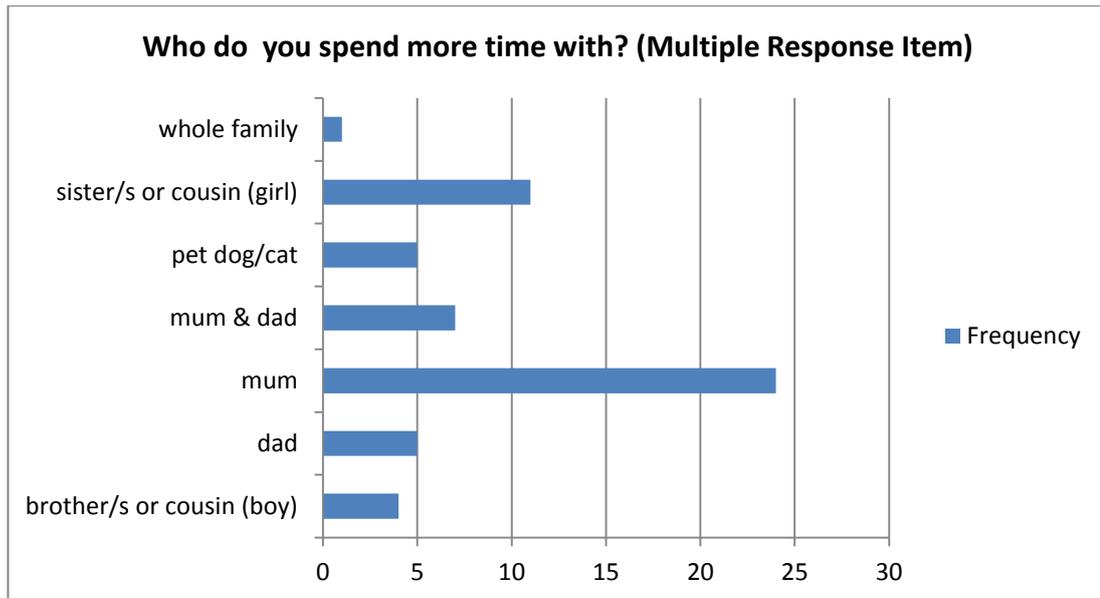


Figure 4.2 – Who do you spend more time with?

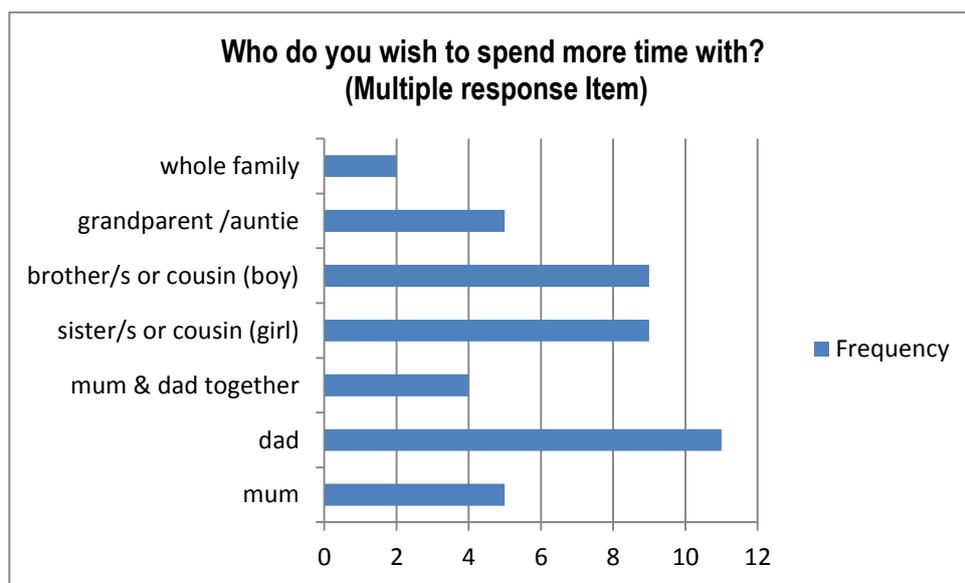


Figure 4.3 - Who do you wish to spend more time with?

Of the 11 girls wishing more time with their dad, about half live with both parents (N=6), while the remaining with their mother (N=3) or mother and stepfather (N=2). A total of 7 girls declared a wish for more time with their brother, either as a first or second preference (representing 30.4% of N=23 having brothers), while another 2 girls (one only child and one with sisters) indicated a wish for more time with a close male cousin. A similar relative proportion of girls declared wishing more time with their sister (9 girls – roughly 39% of the N=23 having sisters).

As will be further discussed within the analysis chapter, relationships with the father and with siblings (especially older brothers and sisters) emerge as a crucial factor in girls' negotiation and enactment of alternative femininities.

4.2.2 Media Habits and Preferences

Most participants appear to be very eager in their consumption of TV and the Internet (although the availability of a computer for personal use was often mentioned as an issue by many, particularly in the younger girls groups), while there was less incidence of regular magazine readers (56.7% never or rarely reading magazines).

Time spent with the three media can be summarised as follow:

- A large majority watched TV every day (64.9%) or most days (21.6%) (=86.5%). Approximately 68% had a TV in their bedroom.
- Less than half of the sample (only 16 girls out of the total sample) used the Internet every day or most days, with 14 girls openly complaining about not being able to use the internet as much as they wished to, due to unavailability of a working computer in the house or because the use of family computer was prioritised in favour of older members
- Only 8.3% of the total sample read magazines every day or most days, although 35.1% read magazines at least once a week.

There is an interesting case of one girl in the sample (Meg, 8/9 years old) who never watched TV channels (only DVDs, mainly animated movies for boys, e.g. *Ben 10*).

The most popular TV channels named by the girls were Disney (45.9%) and Nickelodeon (18.9%), with most popular programs being American comedies such as *Good Luck Charlie*, *Wizard of the Waverly Places*, *The Suite Life on Deck*, *Ant Farm*, and *So Random* (these comedies were often mentioned as a bunch) watched by 60% of the sample, where girls are usually enacted by perfectly groomed characters, mostly in sexualised and stereotyped roles, although due to the assertiveness or humour of their characters they do not come across as mere 'bimbos'.

Reality TV shows and talent contexts were also high on the list of preferences with 80% of girls regularly watching *The X Factor* and 58% *Junior Master Chef*. Soap operas were also popular and watched more or less regularly by 55.7% of the sample.

The vast majority of girls watched some program with their parents: 37.8% watch soaps every day (*Eastenders* and *Coronation Street* were the ones usually named) with at least one parent, while 35.1% watch talent contest such as *Britain's Got Talent* or *The X Factor* as a whole family activity. Family movies were mentioned by 5 girls (13.5%) while Documentaries or Sport were mentioned in two cases only.

Favourite internet activities were playing online games (preferred by 89.2% of the girls, as a first or second favourite activity), on multi-games websites such as *Miniclips* or on websites specifically targeted at girls such as *GirlGoGames*, with games focusing almost exclusively on fashion, grooming, decorating, cooking or caring for pets. Other popular choices were “build your own character” websites such as *MovieStarPlanet*, *MonshiMonsters* and *Binweevils*. The passion for online videogames seem to be confirmed by a recent market research bulletin:

More tween girls are accessing brands and playing games online than ever before, with UK monthly active users growing to 2.5 million. This is up 56 per cent year-on-year from 1.6 million. Data from Newzoo shows that in the US, UK and France, tween girls listed online gaming as their third favourite pastime, after browsing the internet and watching TV. A quarter of their time is spent gaming, according to the research.

Licenzig.biz 2012

Browsing on *You Tube* was named by 59.4%, mostly to watch music videos or funny video clips. 21.6% mentioned *Facebook* among their favourite internet activities, with the girls using it mainly as a venue for chat and videogames, with 40.5% of the total sample (N=15/37) having already their own Facebook profile, despite not being officially old enough to join the site.

Other girls openly admitted that they were not allowed on Facebook or similar networking sites (43.2%), while 4 girls declared they were not interested (10.8%). For the 43.2% “not allowed” group, this was taken as an indication of higher parental screening, often consistent in other media areas (i.e. same parents would usually not allow sexually explicit programs – e.g. *Big Brother* - playing in the background).

Favourite Websites – (Multiple Preferences Item)		
	Frequency	Per cent
Unisex Multi Games (e.g. Miniclips)	19	51.3
Girls Multi Games (e.g. GirlsGoGames)	18	48.6
YouTube	16	43.2
MoshiMonsters/Binweevils	15	40.5
Google search	10	27.0
MovieStarPlanet/ Stardoll/Purpleplanet	8	21.6
Facebook	8	21.6
Cbeebies/ CartoonNetwork/ Disney	6	16.2
Educational (e.g. Kids Astronomy, Maths games)	5	13.5
Shopping & Catalogues Websites (e.g. Ebay, Amazon, Argos)	3	8.1

Table 4.4 - Favourite Websites (Multiple Preferences Item)

Magazines chosen by the girls are “tween” girls’ magazines such as *Girl Talk* and *Pop Star*; these magazines’ content is highly stereotypical, being mainly focussed on gossip around tween celebrities and several pages filled with “tips for looking your best”. Only 3 girls regularly browsed their mother’s celebrities magazines (i.e. *OK, Hello*) and two of them were included in the follow-up stage.

The patterns and habits of media consumption reported by the girls in this study mirror the findings of a fairly recent UK study (Nairn, Ormond and Bottomley, 2007) exploring in depth the connections between children’s wellbeing and the commercial world that surrounds them, through an extensive questionnaire distributed to 557 children aged 9-13 across six schools.

4.2.3 Stereotyped Media Usage Group (SMUG)

On the basis of the considerable amount of information gathered about participants’ media habits and consumption, it was thought helpful in terms of analysis to group the girls into three main groups (Lower-Medium-Higher) depending on their reported consumption of gender-stereotypical or sexualised media content (refer to appendix 11 to see how the grouping is calculated). Factors such as the regular habit of visiting only-girls websites or the preference for videogames typically targeted at girls, regular reading of celebrities/tweens’ magazines, regular watching of Disney’s

comedies, X-Factor and other “pop culture” competitions were employed. It is to be stressed here that this grouping was based on the factual information gathered from the girls and it only aims to give a rough indication of the amount of gender-stereotyped content voluntarily accessed by the girls on a more or less regular basis.

It was of course not possible to include girls’ overall “exposure” (voluntary and involuntary) to stereotypical or sexualised media content, although indicators such as the actual availability of media channels/devices and the general degree of parents’ mediation and parental “screening” in the consumption of media often can assist in making an informed if speculative guess. However, in the calculation were included elements such as the availability of adult celebrities’ magazines (e.g. *OK*) and the exposure to sexually explicit programs (i.e. *Big Brother*), even when only played in the background. The relation between SMUG and other variables will be discussed during the analysis; participants seem to be well distributed between the three usage groups.

Stereotyped Media Usage Group			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Lower	11	29.7
	Medium	15	40.5
	Higher	11	29.7
	Total	37	100.0

Table 4.5 – SMUG Sample Frequency

4.2.4 Extra-curricular activities and hobbies

The majority of girls (62.1%) reported doing some extra-curricular activity after school, while a minority (14 girls, 37.8%) did not. The bar chart (fig. 4.4) shows the range of activities in which the girls are involved on a weekly basis (multiple responses item). Interestingly, subsequent analysis showed that participants involved with many extra-curricular activities (more than two per week) shown generally a more flexible/diverse way of expressing their femininity. Of course, as with many other relations between variables in a small sample study, this could be out of mere chance.

Regular weekly activity/class after school- Multiple Responses Frequency

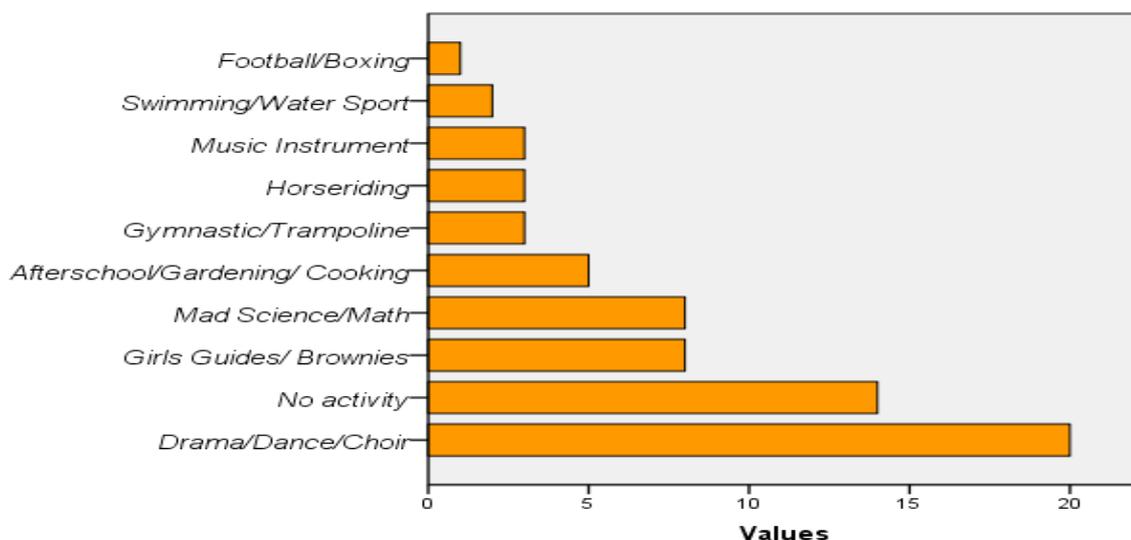


Figure 4.4 – Bar chart of regular weekly activity/class after school (Multiple Response Item)

4.2.5 Body Image & Attitudes towards Beauty

The Children Body Image Scale (Truby and Paxton , 2002 –see appendix 12 for details) was used to assess girls’ satisfaction with their body. The two graphs in figure 4.5 and 4.6 below provide an overview of the results: the pie chart shows results across the total sample while the bar chart uses cross tabulation to see the distribution among different year groups. The findings confirm results from previous studies reporting body dissatisfaction as becoming normative in young girls (Phares, Steinberg, and Thompson, 2004; Ambrosi-Randic, 2000; Davison, Markey, and Birch, 2000; Dohnt and Tiggemann, 2004, 2005, 2006; Poudevigne, O’Connor, Laing, Wilson, Modlesky, and Lewis, 2003) with the percentage of dissatisfaction higher in the older age groups (age 9-11, see figure 5). Because in most cases dissatisfaction is expressed as a desire for a thinner body, a separate category (“reverse unsatisfied”) has been created for the exceptions (n=5 girls wanting to gain weight) and two of these girls were included in the follow-up stage.

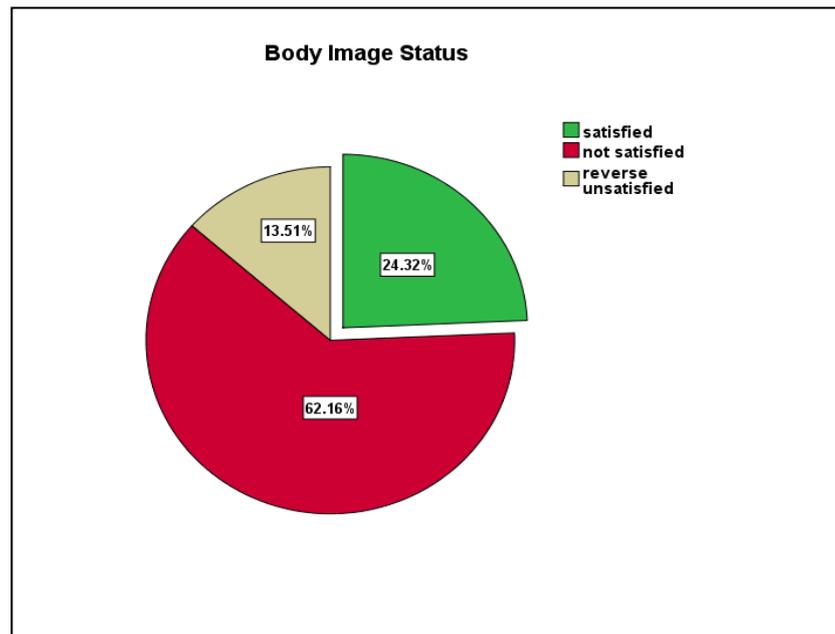


Figure 4.5 – Body Image Status of total sample

Interestingly, only two girls in the “reverse unsatisfied” could be said to be objectively “skinny” (Olga, 9 and Jess, 11), while the other three display an average weight; invariably though, ALL of these girls reported that their mum refers to them as “skinny” or “too skinny”. Three girls reported “A” (thinnest body size) as ideal and they were all included in the final stage. Only 9 girls (roughly 24% of the total sample) reported satisfaction with their body size (perceived body size = ideal body size) and most of them have been included in the phenomenological stage.

By singling out groups of girls with a satisfied body image (6 out of the 9 girls were included in the first round of advert-elicitation, and 4 of them have been selected for the follow-up interview) or an extremely thin body ideal (3 girls out of the total sample made this choice and they were all included in the following stages), the analysis is looking closely at their mode of interaction with portrayals of femininity in adverts and other media (i.e. favourite programs), to see whether there are fundamental differences in the way they read and negotiate these messages (are they more/less critical? Are there signs of parental mediation in their media consumption or understanding of adverts? Do they pay more/less attention to adverts or do they regularly skip them?), or common underlining factors in their life context (i.e. family relationships, media preferences, extra-curricular activities).

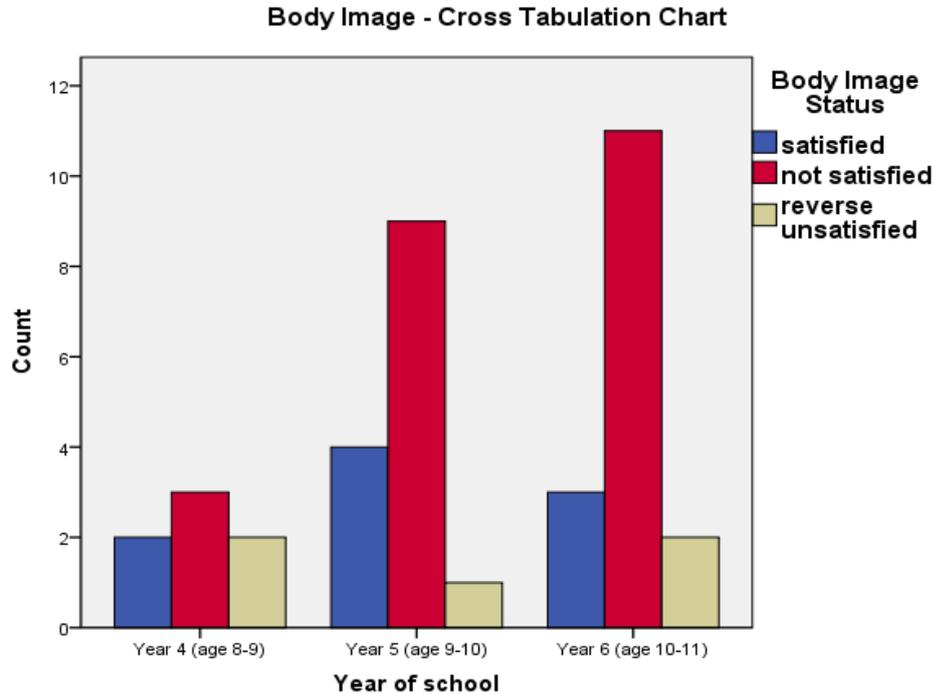


Figure 4.6 - Body Image Status according to age group

Attitude towards beauty

The questionnaire contains three questions aimed at gauging girls' attitude towards their appearance (Q24, 24b and 25), specifically about wearing make-up and their satisfaction with own looks. Other hints regarding girls' attitude towards beauty were provided by their answers to projective slides, by their parents' response to question P22 ("In your opinion, does your daughter care about her image/looks?") and by observing girls' overall attire on occasion of school's "no-uniforms days" and during group sessions (participants were asked to bring a change of clothes for the group session and wear their preferred attire for the performance sessions; see fig. 4.10, page 131).

The practice of wearing make-up seems to be widespread as most girls (84%) claimed to wear make-up more or less regularly: 65% of girls only sometimes or on special occasions, while 19% are real "make-up enthusiasts" and declared to wear it quite often or every day. This latter group often complained about the school policy prohibiting facial make-up (nail polish was permitted), confessing also that they usually wear it anyway, but in a subtle manner so as not to be found out. When asked

which make-up they wear, they mostly indicated lipstick, eye shadow, blusher, mascara and nail polish. Only a minority of girls (16%) would not use make-up and in all cases they explained this as their own decision and not imposed by their parents. This minority of girls would often complain about the pressure to wear make-up at parties. In contrast with the results seen for the Body Image Scale, most girls express satisfaction with their overall looks when asked explicitly, as shown in table 5.6:

Body Image Status * Are you happy about the way you look? Cross tabulation

		Are you happy about the way you look?				Total
		Not much	Only sometimes	Yes, a bit	Yes, a lot	
Body Image Status	Satisfied	0	0	3	6	9
	Not satisfied	1	1	12	9	23
	Reverse unsatisfied	1	1	2	1	5
Total		2	2	17	16	37

Table 4.6 – Cross Tabulation of Body Image Status and Responses for Q25

Interestingly, while there appears to be a positive relationship between “satisfied body image” and “satisfied with looks” as all the 9 girls expressing satisfaction with own body shape would invariably declare to be happy (“a bit”) or very happy (“a lot”) with the way they look, many of the girls “unsatisfied” with their body, would equally declare to be “a bit” happy or very happy with the way they look (see table 5.6). It seems therefore that “body image satisfaction” (as pertaining to thinner/fatter body) is something quite specific and does not necessarily affect girls’ satisfaction with their overall looks. An alternative explanation could be that the more explicit type of question might have generated a “social desirability bias” in the answers. Overall, these findings seem to mirror the results of the recent *Girls Guiding Attitude Survey* (2013) reporting girls’ attitudes towards appearance:

Some gendered appearance expectations are completely normalised among school-aged girls (...) Among younger girls, almost two thirds of 7- to 11-year-olds use nail polish (63%), half wear make-up (49%) (...) Pressure to conform to an idealised body size starts early in girls’ lives and increases as they progress through their teens (...) One in five girls of primary school age (7- to 11-year-olds) say they have been on a diet.

However, compared to older age groups, the satisfaction in terms of looks is still high in this age group (similarly to the findings from this study):

Age plays a key role in how girls feel about the way they look. At ages 11 to 16 as many girls are unhappy with their looks (47%) as are happy (46%). Specifically, at ages 14 to 16 more than half are unhappy with the way they look (51%). Younger girls, up to age 11, are widely positive - 89% are happy with their looks, and just 9% are not.

Girls Guiding Attitude Survey 2013:12

4.2.6 Growing up (dreams and aspirations)

Career aspirations and dreams relating to their future lives as adults were among the contextual and personality aspects that the research considered important to investigate. Q.24b in the girls' questionnaire contains a sentence-completion item "When I grow up I would like to be..." This format was considered crucial in order to allow maximum freedom and honesty in the response as it avoided influencing the girls with pre-determined categories of future work/occupations. It also represents a more discursive tactic during the questionnaire-guided interview, as the girls would usually explore/explain in more details their future aspirations to the researcher than they would have done by simply clicking a box or a category.

Surprisingly, only a minority of girls reported vague or unrealistic dreams of being a "rich and famous" celebrity (n=3), while the majority revealed a more pragmatic and level-headed attitude towards their future vocation. Most girls expressed opinions which value hard work and persistency in achieving one's own dream.

The results regarding girls aspirations are in line with the findings from a recent nation-wide survey (Girlsguiding Attitude Survey, 2013) and another recent study on young people (though with an older sample of age 14-17) where youth consistently expressed ideas that valued hard work over "effortless achievement" (Mendick, 2013).

Table 4.7 shows girls' responses grouped into homogeneous categories.

Q24b- When I grow up I would like to be...

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Animals Related Profession (Vet / Trainer/ Rescuer)	9	24.3
	Singer/ Actress/Dancer	9	24.3
	Teacher	7	18.9
	Pop Star/ Rich and famous	3	8.1
	Manly profession (e.g. fireman)	3	8.1
	Doctor/Scientist	2	5.4
	Author/ Architect	2	5.4
	TV Presenter	1	2.7
	Beautician/Hair dresser	1	2.7
	Total	37	100.0

Table 4.7 – Responses for Sentence Completion Item Q24b

Although in the popularity of the “Singer/Actress/Dancer” category (N=9) the influence of celebrity culture is undeniable, it should be stressed that the responses in this category were expressed in terms of real interest in the practical endeavour of singing/acting/dancing and not focused on celebrity status or becoming “rich and famous”, like in the cases of the 3 responses in the “Pop Star/Rich & Famous” category. Furthermore, the girls expressing this preference were often engaged regularly in singing, acting or dancing classes, so their aspiration was reflected in their current and practical endeavours.

In term of conformance to stereotypical depictions of gender in the media (especially with reference to children programs), one can group together the categories considered more gender-neutral such as “Teacher”, “Manly professions”, “Doctor/Scientist” and “Author/Architect”: from this grouping emerges that approximately one third of the girls (38%) did not aspire to stereotypical female jobs.

4.2.7 Perception and attitude toward boys

It emerged clearly from participants’ responses that many girls associate “doing active stuff” (in their own words) and sports endeavour with boys. This was also clear from observation of their reticence to participate fully during PE class and their eagerness to skip sport classes (football was a particularly unpopular one). Some girls

reported teasing from boys over competition and fear of “getting sweaty” or “too muscular”. The bar chart below - showing girls’ responses to question 28b in the questionnaire - suggests that girls may be internalising conceptions of girlhood which are opposed to being active, strong or powerful. The results seem also to validate recent findings from a large UK survey (WSFF, 2012) and the Girls Guiding Attitude Survey (2013) reporting girls’ disaffection with sport-related activities.

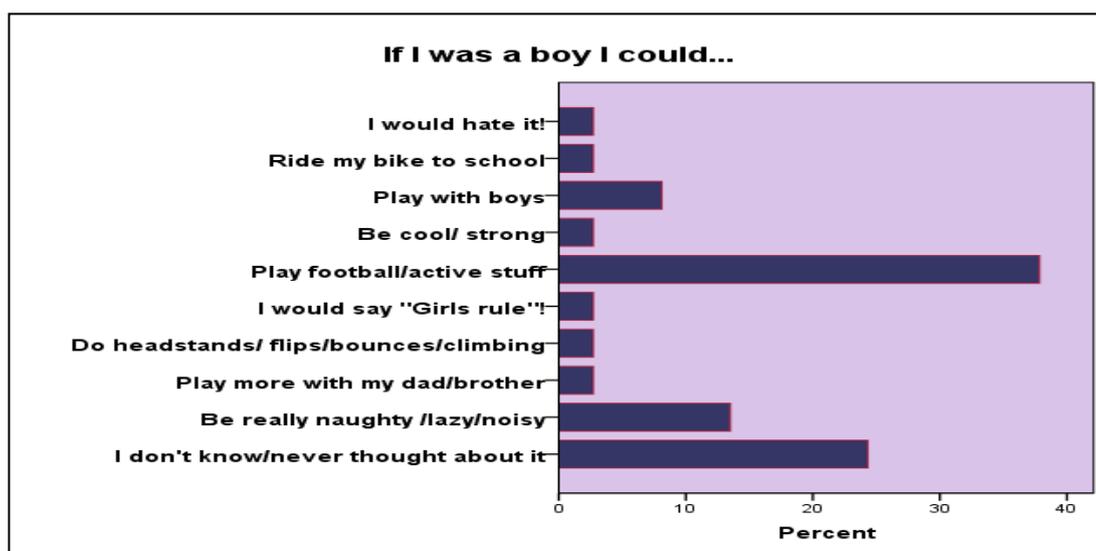


Figure 4.7 – Bar Chart of Responses to Sentence Completion Item (Q28b)

Girls were also asked whether they actually practiced (on a regular basis) any sport or activity popular among boys. Only 2 girls replied that they were actually engaged in such endeavours. One of these girls (Lulu, 10) would point out during the interview that she was “forced” to join a football club by her father; at the end of the academic year, the same girl happily told the researcher “I don’t play that rubbish anymore!” as apparently she was able to convince her father to let her quit the club. The second girl (Enri, 10) would enjoy playing football or basketball with her brother in the garden. During the questionnaire-guided interview, as almost none of the girls (excepted Lulu and Enri) were regularly engaging in typical boys’ activities, the researcher would further probe the girls to include the simple desire or interest in being involved in such an activity. Table 4.8 below shows the main responses. The question was deemed useful in order to gauge the interest of the girls in typically masculine endeavours and also to render explicit which activities the girls would consider as typically “boyish”. Around 30% of the sample would not name any activity, while the majority would identify one or two activities –typically a sport – in

which they would like to engage on a regular basis. In the follow-up interview some of these girls were asked more specifically why they would not practice regularly the desired activity and the main reason emerging seems to be the lack of social acceptability (difficulty in finding friends to share in such activity or previous experience of teasing from boys or other girls). In the analysis chapter this information will be further discussed and triangulated with other data.

Q23 - Would you like to practice any activity which is more popular among boys?

		Frequency	Per cent
Valid	None	11	29.7
	Basketball/ Tag	10	27.0
	Boxing/ Rugby/ Football/ Karate	10	27.0
	Lego / Battle figures	2	5.4
	Sport/ Active stuff	2	5.4
	Watching football matches	1	2.7
	Wrestling/ Shooting videogames	1	2.7
	Total	37	100.0

Table 4.8 – Expressed Preferences for Boys Activities

4.2.8 Role Models and Celebrities

The discussion of celebrities and role models (and the motives behind their choice) provided a way to explore girls' interaction with ideals of femininity/masculinity in their everyday life and in the media. Question Q26 explored “ordinary role models” by asking girls to name one or more people in their life who they really admired. Surprisingly, almost a fifth of the sample would not be able to name a person in their life who they looked up to and only five girls (13%) would name their own mum as a role model, while a significant portion (37%) would name a girlfriend/classmate or a sister/cousin. The qualities more often admired were popularity, kindness/generosity, talent, “looking nice” or being fun to be with.

In contrast, when asked to name a celebrity they really admired (Q27), participants promptly replied naming their favourite singer/actress/actor, often undecided

between two or three different ones. Apart from singers and movie actors, there were no named celebrities from the field of science, sport, charity or humanities.

Q26- Is there a person who you really admire (not a celebrity)?			
		Frequency	Per cent
Valid	Friend (girl)	9	24.3
	Nobody	7	18.9
	Mum	5	13.5
	Sister or cousin (female)	5	13.5
	Teacher	3	8.1
	Brother or cousin (male)	2	5.4
	Friend (boy)	2	5.4
	Older woman (auntie or family's friend)	2	5.4
	Dad	1	2.7
	Grandmother	1	2.7
	Total	37	100.0

Table 4.9 – Expressed Preference for Ordinary Role Model

A third of the sample showed a quasi-obsession with Justin Bieber, while another third were self-declared “anti-Bieber” and could not say enough bad things about the singer. It should be added that sudden shifting between loving/hating of a particular celebrity was not uncommon, with many girls changing their attitude towards their favourite stars – after, for instance, watching a particularly unpleasant interview or reading a negative article about them. In this regard girls seem particularly sensitive to incidents pertaining to the celebrity’s behaviour with their own partners or towards their fans. This shifting practice seems to suggest that girls are usually able and ready to turn a critical eye towards their “idol”, rather than being blindly devoted to their celebrity of choice.

The vast majority of the sample (92%) would have a poster of their favourite star in their bedroom and often this would be a male singer (48%) or a female actress/singer (33%).

More often than not, positive and negative remarks about a particular celebrity provided interesting insights into girls' own criteria of judgement regarding acceptable and likeable (or unacceptable/unlikeable) characteristics in a girl/woman or boy/man. Among the female celebrities most highly regarded were Selena Gomez (American Disney's actress and singer), and Jessie J (British singer) and the reasons cited were often "talent" and "being real" (not lying to their fans or generally acting like a diva). Some of the most devoted Twilight fans – around 30% of the total sample - would name the series' main actress Bella Thorne as their heroine of choice. Among male celebrities, most popular were Justin Bieber, Olly Murs, male singing bands (e.g. One Direction and JLS) and –for Twilight fans- the two main actors in the popular movie series. The reasons behind their fascination were often being "cool", "sexy" "sweet" or "talented".

Overall from exploring girls' relation with celebrity culture, it emerges clear how "talent" and "beauty/sexiness" are perceived as the two main attributes for popularity and success in life, while the category "personality" is constructed as additional quality (desirable but not essential) for retaining a larger fan base ("Well ok ...I think that you can be all that talented and gorgeous but your fans eventually gonna leave you if you act like a @#k!" - Lorraine, age 11)

4.3 MAIN FINDINGS FROM PROJECTIVE TECHNIQUES

Data from *projective sessions* provided information about 3 main areas:

- Embodiment of femininity (stereotyped/counter-stereotyped or neutral)
- Attitude towards grooming practices and appearance
- Critical skills in reading the images

4.3.1 Results from Projective slides A and B

A first projective test consisted in showing the girls two slides (referred to as "slide A" and "slide B" with the girls) which were in sharp contrast as far as the images and the words contained (the two slides are shown in appendix 6), asking them to express their preference. Both slides contain representations of femininity, but while slide A (or "Achiever slide") shows images and words conveying qualities and skills of

neutral or counter-stereotypical connotation, slide B (or “Beauty slide”) shows images and words of obvious stereotypical tone, focusing on appearance and beauty.

The responses to this test show a very balanced distribution of preferences, even within each age group (see cross tabulation on fig. 4.8), with a slightly higher preference for the “Achiever slide” in Year 6. A minority of girls could not decide between the two slides (16%). As will be discussed in the analysis chapter, the results of this test were triangulated with other responses from other projective tests and with girls’ responses to adverts, showing a high level of consistency within each participant, as far as girls’ attitude towards various representations of femininity and their own actual “every day” embodiment of femininity (their preferred way to be a girl).

Slide preference			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Both slides	6	16.2
	Slide A	17	45.9
	Slide B	14	37.8
	Total	37	100.0

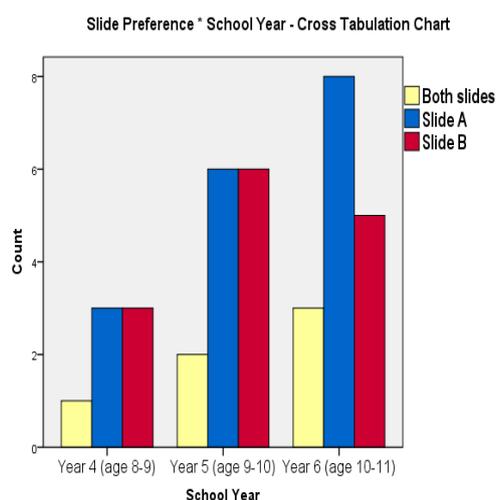


Table 4.10 & Figure 4.8 - Choices expressed for Projective Slide A/B and Cross Tabulation Chart

4.3.2 Results from Slide C – Stereotyped Femininity Index

Slide C contains a series of pictures portraying pre-teens girls in different styles and engaged with different activities. Eight of these pictures have an obvious gender stereotypical tone (e.g. girls ‘doing make-up’ or cheerleaders); eight pictures have a counter-stereotypical tone (e.g. girl doing goalkeeping or karate); the remaining 5 pictures can be considered as neutral (e.g. playing guitar or horse riding).

Girls were asked to mark the pictures with different colour markers:

Red marker: “This is definitely me” (identification)

Blue marker: “This is not me yet, but I would like to get this way” (aspiration)

Black marker: “This is definitely not me and I will never be this way” (rejection)

The scatter plot in fig. 4.9 shows the distribution of participants according to a Stereotyped Femininity Index (SFI) derived from their responses to slide C (refer to appendix 13 to see how the index is calculated). The index provides an indication of participants’ embodiment of stereotyped /counter-stereotyped femininity and guided the selection of a maximum variation sample for the phenomenological stage: the rationale was to include participants along the full spectrum, to investigate how very different girls (in terms of their way of expressing femininity) would respond to the same adverts. A higher SFI implies a more stereotypically embodiment of femininity.

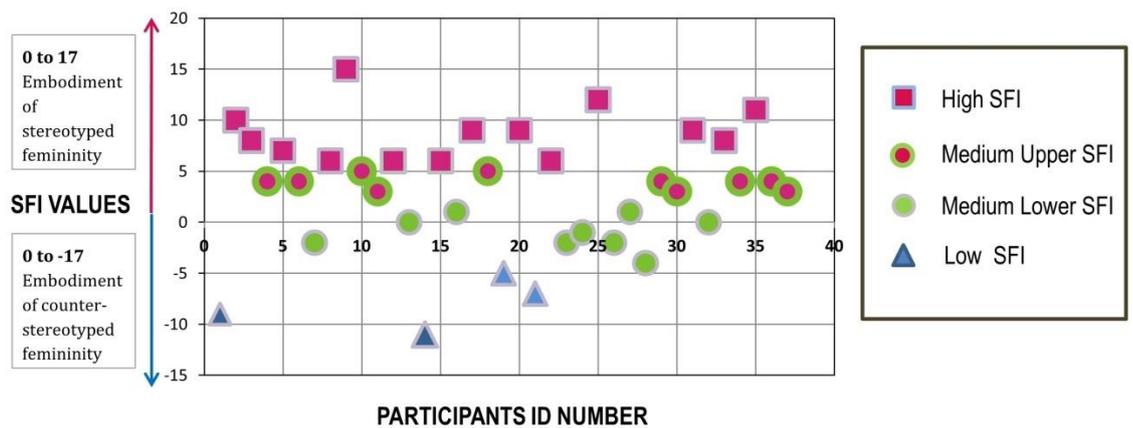


Figure 4.9 - Scatter Plot of Participants' Stereotyped Femininity Index (SFI)

Looking at the scatterplot above, it is evident that the vast majority of girls (65%) are fairly or highly stereotypical in their expressed or aspired femininity, while a minority (24%) show a more fluid shifting between stereotypical and counter-stereotypical embodiments of femininity. A remaining 11% (N=4) expressed more marked counter-stereotypical preferences and two of these girls are self-declared ‘tomboys’ (note that the use of this expression throughout this thesis is merely to use a term which is largely used by the girls themselves. As Currie et al. (2009) has rightly pointed out, the term “alternative” or “unconventional” would better suit, as the term *tomboy* seems to suggest a refusal of the girl status, while in actual fact in all these instances the refusal is merely towards embodying of conventional /stereotypical

traits of femininity; the ‘tomboy’ girls in this and Currie et al, (2009)’s study are indeed very proud to be girls and would often mention “girls’ power” or “girls are the best” during their contributions). The results emerging from this test were validated by girls and parents themselves, who were made aware (privately) of their own position in the scatterplot and were asked to either agree or disagree with it. Only one girl (Solange, age 11) did not agree with her position in the lower SFI range, pointing out that she did not see herself as a ‘tomboy’. On this occasion, the test was repeated to make sure that her responses were accurate; the girl had no further objection after understanding that a low SFI index was not necessarily corresponding to a ‘tomboy’ status – which could be potentially stigmatising at this age - but it was to be read in terms of her actual resistance to typically “girly” practices. The “SFI grouping” proved helpful during the analysis, as it helped to read girls’ response to adverts in connection with their actual or aspirational embodiment of femininity. It should be noted that the SFI calculated through slide C, was not taken as a piece of isolated information: the resulting SFI was triangulated with several other data sources to verify consistency: for example by observing the girls’ attire/make-up practices on special ‘no-uniform’ days at school, or during performance sessions (where girls were specifically asked to dress in their favourite attire) and from their and parents’ responses to specific questions pertaining girls’ practices and attitudes.

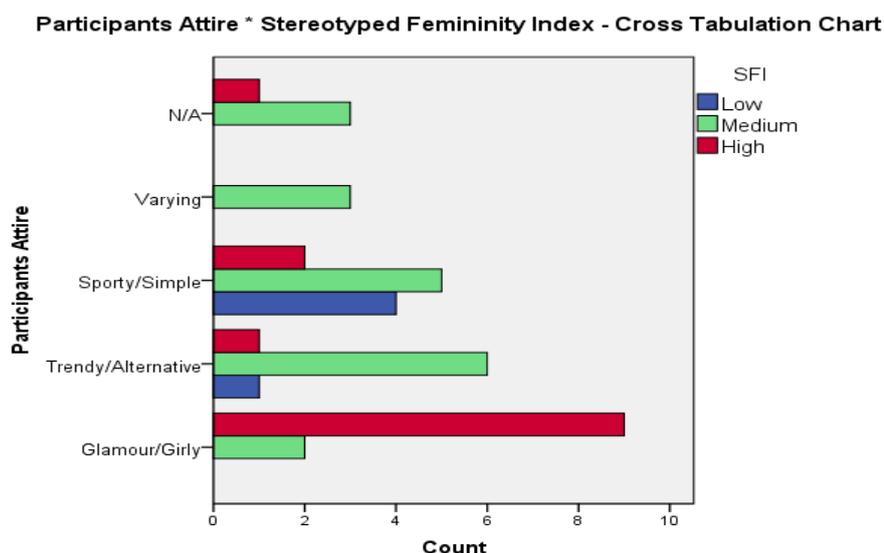


Figure 4.10 –
Example of
Triangulation with
observational data

Triangulation was deemed very important in terms of assessing the overall reliability of the SFI and in most cases the results were consistent between different data sources. The analysis was strengthened by focusing on the most consistent cases (while the most inconsistent or ‘uncertain’ ones were dropped or not included in the phenomenological phase). The chart in fig. 4.11 reveals a high level of consistency between the results of these first two projective tests, with girls in the low SFI group expressing preference for slide A (or “Achiever slide”), as opposed to the higher SFI group where the majority expressed preference for slide B (or “Beauty slide”).

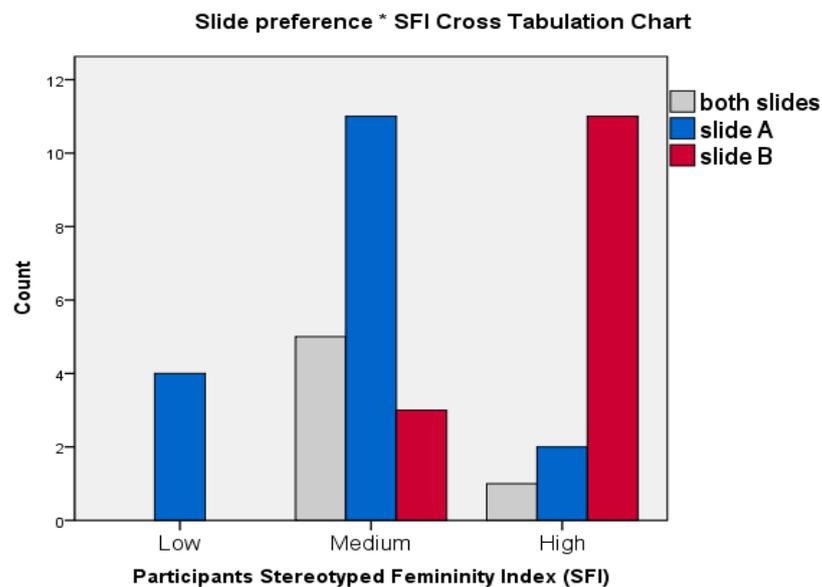


Figure 4.11- Slide preferences according to SFI grouping

4.3.3 Results from Projective Slide No. 1

Projective slide No.1 (see appendix 14) contained a picture of a girl watching TV, with the TV screen showing three pretty pre-adolescent girls dressed and groomed as if appearing in a beauty pageant. Participants were asked to guess what the girl watching the TV was thinking and to write their guess inside the speech bubble. The answers (see table in appendix 14 for original quotes from every participant) were coded into four main categories:

Admiration: when the quote expresses fascination or the desire to be like the girls on the TV screen (e.g. “They look cool, I love the outfits” or “I wish I could be like them”)

Questioning: whenever the quote expresses doubt, puzzlement or curiosity (e.g. “What are they doing?” or “They look pretty. Are they going to a party?”)

Critical/Rejection: whenever the quote contains a critical judgement, a negative remark or a comment expressing rejection (e.g. “I think these girls are spoilt” or “They look stupid” or “Show-off!” or “I don’t really want to be like them”) even if following a first positive judgment (e.g. “She is very pretty but I would want to do and be more my things than pretty”)

Mixed reaction: in one case admiration was mixed with concerns regarding the appropriateness of the girls’ presentation, as in the quote: “I would like to be like them, but they are a bit over the top”.

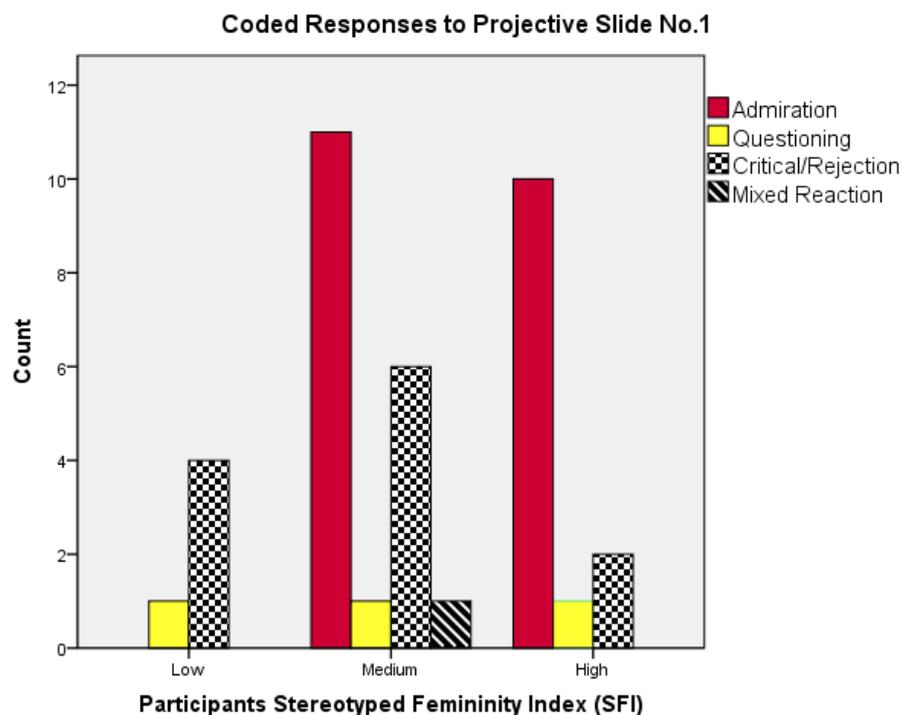


Figure 4.12 – Responses to Projective Slide No.1 according to SFI group

The bar chart above shows that there is proportionately far less incidence of critical judgements in the higher SFI group compared to the other two groups. As it will be further discussed in the analysis chapter, this pattern is confirmed by the results of other projective tests and from the modes of response in the adverts-elicited sessions.

The chart in fig. 4.13 seems also to suggest a positive relationship between “Admiration” type of responses and having an “unsatisfied” body image.

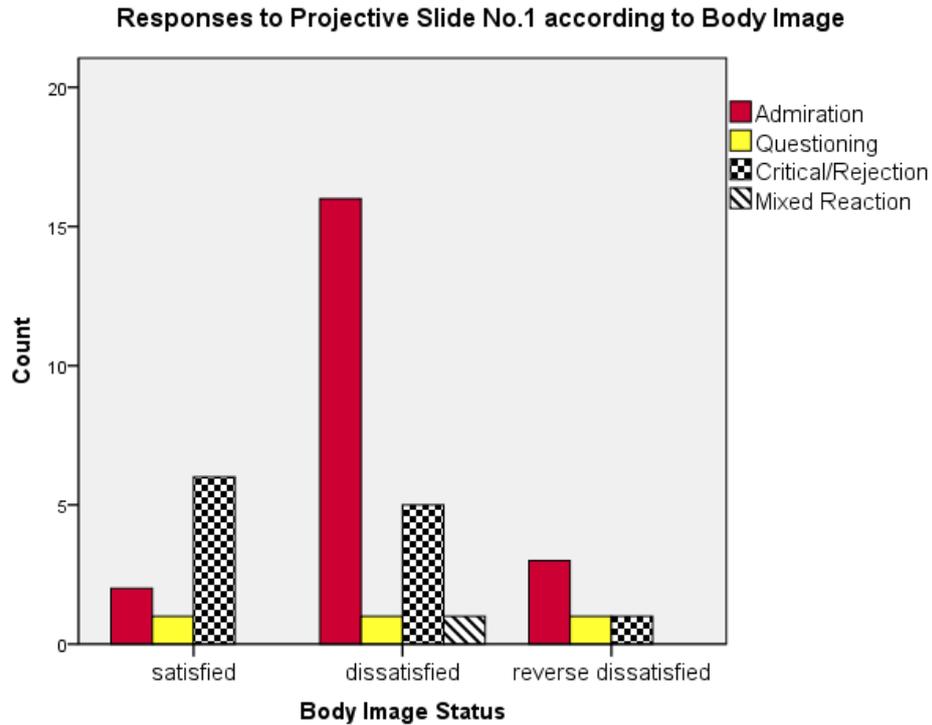


Figure 4.13 – Responses to Projective Slide No.1 according to Body Image Status

4.3.4 Results from Projective Slide No. 2

This slide (see appendix 15) shows two pre-teens girls weighing and measuring themselves. The girls in the picture are visibly interacting but the slide is ambiguous as it is not clear from the expression of the girls whether they are preoccupied, curious or simply playing a game. Participants were asked to write what they thought the girls would be saying inside the corresponding speech bubbles. They were asked also whether they thought the girls in the picture were doing things seriously (S) or just as a game, for fun (F). The majority of the girls (62%) interpreted the slide in a serious sense - *“Yeah, they are checking themselves”*- while a minority (30%) see the girls in the picture as playing a game. A remaining 8% thought it was a bit of both *“I think it’s half serious, half fun”*.

In order to facilitate the analysis, the “speech bubble” responses were grouped into **four main categories** depending on the overall meaning ascribed to the sentences:

Neutral: whenever the written sentences in the speech bubbles represent a factual description of the dialogue between the girls portrayed in the picture, in positive

terms and without reference to the “losing weight/being skinny” ideology (e.g. *"I am... x inches around my waist. You try to see what you are"* *"I am x stones. What are you?"*);

Value: whenever the written sentences are somewhat expressing, reinforcing or reflecting values pertaining to “losing weight/being skinny” ideology (e.g. *"I am tall but I need to stop eating too much"* *"Look I am heavy"*);

Critical: whenever the written sentences contain a critical stance towards the “losing weight/being skinny” ideology (e.g. *"Have you been eating lately? It does not matter how slim you are, just be yourself!"* *"We should not worry about our weight. I don't know why mum is concerned"*)

Reverse: whenever the written sentences express happiness associated with gaining weight /growing, or unhappiness for being skinny (e.g. *"Hey, I've grown a lot!"* *"So have I!"*; *"I think I am too skinny"* *"So am I"*)

The bar chart below (figure 4.14) show the type of responses according to each SFI group: the chart seems to suggest that girls with higher SFI are more likely to express statements reinforcing losing weight, while girls in the lower or medium SFI seem to be more likely to go for “neutral” or “reverse” statements. Additionally, girls expressing statements in the “Value” or “Reverse” categories were more likely to interpret the slide as a serious endeavour rather than a game (see bar chart in appendix 15).

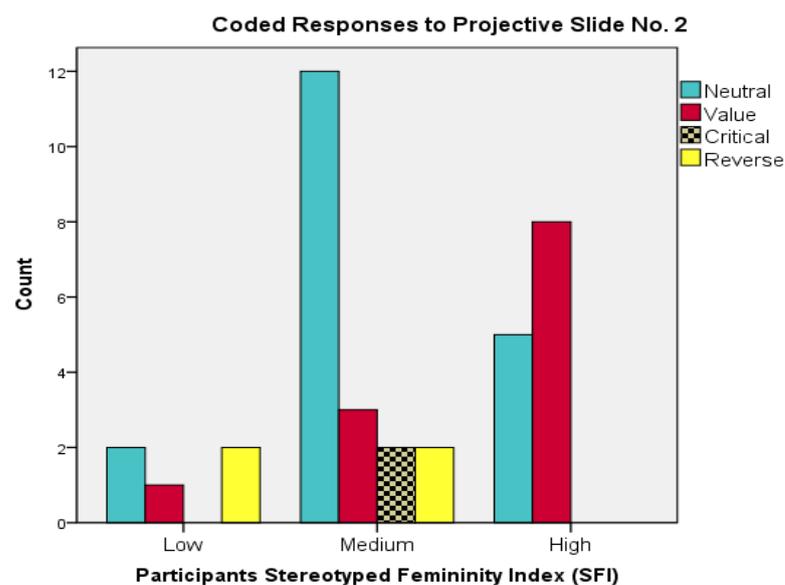


Figure 4.14 – Responses to Projective Slide No.2 according to SFI group

4.3.5 Results from Projective Slide No. 3

Slide no.3 (see appendix 16) portrays a 9-11 years old girl dressed in a princess costume. While the girl is very pretty, her facial expression is quite serious. The ambiguity of the image was thought helpful in terms of stimulating participants' interpretation and to gauge their attitude towards the "beauty princess". Girls were asked first what they thought the girl was doing, investigating also on whether they thought she was "willing" or "forced" into the situation (Q: "do you think it's her own idea, she wanted to do this or not?"). Then the girls were asked to fill the speech bubble, revealing what they thought the girl was saying/thinking.

The data reveal that most participants in the medium and high SFI groups interpreted the pictured girl as "willing", while in the low SFI group most participants perceive the girl as "forced" (see fig. 4.15). Most participants (73%) interpreted the image as "a girl in a beauty contest", while a minority (N=5) thought it was a "professional photo shoot". Other two isolated interpretations were "princess party" and "wedding".

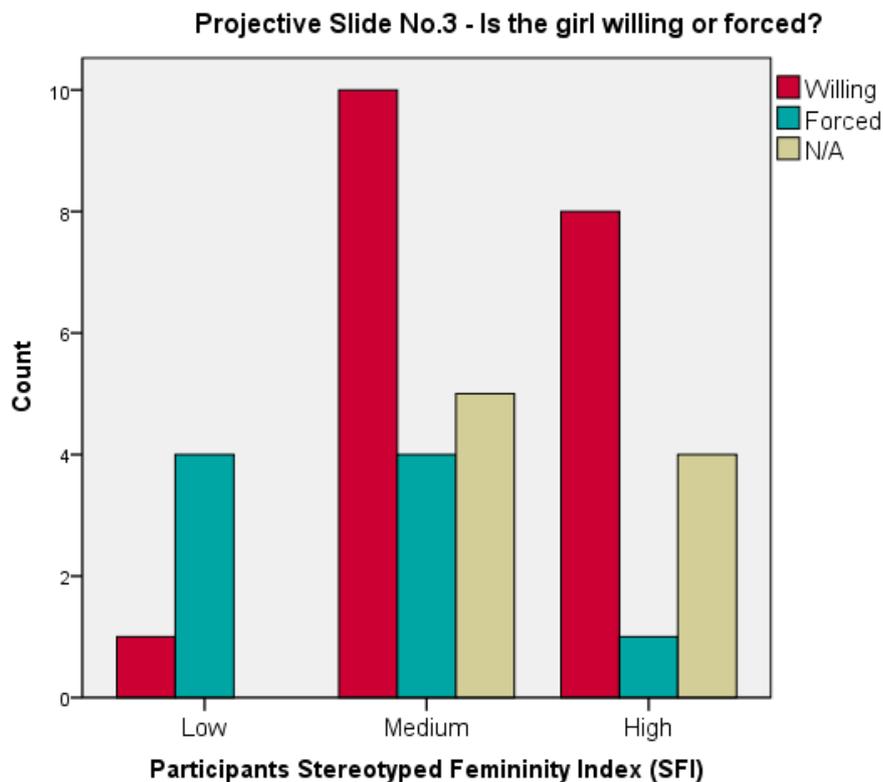


Figure 4.15 – Evaluation of Intentionality in Slide No.3 according to SFI group

The “bubble-speech” responses were categorised as follow:

Positive/Hopeful: whenever the statement expressed happiness/fun/satisfaction or a positive hope to win the contest (e.g. *“I do like dressing up and I have entered the pageant because of my sisters, who won one. I am beautiful”* or *“I hope I win, it would be nice”*)

Worried: when the statement expressed a state of preoccupation such as *“I think I am fat. I wish I had big boobes”* or *“I am worried to go onto stage with all those people looking at me”*)

Resistant: whenever the statement indicates a clear resistance to act or be in the situation (e.g. *“Another stupid contest!”* or *“Why do I have to be like this now?”* or *“Wait until my friends see me. I look stupid”*)

Sad: in some isolated cases the girl is thought to be sad after losing the contest (*“I wish I could win sometimes”*) or missing an event (*“I am really upset my sister wedding has been cancelled”*) or because she won the contest but her friends are envious/upset (*“I don’t like to be the odd one out. Everyone else leaves me out”* or *“I won but my friend is upset”*)

Blank: when the speech bubble was left blank.

Perhaps the most surprising result of this exercise was that a significant number of participants (N=9) struggled to give a “voice” to the girl in the slide, to the point of giving up and leaving the bubble blank, often after trying for several minutes (see bar chart in figure 13). Most of these 9 participants (N=5) would point out that the girl was “probably in a beauty contest or photo shoot”, while 4 of them could not give a meaning to the slide.

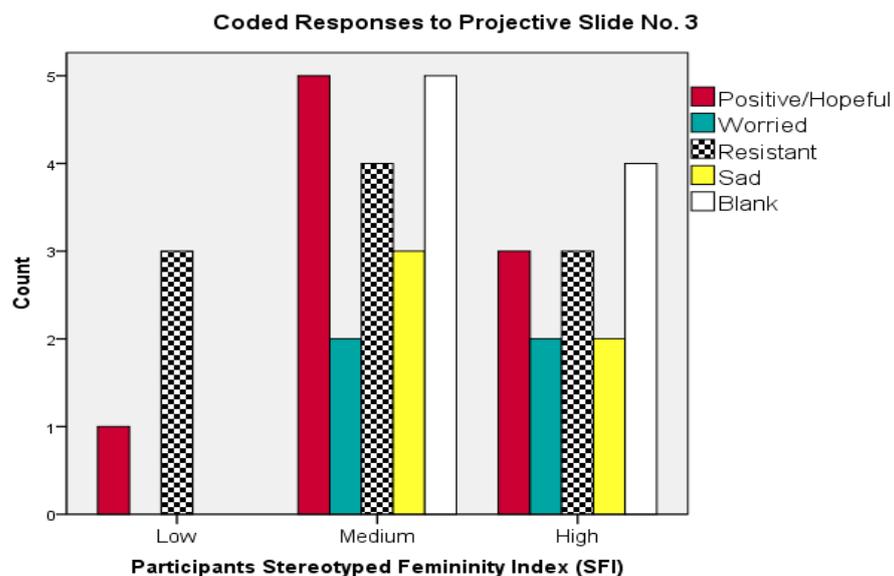


Figure 4.16 – Coded Responses to Projective Slide No.3 according to SFI group

The responses to this slide show once more a greater proportion of “resistance” in the low SFI group (3/4 girls expressing resistance).

4.4 FINDINGS FROM GROUP SESSIONS

Meanings surrounding femininity are constantly negotiated from our social environment. The extent of endorsing certain femininities can vary greatly between individuals, depending on their natural attitude, their family, peer groups, school norms and –of course - the many messages and images from the media surrounding.

Working with a fairly homogenous group of young girls (in terms of age, race, social-economic class and cultural heritage) can facilitate the process of recognising both dominant and alternative patterns of negotiating femininity, especially as the process of gender construction is a constantly adjusting route and one jam-packed with contradictions. Given the focus of the study about “constructing femininity” through negotiation with advertising and media messages, it was considered important as a preliminary step to investigate the main ideas surrounding femininity for this group of young girls.

One of the most insightful exercises from the group sessions (a total of eight sessions, with 6-8 participants of similar age) was to ask the girls to reflect on the many assumptions about being a girl in today’s world. Through the activity “E.T. comes to earth”, the girls were asked to advise the alien regarding the main concepts associated with girlhood from their own perspective (see appendix 17 to see the full range of responses), by writing on separate post-it notes which were eventually attached to a large piece of cardboard featuring the sketch of a girl. Every post-it note was previously marked on the back with their number ID so that their responses could be traced back to their owner (see picture appendix 10).

The girls were intentionally not guided through the process of elaborating these ideas and concepts, as the researcher feared that any type of assistance or suggestion could easily influence their spontaneous thoughts and spoil the process of free associations in their mind. To avoid group’s interplay during writing (girls coping from each other), participants were reminded to keep their notes secret; additionally, the researcher made sure that they were sit at a good distance from each other.

It was important that the girls felt in charge of the task (instead of automatically following instructions): for this reason the researcher allowed them to express their own ideas and even adjust the main task as they pleased. For example, in one of the groups a girl proposed: “should we advise E.T. on the positive and negative things about being a girl then?”; the other girls seemed to like this direction and the task was therefore adjusted by dividing the cardboard into two sections (positive and negative). In another group the girls proposed to advise the alien about whether it would be better for him to be a boy or a girl so the cardboard was accordingly split into “Better to be girl because...” and “better to be boy because...” sections (see second table in appendix 17).

To facilitate the analysis the responses were classed into “stereotypical” and “neutral or counter-stereotypical” (see table I, appendix 17) or into specific categories/themes. The stereotypical attributes not surprisingly far exceeded the neutral or counter-stereotypical ones, with a fair consistency emerging between girls’ individual SFI and their way to conceive femininity.

As Harvard’s psychologist Kindlon (2006) rightly noted:

(...) it’s amazing how children pick up (gender) stereotypes. The reason that they assign these gender roles with such conviction is, to some extent, because they want predictability and a sense of control –a way to orient themselves, understand new experiences, and master their environment. The unpredictable produces anxiety.

Kindlon 2006:70

Other activities from the group sessions included drawing about “being a girl”, role play and performances. For reason of space some artefact and examples are shown in appendices 9 and 10, while in here the reporting is limited to the main insights gathered regarding participants’ thoughts and feelings about “being a girl”.

In the group discussion after the “E.T. comes to earth” activity (the girls were asked to write down about the “good and bad things about being a girl”), the vast majority of the girls expressed their frustration relating to the higher “maintenance” of being a girl: for instance, having to wash more often than the boys (“boys can be smelly while girls can’t” “boys don’t have to wash a lot” “(...) ‘cause girls must always be clean”), or washing their long hair (“for boys is easier as they can have short hair” “boys don’t have to wash as much hair” “my hair get so knotty that I cry for the pain!” “it’s easier to be boys because they don’t get knotty

hair”) or look after the clothes they wear (“like boys can’t be in the same tracksuit for days but if a girl does it then people will say ‘aw she’s so scruffy”).

Girls were often complaining about restrictive /unfair gendered practices and the double standard existing between boys and girls in terms of expected behaviour at home and at school (e.g. “boys can shout or be noisy while girls can’t” “boys can fart” “boys can burp louder and be gross” “if I was a boy I could do flips and jumps” “like boys can be lazy and do nothing around the house” “girls must help with the cleaning and stuff” “if I was boy I could do more active stuff”).

The frustration expressed regarding injustices due to higher social expectation on appearance and behaviour did not deter any of the girls for being a proud member of the female sex. Many girls would eagerly declare their pride in being girls, often asserting their superiority over boys (Solange, age 11: “Girls are smarter than boys (fact)”).

More insights from the “post-it notes” activities have been summarised in table II - appendix 17.

4.5 PHENOMENOLOGICAL INTERVIEWS WITH ADVERTS ELICITATION

As phenomenology’s main aim is to describe the lived experience of a phenomena “through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation” (Lester, 1999) while valuing the context of participants’ embodied and inter-subjective life world, the reporting of findings will hinge heavily on participants’ direct quotes to bring the phenomenon to life and to remain as close as possible to girls’ own accounts. Whenever possible, instead of paraphrasing or summarising their accounts, preference has been given to girls’ own words and terminology to describe their perceptions, thoughts and feelings.

The reporting is predominantly structured in a way that isolates the different modes of response for each advert so that patterns of response can be more easily seen within particular subgroups of girls; in many instances and whenever relevant it is also mindful of the dialogue between the girls, particularly in instances where the conversation is able to bring interesting insights about their interaction (e.g. sharply contrasting views or a follower-leader dynamic between the couple) , or to illuminate

the way girls shape their preferences through conversation with their peers. An effort is made to highlight the interlinking between participants' response to adverts and their overall consumption of media (e.g. preference for particular TV programs, movies or videogames), although the connection will be discussed more fully in the analysis chapter.

For the first round, a selection of 10 adverts was shown to the girls interviewed in pairs during a half hour session (except one girl who wished to be interviewed on her own). A total of 31 girls were interviewed, with 30 valid responses per advert being recorded. One participant's responses had to be discarded due to lack of genuine involvement during the session (the girl would not talk at all or express any personal comment about the adverts, likely due to extreme shyness).

As a guideline, comments have been classified as:

- **Liking**, whenever there is a positive appraisal of the advert on the whole, usually due to a process of admiration/ aspiration on the girls' part;
- **Personalising**, when comments made by girls are directed towards a specific aspect of the advert ("Oh, I love the clothes but I would not have used the dolls in this advert"; "There should be more boys in this advert") often with a process of identification and an effort to re-think the advert in a better way, picking an element and discarding the rest, or customising it to their own preferences;
- **Indifferent/Not interested**, when the advert is not disliked but there is no interest at all: the girl in this case would struggle to express any feeling or thought or simply dismiss the advert saying "I don't dislike it, but I am not interested" or "I would not watch it if it comes up on TV";
- **Babyish**, when the girls would mainly dismiss or ridicule the advert due to the toy advertised being for younger children;
- **Mixed feelings**, whenever the girls fail to express more specific remarks (positive or negative) which could be attributed to other categories, often simply stating that they are not sure whether they like the advert or not; in this category are also included all the instances where girls express contradicting feelings about a certain advert;

- **Critical** whenever comments express a particular critical stance towards the advert (i.e. *“the actresses are too young to play with that toy”* or *“too much pink”* or *“those skirts are too short”* or *“the actress is stupid to talk to animals”*);
- **Rejecting** in case of more extreme and general dislike, such as *“I hate this one!”* or refusal to watch the advert in its entirety, often without specific critical comments directed at the advert.

It is useful to note that in several instances the categorisation of the responses is not a clear-cut process, as the girls express a mix of reactions and many critical or rejecting comments overlap with the “babyish” category. For this reason it has been tempting to collapse the “critical”, “rejecting” and “babyish” categories into a single category (i.e. “deconstructing”), but doing this would have generalised their responses too much, not allowing the nuances to emerge. It was decided in the end to assign each comment to the prevalent and most specific category. There is of course a certain arbitrariness in the process of categorisation and the final identification of 8 categories should not be taken as the only possible one; rather it should be intended as an attempt to order a much assorted array of responses and as a tool to facilitate the recognition of different processes at play during adverts’ consumption.

To give an overall view of the type of responses gathered for each advert, results are summarised in tables and it was thought useful to show the type of responses in relation to participants’ SFI (Stereotyped Femininity Index) - grouped into “low” (SFI <- 5; with values ranging from -6 to -15), “medium” (values from -5 to +5) and “high” (SFI >5; with values ranging from +6 to +15)- to see more clearly whether girls’ types of response are reflective of their actual embodiment of - or aspiration for – certain types of femininity. In the medium SFI group, a further distinction should be draw between girls with negative SFI (values from -5 to -1) and positive SFI (values from +1 to +5), and this will be referred to during the analysis.

In all instances, participants’ names have been changed to ensure anonymity (often with a nickname of their choice). In the dialogues, the researcher is indicated by her initials (“FM”). The age of each participant is indicated in brackets after their nickname and it corresponds to their age at the time of interview. A full list of the adverts used (along with short ‘thumbnail’ story-boards) can be found in Appendix 8.

4.5.1 ADVERT #1 - BRATZ MASQUERADE

Description: Four girls (teenagers, 15-16 years old) dressing in glamorous XVIII century costumes and wearing “Venice Carnival” style masks, walk down a shimmering stair while two teenage boys –equally dressed in XVIII century costumes -stare admiringly at the girls. The girls’ images are alternated with images of the Bratz dolls. At the end of the clip the girls put make-up on their cheeks with the help of a special “drawing hearts” mask. The advert epitomises a glamourised type of femininity.

Most girls used to play with Bratz dolls when they were between 3 and 6 years of age, so the doll is seen by many girls somewhat as a distant memory, a toy belonging to the past. What is interesting to note is that, despite similar age and socio-economic background, participant’s responses to the advert show a very different positioning in respect to the “glamour girl”.

ADVERT #1 Bratz Masquerade - Type of Response * Participants SFI Cross Tabulation

Count		Participants SFI			
		Low	Medium	High	Total
ADVERT #1	Liking	0	1	4	5
Bratz Masquerade	Babyish	0	1	4	5
	Personalising	2	4	3	9
	Mixed feeling	0	0	1	1
	Critical	0	6	1	7
	Rejecting	2	1	0	3
Total		4	13	13	30

Table 4.11 - ADVERT #1 Bratz Masquerade - Type of Response Cross Tabulation

LIKING

Only a minority of girls (5/30) fully appreciated the advert. Four of these girls have in common a high SFI (>5): they seem enthused by representations of feminine beauty and they enthusiastically embrace the idea of “glamourised” femininity.

Millie (age 11) does not agree with the negative remarks previously made by friend Jess:

M: “Not for me. I love it!” – smiling enthusiastically

FM: “So you love this advert?”

M: “Yeah, yes, I just like ... the outfits...and the make-up”

FM: "Would you like to be like one of these girls, all glamour?"

M: "Yes, I'd kind of wear make-up even if my mum wouldn't allow me. I LOOOVE make-up!"

Angel (age 10) watches the advert very attentively and she comments while watching:

A: "I like the hair and the mask they use when they do the make-up. I like that girl with the pink hair. And I like their make-up there"

Carla (age 10): she doesn't agree with friend Hall (age 11) about the advert being only for young children:

C: "No it could be... well for us because they have the make-up masks and the clothes (...) I like the outfits and the make-up but I wouldn't play with Bratz (...)"

She goes on explaining that she used to have lots of Bratz dolls when she was small.

FM: "And do you like these girls in the advert, all glamour?"

C: "Yes, I like them A LOT" (smiling convinced)

FM: "Would you skip the advert or watch it if you see it on TV?"

C: "I would watch it, I like it, I've seen it before"

PERSONALISING

Lulu (age 11) giggles and laughs through the advert

FM: "Does it make you laugh?"

L: "Funny to see teenager girls dressed as Bratz, a bit ridiculous really... I would like the advert if it was without the dolls"

FM: "Do you like the girls in the advert?"

L: "Yeah, I like their outfits and some of the hair styles"

FM: "Is it something you would like to do or just..."

L: "No way I would be allowed to wear that kind of stuff!"

FM: "But if you were allowed..."

L: "Yeah, at a party maybe, for fun..."

Amber (age 10): "I would watch the advert, I like the hair colour and the masks, but I wouldn't play with these dolls (I used to when I was about 4 but not now)"

Solange (age 11): "Never seen this advert before. I like what happens to the face with the masks, but NOT the dolls!"

Lorraine (age 10)

L: "I've seen this before. I think it's kind of strange but it shows you a different way to do make-up"

FM: "Do you like it?"

L: "Sort of...I like what they are wearing, sort of Scottish. But not the Bratz boys, they look GAYS, yuck!"

Olga (age 8): "It's ok but it could be better...I think there should be more boys (...)"

Olga explains that she used to play with Bratz dolls (girls and boys) when she was younger.

Lucilla (age 10) "I like the hair and the outfits, but not the dolls. I don't play with dolls (...) I also like the other Bratz advert where they do their hair with colour streaks"

Mandy (age 11) agreeing with friend **Libet (age 11)** and referring to the models' hair style:

"To be honest I would only look at it because of the actual people in the advert, not the dolls. It would be something that I'd be interested in (...) Bratz are for small children, like 3-4 years old, so this advert would be ok for smaller children but not for us, but if they do it about accessories and stuff, without the dolls, then we would be interested in that".

BABYISH

Becky (age 8) "Nooooo...way too babyish" (she covers her eyes as not to watch the advert)

Kim (age 9) "Really annoying this one! (...) it's for 5 years old like..."

Charlette (age 10) "I don't like it because it's kind of for 3-4 years old"

CRITICAL – INCONSISTENCY

Some girls looked visibly puzzled and they expressed critical comments with regard to the inconsistency between the teenage girls acting in the advert and the toy advertised which is perceived as an early years' toy:

Kirsty (age 8)

K: "Hmmm...girly"

FM: "Girly nice or girly annoying?"

K: "Annoying, definitely! (...) I don't know, it looks really weird...they look like 14 years old but they dress like Bratz. But Bratz is for really young kids. I would only play with them if I play with someone younger!"

Mary (age 9)

M: "I don't like this advert, I've seen it before on telly, every time it comes up I do this" (she covers her eyes with her hands)

FM: "What is it that annoys you so much?"

M: "It goes on my nerves, these girls are like teenagers and think it's cool to play Bratz!?"

Kesha (age 9) "Hmm...well...I don't think it's that good because all it does is showing Bratz dolls dancing and stuff, some people... I mean that would be for 5-6 years old really (...) The girls in the advert act too babyish for their age."

Hall (age 11) "These girls are too old for Bratz dolls so I don't really understand"

Ruby (age 11): "Well, I am not sure for what age is this one because...I think it's made for younger children because of the dolls but then again it's old children... but old children don't really like dolls so..."

FM: "...and what about the type of girl you see in this advert, all glamour, do you like it?"

R: "No... not really"

CRITICAL – INAPPROPRIATE

Enri (age 9) "I watched this before. I don't like this much, a bit too glamorous and the clothes really over the top!"

Jess (age 10) "I watched it before... it gets on your nerves, it plays on your mind and also a bit too grown up for me ...you know for the clothes"

Judy (age 11): "I watched this advert before. I don't like...it's kind of... I don't think children should wear make-up or pushed to wear make-up at this age... it's just not right"

FM: "Would you say that this advert annoys you?"

J: "Yes it's annoying, definitely"

REJECTING

In only one case was there a rejection for all adverts considered "girly" (the term is widely used by the girls themselves and was not suggested by the researcher) and so extreme that the girl would simply refuse to watch the advert in full:

Meg (age 8) watches the first 5 seconds of the advert (dislike expression) then she turns her eyes away from the screen and look elsewhere.

FM: "Meg what do you think about this advert?"

M: "I don't like it. I don't like it AT ALL"

FM: "Can you tell me what is that you don't like at all?"

M: "It's girly - (she mumbles) - I won't watch it"

4.5.2 ADVERT #2 - EUROSTAR EXPLORER

Description: In this advert a girl (age 9-11) is alone exploring Paris. She screams "hello" from a balcony, then she walk around the zoo saying "hello" to different animals. She has a dreaming expression with a fresh looking face (no make-up) and she is dressed simply in a casual t-shirt and shorts.

Despite the fact that the advert contains animals and portrays an independent girl going around Paris the response to this advert was positive from only 40% of the girls, while the remaining express critical/mixed/indifferent or rejecting comments.

ADVERT #2 Eurostar Explorer - Type of Response * Participants SFI Cross tabulation

Count		Participants SFI			Total
		Low	Medium	High	
ADVERT #2	Liking	3	6	3	12
Eurostar Explorer	Mixed feeling	0	2	1	3
	Critical	1	3	3	7
	Rejecting	0	0	5	5
	Not interested	0	2	1	3
Total		4	13	13	30

Table 4.12 - ADVERT #2 - Type of Response Cross Tabulation

LIKING

The girls who like this advert (40%) seem to either aspire or to identify greatly with the actress and made very similar comments with regard to loving exploring, animals and nature. Interestingly, most of them (9 out of 12) have in common a lower or negative SFI (values <5), so these are girls with a lower than average embodiment of stereotyped femininity.

Enri (age 9): "I think it's fun... 'cause I like the fact that she's talking to animals. Never seen this advert before, but if it comes up I would watch it"

Amber (age 10): "Very good, nice one! I love it because she's talking to animals, it's funny. And she's exploring ..."

Jess (age 11): "Yes I love this advert, 'cause Paris and it got pets in it, I love animals"

Solange (age 11): "I never seen this advert before but I really like it because she's involved with nature and animals, I like that (...) This is my favourite advert together with the Pop Princess"

Mandy (age 11): "I think it's quite nice that the girl is trying to make friends with animals by talking to them"

Charlette (age 11) and Judy (age 11): Both girls watching the advert laughing and clearly expressing that they like it.

FM: "So...do you like this advert?"

C: "Yes, I like the exploring and it's funny"

J: "It's kind of showing how nature is and lots of different animals, how she just want to talk to someone..."

FM: "Would you see yourself doing the same thing: going around, talking to animals?"

J: "Yes I'd try to explore as much as I could"

C: "Yeah, I like exploring, climbing on trees..."

J: "Yeah...especially forests, the wild"

FM: "What would you say it's the thing that most attract you about this advert?"

C: "The animals...and she's like... looking for friends"

J: "I love the animals"

Olga & Meg (age 8): They watch the advert really attentively, and then Olga started:

O: "I love it!"

M: "Yeah, I like this. I like the animals in it"

O: " It was like...she was really really lonely and a bit sad, but then she starts to talk to animals and then when she sat down someone else actually got to say hello to her" (the parrot at the end of the clip says "Hello" to the girl)

FM: "And do you like the fact that she's talking to animals?"

O: "Well...it's a bit crazy BUT...it's believable..."

FM: "Yes? We may talk to animals..."

M: "I talk to my cats and kittens"

O: "Yes I talk to animals as well. Tiger is my favourite one, I like all cats but the tiger is the king of all"

M: "Cats and lions are my favourite animals"

Then the girls started a conversation about animals.

This is the only advert appealing to **Meg (age 8)** - a girl who is a self-declared 'tomboy' and is often labelled as "quirky" by both a teacher and some classmates, surely - at least in part -due to her strong refusal to participate in "girly" endeavours or play with girls' toys.

INDIFFERENT- NOT INTERESTED

Lucilla (age 10): "I do like the animals in it, but that's about it...the rest is pretty boring"

Hall (age 11): after watching the advert with a bored expression

FM: "So what do you think of this advert?"

H: "In the Bratz advert the girls were a bit overdressed while in this one she just likes to be a normal girl... she looks a bit bored, so she likes to go and explore"

FM: "Would you prefer the Bratz girls or this one?"

H: "Hmm....I am not sure..."

FM: "Would you watch this advert if it comes up on TV?"

H: "Probably once to see what is about, but I wouldn't watch again"

FM: "Ok not interested then"

H: "I don't dislike it but...it would probably go in my *middle* box"

CRITICAL

The most frequent criticism expressed towards the advert was the fact that the product advertised (Eurostar) does not match the content of the advert (a girl alone talking with animals). Interestingly, most of these girls find the practice of talking to animals irritating, pointless or futile.

Kesha & Sandy (age 9):

K: "This is I think something that adults would like, not children... 'cause adults like to explore and stuff, kids can get really aching legs!"

S: "Yes, because kids only got short legs so they might get aching, going "AW". My uncle used to go exploring up the mountains so I think this is more for adults"

FM: "So you think this advert should be aimed at adults, not children"

K & S: "Yeah"

Emma (age 11) considers the girl in the advert plain "stupid", disagreeing with Roberta (age 11):

E: "Stupid!" (referring to the girl in the advert shouting "Hello" from a balcony in Paris)

FM: "What is stupid?"

E: "I would be like ashamed of talking like that to animals!"

R: "I think it's really nice"

E: "Where are her mum and dad anyway?"

Similarly, **Lorraine** does not agree with friend **Solange (age 11):**

L: "I think it's actually strange the fact that she's talking to animals"

S: "No, it's not strange! I talk to animals; I talk to my pets all the time!"

FM: "But would you say that you like or dislike this advert?"

L: "Hmm...kind in the middle...more...not very much at all actually"

Millie (age 11): The answer of Millie should be understood in context, as the girl was listening to her friend Jess talking very positively about the advert. The main clue about her real feeling was her bored expression while watching the advert.

FM: "And you Millie, do you like this advert?"

M: "Ehm...I...maybe...a little bit "

FM: "Ok. Just a little bit?"

M: "Yes...I love going walking and I love exploring things, but not like this in front of everyone"

FM: "Would you do what the girl does in the advert, talking to animals?"

M: "No! No way! I wouldn't talk to animals. I ain't talking to animals!" (Contemptuous smirk on her face)

FM: "So you would have liked the advert more if she was not talking to animals?"

M: "Yeah maybe..."

Ruby (age 11): "I kind of like this advert because I love animals and there are animals in there, but I think it's a bit odd that she actually tries to speak to animals, saying "Hello"...a bit weird..."

FM: "Would you watch this advert if you see it on TV?"

R: "Usually I would because I LOVE animals and I would think that it's something to do with animals ...but then it's nothing to do with animals so..."

Ruby goes on explaining that she would not watch the advert again after the first time.

REJECTING

While some girls expressed criticism (7/30) or were simply not interested in the advert (3/30), five girls completely disliked the advert. These girls have in common a fairly high investment in stereotyped femininity (SFI >5).

Becky (age 8) with friend Kim (age9):

B: "I would not pay attention to this advert. It's boOOring!"

K: "BoOOring yes... I would not watch it"

FM: "Just not interested or you actually dislike the advert?"

Both Becky and Kim mimicked the cut-throat sign to express a total dislike.

Carla (age 10): "Don't like it. I would skip this one"

FM: "What do you think about the girl in the advert?"

C: "Yeah...she's exploring, she's just that kind of girl...I prefer the Bratz advert"

Angel (age 10): “No, I don’t like this. I would just change channel! Can we watch the Pop Princesses’s now?”

FM: “Can you tell me first what you don’t like in particular about this advert?”

A: “It’s really boring and it’s not realistic...she’s going around alone and she talks to animals: who would do that?”

Lulu (age11): “Is she mad? Why is she talking to animals?”

FM: “Do you think she's out of her mind?”

L: "Yes, absolutely (...) I don't like the advert... I really don't see the point!"

4.5.3 ADVERT #3- POP PRINCESSES

Description: The advert shows a rapidly alternating sequence of female pop singers performing their songs. Most singers appear glamorously/scantily dressed and dancing in a sexually suggestive manner.

Most girls (66%) express good feelings about this advert, singing and dancing while watching and often declaring it as their favourite one or asking to watch it again.

ADVERT #3 Pop Princess - Type of Response * Participants SFI Cross tabulation

Count		Participants SFI			Total
		Low	Medium	High	
ADVERT #3	Liking	0	8	12	20
Pop Princess	Personalising	0	1	0	1
	Mixed feeling	0	1	1	2
	Critical	1	1	0	2
	Rejecting	3	2	0	5
Total		4	13	13	30

Table 4.13 - ADVERT #3 - Type of Response Cross Tabulation

LIKING

Charlette (age 11): she watches excited dancing through the advert

C: "I really like this"

FM: “Do you like because of the songs or do you like also the dancing and the clothes, the whole image thing?”

C: "Yes I like the whole image, you also get a DVD with all the video and dancing in it, I really love it, the customs, the moves... they are amazing!"

Lorraine (age 11) & Solange (age 11) are both singing and dancing while watching the advert. Their comments reveal a different positioning with respect to the Pop Princess' image:

L: "Never seen this before"

FM: "This was in Nickelodeon"

L: "I don't have Nickelodeon. The only kids' channels we have at home are CBBC and ICTV"

FM: "Oh yes, I remember now"

S: "Aw, I love this advert" (she keeps dancing while she talks)

L: "I like the Pop Princesses. I'd love to be a Pop Princess"

S: "No, I don't want to be a Pop Princess, I just like singing pop"

L: "This is my favourite advert by far"

In a follow-up Solange explained that she would love the advert even more if it was more about the music and less about the 'sexy moves' which she find "a bit over the top as usual!": for this reason, despite her general enjoyment of the advert her response was categorised as critical.

Similarly **Olga (age 8)** watches attentively with a big smile, she looks excited and she dances and giggles at the rhythm of the music. However, her appreciation for the advert seems to be more limited to the music rather than the attractive female singers dancing and showing off their bodies, as our conversation reveals:

FM: "Have you watched this advert before?"

O: "Yes, I have seen it on TV"

Being obvious that she likes the advert, the researcher probes her by asking:

FM: "What is the best thing about this advert?"

O: "I love music" (big smile)

FM: "Just the music or the singers as well?"

O: "The music"

FM: "Are you into pop music then?"

O: "I am into males' pop music actually"

FM: "What would you say is your favourite at the moment?"

O: "One Direction!"

Kesha (age 9) watches enthusiastically singing the songs all the way

K: "This has got to be my favourite! 'Cause I mean ...MUSIC! You can dance to it, you can listen to it...everyone loves music. You can actually listen over and over again and never get bored"

FM: "Is it only about the music...? What about the singers and their outfits, the way they dance...?"

K: "It's not just music, I love the dance as well, but the music is the main thing really, without the music we would not be watching"

CRITICAL

Some girls like the advert for the music but they are critical about the use of sexually suggestive dance and customs or the excessive use of colour pink:

Enri (age 9): "Erm...I like it ...but... I would like it more without all the pink and the skimpy clothes"

Roberta (age 11): "I really only like the songs but not the advert ...it's too much princess and pink"

Ruby (age 11): "I am not really sure because it says POP PRINCESSES and it got Cheryl Cole in it and I actually HATE her"

FM: "And what about *The Saturdays*?"

R: "I like *The Saturdays*... but this advert is kind of weird because of the PRINCESS, normally you use princess for young children and some of the music in it I really don't like...it's also too much PINK"

FM: "Would you buy the CD?"

R: "No"

FM: "Which music are you into?"

R: "I like JessyJ and One Direction"

FM: "And do you like the glamorous style of the singers in the advert?"

R: "No, it put me off completely actually"

REJECTING

Only 5 girls out of 30 (16%) completely reject the advert. These five girls have in common a low SFI (<-5): they do not embrace stereotyped femininity, refuse to wear

make-up and show a general dislike for overly sexualised female celebrities. Two of them (Meg and Amber) are self-declared 'tomboys'.

Meg (age 8): "I don't like it, I don't like it" (she turns away again to avoid looking at the advert, while Olga is happily dancing along watching the advert)

FM: "You don't like, ok..."

M: "No, not AT ALL"

FM: "At the level that you don't even want to watch it?"

M: "Yeah"

FM: "Is it ...does it annoy you maybe?"

(Meg nods her head in agreement without talking and keeps avoiding watching the screen)

FM: "Ok let's stop it then- as Olga already watched it before"

Amber (age10): "I don't like this, I like only the music but the rest of the advert I don't like it"

Emma (age 11) watches the advert with an expression of dislike and she first commented on Cheryl Cole while the advert is still playing:

E: "Aw, I hate her!!" - then after the advert ends, the conversation is extended:

FM: "So what do you think about this advert?"

E: "Girly. Boys wouldn't act like that ...or they would be gay"

FM: "Interesting Emma....ok, girly. Do you like it at all?"

E: "Not really...but if my brother sees this he would say: "Aw, I LOVE it!"

FM: "Do you get annoyed with your brother when he makes comments like this?"

E: "I want to change channel or go in another room"

Judy (age 11) watches the adverts without showing appreciation, she watches with a serious expression whilst friend Charlette looks quite excited about it. Then - after Charlette said that she really loves the advert - Judy is asked to contribute; her comments suggest a strong parental influence on her preferences:

FM: "And you Judy, did you watch this before?"

J: "I am not sure... I might have watched, there a lot of these POP adverts, they all look the same to me"

(her facial expression is showing a clear dislike while she talks)

FM: "So what do you think of it, do you like it?"

J: "I don't like it, I think it's like...I don't like the whole "POP thing", I love classical music so..."

FM: "Interesting. How did you get into classical?"

J: "My mum always listens to it"

4.5.4 ADVERT #4 - ZHU ZHU PETS

Description: The advert show two girls happily playing with Zhu Zhu Pets (fluffy plastic toys with wheels representing hamster mothers and babies) and their full play set (houses, beds, slides, merry go around and other accessories). The girls look very pretty and well groomed with perfect hair and smartly dressed. The femininity portrayed in this advert emphasizes innocent play and a caring attitude. The approximate age of the actresses is 8-10 years old.

Regardless of their age, most girls (56%) expressed either mixed feeling or dislike for this advert- mostly because the toy is associated with an earlier stage of their life. A minority of girls of mixed age range (33%) would giggle in amusement watching the clip, admitting they are still find the toy appealing in some way.

ADVERT #4 Zhu Zhu Pets - Type of Response * Participants SFI Cross tabulation

Count		Participants SFI			Total
		Low	Medium	High	
ADVERT #4	Liking	1	3	6	10
Zhu Zhu Pets	Babyish	1	4	1	6
	Mixed feeling	0	4	4	8
	Frustration (Can't buy)	1	0	0	1
	Rejecting	1	1	2	4
	Not interested	0	1	0	1
Total		4	13	13	30

Table 4.14 - ADVERT #4 - Type of Response Cross Tabulation

LIKING

Becky (age 8) & Kim (age 9):

B: "I like this one, they are cute. I would play with them"

K: "Oh yeah, I really like them, they are so cute and soft"

FM: "And the girls in the advert, what do you think of them?"

B: "They look like they are having fun"

K: "I have some Zhu Zhu pets at home" (...)

Then the girls start a conversation about the toy, as they both own some.

Lulu (age 11): "I love these ones, they look so cute! I have the big one in black and white"

Solange (age 11) doesn't agree with friend Lorraine about the toy being "too babyish"

S: "On no...they are so CUUUTE. It might be babyish to play with them but they are so adorable. I really like the advert"

Charlette (age 11) and friend **Judy (age 11)** watch the advert in amusement

FM: "Have you ever watched this advert before?"

C: "Yeah, I love Zhu Zhu pets! (...) I want one so much! I like them because they are fluffy and they talk a little bit"

J: "Yes I like it, it shows motherhood and nurturing. I like the way that the mother makes everything going around"

FM: "What do you think about the girls in this advert? They are a bit different from the ones in the Bratz advert, right?"

C: "Yes, VERY!"

J: "Yes, completely. They look like they're laughing, having a good time and enjoying themselves"

Mandy & Libet (age 11) repeat comments like "Aw, so cute!" many times throughout watching the clip. Both girls have some *Zhu Zhu* from previous years. Mandy says that she has two big *Zhu Zhu* from last year and she was glad to have found them in her bedroom during tidying up. A snippet of their conversation reveal that the girls realise they have gradually grown out of them:

Mandy says that this kind of stuff is "still interesting for our age but not to play with, just to have them as they are cute". Her comments indicate a great deal of self-awareness:

M: "We are at the age that we still like them but we are growing out of them a little bit".

Her friend **Libet** agrees with her by saying that she wouldn't buy them now but she'll keep the ones that she has bought a few years back.

FRUSTRATION -CAN'T BUY IT

Amber (age 10) looks annoyed while watching the advert.

A: "It's always the same voice over these adverts. How do these girls get so much money to buy all the set?"

FM: "Well I suppose the advert want to show you the full range"

A: "I am lucky if I get ONE Zhu Zhu pet! The play set is very expensive"

"BABYISH"

Ruby (age 11): "I think this is babyish and again they use older children but probably they do it because it's easier to work the advert with older children"

FM: "Would you ever buy or play with this toy?"

R: "No, never ever"

FM: "Would you watch the advert if you see it or would you just skip it?"

R: "I would probably still watch it because I got younger friends, like a friend of mine she's only five so I would watch for her, like for a Christmas present or something like that only..."

FM: "The girls in the advert, how do you see them?"

R: "They look young, maybe 8 years old?"

Lorraine (age 11): "I think this is too babyish, look at them..."

Then replying to Solange's positive remarks

L: "They might be cute and adorable but they are stuUUpid! I don't like this advert"

INDIFFERENT or MIXED FEELINGS

Hall (age 11): "I like the girls in the advert, but I would not play with Zhu Zhu pets, they are more for 8-9 years old. This would go in my "middle" box I think".

REJECTING

Meg (age 8) watches the first 4 seconds of the advert and then she turns away again, she doesn't want to watch it.

FM: "Meg, not even this one? Annoying as well? Because...?"

M: "It's girly" (with a very serious and determined expression in her eyes)

Jess (age 10) finds it difficult to watch the entire advert

J: "I don't like this (...)"

M: "I don't like the Zhu Zhu's babies, I only like the big ZhuZhu's, I have loads of them at home"

J: "I don't like the big ones neither, I don't really like any electrical thing that move, it spooks me"

FM: "Have you watched the advert before?"

J: "Yeah millions of times...never liked it"

4.5.5 ADVERT #5 - MONSTER HIGH DOLLS

Description: The advert shows an alternate sequence of animated cartoon characters of the dolls with each character introducing her/himself and a catchy song in the background. There are both girl and boy dolls. The girl dolls have all the same "skinnier than Barbie" body shape, with very long and colourful hair, monster face with heavy make-up and extremely scanty costumes, mostly ultra-miniskirts or ultra-tight leggings.

The response to this advert appears to be very much a "love or hate" one, with most comments falling in the two extreme categories (liking and rejection).

ADVERT #5 Monster High Dolls - Type of Response * Participants SFI Cross tabulation

Count		Participants SFI			Total
		Low	Medium	High	
ADVERT #5	Liking	2	5	5	12
Monster High Dolls	Personalising	0	2	0	2
	Mixed feeling	0	1	1	2
	Frustration (Can't buy)	0	0	2	2
	Rejecting	2	5	3	10
	Not interested	0	0	2	2
Total		4	13	13	30

Table 4.15 - ADVERT #5 - Type of Response Cross Tabulation

LIKING

Olga (age 8) has almost the full collection of these dolls (3 boys and 5 girls), she knows all the names and she also watches the cartoon (there is both a cartoon and a magazine of Monster High dolls). She watches the advert very attentively and then she comments excitedly:

O: "These are my favourite; I love all the Monster High dolls!"

O: "There are more boys coming out now and 3 more girls. I haven't got Laguna's boy, which is the only one I am missing, but I got 3 boys"

FM: "When you play with these dolls do you play on your own or with friends ...or maybe with your brother?"

O: "My brother hates Monster High dolls! I do have a friend, Abi, who's come around a little bit -she loves Monster High so I play with her and on my own most of the time"

FM: "What is that you like so much about these dolls?"

O: "Well...the fact that they are monsters and so different from the other dolls. You can play better stories with them"

FM: "Hmm... for example?"

O: "You know... scary stories like the cartoon... not just going shopping like Barbie!"

FM: "So you watch the cartoon as well?"

O: "Yes, and sometimes I buy the magazine as well"

Carly (age 8) is another fan of the dolls, although she admits the fact that she might also be scared at times:

C: "I really like them. They are freaky though. I've got the green one. When it's dark in my bedroom at night the doll really scares me, from my bed I can see it, so I try not to look at it"

Kesha & Sandy (age 9):

K: "I really like Monster High dolls, they are actually the only dolls I would play with"

FM: "Yes, I remember you said earlier that you don't play with dolls..."

K: "Normal dolls yes, but these ones are ok. They are more suitable to our age because they are more experienced and scary and you can actually play like you are killing someone like: *"HEY, let's get some blood from the humans"*

S: "Yeah...it's more fun. They are like teenager dolls in a way, because small children would freak out if they play with them"

K: "They are also more flexible, they can do this and this and that"

(She moves her arms, legs and neck pointing to the fact that these dolls have joints, which enhance the range of movements they can perform)

FM: "I understand. So you play with these often?"

K: "I always play with them when I go to Olga: she got the full collection of them, even the boys"

S: "Cool..."

FM: "And are you into scary movies as well or just the dolls?"

K: "Oh yeah, I love Dracula and Twilight"

FM: "Do you like this version of girl, all freaky and monster?"

S: "Yeah, it's cool"

Kesha is nodding her head in approval.

Then the girls asked to be watched while they perform a role play where they impersonate the Monster High dolls. Kesha pretends to suck blood from Sandy's neck. They actually move like the dolls (simulating stiffed harm, neck and legs) and they seem to be rehearsing a story-line seen from the MH's cartoon animation.

Amber (age 10) declares in several occasions to be obsessed with *Twilight Saga* (a sequel of sci-fi/fantasy movies about vampires and humans mostly centred on romance and jealousy, with characters falling in love with each other and regular fights between love rivals). She appears completely captivated by the saga and she is particularly fascinated by the lead female character, Bella Swan. The obsession started from the first year of the movie's release (2008) - when Amber was only 6 years old -and has increased to the extent that she renamed herself "Amber, the vampire" and every mate at school would know about it. Knowing how much this girl buys into "creepy imaginary", her response to the "MH" dolls did not come as a surprise.

A: "Aw, I love these! I've got the whole collection, every single one of them. I also watch the cartoon at home. This is definitely my favourite one!"

REJECTING

Angel & Lucilla (age 10) both looking at the advert with dislike, towards the end of the clip Angel even rolls her eye, perhaps to emphatically show her disapproval for the toy.

FM: "Not your taste Angel?"

A: "No, not really, not for me" - nodding her head many times

L: "Me neither"

FM: "Ok, you wouldn't play with these dolls, but what about the advert?"

A: "No, no way, I don't like this"

FM: "Can you tell me what is it in particular?"

A: "Because it's so...I like normal things, not creepy stuff, they look disgusting"

FM: "Same for you Lucille?"

L: "No, I'm ok with creepy things, like I like spiders, I actually have a spider on my bedroom wall so...it's just that I don't play with dolls and I don't like *monstery* stuff, I like maybe *Halloweeny* stuff but not monster dolls"

Then both girls agree that they are not playing with dolls any longer

A: "I don't really play with toys as much, I like doing art or drawing or other stuff"

L: "I don't play with dolls"

A: "And these dolls...they may look good in the advert but then when you see them for real they don't look as good"

FM:" I understand. Did you use to play with dolls when you were younger?"

L: "Yeah, when I was about 6/7, until I was 8 I think"

A: "Yes, same"

It should be added that in the case of Angel and Lucilla, the interaction between the girls could be often read as reflecting a "leader and follower" dynamic, due to Lucilla's admiration towards Angel (she named Angel as "a person in your life who you really admire" during the first questionnaire-guided interview). Despite this dynamic, her answer regarding Monster High dolls can be considered genuine as it is consistent with other media preference expressed by the girl (i.e. her dislike for movies such as *Twilight*). It must also be recognised that Lucilla's personality is one of a very assertive and opinionated individual, so her admiration for Angel would not be enough to make her blindly follow her friend's opinions; rather, in case of disagreement, she would express her own thoughts in a cautious manner as to minimise any contrast.

Emma (age 11): she watches the advert with a very expressive dislike on her face

FM: "Emma I don't see you fascinated by this. What do you think of this advert?"

E: "Quite retarded!"

Then she makes an impression of the monster doll clearly aimed at ridicule

FM: "So you don't like them at all, not them nor the advert?"

E: (mumbling) "I can't say what I really think in front of the camera"

In the follow-up interview she clarifies that she is not into creepy stuff in general (she doesn't watch Twilight or other horror movies) and that she never really plays with dolls, even when she was little:

E: "I used to have a farm with figures animals and lots of stuffed animals".

She also thinks that for her age these dolls are inappropriate: "maybe 7-10 year old will play with them".

Lorraine (age 11): "Monster High is rubbish! It's just Bratz but made scary and in real life they don't even look that good"

Millie & Jess (age 11) reject the creepy image of the dolls. Their reaction seems in line with their preferences as far as media/movie consumption as they do not watch the widely popular Twilight and in more than one instance during previous conversations they expressed their general dislike for horror movies. Millie does not wait for the advert to finish and immediately expresses her feelings:

M: "No, no, don't like this" - said together with Jessica

FM: "Can you tell what exactly you don't like?"

M: "It's just..." (disgusted expression on her face)

FM: "Does it put you off?"

M: "Yes, completely... the actual doll, oh no!"

Then she continues watching the advert and talking to her friend **Jess (age 11):**

M: "It actually got a snakehead there, how disgusting!"

J: "Yeah, they look horrible"

FM: "Not your taste I see..."

M: "I can do Barbie dolls or Bratz dolls, but not these!"

FM: "Would you actually play with any doll at the moment?"

J: "I only have, you know the ones that look really realistic? My mum makes them, you know the ones that got goat hair and they actually look real, they are called REBORN"

FM: "Yes I think I've seen them advertised in a magazine"

J: "I have 3, actually now 4 of them...and yes, I do play with them"

M: "They are really creepy though, they look too real!"

FM: "Would you play with them?"

M: "Not sure. But I love babies! One of my favourite shows is *One born every minute*, because I LOVE this kind of documentaries about babies and stuff... yes, aw...and you can see them coming out and then...well, I just can't wait to get birth now!!"

Jessica smiles at her and gives her what looks like an emphatic hug.

Judy (age 11) similarly expresses her disagreement with any kind of scary imaginary:

J: "I don't really like it, it's too teenagers"

FM: "Can you explain to me what do you mean by that?"

J: "Because teenagers are into creepy stuff, like vampires and zombies..."

Judy explained that she doesn't like to watch horror movies or anything creepy as that kind of movies makes her really scared and she would keep imagining scary things after the movie ends.

FRUSTRATION- CAN'T BUY IT

Becky (age 8) talking with friend **Kim (age 9)** seems to like the dolls but she shows frustration regarding their price and the fact that she does not own any of them:

B: "I play with these at a friend's house - you know Olga?"

FM: "Yes of course I know her; she's in your class"

B: "Well, they are alright...if they didn't cost so much though...my mum would not buy me one"

K: "Yeah right, they are well expensive"

FM: "What would you say is good about these dolls?"

B: "They are alright, cool hair, I like the fact that they are monsters, not like normal people"

Lulu (age 11) also expresses frustration at her parents' refusal to buy. The problem this time seems not to be in the price but with the monsters' horrific style which her parents do not find appropriate:

L: "I would love to buy these but my parents don't let me"

FM: "Is it because of their price?"

L: "No they don't like any kind of monster doll or creepy stuff, remember?"

Lulu is referring to a previous conversation where she explained that her parents would not allow her to watch *Twilight* or *Dracula* or any other scary kind of movies.

This is another instance of strong parental influence which will be referred to in following chapters.

PERSONALISING

Mandy & Libet (age 11) like the idea of monsters characters and the story-line of Monster High cartoons, but would not play with the dolls:

M: "I wouldn't buy the dolls, because they are like Bratz for me. But I like the *monstery* idea and it would be actually cool if it wasn't the cartoon but the actual live actors doing it. That would be really cool!"

L: "Yeah, it would be awesome"

FM: "You mean the story line of the cartoon but with real actors in it?"

M: "Yeah"

FM: "Have you ever watched the cartoon of Monster High?"

M: "Yes, I know what it's about, like teenagers in High School"

L: "But it's a Monsters High School obviously"

Then the girls start a conversation about movies, citing the example of *Twilight* or *Transilvania*, as movies of this genre that they usually enjoy.

4.5.6 ADVERT #6 - FURREAL GOGO WALKING PUP

Description: The advert shows a girl walking her Furreal walking pup in the park (a fluffy battery-operated puppy on the leash). The girl is quickly attracting the attention of other young people in the park - mostly girls as only one boy is visible- who start to follow her, dancing around her and taking pictures with their mobile phones. A group of teenagers cheerleaders in their costumes join the crowd and perform their jumps and cartwheels around the girls. The main actress is a pretty girl of around 9 years of age and she wear trendy and colourful clothes, a mini skirt with leggings and a jacket, with Converse All Star footwear. She doesn't seem to wear make-up but her hair and general appearance suggest a looks-conscious girl. Most of the girls in the adverts appear to be of similar age, prettiness and attire.

This advert is considered unappealing by the vast majority of participants (19/30, roughly 63%) who regard the advert as "babyish" "ridiculous" or downright "annoying". Only 3 girls out of 30 were positively impressed by the advert without reserve, while another group of 6 girls would let their attention drift away from the toy advertised, paying close attention to the actresses' attire and behaviour. It should be added that the toy advertised is targeted to 4-7 years old, thus the overall response gathered from the girls makes perfect sense considering that they represent an older

age group. Despite proving a wrong choice on the researcher's part (as far as advert selection) the advert had at least the utility to locate a group of girls who still show appreciation for more "infantile" toys and play and another group of girls who, regardless of the toy advertised, would pay attention to the actresses' attire.

ADVERT #6 Furreal Walking Pup - Type of Response * Participants SFI Cross tabulation

Count		Participants SFI			
		Low	Medium	High	Total
ADVERT #6	Liking	0	1	2	3
Furreal Walking Pup	Babyish	0	6	7	13
	Personalising	1	3	2	6
	Mixed feelings	0	1	1	2
	Critical	0	2	0	2
	Rejecting	3	0	1	4
Total		4	13	13	30

Table 4.16 - ADVERT #6 - Type of Response Cross Tabulation

LIKING

Kirsty (age 8) starts to comment as soon as the advert is played and friend **Carly (age 8)** seems to share her admiration for the advert:

K: "Oh I've seen this before, I really like it!"

FM: "What's the thing that you most like about this advert?"

K: "It's the doggy!" - she talk enthusiastically with a big smile -

C: "Yeah, it just looks like a real puppy"

FM: "And do you like the girls in the advert as well, the way they dress, they walk and act?"

K:"Yes, and I like the dancing!"

C: "They look really cheering and happy"

K:"Yes, really cheering and happy"

Carla (age 10) doesn't agree with friend **Hall (age 11)** (who totally rejects the advert saying she would never watch it as she finds it ridiculous for her age):

C: "Well, for me this would go in my like's box ' cause I love animals"

FM: "So you would watch the advert?"

C: "Yes, I've seen it before"

FM: "You said you like the advert because you love animals?"

C: "Yeah"

This question was asked because previously – in relation to the Eurostar Explorer’s advert #2 (which features a greater amount of real life animals compared to this advert) - Carla did not express any positive comment on the animals and instead seemed quite bored by that advert.

FM: "What else you love about the advert, anything else catching your attention?"

C: "They are all girls and they are having fun. I love the dancing and the cartwheels..."

PERSONALISING

Lorraine (age 11) and Solange (age 11)

L: "Look, you can actually see the wheels under the legs"

S: "I like what they wearing...but I don't like the dog, the dog looks stupid"

L: "Yes I like what they wearing but I don't like the song. I think I don't like the actual thing (dog) but I like the clothes"

S: "No offence to the dog but it looks stupid! I like the girls' clothes, the clothes are alright"

L: "They should be there to be selling clothes, not a dog which is made of plastic!"

FM: "Would you watch the advert or just skip it?"

S: "I would watch it once or twice maybe"

L: "The first few times yeah..."

Millie (age 11) looks at the advert with neutral expression so it's not clear whether she likes the advert or not, but she is certainly paying attention to it while her friend **Jess (age 11)** turns her eyes away and totally denigrates the advert.

FM: "So Jess this advert is really annoying for you, while you Millie, are you annoyed too?"

M: "No really..."

FM: "Or actually you might like it...?"

M: "No, I don't like the dog"

FM: "No you don't like the product. But I saw you watching with interest. What about the girls in the advert, do you like how the girls look and act in the advert?"

M: "Yes, her... - (she's pointing her finger at one of the actresses) - she looks so girly...I like ALL the girls here actually, and the cheerleaders, I'd love to be a cheerleader!"

Millie talks with a dreaming smile, then she asks to play the advert again.

FM: "You like the cheerleader doing cartwheels"

M:"Uh, I love that jacket, look!" (talking to friend Jess)

BABYISH

Ruby (age 11)'s comments exemplify the feeling of all the other girls finding the advert not appropriate for their age:

R: "I've seen this before ...mmm...I think it's a bit too babyish...so weird I mean the way that she's got around all these kids and she's got a fake puppy and she's walking it and all these kids crowding around her and they think it's amazing that they are doing all that...it's just an electronic puppy ...it's weird...I mean, why?"

FM: "OK, so you find it too babyish"

R: "AND weird! I mean why would they do that? Just over an electronic puppy..."

She laughs, looking amused as she seems to find the advert ridiculous.

FM: "Ok the dog is a real put-off. But can you tell me if you like the girls in the advert...the way they dress?"

R:"Maybe I like the shoes, but the dresses are a bit over the top, the skirts are too short "

FM: "Would you pay attention to the advert if it comes up on telly or just skip it?"

R: "Definitely skip it!"

CRITICAL

Lucilla (age 10) express her puzzlement while she laughs at the inconsistency between the toy advertised and the age of the actresses

L: "It's a bit weird...I mean they are quite old girls walking with that thing...it would be just be A BIT embarrassing walking down the street like this!"

Charlette (age 11) express a similar comment:

C: "I think the girls in this advert are too old for that dog (...) that's why I don't really like this advert. I think this dog should be for about 5 years old..."

MIXED FEELINGS

Judy (age 11) watches the advert with amused expression, moving her head at the rhythm of the jingle. Her first reaction to the advert was quite positive but then she seems to shift her appreciation for the advert after the researcher made the mistake of wrongly agreeing with friend **Charlette (age 11)**'s comment about the dog being for 5 years old.

J: "I quite like it. The dog is kind of realistic...except you can see part of the wheels can't you?"

Then Charlotte comments negatively on the advert asserting it is babyish and the toy for 5 years old children.

FM: "Judy do you like this advert?"

J: "Hmm...I'm not sure, I do and I don't, I would say in the middle"

FM: "What is it that you like about this advert?"

J: "The dog really looks realistic and the song with the girls walking around and doing cartwheels"

FM: "Would you watch the advert if it comes up on TV?"

J: "Yeah I would. I might get it (the dog), but then again I might not, I don't go around much so it wouldn't really work..."

REJECTING

Amber (age 11): "I really hate this advert! A girl followed by a crowd of people because she goes around with a fake dog, it looks so stupid, it's just not right!"

Meg (age 8) watches the first ten seconds of the advert, then she turns her eyes away from the screen. She won't watch the rest of the advert, nodding her head left and right in disapproval.

FM: "Meg, you don't like this advert?"

M: "Mhm" (nodding her head in sign of disapproval)

FM: "Can you tell me what's wrong with it?"

M: "I told you it's girly, these are all girly ads we are watching"

FM: "So you don't want to watch anything girly? Is it annoying for you?"

M: "Mhm" (she nods affirmatively)

4.5.7 ADVERTS #7- BUILD YOUR DREAM WEDDING - NINTENDO DS GAME

Description: The advert shows people smartly dressed at a wedding in a Church. The ceremony is well underway and the priest is asking the spouses for their consent. Two well-known and pretty female celebrities – both BBC’s TV presenters - feature as main characters. They are playing with Nintendo DS in one of the rear seats (the game played is “Build your dream wedding” where players can customise the ideal wedding, from the interior décor to people’s attire and make-up). Suddenly the advert becomes humorous, as the choices made in the game translates into real changes: the bride’s traditional long and white dress turns into a skimpy red dress, while the head of the groom displays a punk’s spiky Mohican. A young girl (roughly age 10) from the front seats witnesses the two friends doing the trick and she giggles in amusement. The two presenters smile apologetically while the guests stare in full astonishment.

ADVERT #7 DS Build Your Dream Wedding - Type of Response * Participants SFI

Count		Participants SFI			
		Low	Medium	High	Total
ADVERT #7	Liking	3	13	12	28
DS	Critical	0	0	1	1
Dream Wedding	Rejecting	1	0	0	1
Total		4	13	13	30

Table 4.17 - ADVERT #7 - Type of Response Cross Tabulation

For this advert the response was almost unanimously a very positive one. Most girls (93%) appreciate the humour and would laugh and giggle while watching. Other girls would simply relish the idea of wedding. Some girls – especially the ones who had never seen the advert previously - would ask to play the advert again (highlighting the value of adverts as pure entertainment, as will be further discussed later).

Interestingly, the only critical response is from **Angel (age 10)**, a girl of Catholic upbringing and – of her own admission- very little sense of humour (in several occasions she declared “It’s very hard to make me laugh” or “Nothing makes me laugh”). The other negative response comes from **Meg (age 8)**, simply on the ground of the advert being perceived as “too girly”.

LIKING

Ruby (age11): “It is funny, I like it 'cause... it's really funny how she is with a nice white wedding dress and suddenly it pops into a red dress and then the guy blows into spiky hair! It's fun how they do that at a wedding, by playing with the DS. It's really cool, I like this one, really really funny!”

Kim (age 9): "Oh Oh...wedding!!"

Lorraine and Solange (age 11):

L: "That's so hilarious!!"

S: "Look at their face!"

L: "I like that! (...) I always wanted to get married"

S: "Maybe...it depends if I find my true love"

FM: "And you Lorraine? If you don't find your true love?"

L: "Yes, I'll just get married anyway"

Amber (age 10): "Aw, this is so funny, I love it!"

Judy (age 11) laughs all the way throughout the advert

J: "I never seen it before but yes I like it (...) I like the fact that everything changes because of the DS"

FM: "What do you think about the women making the joke in the advert?"

J: "They look like grown-up and I like the fact that for them the wedding didn't look right so they mess it up!"

Hall (age 11) and her friend **Carla (age 10):**

H: "This would go in my LIKE's box definitely! I love things like that, like... I'm always on the computer play this kind of games, making things you know..."

C: "Me too, I like decorating and customising things"

CRITICAL

Angel (age10), as mentioned earlier, doesn't appreciate the humour of the advert at all and finds it instead quite offensive: from her discussion with friend **Lucilla (age 10)** it seems clear that this is due to her firm religious upbringing:

A: "This advert is really offensive, I don't think is appropriate"

L: "It's quite funny though. I don't have this one but I have other two games of the DS Imagine'

Then Lucilla talks about the other similar Imagine DS games that she plays with, she says she really enjoys them as she likes to customise things. After that, Angel re-affirms her negative appraisal of the advert:

A: "If people do this on a wedding it's not very nice"

L: "BUT it's a joke and... it does look pretty cool" (she laughs)

A: "You don't get it. If kids see this they would think it's fine to do it but then it would be really rude"

She goes on explaining to her friend Lucilla (age 10) that a wedding should be a sacred event in a Church and it's not funny to joke about it in this way. Lucilla tries to sound sympathetic to her friend's concern:

L: "Yeah...but I only like the joke...at the same time I understand that if kids watch an advert like this, where grown-up people play DS during a wedding, then they may try to do the same and that would be quite rude"

4.5.8 ADVERT #8 & #9 - PETIT FILOUS - OLD VS NEW ADVERT

The choice of including the two Petit Filous' adverts was a difficult one, due to the age of the actress in both adverts being quite young (roughly age 7) compared to participants' age group. It was thought that the younger age of the actress would be a put-off or make less likely any process of identification/aspiration on the co-researchers' part. In the end it was decided to include these adverts as an additional exercise due to the startling contrast between the representations of girlhood they put forward: in the old advert there is counter-stereotypical portrayal of femininity, where a girl defends a boy winning arm wrestling against another boy, while in the new advert there is a stereotypical situation where a girl is bullied and a boy comes to her rescue. Interestingly, the old advert (#8) returned to be broadcasted on TV after the new one (#9) was broadcasted for a short period (approximately 7 months between 2011-2012) and then withdrawn. The reason of the old version's coming back is still unclear (the researcher emailed the agency, which so far has failed to acknowledge the request).

The two adverts were shown one after the other and the girls were simply asked to express and justify their preference for one or the other. Similarly to what has been noted in previous adverts response, the results appear much in line with participants' wider preferences and embodiments of femininity.

ADVERT #8 -Description: The scene is filmed in a French village. A boy (roughly age 6) is being bullied and his marbles taken away by some boys. A girl (roughly age 7) witnesses the incident and reassures the boy that she would get his marbles back. She then faces the bullying boy in a arm wrestling contest, winning the marbles back for the boy.

ADVERT #9 -Description: The scene is filmed in a British school's hall (as the actors wear a typical comprehensive school uniform). A girl (roughly age 7) is being bullied by a group of older boys (age 8-9) and she looks quite fearful. A younger boy (roughly age 6) witnesses the incident and immediately runs to help the girl, intimidating the boys by simply turning up his sleeves and assuming the fight position (showing his fists as to start a fight). The girl steps behind the little boy, simply watching what is happening. The bullies turn their back and decide to leave the girl alone.

As is evident from the table below, a great majority of girls (20 out of 30) expressed preference for the new “stereotypical” advert. Cross-tabulation seems to suggest a consistent relation between participants SFI and their preference for stereotyped /counter-stereotyped portrayals of gender.

Petit Filous - Preference (Old vs New Advert) * Participants SFI Cross tabulation

Count		Participants SFI			Total
		Low	Medium	High	
Petit Filous (Old vs New Advert)	Old –Counter Stereotype	3	5	1	9
	New- Stereotype	1	7	12	20
	None	0	1	0	1
Total		4	13	13	30

Table 4.18 - ADVERT #8 & 9 - Type of Response Cross Tabulation

Interestingly, the preference for both adverts was often justified in very similar fashion, by naming the favourite advert as “more realistic” and by denigrating the alternative advert, sometimes in extreme way.

PREFERENCE FOR ADVERT#8 (COUNTER-STEREOTYPE)

Meg (age 8) watches the two adverts and she immediately decide on her favourite:

M: "I like more this one" (referring to the old advert)

FM: “Could you be the girl in this advert? Defending a boy from bullies?”

M: "I did defend my brother once when some boys from Year 5 were pulling his pants down"

FM: “What did you say to them?”

M: "Nothing, I only showed them my fist"

Amber (age 10) and Elisha (age 10) agree on their preference for the counter-stereotyped advert:

A: "I definitely prefer the other one because it's more realistic" (referring to the old advert)

E: "Yeah..."

A: "Argh...this one is really annoying! It's not realistic! The boy is like a midget and look at the size of those guys...just...how can that be? It's like...look .."

She mimics the advert with Elisha by pretending to be much smaller than her and by attacking her. Elisha laughs all the way.

A: "Who would believe it? It's plain stupid!"

Angel (age 10): "Well, this one is a bit ridiculous...I mean why would a little child go up to two big kids like those? And why would the big guys run away like they are scared (...) I prefer the old version because it's a bit more realistic, but it's not that much better...if I had to choose between the two then I'd say the first one"

Hall (age 11): "The kid is too small and those older boys ...I don't think it would really happen...they wouldn't be scared of him, it's just silly (...) The first advert is more realistic"

PREFERENCE FOR ADVERT #9 (STEREOTYPICAL)

In addition to the "being realistic" criteria, the preference for the new advert was often justified with romantic ideas:

Becky (age 8) & Kim (age 9):

K: "Aw, this is so annoying!!" - while watching advert #8

B: "I prefer this one" - while watching advert #9

K: "Yeah..."

FM: "So you both prefer the new advert. What do you think about the little boy against the big boys?"

B: "Yeah, the little boy is sweet. I like the fact that he's doesn't care and he think he can beat the big boys up!"

K: "I have two little brothers and boys are like this, they would think they are so strong even when they are so small...it's really cute"

Note that both Kim and Becky have little brothers and Kim often talked about how much she love looking after them.

Olga (age 8): "I like more the boy defending the girl - because it's more like...a love story" (smiling)

FM: "Ok. What do you think about...the boy in the advert is quite small compared to the bullies: do you think it's realistic?"

O: "Yes it's realistic...you know, I am small as well, but I still can defend myself so..."

Kirsty (age 8) firstly comments while watching the advert #8:

K: "I think it's kind of boyish"

FM: "What do you mean?"

K: "Normally the boys defend the girls. And the harm wrestling and all that..."

Then **Kirsty** and **Carly (age 8)** show their familiarity with the new advert (#9):

K: "Oh yeah...this one is on telly now. Here they are trying to bully the girl"

C: "Yeah... I think it's a bit weird!"

K: "I find it funny... It's like a cowboy film"

C: "The little boy is cute though"

Kirsty makes a funny impression of the little boy by turning her sleeves up and assuming the fight position. Carly is watching her and laughs.

C: "Erm...I don't really believe the big boys would run away in real life, but I like more this one as it's kind of more normal"

K: "Yeah...the boy trying to stand up for a girl!" - she winks and makes a romantic expression.

Kesha (age 9) & Sandy (age 9):

K: "I remember this advert...hmm...I don't like it" - watching the counter-stereotypical advert

S: "Yeah this is kind of annoying actually"

Then the two girls express their preference while watching the new (stereotypical) advert:

K: "Yeah, this is on TV now. I like this one more...because it's more realistic, it's more...IN YOUR FACE!"

S: "For me too. It's like it can happen in our school you know..." - probably referring to the advert's scene which is evidently filmed in a British school

FM: "So you think this advert is more realistic, even if it's a little boy against big boys?"

K: "Yeah it's realistic, boys do that".

Lorraine (age 11) and **Solange (age 11)** do not appreciate the first advert (#8) while smiling repeatedly watching the second advert (#9):

L: "I like the second advert more... 'cause it's more realistic. The first advert is boring"

S: "Yes, I like the second...the little boy wants to be brave to impress the older girl, he looks cute"

FM: "What is not realistic about the first advert?"

L: "Because they sitting on a bench in a village abroad somewhere and... why would someone want to steal your marbles? The second advert is like...it happens at school, it's a lot more realistic"

FM: "So this is the reason you prefer it, because it's more realistic. And you Solange?"

S: "Yes, I like it more. It's definitely more realistic. And the boy is really cute"

4.5.9 ADVERT #10 - SLIDE D – COLLAGE OF VOGUE 'S ADVERTS

Description: This is a PowerPoint 's slide showing a collage of printed adverts which have appeared recently in Vogue and other fashion magazines - sparking a lively debate on the appropriateness of using children models to sell adult clothes. The adverts show children models (looking approximately 10 years old) dressed up and groomed in clothes and make-up which are evidently adult style. Two of the pictures are more extreme, in that they show a child model wearing actual adult-sized clothes and shoes, with heavy make-up, adult hair style and bright red lipstick.

Only one girl, **Meg (age 8)** would refuse to comment at this slide, as she did not seem comfortable looking at it, so the researcher moved quickly onto something else. Her response has been categorised as rejection. The majority of girls were critical about the slide, but would look at it with interest, while a minority expressed positive remarks and would enjoy looking at the images.

SLIDE D - Type of Response * Participants SFI Cross tabulation

Count		Participants SFI			
		Low	Medium	High	Total
SLIDE D	Liking	0	1	3	4
	Personalising	0	1	5	6
	Mixed feeling	0	2	1	3
	Critical	1	8	4	13
	Rejecting	3	1	0	4
Total		4	13	13	30

Table 4.19 - ADVERT #10 - Type of Response Cross Tabulation

Interestingly, most of the girls in the younger age group (8-9 years old) and some of the girls in the older age group (10-11) would not recognise the selling intent of the adverts and would assume that people in the adverts are simply “showing off” to become famous.

LIKING

Olga (age 8): “They want to look smart 'cause they want to become famous or something...”

Kirsty (age 8) and Carly (age 8) seem to like the images; they express their comment smiling:

K: “It looks nice but weird”

C: “They look fashionable!”

FM: “Why do you think they are doing this?”

K: “Maybe they’re looking for a boyfriend? Most girls like doing make-up and stuff, more than adults, don't they?”

C: “Because adults got to work while children have more time to do this make-up and pictures' thing”

Carla (age 10): “They look lovely, really beautiful and sweet”

FM: “Why do you think these two are dressed in grown-up clothes and shoes?”

C: “Well, maybe for fun? I like to put on my mum’s clothes and play with her jewellery sometimes!”

CRITICAL

Some girls appear at first fascinated by the images as they look at them very attentively. They then show real frustration; some of their comments could be read as betraying admiration mixed with envy. In almost all cases the comments seem to indicate some form of parental influence.

Becky (age 8) appears at first fascinated by the images as she looks at them attentively. She then shows real frustration, but perhaps her comments betray admiration mixed with envy:

B: “Are they officially gipsy? This is literally pathetic! Look at the size of the high heels! My mum would never let me wear them”

FM: “Why do you think they make this kind of adverts?”

B: “I don't know. I think it's really wrong. Their parents probably do it to show-off. (...) it's like a shoes' retard, it looks really stupid”

FM: "Would you find adverts like these disturbing or just silly?"

B: "They are wrong! If I was a mum I would not let my children watch them"

Lulu (age 11): "A bit confusing, these girls are like my age and they are allowed to dress like this?"

Enri (age 9) doesn't look annoyed or disturbed by the advert, but she still express a critical judgement:

E: "I like the clothes and the shoes, but I think they are too young to be dressed and made-up like this. It looks SILLY"

Kesha (age 9): "Did I tell you, my sister works for Vogue? But I think this is not right. It's wrong 'cause they are only children"

Sandy (age 9): "It's really wrong, it LOOKS wrong. You know one time I saw a 6 years old in a bikini on a wedding!"

Jess (age 11): "Not for me, too over the top. How old are they?"

PERSONALISING

Millie (age 11) seems enthused by the images; she looks at them very closely like she's actually studying them. She does not seem to find anything wrong (unlike her friend Jess): although she seems to acknowledge that the models are "quite young for it", she limits her attention to the clothes, the hair style and make-up. Her response really epitomises all the others in the "personalising" category. It was tempting to include these responses in the "liking" category (in some way these two categories can be considered interchangeable), but it was decided in the end to include in this category all the instances where girls express positive remarks but at the same time acknowledged (without criticism) the models being very young. It seems that these participants might be aware of the advert's provocative slant but their natural curiosity or the appeal of the images would win their attention and they would focus on what is attractive to them without further questioning the adverts.

M: "Hmm, I know they are quite young for it but they look really nice! I don't like much this one because the shoes are too big, but I like this one and this girl and the hair here ...and this white dress. And this scarf, very Christmassy!!" - (she points at the slide identifying these features).

4.6 SECOND ROUND OF ADVERTS ELICITATION INTERVIEWS

In the second round of phenomenological interviews, the adverts used were identified directly by the girls, who were asked to name at least two adverts –one “like” and one “dislike”. The response to this “task” was very varied, ranging from no response at all to a girl suggesting more than 10 adverts. From the adverts identified by participants (a total of 39), adverts without any representation of girlhood/womanhood were excluded as not relevant. Some adverts were impossible to find online or to locate elsewhere. The final selection constitutes a set of 15 adverts, which were recorded online and saved for the girls to watch during the session.

It was also decided to further narrow the sample of girls for this second round in order to speed up and make more efficient the data gathering process, by excluding the “least involved or talkative” couples from the first round. The main intent here was to retain a “maximum variation sample” of girls (i.e. representing a diverse sample as far as age, SFI, body image and critical skills) and include participants on the basis of their ability to express their thoughts and their involvement during the session. A total of 21 girls were included in the second round.

4.6.1 ADVERTS #11 – HARRIBO “INTERROGATION” and “JUST TOO GOOD”

Two adverts from Harribo proved incredibly popular among the girls (a total of 21 participants suggested at least one of the adverts). As they are very similar in terms of how the starring young girl is portrayed (i.e. assertive/bossy, clever and cheeky) and in terms of participants’ response, it was decided to include the two adverts in the same slot, as advert #11a and #11b.

Description #11a: In the advert “Interrogation” there is a father going through a police’s style interrogation by the rest of the family (mother, son and daughter) as they try to make him confess to being guilty about the disappearance of Harribo sweeties. . At first, the son - a boy around 11 years old - tries to persuade the father without success. Then the son calls in “Detective Mills” and a very young girl- around 6 years old- storms through the door and “grills” the suspect with a powerful stare, shouting aggressively “Look into my eyes!”. The father appears intimidated and immediately gives up by saying: “Alright, alright ...I’ll sign the confession!”

Description #11b: In the advert “Just too good” there is a young girl (7 years old) acting as researcher, dressed with a white lab coat and big glasses. There is man besides her

acting as her assistant. She is doing an experiment about delayed gratification with Harribo sweeties. She explains clearly to her participants (boys and girl looking much younger than her) that they will have to resist eating the sweeties in front of them if they want to win a double portion of sweeties to be eaten later. The participants try to resist but - of course - they cannot, so the young researcher proclaims in the end "The evidence is clear: Harribo is just too good!" Meanwhile, the man assistant cannot help grabbing a sweetie behind her back; the girl spots him and mockingly exclaims: "Greedy chops!"

For both these adverts the verdict was positively unanimous. Most girls would choose to watch both adverts at the start of the session (in this second round girls were allowed to control the laptop and freely choose from the list of adverts which one to click) and appeared in delight watching the video clips, smiled repeatedly throughout and often times asking to watch the advert again. Their comments seem to reflect an undivided admiration for the "feisty little girl".

In fact, one interesting element emerging from some participants' interaction is the fact that the little girl - acting as main character in the adverts - would be considered somewhat realistic, as some girls would compare the girl to real people (often a sister, a cousin or their younger selves) and some would cite examples from their real life. The fact that the little girl is defined as the "powerful" one, the one "in charge", able to scare or belittle the father or adult figure, seems indicative of how the two adverts represent for the girls a truly exhilarating and liberating picture. Most participants would also take great pleasure in acting out the advert, taking turns in their impersonation of the final line "Looking into my eyes" or "Greedy chops!"

Kirsty and Carly (age 8)

K: "Aww...we watched this! You remember? We went to this play where there was...ahem...this boy acting as a teacher and this little girl jumped on stage and goes to him: 'Look into my eyes!' "

Both girls laughing recalling the event

C: "Yeah...she looks the part...so angry!"

K: "So cute, nobody knew HOW to get her off the stage!"

FM: "So you love this advert? What's so good about it?"

K: "She is small but knows how to scare her dad!"

C: "I love her eyes, she reminds me of my little sister Tilly!"

Angel (age 10) laughs repeatedly while she comments: "That girl...ahhh...she scared her dad!!!"

Lucilla (age 10): "Oh I love the little girl: sign the confession, look into my eyes!"

FM: "Do you think it's like a realistic version of a little girl?"

L: "Yeah, I think at that age you can see really bossy girls"

Amber (age 10): ""I love this advert, the girl is so cool! (...) Yeah...she's a feisty little girl, I like the fact that she's in charge!"

Becky (age 8): "This girl is just like my little sister, we call her the 'devil child' because she's so bossy!!"

Mandy (age 11): "It's just that she's so little but act like she's grown-up or something...I love her big glasses, can we watch it again?"

Kesha (age 9): "She knows what she wants, don't mess around with her! (...) My mom's always says I was like that when I was small, bossing around everyone and nobody would tell me off because I looked... just this small thing and cute!"

Jess (age 11): "She's like daddy's girl you can tell!"

4.6.2 ADVERT #12 - WEIGHTWATCHERS "DO IT OUR WAY"

Description: The advert features real members of WW (overwhelmingly women) who happily walk, dance and sing - or rather mimic singing - a catchy song by Alesha Dixon (a popular singer) while acting as they are going about their daily routine (shopping, swimming, dinner out, etc..). The lyric unmistakably proclaims the pride of weight loss, suggesting that members were able to literally transform their life through losing weight.

Quoting a Daily Mail's excerpt on 1st January 2012: "At three minutes and 10 seconds, it's one of the longest adverts to ever appear on British television. And, as it will be broadcast on nearly every commercial British TV channel just before 7pm today, it's also one of the most expensive. But it's not just the length or blanket coverage of the new £15million WeightWatchers' TV commercial that's expected to get the advert talked about. It's also a music video for a song that will be simultaneously released with the ambition of taking it to the top of the singles chart. Written by Alesha Dixon, the song is performed by the Strictly's judge and a group of 180 women - and a few men - who've never performed before, let alone appeared on a TV ad.(...) The song which accompanies the advert is based on the women's own stories with lines such as; 'I used to be so boring Staying in bed all morning.....Didn't like my photo. I'm loving it now.'

Despite being suggested by a small number of participants (total count of 4), this advert proved to be known by most participants, perhaps not surprisingly considering the wide broadcasting coverage. Questions such as “why do you think there are mostly women in this advert?” were asked to prompt the girls into reflecting on what appears as gender bias in the advert. Girls were also asked feedback regarding slimming/dieting adverts in general and whether they witnessed some in their family or friends being on a diet, as this could provide important clues about their context.

The most common responses to the advert show a mix of appreciation (often relating to the catchy song, celebrity Alesha or the women’s pretty/cheering appearance) with sometimes critical remarks regarding the ubiquity of pro-slimming adverts. Some girls would consider slimming adverts to be there for the benefit/health of people. Regardless of the type of response, the advert was very effective in prompting discourses of “femininity and slimness”, where most girls would recognise slimness as something that is both a necessity and a burden in women/girls’ lives.

ADVERT #12 Weight Watchers - Type of Response * Participants SFI Cross tabulation

Count		Participants SFI			
		Low	Medium	High	Total
ADVERT	#12 Liking	0	5	6	11
Weight Watchers	Critical	1	2	3	6
	Rejection	3	1	0	4
	N/A (not interviewed)	0	5	4	9
Total		4	13	13	30

Table 4.20 - ADVERT #12 - Type of Response Cross Tabulation

LIKING

Kirsty and Carly (age 8) seem to enjoy the advert, both girls watching very attentively. Despite their overall liking of the advert, they express some negative comments regarding the overwhelming presence of adverts for dieting:

C: "It's really...girly"

FM: "Ok...very girly nice or very girly annoying?"

K: "Very girly nice"

C: "Mhm...very girly A BIT annoying"

FM: "If you see an advert like this on TV would you skip it or keep watching?"

K: "I would keep watching it"

C: "I would keep watching...I love the song!"

FM: "So you would keep watching even if you find it a bit annoying because you still love the song?"

C: "Yeah"

K: "It's a catchy song"

FM: "What do you think these women are doing?"

K: "They're singing and dancing....because they've lost weight so they are happy and cheering"

FM: "Why do you think they are mostly women in the advert? I could only count 3 or 4 men."

C: "Because normally women have babies, so... men normally don't need to lose weight that much"

K: "'Cause they go gym and everything"

C: "BUT my dad is FAT!" - saying this with a smile on her face

FM: "Oh I see...what about your mum?"

C: "My mum only a little bit"

FM: "And have you ever seen your mum or dad on a diet?"

C & K: "Yeah"

C: "My mum is on Weight Watchers and my dad on something else, I don't remember the name"

FM: "Do you see around any other advert about losing weight?"

C: "There is an advert on my computer showing a man and a woman trying to lose weight in a gym and they cycle like this...really slowly...it's really annoying!"

K: "In the internet there is always one with a flab belly going in and out, it's disgusting!"

Carly also relates how the Weight Watchers' agent - supervising her mum's diet - brought recently to their home a large chunk of fat to let them see how the fat inside their body is. She says it looked really gross and she touched it and it was really soft and squidgy:

C: "The funny thing was...my little brother was there touching it and touching it again and I asked him why and he says 'hmm...it feels nice!'"

FM: "Well, I bet he prefers to have soft and fat parents to cuddle then!"

The girls laugh wholeheartedly.

FM: "So, to ask you a final question...do you like all these adverts about losing weight, do you think it's too much or are they nice and helpful in some way..?"

K: "Yeah, too much..." - simulating a "cut- throat" sign with her hand

C: "Just too much, they are everywhere!!"

Kesha and Sandy (age 9) seems to really love the advert while watching it, looking attentively at it without disrupting their view of the advert even while answering questions: their eyes seemingly wishing to grab every detail within it. They would dance and sing the song, appearing quite familiar already with the lyric. They would laugh, make comments and point their fingers at different elements of the advert. However, just before seeing the advert, Kesha expresses a critical view of watching a Weight Watchers' advert:

K: "For kids I don't think it's very good to see... because some kids may not like their weight and then they think that they can go WW, but some food is very, VERY different and it's not good for kids"

Once having started to watch the advert, the two girls would appear completely absorbed by it:

S: "Oh, I LIKE THIS! I like Weight Watchers! It's like for teenagers girls, like us" - she winks in a flirting way

K:"They are not really singing, but they are good at miming"

S:"Look at the man... he's smiling at her "uh, uh!" - referring to a point in the advert where a man turns around to stare at some women while they are walking

S:"She's beautiful!" - pointing at one of the women

FM: "Have you seen this advert before?"

K & S: "Yeah..."

The girls seem to be very familiar with the advert:

K:"They are all real members, not actors"

FM: "How does this advert make you feel then?"

S:"Happy...?" - she keeps dancing on her chair

K:"It's cheerful...'cause you think that people are not afraid any more..."

S: "Yeah... to go on TV"

K: "...to go out now that they done this thing...they can express themselves"

S:"'Cause if they used to be fat then they may not use to get out a lot and they used to be afraid of showing.."

She interrupted herself as both girls see one of the few men in the advert and point at him laughing.

FM: "They are mostly showing women, why do you think it is so?"

Kesha thinks about it for a few seconds then she says:

K: "Cause women can mostly get pregnant can't they? And they might not lose the weight once they've got the baby, so they might go to WW then..."

S: "I think it's like women more than boys 'cause they go dancing and then they are not afraid to do the moves" (she mimics the dancing with her arms)

Hall (age 11) and Carla (age 10)

H: "I like the song, but it's not true that these women sing because it's only Alicia that sing"

C: "It's a voice over"

FM: "I wonder why I can only see 3 men in this adverts, they are all women...why do you think?"

H: "Well...women care more about their figure...men don't really care that much"

C: "Yeah, we care more about looks" – smiling positively

FM: "Is this a positive thing, caring more about your look and your figure?"

C: "Yeah"

H: "Yeah...If you don't get like...too much about it"

Kim (age 9) and Becky (age 8) appear to enjoy the advert and the song while watching attentively the video. They both see dieting as normal activity – seeing their mum or sister regularly at it - and they do not seem to show frustration about it. Sometimes they would “play” at weighting and measuring themselves “just for fun”:

FM: "Have you see this already I gather..."

K & B: "Yeah..."

FM: "Do you like it?"

B: "Hmm...I like the song"

FM: "Is anyone on a diet in your home?"

B: "Yeah, my mum. She's on a diet, she doesn't like it, but she ALWAYS on a diet"

FM: "And you Kim? Is your mum on a diet too?"

K: "No, my mum not, but my sister is on a diet".

B: "Your sister is slim!"

K: "She lost quite a bit of weight. She used to be really big like... - she simulates a big belly with her hands - and now she's really slim, not overweight anymore. She used to be like out here, like really really big and now she's really skinny"

FM: "And I know from you and Becky in previous conversation that you sometimes measure and weight yourself"

K & B: "Yeah"

FM: "Do you do it to actually check on yourself or just for fun, like a game?"

K: "We do it for fun really..."

B: "Yeah...it's just fun"

Interestingly, **Lucilla (age 10)** likes the advert but she interprets it as being targeted only to women. She has also a view of dieting/slimming adverts as a helpful reminder for people to lose weight.

L: "It's good but maybe it would be better if it had been shorter"

FM: "Ok, so you like it, but just a bit too long for you. Can you tell me what is it that you like about this advert?"

L: "How they have loads of people who have lost weight using Weight Watchers"

FM: "So you like the fact that they are lots of actual people who have lost weight and not actors..."

L: "Yeah"

FM: "Why do you think there are all women and only 3 men there?"

L: "... 'cause it's only for women, that's why"

FM: "Well, actually the advert is for both, men and women"

L: "Then why they show only women?"

FM: "Yes, that's a bit puzzling, I am not sure. Can I ask you if you see around other slimming/dieting adverts?"

L: "Yes, there are quite a lot around"

FM: "Do you think they are there to help people or just too much pressure?"

L: "To help them in persuading them to lose weight I think"

FM: "Oh, so you think there are there to help"

L: "Yeah"

CRITICAL

Angel (age 10) does not seem to be familiar with the advert and she does not show enjoyment while watching it. As soon as the clip finishes playing, she expresses some critical remarks:

A: "Err...it's not that good"

FM: "Can you tell me what is it that is not that good?"

A: "Because it's too long, it has singing which is a bit annoying and I would have turned onto another channel if it was on the TV..."

FM: "Have you watched this advert before?"

A: "I think I might have heard the song from somewhere, but I never seen the advert"

FM: "Do you know that they are real members of WW in the advert, not actors?"

A: "Yes, they've said it at the beginning when the thing started"

FM: "But I noticed that there are mostly women, I can only count about 3 men...why do you think is that?"

A: "Well, because I think the advert is for women so... and it has men in it who look at them. The men look like they like the women"

FM: "Ok, so you think the advert is for women and the men are only there to look at them?"

A: "Yes"

FM: "Can you tell me if you know anybody on a diet?"

A: "No...I don't know anyone..."

FM: "Do you see other slimming/diet adverts around?"

A: "Yeah... lots of them"

FM: "Where do you see these adverts mostly? TV, billboards, internet, magazines?"

A: "A bit everywhere really..."

FM: "Do you think these advert are there to help people or they are annoying and just too much pressure?"

A: "A bit of both really!"

REJECTING

Amber (age 10), would watch the advert with an expression of total dislike. It should be added that at the very beginning of the advert Amber appeared smiling and quite keen to watch it, but she changes attitude as soon as the song starts. The lyrics of the song talk about the joy of losing weight and her mother is often pushing her to lose weight, so this advert could understandably bring uncomfortable feelings for the girl.

A: "I think this is really annoying"

FM: "Have you seen it already?"

A: "I think I might have..."

FM: "Would you watch it or would you just turn it off if you see it?"

A: "I would turn it off definitely ...but it's not like ...always possible"

FM: "What's really annoying for you about this advert?"

A: "Just all these women making celebration about losing weight, going around telling the world 'oh look I lost one stone!"

FM: "Do you see many of this type of adverts around –about losing weight?"

A: "They are everywhere, but I try not to pay attention to them (...) my mum is constantly saying I need to be on a diet"

4.6.3 ADVERT #13 – JUSTIN BIEBER “SOME DAY”

Description: In this advert there is Justin Bieber talking to the camera about having seen a beautiful girl in the crowd and wanting to trace her back by showing the picture he took of her with his mobile phone. "She's like a vision in my mind (...) with blue, brown, hazily eyes (...) The thing I remember most is her amazing scent, the fragrance was unforgettable. I couldn't get through the crowd so I made just a few pics. Want to check' em out?" When he shows the pictures, the screen displays an anonymous shape of a girl with "YOU" typed in the center. Justin Bieber ends by saying: "So this is you: I gotta find you!"

ADVERT #13 Justin Bieber Perfume* Participants SFI Cross tabulation

Count		Participants SFI			
		Low	Medium	High	Total
ADVERT #13	Liking	0	3	3	6
	Mixed feeling	0	0	3	3
	Critical	0	1	2	3
	Rejection	4	5	0	9
	N/A	0	5	4	9
Total		4	13	13	30

Table 4.21 - ADVERT #13 - Type of Response Cross Tabulation

In conversation with the girls during previous interviews and group sessions, Justin Bieber emerged as a highly controversial topic, with roughly a 50/50 split (with respect to the total sample of 37 girls) between “lovers” and “haters”. The most

interesting thing is how some of the girls have switched from love to hate towards the singer and how emotionally charged the “haters” become while watching the advert.

LIKING

Kirsty (age 8)’s enthusiastic response is not a surprise, as in previous conversation she declared her love for “Justin”; she has a poster of the singer in her bedroom and she enjoys collecting other paraphernalia.

K: "I actually have this picture on my You Tube account! I saw the advert and I sent a message and Justin actually sent it to me ...you know, the picture and the perfume from this advert!"

Angel (age 10) watches the advert with a dreaming expression and then she says:

A: "I’ve read 4 books of Justin Bieber so far! He’s the best!"

INDIFFERENT

Carly (age 8) does not seem to share Kirsty’s admiration:

FM: "And you Carly, are you into JB?"

C: "mmm...I don't like him as much, maybe because I have a cousin that looks exactly the same as him, so it's a bit weird"

CRITICAL

Millie (age 11)’s response is similar to other girls who have drastically changed their mind about the singer, due apparently to his “big headed” attitude. Despite admitting their previous admiration, these girls would express new critical views about the singer constantly “showing-off”:

M: "Don't like this much. I did like him before but not anymore"

FM: "Yes, I remember from previous interview that you were quite into him. What made you change your mind?"

M: "Erm...he was different before...he really changed, he starts to be too much of a show-off ...probably because he became so famous...he's getting big headed"

She then explain that the advert shows exactly how he is, “always flirting with girls” and that “lots of girls were into him before but they changed mind when they see how he show-off”.

Very similar comments were expressed by **Hall** and **Mandy (age11)**.

REJECTING

Amber and **Elisha (age 10)**'s response is typical of a group of girls who never liked the singer. These girls would look at the advert almost as if they were in pain; some of them would make fun or insult the singer while watching the advert, adamant to express their dislike in extreme manner. Amber has a disgusted smirk on her face and starts denigrating the celebrity as soon as the advert ends:

A: "Yuk!"

E: "Yeah...yuk!"

FM: "What is that you don't like about Justin Bieber?"

A: "EVERYTHING! He looks like a girl, he sings like a girl, he's horrible, he just wears weird clothes and he got a weird voice...and he's alive!"

E: "Ebony in year 3 brought a CD of Justin Bieber in school and when she played it the teacher thought that it was a girl singing!"

FM: "Wow, you actually managed to destroy him in less than 10 seconds! "

FM: "Aw, well ...I know that lot of girls are mad about him!"

The girls agree, talking about two girls in the class – Lulu and Emile, who were not included in the second round - who are "desperately in love" with the singer. These girls (on their own admission) would usually pretend to be Bieber's wives and they would insult Selena Gomez (currently Bieber's official girlfriend) at every opportunity, seeing her as their undeserving love rival. Amber and Elisha on the contrary, seem to "be into" Selena Gomez and wondering how the two can be a good match:

E: "...and the other day we were saying: how can it be that the worst person in the world (JB) is dating the best person in the world?"

FM: "You mean Selina Gomez?"

A: "Yeah"

E: "We were like 'HOW CAN IT BE?'"

A: "How can she stand him? I mean he's horrible!!"

Lorraine and **Solange (age 11)** express very similar views, while the advert is playing. As soon as they see the thumbnail of the advert on the computer screen the

girls react in quite an extreme way. Solange would dramatically pretend to throw up and her friend would respond by emphatically simulating her own retch:

S: "Oh no...There is one of Justin B...awk!"

L: "Awk...I feel sick"

Then as soon as the advert starts playing, they would start to direct hate messages and insults to the singer quite loudly:

S: "Lies, lies, lies, I am not listening to you!! Beside you have no sense of fashion and you look like a gay!"

Both girls at this point are covering their hears with their hands

L: "You're so GAAAY!!"

S: "Your hair cut looks stuUUUpid!"

L: "Gaaaaay! You are not American!"

S: "Your hair cut is stupid, your music is stupid, you only think that you know about love but you have never been in love, so shut your mouth!"

Then Solange addresses the researcher with a flirty smile:

S: "And you are enjoying this, are you?"

FM: (smiling) "Of course! You made me understand very well that you pretty much HATE everything about Justin Bieber"

During the last 30 seconds of the advert the girls asked to "kill" the advert without allowing it to end and the researcher respectfully agree. The advert is apparently for them a painful sight; they look angry and disgusted while watching and they made sure to cover the singer's voice with their talking aloud insults.

FM: "One thing I'd really like to know is: what is it that you really hate about Justin Bieber, to get so angry and frustrated with him?"

L: "Well, the fact that...the fact that he LIES about everything"

S: "He said that he's never been in love actually, but then he sings that he's in love...it's stupid!"

L: "He done that to Selena Gomez ... "

S: "Yes but that doesn't mean anything. He fancies her, he doesn't love her. He doesn't love her, he FANCIES her, but that's not love"

L: "No I don't think he does...but anyway I found a magazine and it said 'Justin Bieber has been lying about Selena Gomez'"

Then the girls switch their focus on Bieber's appearance:

S: "His haircut is...aargh!" – looking at the sky with wondering expression as if it was difficult to find the right words

L: "It's just gay" with a dismissive smirk

S: "It's...yuk!"

L: "He always has to put his hair like this" (she mimics Bieber's perfectly shaped bang)

S: "He's vain, vain, a poser. And can I say one more thing? He likes to be famous 'cause he thinks he can get any girl he wants, but I don't think that, 'cause he would NOT be able to get Lorraine if she was that age, and he would NOT be able to get ME if I was that age and he wouldn't be able to get half of the girls in this school so..."

Lucilla (age 10) dislikes the singer so much that she would write this brief and concise comment on a post-it note during one of our group sessions: "I HATE Justin Bieber! Liar!"

4.6.4 ADVERT #14 - VIMTO LOW RIDER "BOUNCE 'N' BOOM"

Description: Three model-looking girls in their late teens or twenties are riding in a nice car and just waiting at the traffic light. The girls appear wealthy and perfectly groomed. The girls are approached by Vimto's Low Rider, a multi-suspension car with three happy looking animated cartooned fruits inside: a raspberry, a blackcurrant and a grape. The fruits flirt with the girls in the car by saying "Hello pretty ladies!" The girls do not seem to take them seriously and are giving snobbish smirks clearly intended to get rid of the undesired attention. The fruit respond by making their music louder and activating the multiple suspension of the car, which starts bouncing with them inside. The fruits get more and more excited, with their car bouncing higher and higher at the rhythm of a catchy hip hop song. At one point the bounce becomes so violent that it squashes the fruits, splattering their purple juice outside the car and all over the girls, who appear at first shocked but then delighted with the juice's flavour: "Mhm..", they lick their lips repeatedly and smile excitedly at each other.

With only one exception - **Meg (age 8)** who, as usual, would discard the advert as being "too girly"- the response to this advert was unmistakably positive with all the girls enjoying watching the advert and laughing throughout. Interestingly, most girls (66%) would name this advert as their favorite one in the session (often together with one of the Harribos' adverts). Below are some of the most interesting comments expressed by the girls:

Kirsty (age 8) and Carly (age 8):

K: "Oh yeah I've seen this one – she laughs

C: "Now they're going to have a shower!"

K: "Ha ha, not very good when you are wearing white though!"

FM: "But the girls do not seem to care about it"

K: "Yes, because they love the juice that's why"

C: "Mhm I love Vimto!"

FM: "What do you think about the girls in this advert?"

K: "They look like they're going to a party... "

C: "They look like...very VERY nice!"

Kesha (age 9) and Sandy (age 9) would get really excited as soon as they see the thumbnail of the advert in the list and they would then laugh hysterically throughout watching the advert.

S: "Hello pretty ladies!"

K: "Oh yeah, this has got to be my favourite one!"

S: "They like the girls..." – referring to the fruits and smiling

At this point (when the car in the advert starts to bounce with the music) the girls would dance at the rhythm of the hip hop song. Sandy would actually jump on top of the table as if she was in a dance club; their type of dance could be seen as sexually provocative, as they replicate the sort of sexy moves portrayed in most dance tracks and hip hop videos.

FM: "Ok, so... do you like the girls and the way they act?"

K: "Yeah, they are like... and then...mmm" - she mimics what the girls do (acting snobbish and indifferent at first and then after the "Vimto's splattering" licking the drink out of their lips and smiling excitedly).

Lucilla (age 10) and Angel (age 10):

L: "I like it, it's a bit random and I'm a bit random"

A: "It's funny but it's not realistic because it can never really happen..." - she laughs

L: "Well...you never know, it COUUUULD happen - she answers jokingly

A: "They are cartooOOOn!!"

L: "Yeah...actually I don't like cartoons much, but I like wacky and strange things like this because they make me curious and I want to look and see how it ends up (...) for me the main thing is ...if something looks fun, like something weird happening, then I WILL watch it".

4.6.5 REMAINING ADVERTS

For reason of space the reporting excludes some of the remaining adverts (#18-#24) - which were randomly watched during the second round, due to the "free choice" modality of the session. To the extent that they do not bring any new category or theme to the analysis, these adverts simply confirmed that saturation was being reached (as the comments they prompted would complement or reinforce patterns that had already emerged through previous adverts). The reporting in appendix 24 presents particularly interesting comments emerging from adverts #15 - #17

4.7 MOST DISLIKED ADVERTS

In the "Bring me an advert!" exercise, participants were asked to indicate their most disliked adverts. Only two kinds of adverts were unanimously named as a complete turn-off by participants, emerging as consistently highly unpopular among the girls, regardless of their age or SFI: all the adverts of the *Barbie* range and *Lelly Kelly* shoes.

The aversion for all-things-*Barbie* seems to represent a "rite of passage" (as already found in a research by Nairn, 2005) as the majority of girls admitted to have played in their toddler years with the doll - apart from Meg, Emma and Elisha - and some of them confessed to having owned full boxes of them donated to charities or cousins/friends, so that their fervent rejection for the toy seems to indicate more an "explicit proclamation of their maturity" and distance for toddler years than anything else.

Lelly Kelly was undoubtedly the most "hated" advert (the use of "hated" is here amply justified by the intensity of girls reactions): the girls would regularly see the title of the advert in the list of adverts and react with contempt or anger, sometimes describing in details how bad the shoes were and how ridiculous their expensive price is compared to their poor quality, with some girls recalling memories of frustration from not being able to buy the shoes when they were smaller.

The following is a brief reporting of the most interesting comments from the girls about these adverts:

4.7.1 LELLY KELLY 'S SHOES

Many girls indicated this advert as the most disliked one in previous conversations, so the advert was recorded and the thumbnail was showing in the list of adverts for the second session. All girls would see the thumbnail and react with scorn asking to be spared the watching of the advert (in fact the clip was never played). Most comments revealed a past frustration for the inability to buy the product when the participants were younger. Some girls expressed a clear judgment of the advert as being unethical.

Amber (age 10): "Aw... I hate them! When I was little I was always asking my mum to buy me these but she always said NO 'cause they were too expensive (...) I used to get REALLY cross about not having them"

FM: "That's why you hate the advert now? Does it bring back bad memories maybe?"

A: "Yeah, it still makes me angry! But obviously I don't care about the stupid shoes anymore..."

Elisha (age 10): "It's madness. The other day I saw these high heel shoes made by Lelly Kelly in a shop and they cost £120!! Can you believe it? (...) It's stupid, they are only children shoes, they should not make them so expensive and then all the little girls when they are like 4 or 5 they really want them because they put lipstick and stuff with them and then they get cross with their mum... it's not right"

Kirsty (age 8): "They are actually rubbish shoes and the song...argh!! It's the most annoying thing ever!"

Kesha (age 9): "I say this advert should be banned!"

Becky (age 8): "It's a rip-off and little girls wouldn't understand so they just think they gonna get the lipstick or make-up or whatever...which anyway will break in pieces in the space of TWO days!"

Angel (age 10): "Mhm ... I heard many people saying that these shoes are not actually good as they look"

4.7.2 BARBIE

The adverts from the Barbie's range were consistently figuring in the dislike section of the "Bring me an advert!" form. Despite most girls admitting their previous fascination with the doll (when they were between 2-5 years old), there is an evident detachment from this toy now, oftentimes boarding on resentment and mockery. This is such a consistent response from the girls, which seems to suggest that Barbie – as "universal" early years' toy- is now a symbol, something which must be scorned and even hated as a "rite of passage" to middle childhood:

Olivia (age 8) exclaims proudly: “We are over Barbie by now!”

Kirsty (age 8): “Don’t make us watch BARBIE please!”

Sandy (age 9): “Noooo, Barbieeeee! Don’t even think about it!”

Lucilla (age 10): “Well, as long as we don’t watch the Barbie’s ones then I’m ok”

Lorraine (age 11): “Barbie actually scares me!”

Among the **adult-targeted adverts**, the anti-smoking campaign was mentioned by a group of girls, due to their preoccupation with members of their family (often parents or grandparents) persistent smoking habit (“I always have nightmares after seeing that, ‘cause I think my grandma’ is going to die, she always smokes a lot...” “My uncle died of lungs cancer and I get really sad every time I see it”). Their comments addressed in particular the graphic nature of the images and the fact that “children get scared more easily you know”.

4.8 MOST LIKED ADVERTS

In the Adverts Response Table shown previously, some adverts have not been included as these adverts generated invariably a positive response from all participants. The adverts in question are the two *Harribo*’s ones (both portraying a very assertive and intelligent young girl) and *KFC* (where a middle aged woman is shouting “lunch time is my time” to her boss - see appendix 8 for a visual appraisal of the advert). The *Harribo*’s adverts were often named among the favourites during the second round of phenomenological interviews; they were indeed a popular choice, recommended by the girls themselves and often chosen as the first adverts to watch during the session. However, even in the unanimity of response, one is able to note subtle differences in the way the girls appreciate the adverts. Some girls, for example, would giggle at the idea that the little girl is able to scare her dad, while others would focus their attention more on the cheeky or adorable face of the actress (“aww, she’s so cute!”) or on the product advertised (as seen from Lucilla’s prompt answer when asked: “What do you like the most about this advert?” “The sweeties!”).

Vimto is another advert which has not been included in the table as all girls watching the advert would laugh and chuckle through it (apart from Meg, who again discarded the advert as being “too girly”), with some of the girls dancing to the jingle and many of

them making positive comments about the girls squirted with fruit juices over their white elegant dresses. However, even in this case, there was often a difference in the way girls perceived the advert, which generally reflected their personality and embodiment of femininity: some girls would focus their attention to the fact that the girls were approached flirtatiously by “guys” in their car (in this case represented by animated fruits), another group of girls would pay more attention to the music and start dancing enthusiastically at the rhythm, some girls would make their dance “sexually suggestive” while others would dance in a more childish manner; some girls would comment on the fact that the girls are cool as they do not mind getting their dresses dirty (and instead they lick the ‘delicious’ juice off their clothes with a smile).

4.9 FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS – MAIN THEMES

A total of 16 girls were invited to take part in a follow-up interview.

Most interviews (Lucilla, Angel, Carla, Jess, Millie, Becky, Lorraine and Emma) were conveniently conducted online through Skype chat, while for the girls not used to Skype the interviews were completed at school (Olga, Kirsty, Carly, Enri, Solange, Ruby and Lulu). All interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes. The quotes from the Skype chat are reported *verbatim* as written by the girls themselves (containing therefore some inaccurate spelling and punctuation), while the face-to-face interviews were recorded and transcribed.

The questions were intended to clarify themes emerging from the analysis or to expand/ explain particular responses gathered from the girls across the different methods used. The interviews proved particularly helpful as a clarification tool and to delve more deeply into themes relating to femininity and beauty.

While most of the data gathered from the follow-up were directly integrated in the analysis and discussion chapters, this chapter will present some of the most interesting responses in relation to 2 particular themes which were investigated consistently across all follow-up interviews: 1) Beauty ideals represented in adverts 2) Pressure to look beautiful.

4.9.1 Beauty ideals represented in adverts

To gauge girls' perception of the many images of feminine beauty promoted by adverts, girls were explicitly asked a question in the same way (FM: "In your own opinion, do you think the images in advertising are real or fake beauty?").

The vast majority of girls (13 out of 16) responded in very similar ways, mostly acknowledging that the beauty in adverts is not real but enhanced through photographic manipulations:

Becky (age 8): it's all fake it's so easy for them to do. I even watched a video abt this (Dove I think)

Enri (age 9): well what I think is the models in them are beautiful but they make them more shining like perfection! Like the Panten ProV with the hair really waving and glittery all over you know...

Angel (age 10): FAKE! they look soooooo fake cuz if its a face cream advertisement, their face looks too white

Lucilla (age 10): they r fake coz people on adverts always look pretty or beautiful like they have lots of make up

Jess (age 11): 100% total fake lol (...) hav u seen the rimmel advert the eyelashes r so looong

Millie (age 11): that beauty is NOT real, but of course evrybody know they r fake (...) it's just the way adverts r cuz they want u to buy their product right??

The only three girls who responded differently are all in the younger age group (age 8, Year 4):

Kirsty (age 8): real because in adverts they show you only really beautiful people

Olga (age 8): real, but they all look fab 'cause they are models of course...

Carly (age 8): I'm not sure...it's real beauty but sometimes they make it look a bit fake! (smiling)

Overall the findings seem to confirm the results from several other studies indicating that age is a major factor in understanding advertising's deceptions. For example in the recent Girls Guiding Attitude Survey (2013)

Half of those aged 7 to 11 understand that magazine pictures of celebrities are often altered to make them look thinner or to remove wrinkles (51%), compared with 32% who believe that magazine pictures of celebrities are usually true to what they really look like. By ages 9 to 11, 60% are aware that images are altered, and just 29% think that most images are true to life.

Girls Guiding Attitude Survey 2013:14

A second question investigated whether girls prefer to see images of perfect beauty or more realistic ones:

FM: Do you like watching these images of perfect beauty or you would rather prefer to have around different images...like more realistic and not perfect ones?

Most girls (13/16) expressed a clear desire for more realistic beauty and some of them (6/16) made the point of “adverts cheating” the consumer into buying the product:

Becky (age 8): adverts should not lie they should b more real

Angel (age 10): well i would like them all to be realistic

Lucilla (age 10): realistic are better coz there more true (...) like true beauty like beauty within

Ruby (age 11): more real 'cause advertising should not cheat (...) like u want to see the real thing so you can buy the right product

Only two girls seemed not sure and specified that they still like to watch perfect beauty images:

Kirsty (age 8): More real maybe but I like to see the perfect beauty as well... ;-)

Carla (age 10): ehm not sure (...) I like them to be perfect but real nd always glamorus!

Finally only one girl declared that she prefers to see perfect beauty over more realistic images:

Olga (age 8): No they need to be perfect (...) I mean they are not good adverts if beauty is realistic, if they show normal people...

FM: So u mean the advert would not be effective otherwise?

O: yes I think so

FM: But do you enjoy watching them?

O: yeah I like' em a lot

4.9.2 Pressure to look beautiful

All girls in the follow-up interviews were asked the same question on whether they felt any pressure to look beautiful and from where the pressure came from. The girls were usually asked to provide practical examples of situations, so to make more concrete and explanatory their talking.

Most girls (11/16) responded that they do feel pressure, and the vast majority indicated their peers (or sometimes stating more in general “people at school” or “people at parties”) as the source of this pressure: however, the answers vary in respect of how the pressure is managed by each girl.

FM: Do you feel any pressure to look your best or be beautiful? Where does the pressure come from? Can you give me an example of how it makes you feel?

(Questions were not asked all at once, but each one would follow the girls’ answer). To make the reading easier, the answers are reported here by collating multiple responses from each girl into one answer:

Becky (age 8): yes I do (...) if I’m with my friends like I always worry if I have a spot or smtg then I need to cover it up

Kim (age 9): yh many times (...) friends or people at school (...) if u post a pic on facebook it’s not nice if people write u r ugly or talk behind yr back

Angel (age 10): yes (...) mainly friends and at school (...) well if i was going to a party and people were there from school, who i am not telling u their names only if u want me to tell u, i would think that i would have to dress nicely and properly because if i didn’t then i think they would probably tell their friends and whisper about me

Surprisingly, only two girls mentioned spontaneously the media as the source of pressure, although they would not identify it as a pressure but more as an inspiration to express themselves, as in the example of Lulu with fashion styles

Lulu (age 11): I dont know it depends if I care (...) mainly from your friends I think or when you feel that you want to express yourself (...) I fell down if I see a dress or a really cool jacket on a magz then I think “Oh I will wear that everyday” I want to have it (...) I’m into fashion styles and that, but it’s not easy to find the same clothes...

Some girls (5/16) claimed not to feel any particular pressure, although from the wording of their answers it seems more a “declaration of immunity”, as if they were “blocking out” the pressure by declaring their own resistance to beauty ideals and grooming practices or, in other instances - like in the case of Kirsty or Millie - by declaring that they like (or “LOVE”) to dress up and wear make-up, either for themselves or for fun:

Kirsty (age 8): no... what do u mean? (...) no pressure, but I like to look good if I go to a party

Jess (age 11): I like to dress up for parties but I don’t feel pressure (...) I dont really mind, I can always be how I want to be...

Millie (age 11): no I don't feel pressure. I LOVE beauty stuff and all...

Lucilla (age 10): no really (...) i dont usually put makeup on, its normally just deodorant body spray brush my hair and teeth i dont usually put make up on as u know

Emma (age 11): no I don't really care. I like being myself ☺

4.10 SUMMARY

The findings presented in this chapter provide a rich and detailed picture of girls' interactions with femininity portrayals in adverts, showing great diversity in the ways different subgroups of girls perceive and construct meanings from femininity represented in adverts.

The following chapter will delve deeper into the analysis of girls' responses and interaction with femininity represented in adverts, by contextualising their advertising experiences (that is, understanding participants' response within the frame of reference of their life context, rather than in isolation).

Additionally, the results will be reflected upon in light of pertinent media theories (emphasising the complexity of the dynamics at play in the shaping of media influences and the active role of media consumers in constructing and manipulating the meaning of adverts /media content).

Chapter 5 – Analysis

Thesis Structure

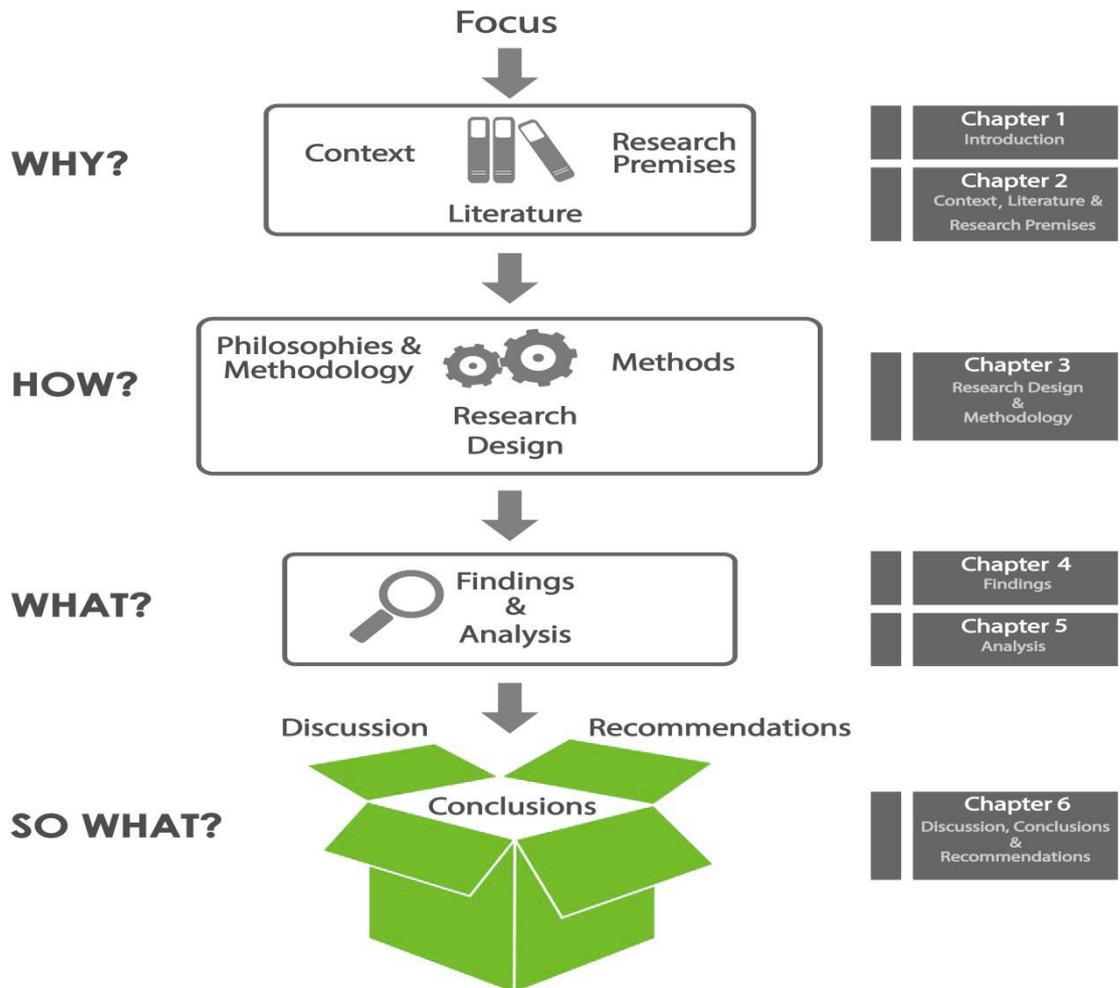


Figure 5.1 – Thesis Structure

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Due to the considerable amount of data collected regarding participants' life, context and personality, a single method of analysis would have certainly done no justice to the depth and breadth of information available. Therefore it was preferred to look at the data in as creative a way as possible – while still retaining a clear structure - combining both inductive and deductive analysis techniques, to break up and re-connect the data, not only in order to answer the different research questions, but also to strengthen the confidence of the conclusions, by assessing the consistency of results across different methods (triangulation). Figure 5.2 below illustrates the analysis in this chapter:

ANALYSIS	QUESTION - SCOPE	METHOD	DESCRIPTION
ANALYSIS PART I	Q.1 - How do young girls respond to different ideals of femininity in adverts and media?	Reception Theory	The types of response identified through phenomenological reduction are considered in the light of the three types of reading postulated in Reception theory (DOMINANT/ NEGOTIATED / OPPOSITIONAL): this allows to identify a prevalent type of reading for each participant. A particular effort is directed to evidencing how similar types of response/positioning are found in particular subgroups of girls (showing patterns of response) and how certain adverts (thus the femininity portrayed in them) were able to elicit unanimity in the type of response (e.g. extreme like or dislike).
ANALYSIS PART II	Q.3 - Are there specific factors enabling young girls to critically respond to the stereotyped femininity portrayed by most media?	EGA Extreme Group Approach (Cross-case Analysis with Systematic Focused Comparison)	Here the attention turns specifically to locating specific "protective" factors which seem to facilitate the critical abilities of participants towards stereotyped femininity. The analysis will consider each factor individually and show their presence/absence within two groups of girls: those girls consistently displaying some form of critical abilities toward stereotyped femininity (<i>critical</i> group) and those girls who rarely or never seem to express critical judgements towards stereotyped femininity (<i>uncritical</i> group).
ANALYSIS PART III	Showing exemplary cases leading to a particular outcome	Narrative Case Studies (Intra-case Analysis)	The mini-case studies aim to provide a more detailed presentation of particular exemplary cases. In other words, the "full story" about specific participants is presented in a narrative and more easy to follow format. This allows the reader to form an unitary picture about certain cases, facilitating a more holistic understanding of specific configurations of variables and their relative outcomes.

Table 5.1 – Analysis Structure

Both in this and the discussion chapter, an effort is made to comprehend the results in light of established media effects and reception theories through relating the evidence provided by this research to the postulates theorised by other scholars (in this study the results seems to support strongly the “reinforcement” theory of Klapper (1960) and Hall’s (1980) reception theory).

The analysis’ first aim is to look at how participants perceived, responded and manipulated meanings from the adverts watched during the phenomenological session, not just in relation to the product advertised, but with regard to the different

portrayals of femininity presented in the adverts, particularly with reference to the participants' responses to stereotypical representations of girlhood (RQ 1).

In the findings chapter, the categories of response identified through phenomenological reduction were previously shown as cross-tabulated with participants SFI (Stereotyped Femininity Index), to see whether girls' embodiment or aspiration for stereotypical femininity is somehow reflected/ linked to their way of perceiving and manipulating meanings from adverts. Part I of the analysis in this chapter will examine the categories in the light of Hall (1980)'s Reception Theory.

A further aim (Analysis Part II) is to identify contextual factors which seem to facilitate or aggravate the ability of participants to critically respond to stereotypical portrayals of girlhood in adverts (RQ 3).

The question relating to identifying negative feelings generated by adverts (RQ 2) will be only briefly addressed, as the analysis failed to reveal any significantly negative feelings (particularly in the sense of inadequacy or self-loathing), apart from the "frustration-can't buy" or themes which were not directly related to femininity (i.e. feeling sad watching an anti-smoking advert) and were therefore not immediately relevant to the topic of enquiry. This is of course "a finding in itself", rather than a "failing" in terms of the analysis, as it suggests that girls at this developmental stage are still not consciously experiencing (in the sense of being consciously aware of) the typical media-instigated doubts and insecurities usually associated with adolescence according to many commentators (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1998; Hancock, 1989; Harrison, 2000; Durkin and Paxton, 2002; Ringrose, 2010).

Part III of the analysis will conclude by presenting a few case studies in a more narrative form, in order to give the opportunity to form a unitary picture of some of the most interesting/exemplary cases. This is considered important, as the many details colouring girls' personal tales would be otherwise, inevitably, widely dispersed across several different chapters, in a way that make it difficult to convey the richness and complexity of their stories.

5.2 ANALYSIS PART I

Understanding categories of response in light of Reception Theory

While the eight categories of response identified through phenomenological reduction allowed a better understanding of the nuances in girls' response to adverts, the analysis would also benefit from understanding these categories in light of a meaningful media theory. As the focus of the investigation is very much aimed at "how girls position themselves in relation to femininity portrayals in adverts", it is considered helpful to comprehend the categories in view of Stuart Hall's (1980) Reception Theory, which postulates that audiences can assume three main *positions* (or *readings*, the two terms are used interchangeably) in the *decoding* of media content, identified as "dominant", "negotiated" and "oppositional".

There are two main aspects which make reception theory an ideal lens for the analysis in this study. Firstly, this study focuses on young girls' reception of femininity portrayals in adverts: as is evident, these portrayals constituted for the most part gender stereotypes (with the exception of a couple of adverts only, which were categorised as counter-stereotypes). As is widely accepted, gender stereotypes presented in the media are expressions of the dominant, hegemonic gender roles in culture. Reception theory recognises as crucial the "structure of discourses in dominance" (Hall, 1980), acknowledging the presence of a *dominant cultural order* in any society, a map of "preferred" meanings assigned to symbols: in doing so, it reminds us that there is always an institutional/political/ideological order embedded into media messages. If there is a dominant cultural order inscribed into media messages, then viewers' reception of these messages (their "decoding" or "constructing meaning" from encoded messages) will vary depending on their own positioning with respect to the dominant "coding". Secondly, because reception theory focuses precisely on the "reading" of encoded messages as an inherently *creative* process, for, as Terni (1973) cited by Hall (1980) put it:

By the word *reading* we mean not only the capacity to identify and decode a certain number of signs, but also the subjective capacity to put them into a creative relation between themselves and with other signs: a capacity which is, by itself, the condition for a complete awareness of one's total environment.

Hall 1980:6

By emphasizing the “position” viewers adopt during their “decoding” of media messages (explicitly recognising the importance of viewers’ context, values, interest and life experiences as determinants of this “positioning”), the theory is ideal for deciphering participants’ positions towards stereotypical portrayals of femininity from their phenomenological response to adverts.

To summarise the main assumptions of Hall’s reception theory, the first step is to define *encoding* – that is, the act of producers, encoding meanings and values onto media texts - and *decoding* - as the interpretative action of the viewer (the audience assigning their own meanings to media texts). The main assumption is that there is *not necessary correspondence* between encoding and decoding. Different viewers will decode the text in different ways, depending on their own ‘code’, given by their views, experiences, values, interests, ideologies, beliefs and so forth (which are often, in children’s case, strongly influenced by others – e.g. parents, siblings, peers).

The theory then postulates three main hypothetical ‘positions’ or ‘readings’:

- **Dominant:** when the audience give the meaning that the producer has intended and this meaning is accepted and integrated harmoniously with their own views. Stuart Hall (1980) named this reading as equivalent to ‘perfectly transparent communication’. In other words, the viewer operates within the dominant or “preferred” code.
- **Negotiated:** a compromise between the dominant and oppositional readings, where the audience accepts only parts of the producer's views, but tends to manipulate meanings according to their own views (according to their values, interests and life experiences).
- **Oppositional:** when the audience rejects the intended reading, and creates its own meaning for the text. Hall (1980) named this instance as leading to ‘systematically distorted communication’.

The aim is now to ‘translate’ each category identified via phenomenological reduction into one of the above readings, by focusing on the (more or less implicit) position adopted by participants during their decoding of the advert. As the process is not always straightforward, table 5.3 on the next page summarised how the categories have been sorted:

RESPONSE CATEGORIES	DESCRIPTION	RECEPTION THEORY POSITIONS	PREVALENT READING
LIKING	whenever there is a positive appraisal of the advert and the meaning is intended in the way the advertiser intended, with a process of admiration and aspiration towards the femininity portrayed in the adverts.	DOMINANT	Here the instances are treated mostly as evidence of dominant reading (particularly when there are evident admiration and aspiration feelings towards the representations of femininity in the advert). In some isolate instance the liking of an advert is treated as evidence of negotiated reading (when there is more identification than aspiration)
PERSONALISING	when comments made by the viewer are directed towards a specific aspect of the advert. The viewer accept only part of the message and discard or manipulate the rest, according to their own values, experiences and interests.	NEGOTIATED	These instances are treated as evidence of negotiated reading.
STRONG CRITICAL	whenever the viewer expresses firm and clear criticism towards the advert and some form of distance or rejection for the type of femininity portrayed in the advert.	OPPOSITIONAL	Depending on the intensity and direction of criticism expressed, the category "critical" could reflect an oppositional or negotiated position. All instances where the criticism was explicitly directed to the stereotypical features of the advert in a strong way, are treated as evidence of oppositional reading.
MILD CRITICAL	whenever the viewer expresses a mild criticism towards the advert and the type of femininity portrayed in it, often with a critical stance related only to particular limited aspects of the advert.	NEGOTIATED	All instances of mild criticism towards aspects of the advert representing stereotypical portrayals of femininity are treated as negotiated reading (e.g. "I love the music in it but there is too much pink!").
MIXED FEELINGS	whenever the viewer fails to express specific remarks (positive or negative) which could be attributed to other categories, often simply stating that they are not sure whether they like the advert or not; in this category are also included all the instances where girls express markedly contradicting feelings about a certain advert.	NEGOTIATED	These instance are treated as evidence of a negotiated position, due precisely to viewers' struggle to position themselves positively or negatively towards the advert. In practical terms, there is a difficulty in elaborating/ explaining their feelings, either due to lack of verbal reasoning skills or for a genuine inability to comprehend why the mixed feelings are generated. Either way this is evidence of a partial dissonance of the message with viewers' values, experiences or interests.
BABYISH	when the viewer would dismiss or ridicule the advert due to the toy advertised being for younger children.	DOMINANT/ NEUTRAL/ OPPOSITIONAL	Caution should be paid here in order to correctly understand which discourse the dismissive stance is directed to. In many responses classified as "babish" the rejection was actually towards the toy advertised -representing early years toys- rather than towards the representation of femininity portrayed in the advert. For this reason, these instances are treated as signifying oppositional reading only when the viewers comments are specifically suggesting this.
INDIFFERENT	when the advert is not disliked but there is no interest at all: the girl in this case would struggle to express any feeling or thought or simply dismiss the advert saying "I don't dislike it, but I am not interested" or "I would not watch it if it comes up on TV".	NEUTRAL	Due to the uninterested nature of the response and the lack of details provided in the comments, these instances have not been considered as evidence of any particular type of reading. Although the complete lack of interest could be sign of oppositional reading, the analysis prefers to treat them as neutral as - when specifically asked - the viewers clarified that they did not dislike the advert's content.
REJECTING	when the viewer expresses an extreme and general dislike towards the advert and rejects the type of femininity portrayed in the advert (e.g. "I hate this one!"). Rejection can also be shown as a refusal to watch the advert in its entirety.	OPPOSITIONAL	These instances are treated unmistakably as evidence of oppositional reading.

Table 5.2 – Phenomenological categories of response in terms of Reception Theory

In table 5.3 the category “frustration/can’t buy it” has been omitted and considered to be expressive of a “liking” stance, while the “critical” category has been split into “mild” and “strong” depending of the type of criticism expressed by participants. Once the phenomenological categories have been translated in terms of the three main positions, the analysis tries to deduce a prevalent type of reading for each participant.

It is worth clarifying that the type of “positioning” is always in relation to the message embedded in the media text (so that “dominant” position means a *correspondence* between producer’s intended message/values and viewer’s decoding, while “oppositional” means a *clash* between the two). As most of the adverts used in this study were in line with stereotypical femininity, the prevalent positioning and its valence (dominant/negotiated/oppositional) is here intended in relation with stereotypical content (so that, of course, instances of oppositional reading towards counter-stereotypical content would be treated as indicating a “dominant” positioning in relation to stereotypically encoded messages). Table 5.4 below summarises participants’ type of response for the most relevant adverts in a colour-codified manner to facilitate the visualisation of a prevalent “positioning” on the girls’ part.

PARTICIPANTS			ADVERTS WITH STEREOTYPICAL ORIENTATION														PREVALENT		ADVERTS	
ID	NAME	SFI	Bratz Masquerade	Pop Princess	Zhuzhu Babies	Monster High	Furreal Dog	DS Wedding	Slide D (Vogue)	Weight Watchers	Reeds	Justin Bieber	J'adore Dior	Arumika	Cheryl Cole GLAM	Katy Perry Adidas	READING	Explorer	PetitFiloUs O/N	
N01	Meg	-9	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	C	R	R	R	R		O	L	O	
N02	Becky	10	B	L+	L	F	P	L	C	L	L	L	L		L		D	R	N	
N03	Olga	8	P	L	M	L+	B	L	M	L	L	M	L	L			D	L	N	
N04	Kirsty	4	B	M	L	L	L+	L	L	L	L	L		L		C	D	L	N	
N05	Carly	7	M	M	L	L+	L+	L	L	C	L	M		L		C	N	L	N	
N07	Enri	-2	C	C	B	R	B	L	C								N	L	O	
N09	Kim	15	B	L+	L	L	B	L	P	L	L	L	L		L		D	R	N	
N10	Kesha	5	C	L+	M	L+	B	L	C	L	C	R	L	C	L	L	N	C	N	
N11	Mary	3	B	L	NI	M	B	L	C								N	NI	N	
N12	Sandy	6	L	L+	L	L+	B	L+	P	L+	L	L	L	C	L+	L	D	C	N	
N13	Lucilla	0	P	L+	L	R	C	L	C	L	L	R	L	NI	NI	C	N	NI	O	
N14	Amber	-11	P	R	F	L+	R	L	R	R	L+	R	L	F		C	N/O	L	O	
N15	Carla	6	L	L+	M	L	L	L+	L	L	L	L	L+	L	L	L	D	R	N	
N16	Elisha	1	P	L	M	R	B	L	M	R	L	R	R	F		C	N	M	C	
N17	Angel	9	L	L+	M	R	B	C	C	C	C	L+	L+	NI	NI	C	N	R	O/C	
N19	Emma	-5	R	R	B	R	R	L	R	R	L	R	R	NI	R	R	O	C	O	
N20	Beth	9	B	L+	B	NI	B	L	P								D	C	N	
N21	Solange	-7	P	C	L	L	P	L+	C	C	NI	R	NI	C		C	N/O	L+	N	
N22	Jess	5	C	L+	R	R	R	L	C	C	L	C	L	L			N	L	N	
N23	Ruby	-2	C	R	B	L	B	L+	C	C	C	R	C	C	R	C	O	C	O	
N24	Hall	-1	C/B	L+	M	L-	P	L+	C	L	NI	M	L			L	N	M	O	
N25	Lulu	12	P	L+	L	F	M	L	P								D	R	N	
N26	Judy	-2	R	R	L	R	M	L	R								O	L	N	
N27	Roberta	1	L+	P	B	P	P	L	P								N	L	N	
N28	Charlette	-4	B	L+	L+	L+	C	L+	M								N	L	O	
N29	Lorraine	4	P	L+	R	R	P	L+	C	C	C	R	L+	C		C	N	C	N	
N31	Millie	9	L+	L+	M	R	P	L	L	L	L	M	L+	L	L	L	D	R	N	
N33	Libet	8	L/P	L+	L	M	B	L	C								D	NI	N	
N34	Mandy	4	P	L+	L	P	B	L	C	L	L	R	L+			L	N	L	N	
N35	Emile	11	B	L+	R	NI	B	L	L			L+	L+				D	M	N	

LEGENDS

RESPONSE

- L / L+ LIKE IT/ LIKE IT A LOT
- B BABYISH
- P PERSONALISING, PICKING SOME ASPECT
- M MIXED FEELINGS
- NI NOT INTERESTED
- C CRITICAL
- F FRUSTRATION (CAN'T BUY)
- R REFUSAL/ TOTAL DISLIKE

PREVALENT READING

- D DOMINANT
- N NEGOTIATED
- N/O NEGOTIATED/OPOSITIONAL
- O OPPOSITIONAL

PETTIT FILOUS ADVERT PREFERENCE

- O OLD ADVERT (COUNTER-STEREOTYPICAL)
- N NEW ADVERT (STEREOTYPICAL)

ID - NAME - SFI

- HIGH
- MEDIUM UPPER
- MEDIUM LOWER
- LOW

Table 5.3 - Adverts Response Table

When a prevalent reading in terms of dominant/negotiated/oppositional could not be assigned with a reasonable level of confidence - and this has happened in the case of two participants where instances of *negotiated* (N) and *oppositional* (O) reading were alternated - these cases have been marked accordingly to indicate a combination of two prevalent positions (N/O). On the left side of the “Prevalent Reading” (PR) column, are found all the adverts considered “stereotypically-oriented”(that is, more in line with stereotypical femininity) while the only two exceptions of “counter-stereotypical” adverts (i.e. *Eurostar Explorer* and the old version of *Petit Filous*) are shown on the right side of the PR column.

The next step of the analysis looks separately at sub-groups of girls with a similar type of *prevalent reading* in order to identify common characteristics and patterns of response. To facilitate the process, the table above (fig. 5.4) is ‘dismantled’ into several extracts according to participants’ prevalent reading.

5.2.1 Prevalent “Dominant” reading

The age composition of this group show a slightly higher proportion of girls (N=5; 45%) in the younger age range (8-9 years old) compared to the total sample (N=12; 32%). Looking at the table extract (table 5.5), it quite immediately shows how the group of girls displaying a *dominant* positioning towards stereotypically oriented adverts (N=11/30) present similar characteristic in terms of their embodiment of femininity, since most of them are in the high SFI group (as indicated by their names highlighted in pink). Similarity is also evident in terms of their individual phenomenological response to certain adverts.

ID	NAME	SFI	Bratz Masquerade	Pop Princess	Zhuzhu Babies	Monster High	Furreal Dog	DS Wedding	Slide D (Vogue)	Weight Watchers	Reeds	Justin Bieber	J'adore Dior	Arumika	Cheryl Chole GLAM	Katy Perry Adidas	Prevalent Reading	Explorer	PetitFilous O/N
N02	Becky	10	B	L+	L	F	P	L	C	L	L	L	L		L		D	R	N
N03	Olga	8	P	L	M	L+	B	L	M	L	L	M	L				D	L	N
N04	Kirsty	4	B	M	L	L	L+	L	L	L	L	L				C	D	L	N
N09	Kim	15	B	L+	L	L	B	L	P	L	L	L	L		L		D	R	N
N12	Sandy	6	L	L+	L	L+	B	L+	P	L+	L	L	L	C	L+	L	D	C	N
N15	Carla	6	L	L+	M	L	L	L+	L	L	L	L	L+	L	L	L	D	R	N
N20	Beth	9	B	L+	B	NI	B	L	P								D	C	N
N25	Lulu	12	P	L+	L	F	M	L	P								D	R	N
N31	Millie	9	L+	L+	M	R	P	L	L	L	L	M	L+	L	L	L	D	R	N
N33	Libet	8	L/P	L+	L	M	B	L	C								D	NI	N
N35	Emile	11	B	L+	R	NI	B	L	L			L+	L+				D	M	N

Table 5.4 - Dominant Reading Group - Table Extract

For instance, they tend to consider “babyish” (coded “B”) adverts like *Bratz* and *Furreal Dog*, much more frequently than other groups. They responded enthusiastically (coded “L”) to adverts emphasizing beauty and appearance, including the *Weight Watchers* advert and the more “extreme” *Slide D* (containing images from *Vogue* magazine, with very young models dressed and groomed in an adult fashion), both of which often obtained critical (“C”) or adverse (“R”) responses from the other groups. Particularly with reference to *Slide D*, often the girls in this group preferred to focus their attention on specific aspects of the slide (e.g. a fashion accessory or the hair style) instead of addressing the “premature” nature of the model presentation.

Comments from this group were often specifically addressed to the beauty or attire/accessories/hair style of the singer/model/actress in question in the *Bratz*, *Pop Princesses*, *J'adore Dior*, *Weight Watchers*, *Cheryl Cole* and *Katy Perry* adverts (and categorised as “P” or “L” in the table). By contrast, their responses to non-stereotypical adverts very often indicate an oppositional reading (“C” or “R”), visible in their pattern of response to the *Explorer* and particularly to the *Petit Filous* adverts, where none of the girls expressed a preference for the old version of the advert (portraying a girl defending a boy).

In this group were also most of the *Justin Bieber* fans, apart from two girls who expressed mixed feelings. Finally, there is overall far less incidence of critical (“C”) responses compared to the other groups, and this was also found in the response to projective techniques (slides 1/2/3) of the high SFI group.

5.2.2 Prevalent “Negotiated” reading

In the group with prevalent negotiated reading (N=13/30) the girls are far less homogenous in terms of their embodiment of femininity (SFI) and when one looks to find a pattern in their response to particular adverts, there seems to be a great deal of variation, particularly with reference to some adverts (i.e. *Bratz*, *ZhuZhu*, *MonsterHigh*, *Arumika*). As the nature of this reading implies some form of negotiation - whereby meanings are changed and adapted according to individual views and values - it is indeed not surprising that the outcome would usually be a more heterogeneous range of responses as compared to the *dominant* reading group.

ID	NAME	SFI	Bratz Masquerade	Pop Princess	Zhuzhu Babies	Monster High	Furreal Dog	DS Wedding	Slide D (Vogue)	Weight Watchers	Reeds	Justin Bieber	J'adore Dior	Arumika	Cheryl Chole GLAM	Katy Perry Adidas	Prevalent Reading	Explorer	PetitFilous O/N
N05	Carly	7	M	M	L	L+	L+	L	L	C	L	M		L		C	N	L	N
N07	Enri	-2	C	C	B	R	B	L	C								N	L	O
N10	Kesha	5	C	L+	M	L+	B	L	C	L	C	R	L	C	L	L	N	C	N
N11	Mary	3	B	L	NI	M	B	L	C								N	NI	N
N13	Lucilla	0	P	L+	L	R	C	L	C	L	L	R	L	NI	NI	C	N	NI	O
N16	Elisha	1	P	L	M	R	B	L	M	R	L	R	R	F		C	N	M	C
N17	Angel	9	L	L+	M	R	B	C	C	C	C	L+	L+	NI	NI	C	N	R	O/C
N22	Jess	6	C	L+	R	R	R	L	C	C	L	C	L	L			N	L	N
N24	Hall	-1	CB	L+	M	L-	P	L+	C	L	NI	M	L			L	N	M	O
N27	Roberta	1	L+	P	B	P	P	L	P								N	L	N
N28	Charlette	-4	B	L+	L+	L+	C	L+	M								N	L	O
N29	Lorraine	4	P	L+	R	R	P	L+	C	C	C	R	L+	C		C	N	C	N
N34	Mandy	4	P	L+	L	P	B	L	C	L	L	R	L+			L	N	L	N

Table 5.5 - Negotiated Reading Group - Table Extract

Unlike the previous group, most of the girls here responded critically to *Slide D* and often their comments suggested some form of parental influence. Their response to *Weight Watchers* and *Katy Perry Adidas* were often critical too. With the exception of Angel - who is fervently devoted to the singer - this group was also particularly hostile towards *Justin Bieber*.

Overall, critical comments towards adverts portraying stereotypical femininity were far more common compared to the previous group, with the girls expressing comments such as “over the top” addressed to overly scantily clothed models (*Bratz* advert), “too much pink” (*Pop Princess* advert) or “it’s too catchy” relating to captivating slogans (*Reeds* advert).

On the other hand, their response to the *Explorer* (non-stereotypical advert) was far more positive compared to the “dominant reading” group, while the older version of the *Petit Filous* managed to gather almost half of the preferences (5/12) in this group (as opposed to none in the previous group).

With regard to popular “highly stereotypical” adverts such as *Pop Princess* and *J’adore Dior*, the response was – like in the previous group - mostly appreciative, although from most girls’ comments one can detect a different “focus” (where their appreciation is directed to): for instance most of the girls here would rave about the music in the *Pop Princess* advert (no comments directed to the singers, their dance moves or their clothes) and when specifically asked about what they really liked they would confirm “it’s all about the music”.

Similarly, they appeared to appreciate *J'adore Dior* (see advert's thumbnail in Appendix 8:346) for the music and the sparkling/luxurious atmosphere of celebrities presented in the advert, without making direct comments about their beauty. Moreover, as it emerged in two of the follow-up interviews, the advert is perceived as 'adults territory' (albeit an opulent one, filled with fashion models and celebrities), somewhat detached and distant from children's reality. So for this group of girls it's more 'a world of fantasy', ("like in a fairy tale"), rather than something to identify with or aspire to.

5.2.3 Prevalent "Negotiated/Oppositional" reading

Amber (age 10) and Solange (age 11) represent two cases where instances of negotiated and oppositional reading are alternated, so that an unequivocal prevalent positioning on their part is difficult to assert. In these two instances it is preferable to state that the girls seem to combine negotiated and oppositional reading, assuming one or the other position depending on the particular advert they watched.

ID	NAME	SFI	Bratz Masquerade	Pop Princess	Zhuzhu Babies	Monster High	Furreal Dog	DS Wedding	Slide D (Vogue)	Weight Watchers	Reeds	Justin Bieber	J'adore Dior	Arumika	Cheryl Chole GLAM	Katy Perry Adidas	Prevalent Reading	Explorer	PetitFidous O/N
N14	Amber	-11	P	R	F	L+	R	L	R	R	L+	R	L	F	C	C	N/O	L	O
N21	Solange	-7	P	C	L	L	P	L+	C	C	NI	R	NI	C	C	C	N/O	L+	N

Table 5.6 - Negotiated/Oppositional Reading Group - Table Extract

These two girls present similarities in their position to many adverts. While their comments to the *Bratz* advert reveal a specific fascination with face painting, masks and wacky hair colour choices, their response to the femininity depicted in the *Pop Princess* advert was clearly negative (despite their love for music), with both girls explicitly distancing themselves from the glamourised image of singers and their sexy moves (as previously seen in Solange's answer to her friend Lorraine: "No, I don't want to be a Pop Princess, I just like singing pop").

They also responded very negatively to *Slide D*, considering the attire and presentation of the young models not appropriate for children (with evident parental influence in their comments) and appeared visibly annoyed by the *Weight Watchers*

advert (interestingly both girls are overweight and Amber often complained about how she feels pressured to lose weight).

Both girls are absolute “haters” of Justin Bieber, with their comments towards the singer often verging on extreme insults, and they equally love the “monstery and freaky” (as some girls called it) imagery represented by Monster High dolls, declaring also to be regular watchers of the MH cartoon. They, also similarly, identify with the girl talking to animals (thus showing full appreciation for the *Explorer* advert).

Where they differ greatly however, is in their response to the *Petit Filous* adverts. Amber’s comments reveal an overt and fervid aversion towards the stereotypically-oriented advert (where a little boy defends a bigger girl from being bullied by a group of older boys), she would call the little boy a “midget” and use terms such a “stupid” “unrealistic” and “annoying”. On the contrary, Solange finds the little boy “cute” in his attempt to “impress a bigger girl” and the advert more realistic because of being more attuned with her experiences (the advert is clearly filmed in a British school - a familiar scenario).

5.2.4 Prevalent “Oppositional” reading

ID	NAME	SFI	Bratz Masquerade	Pop Princess	Zhuzhu Babies	Monster High	Furreal Dog	DS Wedding	Slide D (Vogue)	Weight Watchers	Reeds	Justin Bieber	J'adore Dior	Arumika	Cheryl Chole GLAM	Katy Perry Adidas	Prevalent Reading	Explorer	PetitFilous O/N
N01	Meg	-9	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	C	R	R	R	R		O	L	O
N19	Emma	-5	R	R	B	R	R	L	R	R	L	R	R	NI	R	R	O	C	O
N23	Ruby	-2	C	R	B	L	B	L+	C	C	C	R	C	C	R	C	O	C	O
N26	Judy	-2	R	R	L	R	M	L	R								O	L	N

Table 5.7 - Oppositional Reading Group - Table Extract

The girls expressing an oppositional reading are a small group (N=4), with a common negative SFI value, which indicates a lower embodiment of stereotypical femininity. In this group there is a clear rejection towards glamourised femininity, which is often expressed through the refusal to watch an advert in its entirety (like Meg or Emma in many instances) or extremely disdainful comments directed towards the images.

Apart from Meg – who only shows appreciation for the *Explorer* and the *Petit Filous* adverts - responses were less adverse with regard to *ZhuZhu Babies* (an advert portraying younger non-glamourised girls) and *DS Wedding*, which was actually truly cherished for both its humour and the product advertised.

In this group we find other vehement “haters” of Justin Bieber (particularly Emma and Ruby) and the two girls often expressed strong hostility towards Cheryl Cole.

Most girls in this group (apart from Judy, who - it should be added - comes from an American family with very firm views on religion and traditional gender roles) express preference for the counter-stereotypical version of *Petit Filous*, while the *Explorer* advert was at first liked by all due to the animals portrayed in it, but then criticised by Emma and Ruby due to perceived inconsistency with the product advertised (the girls were expecting something different, perhaps a Zoo’s advert rather than Eurostar).

In terms of “fitting in”, while Meg and Judy are much isolated members of the class and their behaviour could be described as ‘alien’ in many respects compared to the rest of the girls (an observation later confirmed by their teachers), the same cannot be said about Ruby and Emma, who are in general accepted members of their peer groups (having also a personal close friend who they can confide in) and whose behaviour is not noticeably different from other girls.

5.3 EGA EXTREME GROUPS ANALYSIS

As is already evident from the analysis so far, girls’ ways of responding to and interacting with femininity portrayals in adverts appear to be highly reflective of their actual or aspirational embodiment of femininity. To make this even more evident, the following table extracts (table 5.8) present the codified responses of two “extreme” groups of participants according to their low/high SFI. In this way the two extracts are able to visually convey the different patterns of response which characterise each group (highlighting how these patterns are broadly similar within each group).

In the high SFI group for instance, the girls tend to apply a “dominant reading” (apart from Jess and Angel) regarding the stereotypical representations of girlhood

presented in most adverts they watched: this means that they tend to embrace and feel in harmony with the images and messages conveyed by these adverts and – from their own admission - actively pay attention to these adverts and enjoy *watching* them when they appear on TV or other media (confirmed also by their frequent use of the term “watching” instead of “seeing”).

	ID	NAME	SFI	Bratz	Pop	Zhuzhu	Monster	Furreal	Slide D	Weight	Reeds	Justin	J'adore	Arumika	Cheryl	Katy	Prevalent	Explorer	PetitFiloUs	RESPONSE		
				Masquerade	Princess	Babies	High	Dog	(Vogue)	Watchers	Bieber	Dior		Chole	Perry	Reading		O/N				
HIGH SFI	N02	Becky	10	B	L+	L	F	P	C	L	L	L	L		L		D	R	N	RESPONSE L/L+ LIKE IT/ LIKE IT A LOT B BABYISH P PERSONALISING, PICKING SOME ASPECT M MIXED FEELING NI NOT INTERESTED C CRITICAL F FRUSTRATION (CAN'T BUY) R REFUSAL / TOTAL DISLIKE		
	N03	Olga	8	P	L	M	L+	B	M	L	L	M	L	L			D	L	N			
	N05	Carly	7	M	M	L	L+	L+	L	C	L	M				C	N	L	N			
	N09	Kim	15	B	L+	L	L	B	P	L	L	L	L		L		D	R	N			
	N12	Sandy	6	L	L+	L	L+	B	P	L+	L	L	L	C	L+	L	D	C	N			
	N15	Carla	6	L	L+	M	L	L	L	L	L	L	L+	L	L	L	D	R	N			
	N17	Angel	9	L	L+	M	R	B	C	C	C	L+	L+	NI	NI	C	N	R	O/C			
	N20	Beth	9	B	L+	B	NI	B	P								D	C	N			
	N22	Jess	6	C	L+	R	R	R	C	C	L	C	L	L			N	L	N			
	N25	Lulu	12	P	L+	L	F	M	P								D	R	N			
	N31	Millie	9	L+	L+	M	R	P	L	L	L	M	L+	L	L	L	D	R	N			
	N33	Libet	8	L/P-B	L+	L	M	B	C								D	NI	N			
	N35	Emile	11	B	L+	R	NI	B	P								D	M	N			
	ALL HIGH SFI (VALUES FROM 6 to 15)																					
	LOW SFI	N01	Meg	-9	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	C	R	R	R	R		O	L		O	PREVALENT READING O OPPOSITIONAL N NEGOTIATED D DOMINANT
N07		Enri	-2	C	C	B	R	B	C								N	L	O			
N13		Lucilla	0	P	L+	L	R	C	C	L	L	R	L	NI	NI	C	N	NI	O			
N14		Amber	-11	P	R	F	L+	R	R	R	L+	R	L	F		C	N/O	L	O			
N19		Emma	-5	R	R	B	R	R	R	R	L	R	R	NI	R	R	O	C	O			
N21		Solange	-7	P	C	L	L	P	C	C	NI	R	NI	C		C	N/O	L+	N			
N23		Ruby	-2	C	R	B	L	B	C	C	C	R	C	C	R	C	O	C	O			
N24		Hall	-1	C B	L+	M	L-	P	C	L	NI	M	L			L	N	M	O			
LOW SFI	N26	Judy	-2	R	R	L	R	M	R								O	L	N	PETIT FILOUS O OLD ADVERT (COUNTER-STEREOTYPICAL) N NEW ADVERT (STEREOTYPICAL)		
	N28	Charlette	-4	B	L+	L+	L+	C	M								N	L	O			
ALL LOWER /NEGATIVE SFI (VALUES FROM -11 TO ZERO)																						

Table 5.8 - Extreme SFI Groups - Extracts Table for High and Low SFI Groups

In the “extreme” lower SFI group (all girls with negative value of SFI were included in this group) one can see a regular incidence of criticism and rejection towards stereotypical portrayals in adverts, with an equal incidence of negotiated and oppositional reading - and many girls often oscillating between the two. An interesting exception is provided by the response to *Monster High dolls*, which in this group registered a 50/50 split between love/hate (liking or rejection), with no middle ground in between. Looking at the somewhat “ambiguous” characteristics of Monster

High dolls, this split is understandable as both the doll (as a product) and the advert in itself could be assigned both stereotypical and counter-stereotypical connotations. While the extremely scantily clothes and unrealistic thin body shape (which looks skinner than Barbie) is in line with most stereotypical products, the monstrosity of the dolls and their aggressive character is definitely counter-stereotypical.

5.4 ANALYSIS PART II – LOCATING PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Part II of the analysis addresses specifically the third research question:

Q3: Are there specific factors enabling young girls to critically respond to the stereotyped femininity portrayed by most media?

Here the attention turns specifically to the critical abilities of participants towards stereotypical representations of femininity, in particular by looking at two extreme groups of girls: those girls consistently displaying some form of criticism toward stereotyped femininity (in terms of both representations and practices) and those girls who never or rarely seem to express critical judgements towards stereotypical femininity. The two extreme groups have been called “CRITICAL” and “UNCRITICAL”. For the latter, it should be clarified that the word “uncritical” refers only to girls’ attitude towards stereotypical representations of femininity, therefore it should be emphasised that, more often than not, the girls’ response in this “uncritical” group seems to stem more from their enthusiasm and fascination with stereotypical representations of girlhood, rather than from any general lacking of critical abilities.

To give a practical example, the fact that Lulu likes the attire of the Bratz dolls does not stop her from judging the advert as “ridiculous”, due to the producers’ choice to employ teen-age actresses to advertise an early years toy. Despite her remark pointing at this inconsistency, it is evident that she still finds the advert attractive in some respect as she doesn’t look away or dismiss it (as other girls have done), but instead she watches with amusement and pays attention to the details, like the actresses’ clothes and hair style (similarly to other participants displaying dominant reading and as was evident from the analysis in the previous section). Moreover, girls in the “uncritical” group were at times very critical towards counter-stereotypical representations of girls, such as the simple, solitary girl talking to animals in the

Eurostar-explorer advert or the girl winning arm wrestling to defend a boy in the *Petit Filous* advert.

Understood in these terms, the level of critical abilities of the two “extreme” groups were assessed not just on the basis of data gathered from the phenomenological phase (adverts-elicited sessions), but also from their responses to projective exercises performed at the beginning of the project (slides 1/2/3), and from their inputs during group sessions and other informal encounters (i.e. chatting in the playground during break times or during school parties/events), taking also into account their ability to express opinions in disagreement with their friends.

The analysis presented in the following pages looks closely at these two “extreme” groups of girls (their characteristics and their configuration of factors) to advance some tentative suggestions regarding contextual influences which might contribute to their enhanced or impaired critical abilities towards stereotypical portrayals of femininity in the media.

To make the presentation of the analysis as clear as possible, the main table of codified information will be broken into separate extracts according to the particular section of variables, namely:

- main characteristics of age/SFI/body image
- family
- social / attitudes and life style
- consumption of media
- role models and celebrities

The evidence from each extract will be discussed by looking at how each variable ‘behaves’ in the two groups.

As has been clarified before, it is understood that the small sample of this study would not allow any statistical inference to be made from the data and therefore any suggestion coming from this analysis should only be regarded as speculative and to be tested by further studies (i.e. explorative/initiation intent).

5.4.1 EGA Analysis – Main Characteristics

In the "critical" group have been included 10 participants who consistently showed enhanced critical abilities towards stereotypical representations of femininity, while only 9 girls could be included in the "uncritical" group. The extract table below (5.9) shows some of the main characteristics for each group.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

The colour coding of the table is meant to facilitate the visualisation of patterns through reading of contrasting modalities and it refers generally to the variables' "behaviour" or "influence":

Pink = stereotypical
Green = counter-stereotypical
White = neutral

The girls' names are colour-coded to represent their SFI:
Blue = low SFI; **Green** = medium SFI; **Pink** = high SFI.

		MAIN CHARACTERISTICS						LEGEND
		ID	Name	AGE	SFI INDEX	SFI GROUP	SATISF BODY IMAGE	BI GAP
C R I T I C A L	N01	Meg	8	-8	L	Y	D-D	SFI GROUP L/M/H : LOWER/MEDIUM/HIGHER BODY IMAGE Y = YES (SATISFIED) N = NO (NOT SATISFIED) ow = ACTUALLY OVER WEIGHT R = REVERSE UNSATISFIED BODY IMAGE GAP A = THINNER B-C-D-E = IN BETWEEN F = FATTER = THINNER BODY IDEAL
	N07	Enri	9	-1	M	Y	C-C	
	N14	Amber	10	-10	L	N ow	E-C	
	N16	Elisha	10	1	M	N	D-C	
	N19	Emma	11	-4	L	N	D-C	
	N21	Solange	11	-6	L	N ow	C-B	
	N22	Jess	11	6	H	R	A-B	
	N23	Ruby	11	-1	M	N	C-B	
	N26	Judy	11	-2	M	N ow	F-E	
	N29	Lorraine	11	4	M	Y	B-B	
U N C R I T I C A L	N02	Becky	8	10	H	N	B-A	
	N03	Olga	8	8	H	R	A-C	
	N04	Kirsty	8	4	M	N ow	F-B	
	N09	Kim	9	15	H	N	C-B	
	N12	Sandy	9	6	H	N	C-B	
	N15	Carla	10	6	H	N	D-C	
	N25	Lulu	11	12	H	N	B-A	
	N31	Millie	11	9	H	N	B-A	
	N35	Emile	11	11	H	N	D-B	

Table 5.9 - EGA –Extract Table: Main Characteristics

Age: In the *critical* group the age of participants seems to reflect the percentages in the total sample, while in the *uncritical* group there is a higher incidence of younger participants compared to the total sample.

SFI Index/group: Here the difference in composition appears very evident between the two groups: most of the girls in the “critical” group have a negative SFI value, (which indicates a much lower embodiment of stereotyped femininity), with the sole exception of one girl (Jess). In contrast, participants in the “uncritical” group are all in the higher SFI group (values between 6 and 15).

Body Image Satisfaction: In the critical group there is a higher incidence of girls satisfied with their body weight (30%, as compared to 24% in the total sample and 23.3% in the sample selected for phenomenological sessions). If one adds in the count of “satisfied” cases the “reverse” case of Jessica – who, in fact, declared in the follow-up interview to be very happy with her body and to be proud of not having to worry about putting on weight – the incidence of “satisfied” in the critical group becomes then even higher (40%). In addition, three of the girls in this group reporting wanting to get thinner are visibly overweight, so their aspiration for a thinner body is, in these cases, a reasonable reaction to comments they receive from friends and family (Amber: “Aww...my mum says that I need to lose weight. Now I am going to be put on a diet: I hate it!”), therefore justified by their actual circumstances.

The difference can be said to be startling in the *uncritical* group, where all the girls reported a desire for a thinner body - with the single exception of Olga (“reverse”) whose petite features would make such a desire unlikely (although always possible, as the case of Becky – in the same group – who is of similar size and yet expressed the desire to be thinner). It should be added that the “reverse” of Olga, as compared to the earlier case of Jessica, has a different value: while Jessica speaks proudly about her body and the fact that she does not have to watch her weight, Olga’s sentiment is definitely different (quoting her from an interview, “I don’t think I’m pretty”). She is also one of the two girls – together with Amber - replying “not much” to the question “are you happy about the way you look?”) and this is despite her Barbie-like look (thin body, blond hair and blue eyes).

Body Image Gap: When one looks at the gap between the “perceived body” and the “ideal body” the difference between groups appears even more striking: while in the critical group the ideal body weight is never thinner than B, the only three girls in the total sample expressing “A” (the thinner body shape) as their body ideal are all

included in the *uncritical* group. Just to put things in perspective, table 5.10 shows the ideal body size expressed by the totality of the sample.

Ideal Body - Preference Expressed			
		Frequency	Per cent
Valid	A	3	8.1
	B	17	45.9
	C	8	21.6
	D	7	18.9
	E	2	5.4
	Total	37	100.0

Table 5.10 – Ideal body preference of total sample

In the *critical* group there are also more preferences for average body sizes (7 out of the 10 girls expressed C/D/E as a body ideal) as compared to the prevalence of thinner sizes (A and B) desired by most girls (6/9) in the *uncritical* group. From this evidence, there appears to be a link between girls' attitude towards stereotypical representations of girlhood (critical or uncritical) and the level of satisfaction with their own weight.

5.4.2 EGA Analysis – Family

Looking at factors in the family, there is a pattern emerging from the configuration of variables in the two extreme groups, which seems to point towards the relationships with father and older siblings as playing a crucial role in the position of girls towards stereotyped femininity.

		FAMILY									
	ID	NAME	CLOSE OLD BRO	CLOSE YOUNG BRO	CLOSE OLD SIST	CLOSE YOUNG SIST	FATHER CLOSE & FULLFILL	SPENDING MORE TIME WITH	WISHING MORE TIME WITH	LIVE WITH BOTH PARENTS	LEGEND
C R I T I C A L	N01	Meg	Y	N	N	N	Y	OB	OB	Y	LEGEND Y /Y+ = YES/ A LOT N = NO Yn = YES with negative/opposite effect SPENDING/ WISHING MORE TIME M = MOTHER F = FATHER OB = OLDER BROTHER OS = OLDER SISTER YB = YOUNGER BROTHER YS = YOUNGER SISTER GM = GRANDMOTHER GP = GRANDPARENTS OCG = OLDER COUSIN GIRL YCG = YONGER COUSINS GIRL
	N07	Enri	Y	N	N	N	Y+	OB	F/OB	Y	
	N14	Amber	Y	N	N	Y	N	M/YS	OB	N	
	N16	Elisha	N	Y	N	Y	Y+	M/YS	F	Y	
	N19	Emma	Y	N	Yn	N	Y+	OB	OB	Y	
	N21	Solange	Y	N	N	N	Y	GM/F	OB	Y	
	N22	Jess	N	N	N	N	Y+	M	GP	Y	
	N23	Ruby	N	N	N	Y	Yne	M	F	N	
	N26	Judy	N	Y	N	N	Y	M	M/YB	Y	
N29	Lorraine	N	N	Y	N	Y+	OS	GP	Y		
U N C R I T I C A L	N02	Becky	N	Y	Yc	Y	N	YS	OCG	N	
	N03	Olga	Yn	N	N	N	N	M	F	N	
	N04	Kirsty	N	N	N	N	N	F	M	N	
	N09	Kim	N	Y	Y	N	Y	M/YB	W	Y	
	N12	Sandy	N	Y	Y	N	Y+	M/OS	F	N	
	N15	Carla	Y	N	Y	N	N	OS	OS	N	
	N25	Lulu	N	N	N	N	Y+	GM	M/F	Y	
N31	Millie	N	N	Y	Y	Y+	M/YS	YCG	Y		
N35	Emile	Yn	N	N	N	Y	F	M	Y		

Table 5.11 - EGA –Extract Table: Family variables

‘Close’ Older Brother (COB): (note: in the variable definition ‘close’ refers to a strong bond between). Half of the 10 girls in the *critical* group have a very intimate bond with their older brother, compared to 25.8% in the total phenomenological sample of 31 girls (to put numbers into perspective, only 8 girls out of 31 have older brothers, with age differences of not more than 3 years – while another 2 girls have brothers who are much older than them, with 5-7 years difference, which means they did not share toys and play time as much as age-closer siblings). In all the five cases in the *critical* group, the brother’s age is 1-3 years older than the sister and the girls (Meg, Erin, Amber, Emma and Solange) declared having grown up playing with their brother and sharing their toys and games; even more interestingly, all of them named their brother as the person they wish to spend more time with. While Meg, Enri and Emma are still spending more time with their brothers (and still wish for even more time with them), Solange and Amber complained about “feeling left out” due to their brothers’ obsession with videogames in the case of Solange (i.e. *S*: “Stupid Xbox!”) or in the case of Amber reporting that the brother has recently moved out due to stressful conditions. This evidence seems to suggest a sort of “counter-stereotypical push” exerted by the COB factor.

In the *uncritical* group, by contrast, the only 3 girls having an older brother did not report having a close bond with him and, in fact, their comments reveal quite an opposite attitude (they are annoyed by their brother's bullying or their constant fighting). In all three cases (Olga, Carla and Emily) there seem to be a mediated influence by other factors: in Olga's case the brother - 2 years older than her- is very immature and he suffers from a syndrome which make him, in her eyes, like a little brother instead of someone to look up to. Olga resents the fact that the brother has this syndrome, which means that he always get his way and he would decide what to watch on TV and what to play, while her mother constantly reminds her that "it's not his fault, you must be patient and look after him". Carla has an older sister (OS) whom she spends most of her time with: the two sisters are very close and almost inseparable, while their two brothers are used to playing together (so that there appears to be mutual gender segregation in these siblings' playing practice starting from early age). In the last case of Emily, the girl has only one brother (4 years her major) but they never got along (E: "...like cats and dogs, as long as I can remember!"), so that their relationship appears to be antagonist rather than supportive.

'Close' Older Sister (COS): By contrast, it seems that the influence of an older sister could play as a "stereotypical push". Compared to the *critical* group, in the "uncritical" group there is more frequent incidence (5 cases over a total of 9) of girls having a close bond with an older sister (or in the case of Becky is an older cousin living nearby whom she spends most of her time and she considers like a sister). In all these cases, the girls refer to their sisters as their mutual ally and playing companion from early years. In two cases (Sandy and Carla) the older sister is also the person who they share more time with. Interestingly, in the case of Emma ("critical" group), the influence of the older sister acts in a reversed counter-stereotypical fashion considering that this older sister enrolled in the army and she is also a boxing champion (Emma is incredibly attached to her and named her as her main role model, the person she admires the most).

Close and Fulfilling Relationship with father (CFF): in the *critical* group there is a higher incidence of girls reporting a very satisfying and close relationship with their father (i.e. talking, cuddling, sharing secrets and doing activities together) as compared to the other group: 6 out of 9 girls in this group would mention quite often their father during conversation and 3 of them named him as the family member they

wish to spend more time with. Only two girls in the *critical* group do not live with their father (Amber and Ruby): while Amber seems to be the only girl in this group who does not talk about her father in euphoric terms and she seems to avoid the topic (A: “my mother has a new boyfriend now. I like the guy. My father hates him!”), Ruby talked often about how she misses her father (as he lives in New Zealand), describing her rapport with him as “amazing”, with lots of shared play and activities (particularly horse riding and rugby, which she used to really enjoy doing in his company). In the “uncritical” group, with the exceptions of Sandy, Lulu and Millie, the majority of girls seemed to be less strongly connected with the father and more with their mother or sister, some of them commenting that they do not see their father often or play with him much. Olga, in particular, seems to resent the fact that the father shares games and plays with her brother but not with her (“No, my father never plays with me; if I was a boy he would play more as with my brother it’s different...”). Another aspect worth mention is the gender role orientation and attitude of the father towards the girl. Responding to the question, “Does your father use a nickname for you? Does he ever call you princess?”, the majority of girls in the “uncritical” group (5/9) confirmed that the father often call them affectionately “my princess”, as opposed to only two girls (2/10) in the “critical” group.

Wishing more time with (WMT): to gauge girls’ attitude towards family members, girls were asked to name which person in the family they wished more time with. The difference in pattern between the two groups is very striking for this variable: while in the *critical* group almost all of girls (9/10) named an older brother or the father (plus in 2 other cases a grandfather and younger brother), in the *uncritical* group only a minority of girls (2/9) preferred more time with a male family member (in both cases naming the father) while wishing to spend more time with either a sister, the mother or a female cousin.

Living with both parents (LBP): here again there is a marked difference between the two groups, with most girls in the *critical* group (8 girls out of 10) living with both parents, while the majority in the *uncritical* group (5 girls out of 9) have separated parents and live with their mother (apart from Kirsty, who lives with her father, although she often declared that she would rather stay with her mother).

5.4.3 EGA Analysis – Social and Life Style

More marked differences between the two groups shows in the life style variables, which are reported only briefly by highlighting the main patterns of interest.

SOCIAL / ATTITUDES & LIFE STYLE											
	ID	NAME	PROXY IMAGE CONSC	BOY FRIEND	GIRLY ATTIRE	BEAUTY CLUB	MAKE UP	HAPPY ABT LOOK	PAST PLAY DOLLS	EXTRA CURRIC	SOCIAL CLASS
C	N01	Meg	N	N	N	N	N	Y+	N	N	W
	N07	Enri	Y	Y+	Y	N	N	Y+	N	Y+	W
R	N14	Amber	N	N	N	N	OS	N	Y	N	D
I	N16	Elisha	OS	N	N	N	OS	Y+	N	Y	M
T	N19	Emma	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	W
I	N21	Solange	N	N	N	N	OS	Y+	N	Y+	M
C	N22	Jess	Y	N	Y	N	OS	Y+	Y	Y	M
A	N23	Ruby	NR	N	N	N	OS	Y	N	Y	W
L	N26	Judy	N	N	N	N	N	Y+	Y	Y+	W
	N29	Lorraine	Y	N	Y	N	OS	Y	Y	Y+	M
U	N02	Becky	Y+	Y+	Y+	Y+	Y+	Y	Y	Y	D
N	N03	Olga	Y	Y	Y	N	OS	N	Y	N	M
C	N04	Kirsty	Y	Y	Y+	Y+	Y+	Y+	Y	N	D
R	N09	Kim	Y+	Y+	Y+	Y+	Y+	Y+	Y	N	W
I	N12	Sandy	NR	Y+	Y+	Y+	Y+	Y+	Y	N	D
T	N15	Carla	Y	N	Y	Nw	Y+	Y	Y	Y	W
I	N25	Lulu	Y+	Y	Y	Nw	OS	Y+	Y	Y+	M
C	N31	Millie	Y	Yn	Y+	Nw	Y+	Y+	Y	N	W
AL	N35	Emile	Y+	Yn	Y+	N	OS	Y	Y	Y	M

LEGEND

Y/Y+ = YES/ A LOT
 N = NO
 OS = ONLY SOMETIMES
 Nw = NO (but would love to)
 NR = NO PARENTS REPLY
 Yn = YES (never before, but ready now)

SOCIAL CLASS

M = MIDDLE CLASS
 W = WORKING CLASS
 D = DISADVANTAGED

Table 5.12 - EGA –Extract Table: Social and Life Style Variables

From the colour coding in table 5.12 above, the difference between the two groups is striking, particularly for the variables relative to participants' attitude towards beauty ("girly attire", "make-up" and "beauty club" – the latter consisting of girls' gathering together to share grooming practices and make-over sessions).

Proxy Image Conscious (PIC): Parents' responses about how much their daughter cares about her looks seem to confirm a more relaxed attitude towards beauty in the *critical* group. Another striking contrast seems to be in girls' attitude towards having a boyfriend, with most girls in the *uncritical* group claiming to be already engaging in romantic relationships with boys, as opposed to only one girl in the *critical* group.

Past Play Dolls (PPD): given some of the adverts about dolls, girls were asked about their past playing practice with dolls, referring to their early years, from toddler to the present (variable "past play dolls"): in the *critical* group it is quite intriguing to note a high incidence of girls who –according to their own accounts - have never been interested in dolls. These girls reported that they always preferred playing with other

toys (i.e. Elisha: “I’ve never been keen on dolls”, such as animal/action figures or stuffed toys (of course, it is not possible to know for certain whether this is true or just the way the girls like to remember or present things). This could be indicative of an innate/temperamental attitude in some of the girls towards stereotypical “girly” toys. The two groups seem also to differ on levels of **extra-curricular activities**, with overall a greater involvement and variety of activities for the girls in the *critical* group, although the difference here is not as striking as with other variables (however, the reader is reminded that the focus of attention here is not so much on any single factor, but on configurations of multiple factors leading to a certain outcome).

5.4.4 EGA Analysis - Media Consumption

		MEDIA																	
	ID	Name	SMUG	PARENT MEDIATION	PARENT TV LIMIT	PROXY TV USAGE	FAV TV CHANNEL	DISNEY COMED	EXPLICIT (i.e. BIG BROTHER)	ADULT CELEBS MAGZ	REGULAR INTERNET	"GIRLY" VIDEO GAMES	"BOYISH" VIDEO GAMES	YOU TUBE MUSIC VIDEOS	REGULAR B&C MAGZ	FACE BOOK PROFILE	X FACTOR	SOAPS	TWILIGHT
	N01	Meg	L	H	Y+	L	DVD	N	N	N	N	N	Y+	N	N	N	N	N	N
C	N07	Enri	H	M	Y	M	N	Y	Yb	N	Y	N	Y+	Y	N	N	Y	N	N
R	N14	Amber	H	L	N	H	D/N	Y	N	N	Y+	N	Y+	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y+
I	N16	Elisha	H	M	Y	H	D/N	Y+	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N
T	N19	Emma	M	M	N	M	D/N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y+	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
I	N21	Solange	L	H	Y+	M	D	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
C	N22	Jess	M	H	Y+	H	CB/N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N
A	N23	Ruby	L	M	Y	M	CB/P	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y+
L	N26	Judy	L	H	Y+	NR	P/N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
	N29	Lorraine	L	H	Y+	L	CB/I	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N
U	N02	Becky	H	L	N	H	D	Y	Y+	Y+	Y	Y+	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
N	N03	Olga	L	M	Y	L	CN/CB	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y
C	N04	Kirsty	M	L	N	L	D	Y	N	N	Y	Y+	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N
R	N09	Kim	H	L	N	L	D	Y	Y	Y+	Y+	Y+	N	Y	Y+	Y	Y	Y	N
I	N12	Sandy	M	L	N	NR	CB/I	N	Y	Y+	N	Y	N	Y	Y+	N	Y	Y	Y
T	N15	Carla	H	L	N	H	D/N	Y+	Yb	Y	Y	Y+	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N
I	N25	Lulu	M	H	Y+	L	DVD	N	N	N	N	Y+	N	Y	Y++	N	N	Y	Y
C	N31	Millie	H	M	Y	M	D/CB	Y	Yb	N	Y	Y+	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N
AL	N35	Emile	M	L	N	M	D	Y	N	N	Y	Y+	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N

LEGEND	
Y/Y+ = YES/ A LOT	SMUG (STEREOTYPED MEDIA GROUP)
N = NO	H / M / L = HIGHER / MEDIUM/ LOWER
NR = NO PARENTS RESPONSE	Yb = YES, PLAYING in the BACKGROUND
TV CHANNELS	
D = DISNEY	CB = CBEBBIES (BBC)
N = NICKELODEON	I = ITV
CN = CARTOON NETWORK	P = POP GIRL
DVD = NO TV, ONLY DVDs	

Table 5.13 – EGA Extract Table: Media Consumption

Looking at overall consumption of media, there appear to be differences between the two groups as far as average amount of media consumed, types of media and preferred programs, with the *critical* group showing a higher proportion of girls reporting lower access to stereotypical media content (5 girls with lower SMUG, as compared to only 1 in the *uncritical* group). As always, any (direction of) causality cannot be ascertained: this could be either an indication that girls accessing a higher level of stereotypical content become more accustomed and less critical towards this type of content (resulting also in increased influence on their behaviour), or - considering the self-selective nature of most media activities - it could be assumed that girls with a natural predisposition towards stereotypical femininity (and so less critical of stereotypical portrayals in general) would usually look for more stereotyped content. Alternatively, other 'external' factors may be influential on both aspects. This difference is particularly evident in their videogames consumption, which definitely shows a contrasting pattern, with a higher incidence of girls (N=4) playing "boyish" videogames in the *critical* group (i.e. games featuring shooting, battles or car racing) as opposed to the *uncritical* group where most girls - except Olga - play "girly" videogames (i.e. games which themes revolve consistently around beauty, fashion, decorating, pets, cooking). Some girls do not seem to play either "boyish" or "girly" videogames (e.g. Jess, Ruby and Lorraine), preferring games with a "unisex" orientation (for instance, brain and educational games or strategic life simulations such as *The Sims*).

On the B&C (Beauty & Celebrities) magazines front, it is noticeable that there are more girls in the *uncritical* group (4 girls as opposed to 1 in the *critical* group) who regularly browse their parents' or older sister's celebrities magazines such as *OK* (Becky, Kim, Sandy and Carla). As far as Tween's magazines, in the *critical* group there are only 2 girls (Emma and Amber) who would read these magazines regularly, as opposed to 4 girls (Becky, Kim, Sandy and Lulu) in the *uncritical* - with 3 of them reporting an "obsession" with tweens' celebrities magazine. For instance, Lulu often mentioned with pride that she has the full collection of the last 2 years of *Girl Talk* - a popular tween magazine predominantly focusing on gossip, celebrities and beauty. It should also be added that Lulu's parents restricted greatly her consumption of other media - such as TV and Internet - so that perhaps her "obsession" (this is the exact word she used in one interview to describe her love for the magazine) and daily

reading of *Girl Talk* is her way to compensate and still be knowledgeable of celebrities and movies/music culture. In one group session, Lulu had heated arguments with Solange over reading a recent copy of *Girl Talk*, even to the point of crying about it.

Regarding web profiles, a much higher number of girls have their Facebook profile in the *uncritical* group (5/9 as opposed to 1/10). As discussed in the findings chapter, despite most girls mentioning Facebook as an avenue for online games and chatting, only about 40% of them (15 girls out of 37) are allowed by their parents to have their own personal profile active. Predictably, this aspect seems to reflect parents' controlling/limiting attitude with regards to media (which appears a lot higher in the *critical* group), as the two variables (self-reported parents' limitations on TV time and allowing daughter's Facebook profile) show a similar pattern.

Another important difference between the two groups seems to be in the level of parental mediation (here intended as parents' habit of talking to their daughters about media content and adverts), which appears to be markedly higher in the "critical" group. The influence of parents' mediation was particularly noticeable during conversations with several girls in the "critical" group (especially with *Solange, Emma, Ruby, Jess* and *Lorraine*) who seemed oftentimes more aware than other girls regarding the manipulating intent of adverts.

The fact that these girls are all in the older age group may of course play a role in their increased awareness, but age alone does not automatically mean increased media literacy awareness, as is evident from other girls from the same age group (*Lulu, Millie* and *Emily*, in the "uncritical" group) who rarely or never expressed criticism towards stereotypical femininity in adverts.

5.4.5 EGA Analysis – Roles Models and Celebrities

Looking at the final extract table, which shows the variables relative to girls' attitude towards roles models and celebrities, there appears to be a definite pattern in the way the girls relate to celebrities and how this relationship is reflected in their choices regarding role models and future career aspirations.

ROLE MODELS & CELEBS									LEGEND
ID	NAME	ORDINARY ROLE MODEL	CELEB ROLE MODEL	PROXY ROLE MODEL	INTO JUSTIN BEIBER	INTO MALE CELEB	INTO FEMALE CELEB	CELEB JOB	
C R I T I C A L	N01 Meg	F(B)	N	M	N	N	N	N	Y/Y+ = YES/ A LOT
	N07 Enri	M	N	M	N	N	Y	Y	Y++ = SELF-DECLARED OBSESSION
	N14 Amber	NONE	Y	Fcel	N++	N	Y	N	N/ N+ = NO / NOT AT ALL
	N16 Elisha	F(G)	N	NONE	N	N	N	N	N++ = HATING / PROFOUND DISLIKE
	N19 Emma	OS	N	OS	N	Y+	N	N	Y/N = IN THE MIDDLE / NOT SURE
	N21 Solange	OB	Y	Fcel	N++	N	Y	Y	ROLE MODELS
	N22 Jess	NONE	Y	FCel	Y/N	Y	Y	Y	F(B) = FRIEND (BOY)
	N23 Ruby	F(G)	N	NR	N++	Y	N	N	F(G) = FRIEND (GIRL)
	N26 Judy	M	N	M	N	N	N	N	CB = COUSIN (BOY)
N29 Lorraine	C(B)	Y	FCel	N++	Y	Y	N	OB = OLDER BROTHER	
U N C R I T I C A L	N02 Becky	OCG	Y	Fcel	Y	Y	Y	Y	OS = OLDER SISTER
	N03 Olga	GM	N	M	N	Y	N	Y	OCG = OLDER COUSIN GIRL
	N04 Kirsty	F(B)	Y	Fcel	Y+	Y	Y	N	F = FATHER
	N09 Kim	T(F)	Y	OCG	Y+	Y	Y	Y	M = MOTHER
	N12 Sandy	OCG	Y	NR	Y+	Y	Y+	Y	GM = GRANDMOTHER
	N15 Carla	F(G)	Y	Fcel	Y	Y	Y	N	TF = TEACHER (FEMALE)
	N25 Lulu	NONE	Y	Fcel	Y++	Y	Y+	Y	Fcel = FEMALE CELEBRITY
	N31 Millie	NONE	Y	Fcel	Y	Y	Y	Y	Mcel = MALE CELEBRITY
	N35 Emile	M	Y	Mcel	Y++	Y	Y+	Y	NR = NO PARENTS RESPONSE

Table 5.14 - EGA –Extract Table: Role Models & Celebrities

To fully grasp the meaning of the preferences expressed by the two groups it is paramount to pay attention to the role model's character and the reason behind girls' choices (particularly, by looking at the qualities they reported to admire in their role models). At first glance, for instance, responses regarding "Ordinary Role Model" (girls were asked to name an ordinary person - not a celebrity - who they really looked up to) do not appear to differ greatly between the two groups. However, when one looks more closely, there are noticeable differences.

In the critical group:

- 3 girls (*Meg*, *Solange* and *Lorraine*) named as role model a boy; the qualities admired are bravery (*Meg* & *Solange*) and intellectual skills (*Lorraine*).
- 1 girl (*Emma*) named her older sister for her courage and strength (she is abroad serving in the army for the last 3 years and she is also a boxing champion).
- 2 girls named their mother (*Enri* & *Jade*) and the qualities admired are their overall personality (both girls), humour (*Enri*) and strength (*Jade*).
- 2 girls (*Elisha* and *Ruby*) named a girl in their class: the qualities admired relating to being good academically or in the arts/sports.

- 2 girls (*Amber* and *Jess*) declared not to have any ordinary person they look up to, while confessing their undivided admiration for their idol of choice: *Jess* named singer Adele as her role model, admiring her voice/talent and anti-diva attitude, while *Amber* is self-declared as obsessed with Bella Swan, the female character protagonist in the movies series “Twilight”; their mothers confirmed this in their questionnaires. Both Adele and Bella are strong female characters and their appeal for the two girls is more down to their talent and/or strong character rather than to beauty or sexiness.

In the uncritical group, by contrast, the qualities indicated were mostly about beauty for *Becky*, *Sandy* and *Carla* (“beautiful”, “nice hair”, “cute dresses”, “good fashion sense”), while for *Olga*, *Kim* and *Emile* about being caring and generous. Overall it is interesting to note that no girls in this group reported to admire the strength, courage or other counter-stereotypical qualities in their chosen role models. Moreover, only one girl in the group named a male figure as a role model (compared to 3 in the other group), and two girls (*Lulu* and *Millie*) answering “none” to the question, would quickly name instead at least 3 sexy female singers as their role models.

Girls’ nominations of their “ordinary role model” were confirmed by parents’ response to the “Proxy Role Model” question (“does your daughter look up to a particular person or celebrity as her role model?”). As it is evident from the question, parents were intentionally left free to name a common person or a celebrity (or both). Their responses reveal a marked difference between the two groups: while in the “critical” group most parents’ responses referred to ordinary people or members of the family, in the “uncritical” group the vast majority reported the name of a sexy celebrity (6/9 in the “uncritical” as opposed to 3/10 in the “critical” one). Thus, there appear to be clear differences in the degree of involvement with celebrities and a different focus regarding the “admired qualities” between the two groups. This is even more evident when looking at the far-right column of table 5.15, where the future job aspiration indicated by the girls has been translated into the binary “Y” (celebrity job) or “N” (ordinary job). The preferences regarding future career are also reported in the table 5.16 below; when two options were expressed, the first option is considered dominant. In the critical group, there appears to be less fascination with “celebrity- type” jobs.

	ID	NAME	FUTURE JOB ASPIRATION	CELEB JOB
C R I T I C A L	N01	Meg	Fireman	N
	N07	Enri	Comedy Actress	Y
	N14	Amber	Archeologist (or Spacewoman)	N
	N16	Elisha	Teacher	N
	N19	Emma	Horse Rider	N
	N21	Solange	Singer	Y
	N22	Jess	Singer (or Animal Rescuer)	Y
	N23	Ruby	Horse Riding Instructor (or Book Author)	N
	N26	Judy	Lion man in New Zealand (or Vet)	N
N29	Lorraine	Teacher	N	
U N C R I T I C A L	N02	Becky	Pop star (or Teacher)	Y
	N03	Olga	Vet on TV	Y
	N04	Kirsty	Dolphin Trainer (or Vet)	N
	N09	Kim	Singer	Y
	N12	Sandy	Rich & Famous	Y
	N15	Carla	Vet	N
	N25	Lulu	Singer (or Hairdresser)	Y
	N31	Millie	Singer	Y
	N35	Emile	Pop Star	Y

Table 5.15 – EGA Future Job Aspiration

The implications of what has been reported in the analysis and findings chapters will be further discussed in the light of previous literature within the final chapter.

To fully “bring to life” participants’ realities, this chapter will conclude by reporting a few exemplary mini-case studies. This is considered important, as the many and varied details colouring girls’ personal tales would be otherwise, inevitably, widely dispersed across different chapters, in a way that makes it difficult to convey the richness and complexity of their stories.

This final analysis should help the reader to form a more unitary picture of particularly interesting and insightful cases in a way that facilitates a more holistic grasping of how specific configurations of variables can apparently lead to particular outcomes, thus illuminating the complex interplay of factors inherent to any process of media influence.

5.5 ANALYSIS PART III – MINI CASE STUDIES

This part of the analysis presents a handful of “mini-case studies” in a narrative format, where the main aspects of interest about the case are highlighted and discussed in a focussed way. To facilitate the comparison between cases, each case will be structured to include essential elements, such as:

- Girls’ character and social attitudes
- Family and peer relationships
- Media Consumption and parental mediation
- Playing habits and favourite activities
- Extra-curricular activities
- Attitude towards beauty and celebrities
- Memorable quotes

In order to give an overall view of the main **mediating factors** and relative **outcomes**, most participants’ cases have been summarised in a table (Table 5.17 – Part 1 and 2) at the end of the chapter.

5.5.1 CASE #1 - MEG (A SELF-DECLARED ‘TOMBOY’)

Meg is a bright, talkative and assertive 8/9 years old girl; her teacher describes her as “quirky, unique and very good at maths”. She lives outside town with her parents, her brother (age 11) and 5 cats. Her mother works as assistant teacher in the same school and in her response to the questionnaire she refers to Meg as “confident, clever, loving, outgoing, enthusiastic, opinionated and helpful”.

Her social behaviour and attire/presentation reflect a low self-monitoring and rather self-centred attitude. Her tone of voice is quite masculine for her age, she always wear trousers and has her hair tied back in a low pony tail. During conversation she tends to divert from topics discussed by other girls and does not show much empathy if someone around her is upset. At times she seems to be in her own world and due to her individuality she does not seem to fit with any group. She describes herself as a “tomboy”, but this does not mean that she rejects in any way her female status: she would still write post-it notes such as “Girls are better than boys: full stop!” and “Girls rule

and girls are clever", clearly declaring her pride in being a girl. She does not practice any extra-curricular activity and she does not seem to enjoy sport much during P.E. classes. Her favourite activities are drawing and building models with Lego (M: "You know I have more than 500 Lego men!")

The interesting aspect about Meg's case is the fact that her media consumption is extremely restricted compared to a typical 8 years old: she has never watched regular TV channels (as the family do not have TV channels), while only occasionally enjoying watching DVDs with boy-targeted material, such as the cartoon *Ben 10* or *Dungeon Dragons* and the movie *Avatar* ("it's my favourite movie of all time"), which she said she had watched twelve times. Similarly, she would surf the internet only rarely at school, mainly for educational purposes or homework (and this explains why she is not aware of most of the online video games reported by the majority of participants). Her mother confirmed that her 'screen time' is not more than 5 hours per week and that they do not have TV channels or home internet access. Consequently, Meg's exposure to advertising, sexualised content and celebrity culture is minimal compared to the average 8-years old and she was not familiar with any of the adverts or the celebrities discussed during sessions.

Meg is very attached to her brother and named him as the person she would like to spend more time with. The siblings seem to spend most of their free time playing together (Meg: "...as we live far away so I can't really get together with my friends from school").

The other striking aspect about Meg's case is that – unlike most other girls – she seems to have been engaging daily with boy-oriented toys and video games (i.e. *Alcon Quest*) right from an earlier age, with the total exclusion of any girls' toys. Her mother claimed - during one of our informal chats - that this was Meg's own choice. During our several encounters, Meg never failed to show her fascination with trucks, Action-men and Lego, while expressing a strong rejection for anything remotely "girly" (we were usually having the interview in a toys room called "Sanctuary", so she would often get distracted by boy-oriented toys and she would show the researcher her favourite ones).

Unusual as it is, Meg's case is insightful as it provides an example of little or absent media socialisation. The outcome in this case is a girl whose embodiment of femininity seems completely disjoined from the dictates and pressure of the media.

To be sure, the “tomboy” and counter-stereotypical demeanour of Meg seems also to reflect her regular engagement with her brother through boyish activities, toys and games and concurrent minimal socialisation with other girls (plus, perhaps, some influence resulting from her innate temperament, as there is always a combination of factors leading to a particular outcome).

Memorable quotes: There are less girls in the world, that's why they are more popular; I'm a good artist, I make a lot of tomboy drawings; I'M NOT WATCHING IT. IT'S GIRLY; I get angry when my brother tries to tease me. The other day we were playing action figures and he forced me to play with a girl character and then he teased me "you like girl stuff, you like girl stuff" so I punched him!

5.5.2 CASE #2 – BECKY (A SELF-DECLARED ‘GIRLY’ GIRL)

Becky immediately stands out as a very clever, talkative, cheeky and opinionated 8/9 years old. Her teacher describes her as hard working and determined, while her mother defines her as “honest, sweet, caring and loving”.

She lives with her mother, stepdad, sister (age 5) and baby brother (1). She sees her father regularly, although she does not seem to have a strong bond with him. Becky reports that the father calls her “little princess”. Her step-father is a sales attendant at B&Q, while the mother is a housewife. Apart from her mother and grandmother, she spends most of her time with girlfriends living in the same street: her next door neighbours (Katherine, age 11- who she named as her “ordinary role model”) and her cousins, who are three girls of age 12, 7 and 3. Becky seems very attached to her 12 years old cousin: she named her as the person she would like to spend more time with and she often talked about going shopping and doing “beauty club” with her or Katherine (a sort of “make over” sessions where the girls have fun doing make-up, trying different clothes on and “posing” in front of the mirror or a camera).

Becky’s case is one of the few “extreme” ones, both in terms of amount of stereotyped media content and in terms of her embodiment of femininity, which is much highly geared towards “girly” practices: she is extremely into beauty, make-up and boyfriends. Throughout the year she often opened up about having a boyfriend and she likes to talk about romantic relationships to her girlfriends.

She shows a preoccupation with her looks and would use make-up even at school (without her mum knowing); she also weights herself every day and –despite being already quite petite – she expressed the desire for a thinner boy (her ideal body weight is the thinner “A” - preference expressed by only other 2 girls (Lulu and Millie). In one interview she referred to herself as “ugly”.

Her media consumption is quite high compared to the average and she tends to watch a great deal of stereotypical and sexualised content, either by personal choice or through her family’s watching habits. For instance she watches *Big Brother* and *Eastenders* every day with her mother, which are also her favourite programmes; she watches *Take Me Out* with the whole family – a dating show where single men try to obtain a date with one of thirty single women – together with *Hanna Montana* and *Victorious* - two popular Disney comedies.

She also has her own personal laptop, which her grandmother bought for her as birthday present (B: "It's so nice when it's night...I just go to my bed and chill out with my laptop. My granny really spoils me, she let me stay up until midnight"). She is very fond of watching music videos on You Tube (her favourite singers are *Rihanna* and *The Wanted*) and playing online videogames on *GirlsGoGames* website (dressing/fashion/make-up and cooking games are her favourites) or the very popular *MoviesStarPlanet* (where you can build and customise your own movie star character). She has a Facebook profile and often uses the social network for chatting with her friends and family. She would also read the *Pop Star* magazine once a week. Her parents do not seem to limit her TV or Internet time (B:"I can watch as much as I want, my mum doesn't care").

Memorable quotes: Sometimes I wear make-up at school, only a tiny drop of foundation on the cheeks so my mum won't notice it; Sometimes I think I hate my spots and I must put some spot remover on my skin; Yes I would love to be gorgeous like them, but it will never happen 'cause I'm ugly!

5.5.3 CASE #3 – EMMA (A CLOWNISH UNCONVENTIONAL GIRL)

Emma (10/11 years old) comes across as a funny and sociable girl who during sessions would not talk much. She often likes to be on the side line, observing what others are doing and she has the tendency to express herself by doing funny faces and

clowning around. She often answers questions though jokes, both during interviews and with her friends. Her teacher describes her as a sociable character with average capabilities. She can be extremely caring if someone is upset or needs assistance. She is one of the few girls in her age group who is not showing much appearance-related concerns or interest in make-up. Her mother confirmed this carefree attitude (answering “Not much” to Q22: “Is your daughter conscious about her looks?”) and defines her as “caring, thoughtful and funny”.

She lives with both parents (father is a police officer, while mother is a chain store assistant), brother (age 15) and sister (age 16). She has also an older sister (age 20) who is a boxing champion currently training abroad with the Army and whom she named as her main role model (“she's so brave; she even won a boxing prize!”). Within her family, Emma usually prefers to spend time with her brother (confirmed by her mother, who named the brother as the closest person to Emma) and her oldest sister (“I only manage to see her once every two months, cause she's in Germany; she wants to be back when the 5 years are finished, she will leave the Army”).

Emma's case is interesting as she is one of the few girls in her age group who – despite her regular exposure to sexualised portrayals of femininity- is not concerned about her own looks, refuses to wear make-up even at parties (“I don't like it”) and does not show much interest in stereotypically feminine activities. Nevertheless, she manages to be good friend with more “girly” members of the class (i.e. she is a good friend of Lulu). Her projective tests show a rejection of stereotypical femininity, which was also confirmed by a firm dislike of stereotypical or hyper-sexualised media portrayals of femininity in adverts (“I hate Cheryl Cole”). Interestingly, Emma reported that her playing practice during earlier years never involved dolls (“I never played with dolls much”), she preferred to play with animals figures or her stuffed animals.

Her media preferences are also unconventional compared to her class mates, with a more balanced mix of boys/ girls-oriented programs (e.g. *Men vs food*; *Horrid Henry*). She prefers videogames typically played by boys (i.e. cars and football) and she plays these games daily either alone or in the company of her brother. However, she watches also popular TV shows where sexualised/ glamourised representations of femininity are prevalent and where gender stereotypes abound (e.g. *High Street Musical*, *X Factor* and even the more sexually explicit *Big Brother*). Her mother

confirmed that she also regularly browses celebrities magazines (i.e. *Popstar* and *OK*) (“but I usually skip adverts as I am not interested”). Therefore Emma’s case provides a good example of a girl who, despite being regularly exposed to stereotypical and glamourised representations of femininity and despite what seems a relaxed parental attitude regarding her media consumption, does not seem to be influenced by these images/messages in her own enactment of femininity. This is probably due to her own stance towards these images: she does not like them, so she does not imitate them; she still watches them, but there is a clear detachment from them - what Hall (1980) defines as *oppositional reading*. Her ideal body shape is C, which is a middle-ground and healthy choice compared to slimmer shapes such as A and B.

Memorable quotes: She’s my role model (older sister)...’cause she’s so brave. She even won a boxing prize! – No...(don’t play with dolls), I only dress my stuffed animals ‘cause I feel sorry for them; I used to have a farm with figures animals and lots of stuffed animals but that’s when I was about 7; Bratz...augh...they are so annoying!; I’d love to be a horse rider. I love horses, we used to have one but we sold it; No, I don’t like make-up; Aw...I HATE Cheryl Cole!

5.5.4 CASE #4 – OLGA (*THE SWEETEST GIRL IN THE CLASS*)

Olga is a sociable, talkative and sweet 8 years old girl (she was one of the youngest in her class and she remained 8 years old for most part of the academic year).

She is quite petite, conventionally pretty and tends to finish her sentences with a sweet smile. During sessions she was always able to focus on task, express her feelings openly and clearly, overall coming across as an easy person to converse with.

Her mother describes her as “outgoing, happy, funny, caring, wonderful”, while her teacher describes her as “just perfect: always attentive, caring and dutiful”. Her friends often defined her as “the sweetest person in the class” due to her kindness and her willingness to help others.

Olga lives with her mother and brother (age 10) and two cats. Her parents are divorced and Olga, on two occasions, expressed her sadness about the parents’ split up (“I was still in my mummy’s tummy when they split up. I would like them back together so we could spend more time all together”).

The mother works as administrator for a building society and from her manner of dressing and speaking she appears as distinctively middle class. Her brother (Ben,

age 10) has an impairing syndrome so Olga often complained about having to compromise on things a lot (i.e. always having to watch TV programs chosen by him or play boys' games with action figures).

Her media habits are quite limited compared to her friends, suggesting very little exposure to glamourised and sexualised femininity. As favourite programs she mentioned cartoons such as *Adventure Time* and *Tom & Jerry* ("but I rarely get the chance to watch 'em, sometimes I do it at my granny's house"). She does not seem media savvy at all and she admitted to rarely using the internet as "Internet connection most times doesn't work so I can't go on it". She named Google – a search engine - as a favourite website.

She is a conventionally pretty, Barbie-like, girl. Despite her looks, she does not seem to like her looks much: she said "I don't think I'm that pretty" while ticking box "not much" in the "Are you happy about the way you look?" question (in fact, she is the only girl in the whole sample who replied "not much" to that question). She seems to have a limited relationship with her father, as she often complained about not seeing him or playing enough with him. In the body image test, she expressed a desire for a fuller figure (defined in this study as 'reverse unsatisfied'): could this be linked to her media habits and her lack of exposure to media programs emphasising the thin ideal?

As far as role models, she really admires her grandmother as "she's funny and generous".

She cites dancing and singing as favourite activities; she talks proudly about her full collection of Monster High dolls which she would play with every day (in fact all her class mates - except for Meg of course - would talk about Olga's extensive collection of dolls without hiding their envy). At her first interview she would not name any pop singer as her favourite, naming instead the band *Red Hot Chilli Peppers* as her inspiring celeb – an unusual choice for her age, which she justified by saying "as my father likes them" - and when probed she did not seem to be, overall, knowledgeable on pop culture. During the year she gradually became more exposed to pop material and in a follow-up session (at the end of the school year) she named *One Direction* as her favourite band. As a future career aspiration she said she wanted to be a Vet on TV.

The case of Olga is interesting because it provides an insightful example of very low exposure to stereotypical and sexualised media content with a concomitant high stereotypical orientation of her gender expression. In the negative case analysis, her

case emerged as an exception to the pattern of “counter-stereotypical influence of older brother on gender role socialisation” emerging from the data. Being Olga a girl with an older brother, her markedly stereotypical attitudes were in contradiction with the mainstream outcomes in similar cases. In her instance however, the influence of the brother is actually reversed due to the brother’s syndrome and the fact that Olga sees him as immature (as if he was younger than her), along with resenting that she has to play boys-oriented games or watch boys programs (i.e. *Ben 10*) with him.

Memorable quotes: I was still in my mummy's tummy when they split up. I would like them back together so we could spend more time all together; I don't think I'm that pretty; No, I never play with my dad, I would like to. If I was a boy he would play more with me as with my brother he's different; but I play with mum usually, make-up and dolls.

5.6 CASES SUMMARY

In the table that follow (Table 5.16 –Part 1 and 2) most cases are summarised according to their main mediating factors (“MF”) and the main outcomes/profiles (“O”), to give a general overview of how different configurations of variables in participants’ life (representing the interplay of factors) can be linked to certain “results”. The terms “outcome” or “result” have a positivistic feel, but they should be intended here as tentative only, as the analysis is trying to detect patterns in order to locate possible interplaying and causal relationships between configurations of variables and “outcomes”. The analysis was able to find similarities between configurations and identify several cases where similar configurations lead to similar outcomes (see data summarised in the far right column of both tables). The underlying question guiding this analysis was how higher/lower consumption of stereotypical media content interplays with other factors to produce certain outcomes in terms of young girls’ femininity embodiment, their body image, their playing practices and their embracing of ‘boyfriend culture’.

CASE ID	No	MAIN MEDIATING FACTORS	No.	OUTCOME	SIMILAR CASES
#1 Meg	1	Close bond with older brother	1	Very low SFI (counter-stereotypical behaviour and attitudes)	None
	2	Low peers' socialisation	2	Rejection of "girly" toys, play and practices	
	3	Very low media consumption and SMUG	3	Satisfied body image	
	4	Boy-oriented programs and play practice from early years (i.e. Trucks, Lego)	4	Healthy body size ideal (D)	
	5	Absent or minimal exposure to sexualised media content	5	Proxi image conscious: "Not at all"	
	6	Very high level of parental mediation	6	Not interested in romantic relationship with boys	
	7	No regular extra-curricular activity			
#2 Becky	1	Close bond with older/younger* cousin girl / sister	1	Very high/High* SFI (behaviour/attitude are markedly stereotypical)	Kim (MF 1-7; O 1-3, 5-6)
	2	High level of peers socialisation	2	Rejection of "boyish" play and practices	Sandy (MF 1-7; O 1*-3, 5-6)
	3	High media consumption and SMUG (stereotyped media content)	3	Unsatisfied body image	Kesha (MF 1-7; O 1*-3, 5-6)
	4	Girly-oriented play practice in early years (i.e. dolls, beauty club)	4	Thinnest body size ideal (A)	Millie (MF 1*, 2, 3, 4, 5*, 6*, 7; O 1-5, 6*)
	5	Low / medium* level of parental mediation	5	Proxi image conscious: "Yes, a lot!"	Carla (MF 1-6; O 1*-3, 5, 6*)
	6	Little or none regular extra-curricular activities	6	Engaging or envisaging* romantic relationships with boys	
	7	Particularly rigid family's gender role orientation			
#3 Angel	1	Brother perceived as a nuisance	1	High SFI (behaviour and attitudes are markedly stereotypical)	Olga (MF 1-5, 7; O 1-6)
	2	High level of peers socialisation	2	Rejection of "boyish" play and practices	
	3	Low SMUG (consumption of stereotyped media content)	3	Slightly unsatisfied body image	
	4	Only-girls-oriented play practice in early years (i.e. dolls)	4	Healthy body size ideal (D or C)	
	5	High level of parental mediation	5	Proxi image conscious "Yes, fairly"	
	6	Practicing sport at competitive level (swimming and ballet)	6	Only fantasising about romantic relationship with boys	
	7	Wishing more shared play/ fun time with father			
#4 Emma	1	Close bond with older brother	1	Low SFI (counter-stereotypical behaviour and attitudes)	Amber (MF 1, 3-5, 7-8; O 1, 2, 4-6)
	2	Older sister as counter-stereotypical role model	2	Preference for unisex games, toys and play practice	
	3	Average level of peers socialisation	3	Slightly unsatisfied body image	
	4	Medium/ high SMUG (consumption of stereotyped media content)	4	Healthy body size ideal (C)	
	5	Preference for boyish videogames (Cars and football)	5	Proxi image conscious "Not much"	
	6	Unisex play practice in early years (animals figures instead of dolls)	6	Not interested in romantic relationship with boys	
	7	Medium/ low level of parental mediation			
	8	Little or none regular extra-curricular activities			

Table 5.16 – Cases summary - Part I

CASE ID	No	MAIN MEDIATING FACTORS	No.	OUTCOME	SIMILAR CASES
#5 Lucilla	1	Good relationship with sister	1	Medium SFI (mix of stereotypical and counter-stereotypical)	Elisha (MF 1*, 2-8; O 1-6)
	2	Average level of peers socialisation	2	Preference for creative activities, dance and acting	
	3	High SMUG (consumption of stereotyped media content)	3	Slightly unsatisfied body image	
	4	No reading of beauty/celebrities magazines (confirmed by parents)	4	Naming a girlfriend (class mate) as a role model due to her skills	
	5	Preference for girls' videogames (decorating, build your own character)	5	Proxi image conscious "Only sometimes"	
	6	Not interested in playing with boys	6	Not interested in romantic relationship with boys	
	7	Medium level of parental mediation with pro-active mothers			
	8	Good range of extra-curricular activities			
#6 Ruby	1	Particularly close bond with father/ brothers*	1	Low SFI (attitudes/behaviour are slightly counter-stereotypical)	Solange (MF 1-7; O 1-5)
	2	Low SMUG (consumption of stereotyped media content)	2	Preference for unisex games, toys and play practice	
	3	No reading of beauty & celebrities magz	3	Slightly unsatisfied body image (C-B)	
	4	High level of parental mediation	4	Proxi image conscious "Only sometimes"	
	5	Unisex play practice in early years (animals figures instead of dolls)	5	Not interested in romantic relationship with boys	
	6	Very bright academically			
	7	Good range of extra-curricular activities			
#7 Enri	1	Close bond with brother/cousin boy*	1	Medium SFI (mix of stereotypical and counter-stereotypical)	Maddi (MF 1-5; O 1-5) MJ (MF 1-6; O 1-2, 3*, 4-6)
	2	High level of peers socialisation	2	Preference for creative activities and unisex games/play practice	
	3	Medium SMUG (consumption of stereotyped media content)	3	Satisfied body image with healthy body size (C) /or reverse (D-E)*	
	4	Unisex play practice in early years (animals figures instead of dolls)	4	Proxi image conscious "Yes, fairly"	
	5	Medium level of parental mediation	5	Naming mother as a role model	
	6	Good range of extra-curricular activities	6	Engaging in romantic relationships with boys	
#8 Lorraine	1	Close bond with older sister	1	Medium SFI (mix of stereotypical and counter-stereotypical)	Roberta (MF 2-6; O 1-2, 3*, 4-6)
	2	Medium level of peers socialisation	2	Preference for creative activities and unisex games and play practice	
	3	Low SMUG (consumption of stereotyped media content)	3	Satisfied body image or slightly unsatisfied*	
	4	Both girls-oriented and unisex play practice in early years	4	Thin body ideal (B)	
	5	High level of parental mediation	5	Proxi image conscious: "Yes, fairly"	
	6	Good range of extra-curricular activities	6	Not interested in romantic relationship with boys	
#9 Lulu	1	Spending more time with father	1	High SFI (behaviour and attitudes are markedly stereotypical)	Emile (MF 1-3, 5-6, 7*, 8; O 1-6)
	2	High level of peers socialisation	2	Rejection of "boyish" play and practices	
	3	Medium SMUG (consumption of stereotyped media content)	3	Unsatisfied body image	
	4	Heavy B&C magazines reader (Girls Talk)	4	Thinnest body ideal (A or B)	
	5	High level of fascination with celebrities	5	Proxi image conscious: "Yes, a lot!"	
	6	Only-girls-oriented play practice in early years (i.e. dolls)	6	Thinking of starting romantic relationship with boys	
	7	High/ medium* level of parental mediation			
	8	Good range of extra-curricular activities and sports			

Table 5.16 – Cases summary - Part II

The analysis of cases summary presented above shows a great variety of combinations and highlights the necessity of considering each case of purported media influence in the context of distinct configurations of variables, with each configuration producing a particular interplay between media and girls' life context. For instance, both the exemplary cases #2 and #5 share a high level of SMUG (consumption of stereotypical/sexualised media content), but the outcomes of these cases are quite different in terms of girls' embodiment of femininity, their satisfaction with their body (body image), attitudes towards beauty and endorsement of boyfriends' culture. When one looks at the modalities of main variables in these cases (such as parental mediation, extra-curricular activities and gender roles orientation within the family), the case analysis seems to point clearly at the influence of these factors as mediating the influence of media in girl's life.

The next chapter will draw the conclusions and discuss the main implications from the various levels of analysis presented in this chapter.

Chapter 6 - Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

Thesis Structure

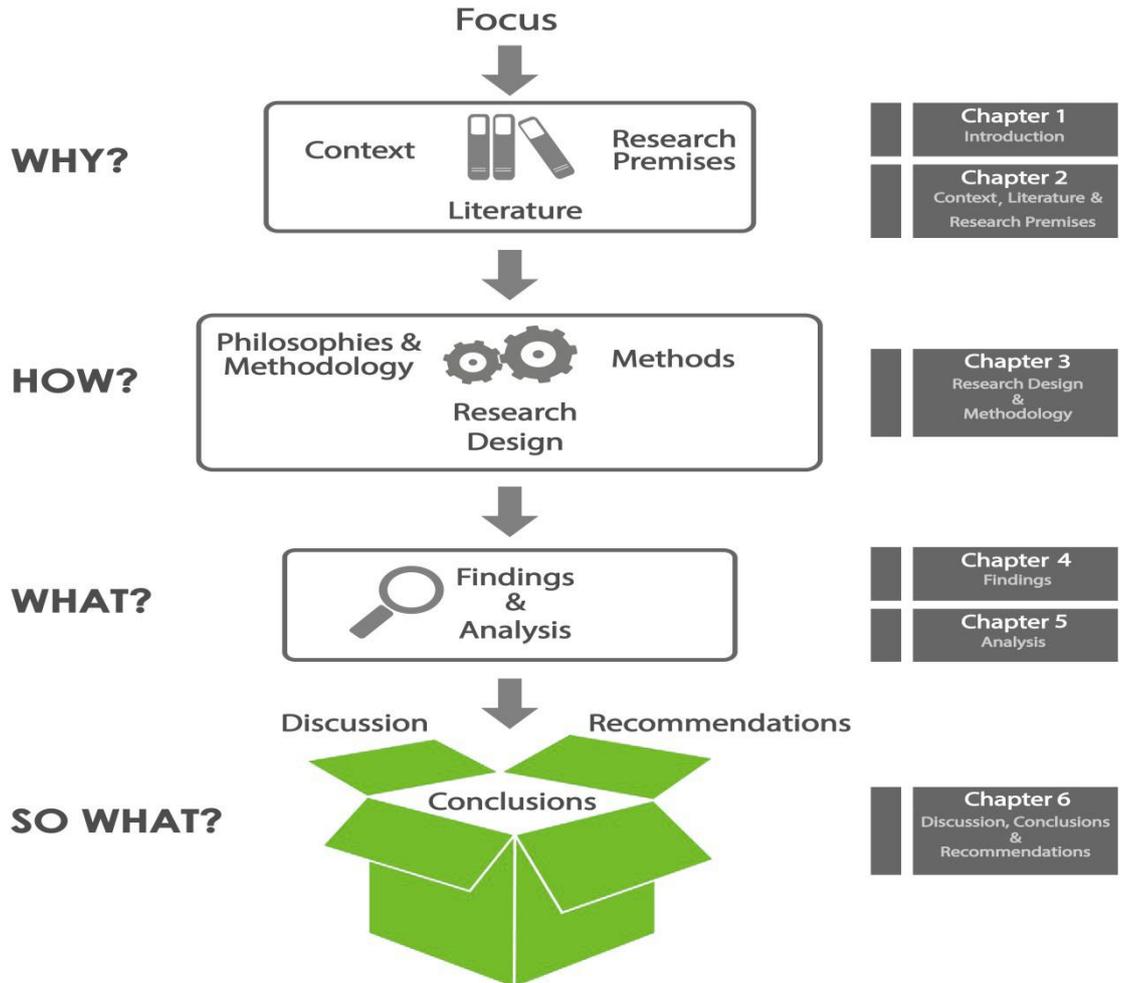


Figure 6.1 Thesis Structure

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This study started as an exploration of young girls' advertising experiences: the main curiosity was to see how pre-adolescent girls related to the many images of girlhood and femininity promoted through advertising. Particularly, as most images in the adverts are fairly stereotypical, there was an interest to see whether girls' way of expressing their femininity was influenced by their different degrees of exposure and own interpretations of these images and messages.

The exploration turned out to be a fascinating journey into young girls' femininity and their relation with media and adverts. The iterative nature of the research process, where every stage would inform and inspire the following stage prompted the researcher to realise quite early in her field work that she would have to know more about the context in which the girls were immersed, in order to more fully understand their ways of perceiving, interpreting and responding to representations of femininity in adverts.

As the data collection delved more deeply into this context, the research became more and more a real insight into the world of these young girls, their media preferences, their relationships in the family and in the school, their different attitudes and tastes and their ways of conceiving and enacting femininity in their everyday world. All these pieces of information became elements of a giant puzzle which the analysis needed to put together.

This chapter discusses the main findings in light of previous literature and it will be structured in four main sections, corresponding to the three specific research questions and to the overarching aim of the enquiry (see fig. 6.2):

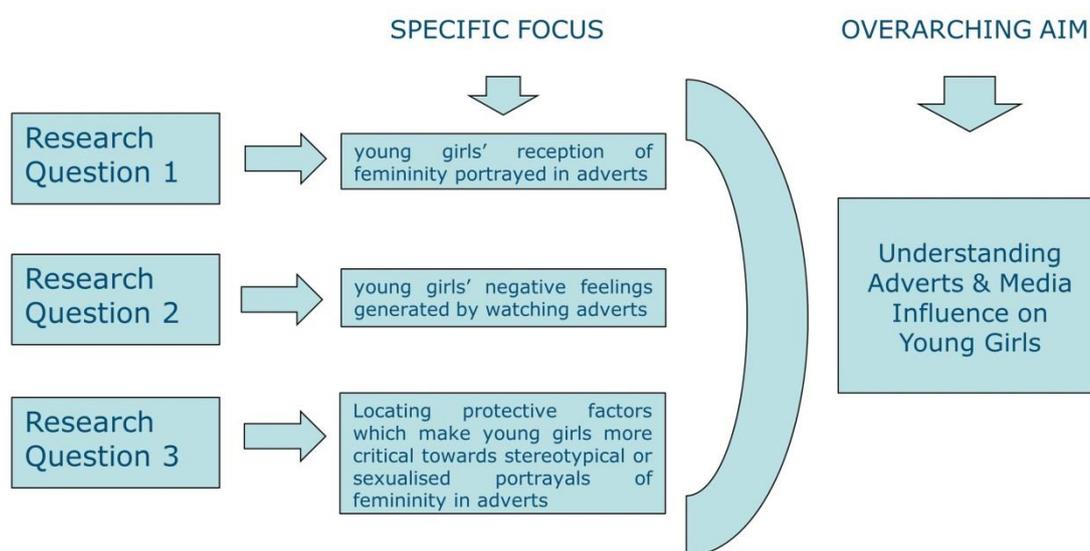


Figure 6.2 – Discussion of findings

- How young girls respond to adverts (Hall's Reception Theory) (6.2)
- Negative feelings generated by adverts (body image literature) (6.3)
- Important themes and mediating factors emerging from the analysis (6.4)
- Understanding media influence (Klappler's Phenomenistic Theory) (6.5)

6.2 HOW YOUNG GIRLS RESPOND TO ADVERTS

The central perspective of this study assumes that, more often than not, consumers process advertisements for meaning rather than information (McCracken, 1987): from this assumption, one aim of this research was to see how young girls perceive and negotiate meanings around femininity from the adverts they see or watch.

The analysis presented in the previous chapters provided evidence that, even in a fairly homogeneous group of girls as far as social-economic background and age, there is a fundamental difference in the way different sub-groups of girls perceive and respond to representations of femininity in adverts and media.

The eight phenomenological categories of response have been adapted in light of Stuart Hall's (1980) Reception Theory and therefore reduced to three main *positions* or *readings*. From this process, it emerged that most participants have a prevalent reading /positioning towards stereotypical or sexualised portrayals of femininity, which is either *dominant*, *negotiated* or *oppositional* (see section 5.2).

Similarly, to refer to the marketing literature, Hirschman and Thompson (1997) in their in depth grounded theory investigation of media and advertising experiences (see section 2.14) found confirmation of Hall's theory, identifying three key "interpretive relationships" between consumers and mass media:

Our analysis substantiates Hall's comments by identifying three families of interpretive strategies consumers employ to create meanings from their experiences with cultural products. These consumer-generated productions have systematic and describable qualities that reflect the interplay between the cultural code (or system of meanings) embodied in the cultural product and the culturally situated reading the consumer gives to the text.

Hirschman and Thompson (1997: 57-58)

Figure 6.3 below summarise their findings.

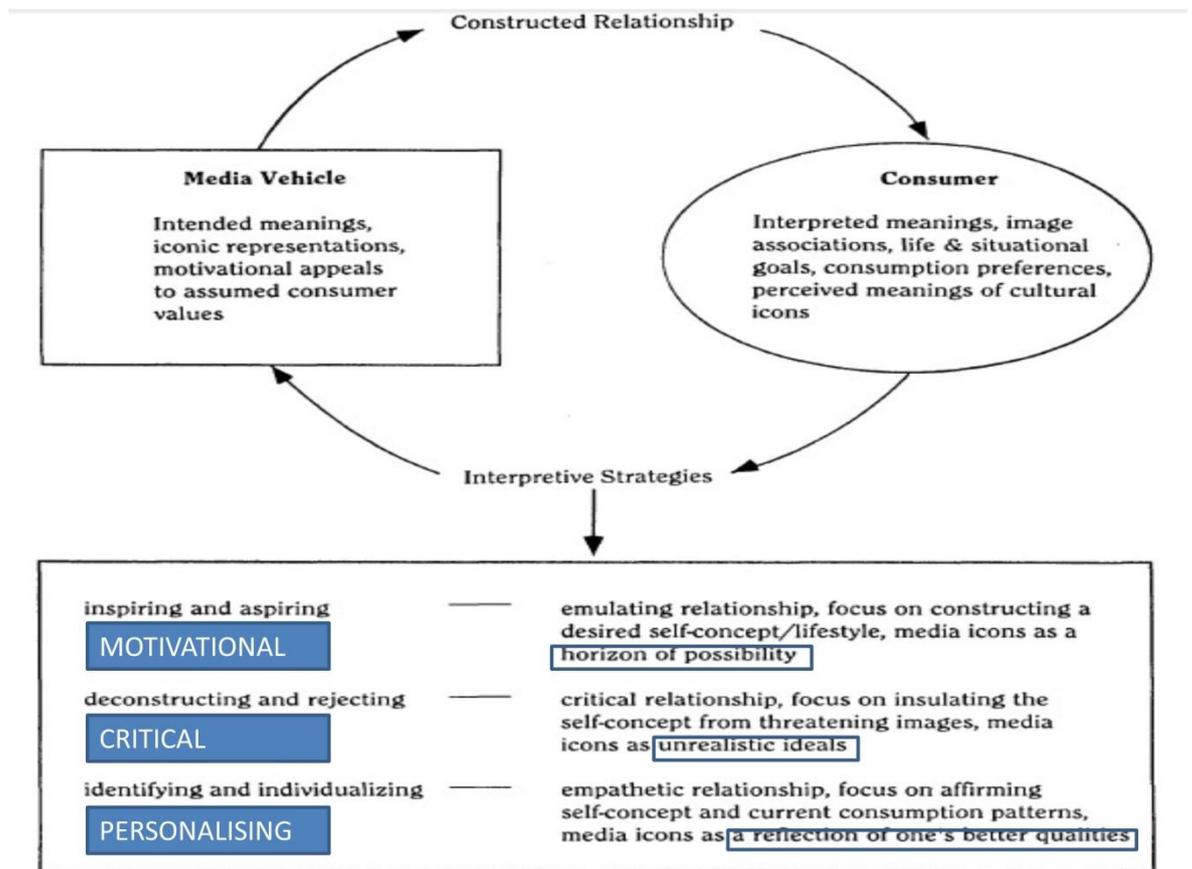


Figure 6.3- Interpretive Strategies Used to Create Consumer-Media Relationships
Adapted from Hirschman and Thompson (1997)

The three interpretative strategies in fig. 6.3 clearly correspond to the three *positions* or *readings* formulated by Hall (1980) and what follows is a confirmation of Hirschman and Thompson's conclusions in light of girls' responses in this study:

1) *MOTIVATIONAL* - In this first interpretative mode the girls believe in the images and messages portrayed by the media (suspension of disbelief) and these images are utilised in the construction of an ideal self toward which they direct their efforts. Striving toward this ideal becomes a striving to one's best, a goal which is usually seen as attainable (Hirschman and Thompson, 1997). Even when the images portrayed are seen as unattainable (the body of a top model for instance) this does not generate frustration, but rather become a source of attraction and fascination which helps to motivate the girl toward some sort of improvement of the self.

The aspirational stance was particularly evident in girls' relationship with celebrities. The celebrity works as an archetype representing cultural ideals (Fiske, 1992), as

these are people who have already successfully achieved and embodied meanings and traits deemed most desirable by society (Turner, 2004; Gamson, 1994).

Hall (1980) termed this “reading within the dominant code”, in the sense of an individual fully embracing the media images without invoking cynical or critical judgement which may undermine their authenticity.

2) *CRITICAL* - This second mode can be seen as opposed to the first, in that the girls were openly critical towards media content and tended to see the images and messages conveyed as unrealistic, artificial or even morally wrong. This is a much more sophisticated stance, where the girls shared some form of awareness of the economic or ideological interests behind advertising’s content and purpose, and were more able to deconstruct the images being presented. Hirschman and Thompson (1997) note that a *deconstructing* mode does not lead to full rejection, but it acts as a critical lens through which media images are seen. Conversely, the more extreme *rejecting* mode is characterised by total detachment: in this instance girls would attribute much more malicious motivations to the medium’s producers, entirely disavowing the image and its implicit meanings. This stance clearly corresponds to Hall’s (1980) *oppositional* reading.

3) *PERSONALISING* - In this third mode the girls tended to see media content as reflecting their own life experiences and qualities, in a sort of identification process. The idealised images portrayed by the media were seen as desirable and the girls were either able to share some of the meanings/qualities or willingly emulated them in order to positively affirm their self-identity, as a form of self-validation (Hirschman and Thompson, 1997). This personalising stance can be seen as Hall’s *negotiated* reading. Thus, it was evident in this form of girls’ responses that identification with images or icons seen in the media is often a process of personalising fantasies, picking and choosing certain aspects (i.e. way of talking, a particular fashion of clothing or a personality trait) and adopting them or recognising them as their own. It should be stressed that this process is not merely about copying, rather about identifying and incorporating certain characteristics and meanings into one’s own sense of individuality. At times, mild criticism was expressed if the girls did not agree with an aspect of the adverts and they would usually make suggestions to personalise or improve the advert.

6.2.1 Girls embodiment of femininity reflecting their positioning

Grouping the girls in low-medium-high SFI (according to their lower or higher embodiment of stereotyped femininity) allowed study of the relationships between their response to femininity's portrayals in adverts and their actual or aspirational embodiment of femininity, and also to assess whether there were similarities in the reception and negotiation of femininity portrayals in particular subgroups of girls.

The results suggest that girls' prevalent type of *positioning* or *reading* (Hall, 1980) towards femininity portrayals in adverts - or their prevalent interpretative strategy to refer to Hirschman and Thompson (1997)'s model - is highly reflective of their actual or aspirational embodiment of femininity. Figure 6.4 illustrates the observed relationship as a "Positioning-Embodiment Mirroring Model (P-EMM)" - or *Mirroring model* for short - which integrates both Hall's reception theory and Hirschmann and Thompson's interpretative strategies, relating the types of *positioning* /*reading* of adverts to girls' prevalent embodiment of femininity.

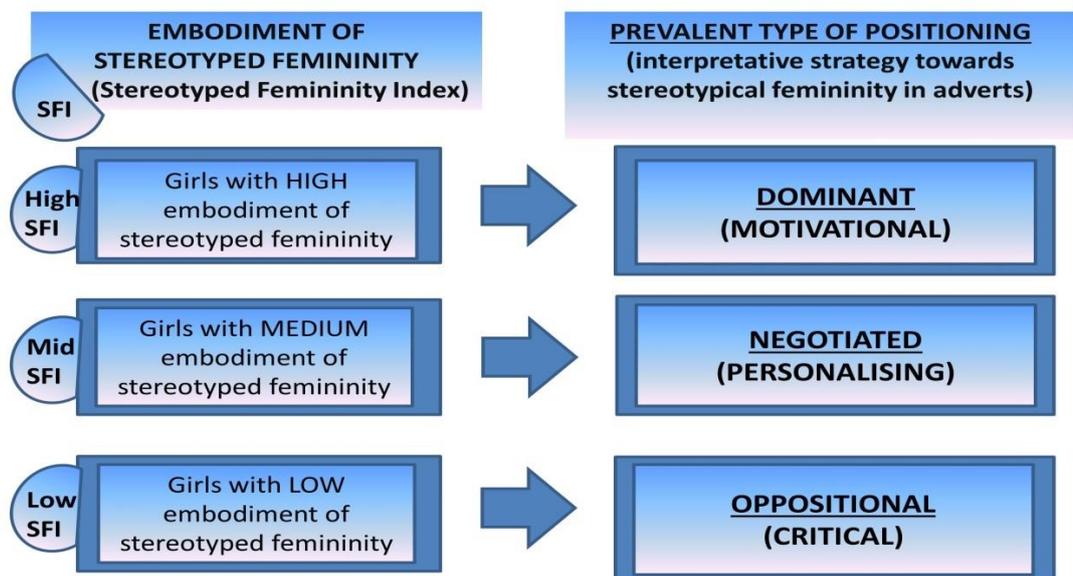


Figure 6.4 – Positioning-Embodiment Mirroring Model (P-EMM) - Source: Author

Correspondence between Embodiment of femininity and Positioning towards femininity in adverts

To express the findings in terms of girls' critical stance towards stereotypical or sexualised femininity portrayals in adverts, the P-EMM model suggests that:

- Girls with higher embodiment of stereotyped femininity typically displayed few or no critical skills in their response to stereotypical portrayals of femininity in adverts. Their prevalent type of reading or interpretative strategy is identified as *dominant* (Hall, 1980)/*motivational* (Hirschman and Thompson, 1997);
- Girls with lower embodiment of stereotyped femininity often expressed rejection or a firmly critical stance towards stereotypical femininity in adverts. Their prevalent type of reading is identified as *oppositional* (Hall, 1980)/*critical* (Hirschman and Thompson, 1997);
- Girls with a more fluid embodiment of femininity (constantly shifting between stereotypical and counter-stereotypical) often personalised or mildly criticised stereotypical portrayals in adverts. Their prevalent type of reading is identified as *negotiated* (Hall, 1980)/*personalising* (Hirschman and Thompson, 1997).

Thus, from this analysis there seems to be an overall correspondence between girls' embodiment of femininity and the way they perceive and construct meanings from femininity as represented in adverts, along with their capacity to critically interrogate/challenge stereotypical notions of femininity.

Similar findings were reported in a study by Currie et al. (2009), where girls who were more fluid in their embodiment of femininity - named by the authors "in-betweeners", due to their "being in the middle" attitude towards conventional and unconventional femininity - were much more likely to "critically interrogate the confines of girlhood":

Girls who push the boundaries of girlhood (...) are more likely than those benefiting from conventional girlhood to critically interrogate the confines of girlhood.

Currie et al. 2009:131

It is likely that girls' interpretative frame is formed through experience with their closest environment (e.g. family, peers, school) as the findings in section 6.4 suggest. The primary frame of reference (values, beliefs and meanings gathered through direct

experience within family, peers and school) form a prime set of lenses through which media messages are perceived and manipulated for the production of meanings (consumers as active meaning makers). These meanings in turn become part of the consumers' frame of reference: like in a perpetual cycle of updating process, the frame of reference constantly changes and evolves through both life experiences and media experiences.

6.2.2 Media and advert symbiotic relationship

Another important aspect emerging from the analysis is how the wider media consumption of participants constitutes a multiple frame of reference influencing their interpretation of the adverts.

This emerged often in the high consistency between participants' positioning towards certain adverts and their related media preferences (e.g. the *Monster High's* advert was often perceived favourably by fans of the *Twilight Saga*: both media products share similar themes) or in their ability to comprehend ideals and values conveyed in certain adverts on the basis of participants' previous "ideological socialisation" through other media products. As Hirschman and Thompson citing Fiske (1989) and Traube (1992) noted:

Cultural critics argue that the seeming plethora of media images, plot lines, and character portrayals is organized around a limited set of themes that continuously reproduce a particular cultural system of beliefs or ideology.

Hirschman and Thompson 1997:44

In fact, it was not unusual for girls to cite examples from TV programs, movies or celebrity culture regarding their familiarity with a particular value or theme conveyed by the adverts (e.g. the importance of losing weight/being fit for a woman while discussing the *Weight Watchers* advert). Similarly, most girls in the study appeared to have internalised the cultural belief that beauty and good looks are girls/women's primary social assets (see also Stephens, Hill and Hanson, 1994; Nichter and Nichter, 1991).

In the case of Meg, the only girl on a serious "media diet" (no TV, no Internet, no magazines, supplemented by regular boy-oriented videogames and DVDs) there was

an obvious uneasiness discussing topics related to the adverts, with a total rejection of the 'ideals' portrayed in the adverts and often a lack of understanding which made Meg seem a little bit like an 'alien' compared to her school mates. This was obvious also in her limited social interactions with her class mates, her overall lack of social skills and her difficulty to fit in with the rest.

In sum, the wider media consumption represents an essential element inextricably entwined with consumers' production of meanings from adverts.

6.3 NEGATIVE FEELINGS GENERATED BY ADVERTS

From the analysis of girls' contributions in the two rounds of adverts-elicited interviews there were only very sporadic expressions of negative feelings towards themselves generated from adverts. Apart from frustration due to an inability to buy a particular product (which could make some girls feel inadequate in terms of being financially disadvantaged) there were only a few other instances of negative feelings expressed towards oneself.

There are however two themes emerging from other methods (particularly from group discussion around "being a girl" and follow-up interviews around "beauty pressure") in relation to negative feelings towards oneself, which may be said to be generated by the aggregate effect of pervasive advertising on beauty/thinness and representations of femininity in media/adverts:

- 1) Pressure to conform to beauty ideals (grooming, make-up, attire)
- 2) Body dissatisfaction (desire to lose weight, girls overcritical over own flaws)

1) Pressure to conform to beauty ideals

As girls heed the messages that inform them that feeling good about oneself is dependent on physical appearance, that elusive quest for perfection begins. They are taught that there is something wrong with them if they are not constantly trying to improve their looks.

Friedman, 1997:159

During follow-up interviews, the vast majority of girls (n=12/16) admitted that they feel pressure to look beautiful, although most of the time they attribute the pressure to peers and “people at school” rather than the media (see section 4. 8).

Perhaps surprisingly, only a couple of girls cited the media explicitly as a source of pressure. This could be due to the way the questions were formulated (without suggesting the idea to them) or it could be a sign that girls at this age feel more pressured by their immediate environment rather than the images they see in the media (or that they do not see the media as something separate from the rest of their ‘natural’/normal environments). Another important point to consider is that the word ‘pressure’ has a negative connotation; some girls (particularly the ones in the higher SFI group) consider make-up and grooming as a way of having fun, so these girls would rather describe their experiences as “being inspired” by media images rather than “being pressured” to appear in a certain way.

For instance, in the results from projective slide 1 (see appendix 14) many girls in the higher SFI group expressed the desire to be like the beauty pageant girls portrayed in the picture: their desire to look like beauty contestants is indicative of their fascination with beauty ideals in the media and it is very likely that this fascination make this group of girls more receptive to advertising and media suggestions about beauty. However, stating that they feel “pressured” by the images of beauty in media and adverts would be inaccurate as many of these girls would define their feelings as aspiration /captivation /envy rather than pressure (at least at this earlier stage of their life; this could of course change entirely during adolescence). On the other hand, the girls who actively rejected the beauty ideal in the projective slide could be in a position of actually resenting the constant pressure about beauty coming from media and adverts (or not yet sensing the pressures of adolescence).

Thus, the meaning assigned to the word ‘pressure’ in this paragraph should be clarified as not necessarily involving conscious negative feelings about oneself on the part of the girls. It could be rather intended in the sense of a recognised influence, pushing girls towards investing more time and energy on their appearance.

In this sense, despite almost all girls mentioning their friends or “people at school” as a source of pressure, it should be considered that the beauty standards found in adverts and other media represent in the whole a pervasive culture which is hardly

discernible from the social expectations of friends or the discourses and practices within the family. Indeed advertising and media contribute to the culture through a process of circulation of meanings (McCracken, 1987): the meanings conveyed through adverts and media circulate and become part of the general culture, so it could be said that the pressure felt by the girls is directly perceived by them from their immediate environment, but the people in their close environment are in turn expressing the values and desires linked to the images, values and beauty standards portrayed in the media, so that virtually all girls by the age of 9 (and a few years earlier for many of them) have absorbed the message. Thus, even the girls who actively rejected the mainstream beauty ideal become nonetheless conscious of the importance of being fit and “looking nice” for a girl/woman, as an indisputable reality of the world they live in.

Moore (1999) expressed this concept eminently well:

How does the fact that I have dimples on my thighs effect who I am as a woman, a partner, a friend, an educator? Why has this become so inordinately important in the lives of females? If everyone who has experienced feelings of inferiority through media messages stands together, voices strong and in unison, we can offer young girls alternative interpretations. Unfortunately, girls interpret the messages they receive in the media based not only on the messages themselves, but also on their observations that most females in their world respond to the media in the same way. Girls watch their mothers stand in front of the mirror, obsessed with a round tummy or flabby thighs. They observe their female teachers standing all day in uncomfortable but fancy shoes. They see women in their neighbourhood stand at the cash register, some purchasing the latest issue of Vogue or Glamour, others looking at People magazine's best and worst dressed celebrities.

Moore, 1999:116

Thus, it is often possible to look at how girls internalise social and media messages about femininity, without being able to discern what is socially and what is media-generated. It is as if the countless messages and values about femininity and expected gender roles promoted in both media and society become interwoven in a complex, unified cultural and ideological system, making increasingly elusive the task of understanding and separating media influences. As Thompson et al. (2004) noted regarding internalisation of beauty standards:

It might also be useful to conceptualize media as a type of overarching influence, perhaps playing a formative role in the adoption of idealized standards of appearance by parents, peers, and other influential social agents (teachers, coaches).

Thompson et al. 2004:303

What emerges unmistakably from the findings is how the vast majority of participants are aware of the double standards affecting gendered practices on appearance and behaviour in general. Most girls expressed frustration with the higher looks-maintenance activities required from girls (for instance, having to wash more often than the boys or having long hair to care for; see more insights from “E.T. comes to earth” activity in section 4.4), yet all of them would still be ‘complying’ (by having long hair instead of cutting theirs short for example).

Girls’ frustration was often not limited to the higher expectations regarding their appearance, with girls often complaining about restrictive /unfair gendered practices and the double standards existing between boys and girl in terms of expected behaviour at home and at school (see details in section 4.4).

In her recent participatory research on primary school children’s sexuality, Renold (2013) reports similar findings:

Many girls were aware and highly critical of heterosexual double standards and girls of all ages talked about their bodies as being constantly judged and valued. (...) The pressure to conform to gender norms is pervasive in children’s lives. Girls in particular talked about the difficulty of “being yourself” and “fitting in”. Indeed many older girls had given up on the active pursuits they enjoyed when they were younger because sporty bodies clashed with their ‘femininity’. (...)

Girls of all ages talked about their bodies almost wholly in relation to their appearance and the considerable effort that went into producing a recognizable and socially acceptable girl’s body (...) Girls also talked about struggling with media messages to ‘be yourself’ and social pressures to ‘be like everyone else’ and conform to narrow notions of heterosexual attractiveness.

Renold, 2013:11/39

Similarly, the findings from the most recent Girls Guiding survey (1,288 girls and young women aged between 7 and 21 took part in the 2013 *Girls’ Attitudes Online Survey*) indicate that young girls are conscious of being valued for their looks over ability:

87% of girls aged 7-11 think women are judged more for looks than ability.

Girls Guiding Attitude Survey 2013:14

However, it remains uncertain to what extent these ideas and expectations regarding beauty will be bearing on girls as a ‘pressure’ or simply as enjoyable experience (i.e. having fun with beauty and fashion) in their present and later life. This will probably

depend on how balanced their identity /life will be and on how successfully they meet their self-set expectations, as much of the relevant literature on eating disturbance and low self-esteem seems to suggest.

2) Body dissatisfaction

Pressure to conform to an idealised body (i.e. the thin ideal, expressed by shapes A-B-C in the body image scale) was evident in the vast majority of the sample, where only 9 girls out of 37 expressed preference for mid-range shapes such as D or E.

As discussed at length in the literature chapter, body image is considered by researchers a crucial aspect in self-esteem and it plays an important role in individual identity construction.

The findings from this study confirm the results from a growing number of studies (see literature section 2.6) indicating that body dissatisfaction is set from early years - as early as 5 years old according to some scholars (Abramovitz and Birch, 2000; Davison et al. 2002) - to then become normative in girls by the age of 9-10.

In the present study, only 9 girls out of 37 (4 of them in the younger age group, 8-9 years old) were satisfied with their body. Age emerged as a crucial factor, with older girls showing more dissatisfaction than the younger group regardless of their actual body shape or size.

Today, 6- and 7-year-old girls are concerned about their weight. Standing at the cusp of puberty, 9-year-old girls talk about feeling fat before their bodies have even begun to change. At 10 and 11, feeling fat has been incorporated into their everyday language. It influences how they see themselves and the way they interact with the world.

Friedman 1997:41

With reference to young girls in the UK, these findings mirror the recent *Girls Guiding Attitude Survey* (2013), where 20% of 7-11 year-olds said they have been on a diet.

Body image and its relationship with girls' own embodiment of femininity (SFI) was another aspect investigated by this study, revealing that girls more stereotypical in their enactment of femininity are much more likely to be dissatisfied with their body.

Interestingly, none of the girls declared they felt pressured by the narrow beauty standards promoted by the media: at this younger age what appears to have taken place is a process of *internalisation* of the thin ideal (Thompson et al., 2001, 2004) which works at a subconscious level, without the girls consciously realising where the pressure comes from.

When girls begin to view fashion models and celebrities as icons, it is called media internalization. This internalization refers to the extent to which an individual invests in societal ideals of size and appearance (thin ideal for girls and muscular for boys) to the point that they become rigid guiding principles.

About-face.org 2013 quoting Thompson et al. 2004

In other words, most girls talk about the importance of “being fit” and many of them show they have internalised the thin body ideal, but their line of thinking seems to be an essentialist “this is just the way it is”: at least at this age, they clearly do not see media messages as responsible. They tend to see media images as a reflection of what is valued in society (similar to advertisers’ contentions and confirmed by many other media messages than advertising). As seen in the literature review, studies on adolescents paint a different picture, having found that girls reaching adolescence do indeed feel directly pressured by images in the media, so the hypothesis advanced here is that girls at this earlier stage of their development do not tend to directly compare themselves to images in adverts or feel negative about themselves as a result of this comparison (although many do aspire to be slimmer). This evidence was observed in this study across the board with most girls interviewed through advert-elicitation and in the group discussions.

Hogg and Fragou (2003) argued that young women’s responses to beauty ideals presented in advertising are influenced by their specific social comparison goals, with the goal of self-improvement usually associated with negative feelings about their own bodies, while other goals such as self-enhancement, are usually linked with a rise in self-esteem. Thus, it could well be that girls at this age tend to use advertising with a *self-enhancement* or *self-evaluative* goal in mind, as this was particularly evident in some of the adverts-elicited responses.

Alternatively, it could be that girls at this age tend to see models as a completely separate category from themselves, so that self-evaluative comparison is bypassed altogether (Hogg and Fragou, 2003) or that the images are seen as unrealistic, “too

ideal” or - to use the girls’ words - “fake” and therefore discounted on the grounds of being “too ideal” (Hogg, Bruce and Hough, 1999; Wood 1989).

In the instances where the girls felt pressured to lose weight (like in the clear case expressed by Amber, age 10) they talked about pressure from their immediate environment, such as family, friends and school, rather than mentioning the media (only when specifically asked, after watching the *Weight Watchers*’ advert, did many girls admit that they find the ubiquitous presence of weight-loss advertising “over the top” and “annoying”, although other girls thought that these types of adverts were promoting good health).

The extensive research of Thompson and Stice (2001) identified internalisation of the thin ideal as a causal risk factor for body image and eating disturbances.

Work conducted independently in our labs over the past decade has included scale development, correlational studies, prospective risk-factor studies, randomized experiments, and randomized prevention trials. Findings collectively suggest that internalization is a causal risk factor for body-image and eating disturbances, and that it appears to operate in conjunction with other established risk factors for these outcomes, including dieting and negative affect. Future research is needed to examine the specific familial, peer, and media influences that promote internalization.

Thompson and Stice 2001: 181

After all, the thin ideal permeates the culture of our society and it is plausible that girls at this young age are not yet aware of where the ideal comes from: during group or individual conversation about weight /beauty, the girls seemed to refer more to their direct experiences with family and peers, more than comparing themselves with images in the media or celebrities. It should also be added that in the wording of questions, the researcher was very careful not to suggest that media (adverts, movies, magazines, videogames, TV programs and so on) could be held accountable. The question was phrased in a very neutral way:

“Do you ever feel pressure to lose weight and where does this pressure come from?”

Perhaps a different result would have been obtained if the question was phrased in a ‘leading’ way, such as

“Do you ever feel pressured to appear in a certain way by the images you see in advertising?”

However, this would have most likely raised issues of social desirability bias. Still, the findings are informative in the sense of capturing young girls’ feelings about pressure

over appearance (regardless of where the pressure is attributed to come from), a feeling which appears to be already – and worryingly so - widespread at a rather young age. In this regard, the recurring thinness of models/actresses in adverts and media content is definitely seen as an unhealthy trend (as something which undoubtedly contributes to the narrowing of beauty standards in our society) and as such should be re-considered by advertisers/ media producers and urgently acted upon.

6.4 MAIN MEDIATING FACTORS

The third research question aimed at locating specific “protective” or “resiliency” factors linked to girls’ enhanced critical abilities towards stereotypical representations of femininity in adverts. To answer the question the analysis looked at two extreme groups of participants (EGA- extreme groups approach) according to their lower or higher critical stance towards stereotypical or sexualised femininity portrayed in adverts.

A word of caution should be made here regarding the significance and generalizability of the findings:

In multiple participant research, the strength of inference which can be made increases rapidly once factors start to recur with more than one participant. In this respect it is important to distinguish between statistical and qualitative validity: phenomenological research can be robust in indicating the presence of factors and their effects in individual cases, but must be tentative in suggesting their extent in relation to the population from which the participants or cases were drawn.

Lester 1999:1

One of the main results emerging from the analysis is that the influence of media on young girls is greatly mediated by the level at which girls are able to access alternative and diverse discourses about femininity in their immediate environment (for similar findings, see Currie et al. 2009).

This means that the same amount of stereotypical images about femininity resonate and influence each girl differently, depending on mediating factors in her life context, particularly discourses and practices about gender roles in the family, peer groups and school.

Lessa (2006) summarizes Foucault's (1972) definition of "discourse" as

systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak.

Lessa 2006:285

While there appears to be at play an innate temperamental/ personality component which makes some girl more *receptive* (in the sense of being more enthused by) to stereotypical or sexualised portrayals of femininity, certain "protective or buffering" factors emerged from the context of a group of girls displaying higher critical skills and a more fluid /diverse embodiment of femininity, often combined with a more positive body image. These factors are:

- 1) Living with both parents;
- 2) Strong bond with a close older brother (with history of shared playing practices);
- 3) A satisfying and open relationship with the father (particularly if combined with non-stereotypic gender role on his part and towards the daughter);
- 4) Flexible, non-stereotypic gender role enactment within the family;
- 5) Consistent and regular parental mediation in the consumption of media.

Each factor will be reviewed in the light of peer-reviewed literature, in order to assess to what extent the findings from this study are supported by previous research. Due to the lack of literature specifically linking girls' media reception with their embodiment of femininity, most of the supporting studies will be centred on the supporting evidence of positive /healthy effects of the located factors over various aspects of girls' life, such as stereotypical vs. counter-stereotypical gender roles, self-esteem, body image or overall wellbeing.

6.4.1 Living with both parents

In this study, girls who live with both parents were found more likely to have a less stereotypical/rigid gender role, be more critical towards stereotypical representations of femininity and be satisfied with their body.

The findings seem to be supported by Slavkin and Stright (2000) who studied the gender roles of college students (n=90) raised in one- versus two-parent families to see if any significant difference could be detected in their gender role orientation. Their evidence indicated that females in intact two-parent families were more likely than females in mother-headed one-parent families to view themselves as androgynous (that is, gender-neutral).

In terms of general positive effects on children's wellbeing, the recent "Understanding Society" project commissioned by the ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council, 2011) found that not living with both natural parents adversely affected a child's 'life satisfaction' more than the household's material situation.

6.4.2 Strong bonds with a close older brother

From the time we're born, our brothers and sisters are our collaborators and co-conspirators, our role models and our cautionary tales. They are our scolds, protectors, goads, tormentors, playmates, counselors, sources of envy, objects of pride. They help us learn how to resolve conflicts and how not to; how to conduct friendships and when to walk away from them. Sisters teach brothers about the mysteries of girls; brothers teach sisters about the puzzle of boys.

Kugler (The Sibling Effect) 2011:7

growing up with siblings affects children's personalities, their intelligence, their ways of thinking and talking, and their perceptions of themselves, their families, and their friends.

Dunn, 1985:154

The analysis of findings from this study suggests that girls with a close older brother are in general less stereotypical in their femininity and more likely to express negotiated or oppositional (critical) reading towards stereotypical portrayals of femininity in adverts. A close relationship with an older brother means that often the girl has shared playing time and media programs with her brother during earlier years: it is very likely that these shared practices with brothers provide girls with a wider range of opportunities to experience boy-oriented activities/media programs and play. This wider range of experiences may translate into a more fluid gender expression and thus a more critical stance towards stereotypical or sexualised femininity portrayals in media/adverts.

A brief review of the academic and medical research on the brother-sister dynamic (McHale, Updegraff, Helms-Erikson, 2001; Kornreich, Hearn, Rodrigues and O'Sullivan, 2003; Dunn, 1985; Sutton-Smith, Roberts and Rosenberg, 1964) seems to confirm the importance of this relationship in terms of facilitating a wider social orientation and as significantly affecting various aspects of personality and behaviour.

Psychoanalysts Bank and Kahn (2003) distinguish the processes of either *close identification*, *partial identification*, or *distant identification* occurring between siblings, as greatly mediating the influence between younger and older siblings, concluding that partial identification is the healthiest.

The most important research in support of the findings here is a large scale (n=5542) correlational study performed by Rust et al. (2000) to assess the influence of siblings on gender role behaviour (that is, gender expression or expressing feminine vs masculine gender roles characteristics). Their study provides clear evidence of the importance of older brothers in facilitating a more balanced (less stereotypical) gender expression in their younger sisters.

The study examined whether the sex of older siblings influences the gender role development of younger brothers and sisters of age 3 years. Data on the Pre-School Activities Inventory, a measure of gender role behavior that discriminates within as well as between the sexes, were obtained (...)

It was found that boys with older brothers and girls with older sisters were more sex-typed than same-sex singletons who, in turn, were more sex-typed than children with other-sex siblings. Having an older brother was associated with more masculine and less feminine behavior in both boys and girls, whereas boys with older sisters were more feminine but not less masculine and girls with older sisters were less masculine but not more feminine.

Rust et al. 2000:292

Note that the authors use the term *sex-typed*, to mean whether a child is expressing feminine/masculine behaviours in accordance with his/her sex (e.g. a girl is said to be less sex-typed if she expresses less feminine or more masculine behaviours).

Just like the pattern emerging from this study, girls with older brothers emerged less sex-typed (what in this research was termed "less stereotypically feminine"), while sisters with older sisters were more sex-typed (or more stereotypically feminine).

6.4.3 Father relationship

In this study, girls reporting a satisfying and more open relationship with their father, particularly when combined by a flexible gender role orientation on his part (e.g. engaging with daughter in boys- oriented activities, such as football, rugby, boxing, DIY; avoiding calling daughter with nicknames such as “my little princess”) were in general more fluid in their embodiment of femininity (that is, investing in both stereotypical/counter-stereotypical and gender-neutral activities and behaviour) and more likely to express a negotiated or oppositional positioning towards stereotypical portrayals of femininity in adverts.

Harvard psychologist Kindlon (2006) in his study on *Alpha girls* (a group of ‘winning’, self-assured girls) emphasises how its findings indicate that for girls an open and close relationship with their father is a huge advantage, particularly when fathers encourage masculine or androgynous roles/play on the part of their daughters. This interesting study suggests:

One of the most striking differences between our sample of alpha girls and their non-alpha peers was how much more involved their dads were in their lives (...) the alphas felt accepted by their father and trusted by them (p.32)

Father play can help daughters learn how to relate to men, especially in competitive situations. (p.50)

Many alpha girls gravitate toward their fathers because they identify with them. They feel they are like their fathers in fundamental ways. (p.54)

Kindlon 2006

Ellis et al. (1999) in their longitudinal study with 173 girls and their families found that a closer relationship with father has positive implications that go beyond the psychological, as its finding strongly indicated that girls who were closer to their fathers started menstruating later in life. Bulanda (2004) found that low levels of father involvement in parenting were consistent with a more traditional gender ideology, which in turn influenced how adolescent children constructed their gender ideologies.

Interestingly, Crespi (2004) in her quantitative study on British families (n=717) found that cross-gendered relationships between parents and their children (that is, father with daughter and mother with son) have significant impact in determining non-traditional gender attitudes. In particular, she noted that

the relation with the parent of opposite sex could be a strong factor in reducing stereotyped attitudes.

Crespi 2004:6

Overall then, past research seems to strongly support the notion that an open and close relationship with a father can foster a more balanced (that is, less stereotypical) gender expression in daughters. Additionally, in this study the findings suggest that girls with less stereotypical gender expression often express a negotiated or oppositional (that is, critical) stance towards stereotypical femininity in adverts/media.

6.4.4 Gender roles within the family

Cultural definitions combined with microcultural parental influences are superimposed on a child's unique temperament to create the way in which she eventually comes to define her gender identity, including how closely she will conform to gender stereotypes (p.71)

Girls who can play masculine or androgynous roles are at distinct psychological advantage (p.100)

Kindlon 2006

The findings of this study indicate that girls who live directly or indirectly (for example through seeing the experience of an older sister in the Army, like in the case of Emma), the diversity of perspectives that a more fluid enactment of gender roles can bring, will be much less influenced in their behaviour by stereotypical or sexualised representations of femininity in the media.

How parents enact gender roles within everyday family life (e.g. traditional versus counter-stereotypical) emerges as a primary influence in the way girls enact femininity and position themselves towards femininity in media/adverts.

Several decades of sociological research support the notion of the inter-generational (that is, from parents to their children) transmission of attitudes regarding gender (Moen et al. 1997; Thornton et al. 1983). Parents influence their children's gender role by transmitting their beliefs on gender through guidance and instructions (Eccles, 1994), reinforcing sex-typed behaviours by favouring certain gender-stereotypical activities (Lytton and Romney, 1991) and by being the main role

models, as their children will constantly replicate their parents' sex-types behaviour from the day they are born (Collins and Russell, 1991).

Specific research on the influence of parents' gender role orientation over children's gender role development (Eccles, Jacobs and Harold, 2010; Crespi, 2004; Witt, 1997) seems also to substantiate the findings.

Parents play a vital part in a child's early life, for they are the first group of people that a child meets and learns from. The information that surrounds a child at home becomes reinforcements for desired behaviors of a male or female. Studies have shown that as immediate as 24 hours after a child is born most parents have already engaged in gender stereotypic expectations of sons or daughters. Through examples such as painting a room pink or blue, encouragement to participate in shared sex-typed activities, offering gender differentiated toys, or treating the opposite sex child differently, these parent-child interactions have long lasting influence on how a child connects to certain gender-specific behaviors.

Witt, 1997:255

In a quantitative analysis of British families (n=717), Crespi (2004) studied how family and parents' attitudes mediate traditional gender roles and the effect of parental attitudes towards gender roles on their adolescent children. Her findings indicate that the way parents enact gender role is significantly reflected in their children's gender roles and that the relational aspect of gender role is the more influential aspect.

Thus, literature on the topic seems to support the notion that a flexible, non-stereotypical gender role within the family encourages a more flexible and non-traditional gender role on the part of children, as in the case of the vast majority of the girls in this study.

6.4.5 Parental mediation

The findings suggest that active parental mediation is an important factor enhancing girls' critical abilities towards media content, particularly with reference to stereotypical and sexualised representations of femininity in adverts.

A growing number of studies (Reid, 1979; Donohue and Meyer, 1984; Austin, 1993; Nathanson and Yang, 2003; Buijzen and Valkenburg, 2005) have confirmed a positive correlation between parental mediation (meant as parent's critical discussion of

media content with their children) and children scepticism /critical abilities towards adverts/media content.

It should be clarified that the literature (Austin, Pinkleton and Fujioka, 2000) distinguishes between *negative* parental mediation - directed to enhance critical abilities and scepticism towards media content - and *positive* mediation - when parents actually reinforce media messages. In this study in general “parental mediation” is used to connote *negative* parental mediation (critical discussion of media content).

Austin (1993) analysed parental mediation by creating an index as indicator of the frequency with which parents actively mediated children's interpretations of TV messages from a survey of 346 adolescents. In her study, she concluded that parental mediation was the only significant predictor of scepticism in the children.

When tested along with family communication norms including concept orientation, socio orientation, and communication warmth, mediation remains a significant predictor. It is the only significant predictor among the variables tested for skepticism, in which the variance explained remains small.

Austin 1993:147

Buijzen and Valkenburg (2005) investigated the effects of different styles of parental mediation through a survey of parent-child dyads (n=350) with children aged 8-12. Their findings led them to conclude that active advertising mediation by parents was most effective in reducing the negative impact of adverts:

we investigated how different styles of advertising mediation (active vs. restrictive) and family consumer communication (concept-oriented vs. socio-oriented) moderated the relations between the children's advertising exposure and their materialism, purchase requests, and conflicts with their parents. Our results showed that active advertising mediation and concept-oriented consumer communication were most effective in reducing the effects of advertising.

Buijzen and Valkenburg 2005:242

In most cases in this study, parental mediation was represented by proactive mothers who critically discussed media content with their daughters. The girls would mention that their mothers would make regular comments about sexualised adverts, for example, by reminding their daughter that “real beauty is inside” or warning about

the danger of obsessing over one's appearance (girls were specifically asked whether their parents discuss media/adverts content with them in a critical way).

It must be added though that there were cases of high parental control in the consumption of media (i.e. emblematic cases are Olga and Lulu) which did not lead to girls' higher critical stance towards stereotypical or sexualised femininity in adverts. Thus it appears that *parental control* (or *rule making*, that is, limiting the amount and type of media consumption) does not have the same benefits as *mediation*.

Fujioka and Austin (2002) seems to come to the same conclusion: in their study of parental mediation styles they distinguished between control-oriented and discussion-based strategies on the part of parents (telephone survey of 216 parents of third-, sixth-, and ninth-grade children). The findings suggested that parental control without an open style, discussion-based mediation seems to actually reinforce media messages:

The results suggest that parents with an open communication style are more likely to make use of discussion-based intervention strategies applied to television. A parent's more control-oriented style translates into reinforcement of TV messages.

Fujioka and Austin 2002: 642

In particular cases in this study, parental mediation appeared to be present at least in an occasional way (i.e. girls reporting parents criticising media content or discussing adverts deceptive intent), but the girls seemed to be greatly influenced by the actual behaviour and life style of their mother or other female role models in their family (i.e. an older sister devoting lot of attention to make-up or a mother/older sister very immersed in celebrity culture, with frequent reading of celeb magazines).

This seems to indicate the importance of parents' consistency between the verbal messages they give to their children (e.g. a mother telling her daughter that "beauty is within") and their actual lifestyle or behaviour (e.g. the same mother actually spending hours in front of the mirror or obsessing about dieting /losing weight).

6.5 UNDERSTANDING MEDIA INFLUENCE: KLAPPER'S PHENOMENISTIC THEORY

One of the main underlying curiosities behind the study was to see the overall influence of media on girls' behaviour; in other words, whether girls consuming more stereotypical and sexualised representations of femininity through media were, on the whole, more susceptible to behave in a stereotypical fashion (acting "girly") and to see themselves in a sexualised/objectified way (i.e. paying greater attention to their own appearance, feeling the urge of using make-up every day, behaviours such as posing in front of the mirror or trying on many different clothes, abstaining from sport activities and strictly avoiding boyish games or activities).

The results from this analysis seem to indicate that there is a link between the amount of stereotypical and sexualised content accessed by girls and the way they embody and conceive femininity; however, this link is influenced by other mediating factors in their life and personality so that not all girls watching/accessing a greater amount of sexualised content will be affected in the same way. The fact that most girls self-select or actively look for their own favourite media content (TV programs, videogames and so on) makes it difficult to establish the direction of causality: for example, are some girls more stereotypical or sexualised in their behaviours and preferences because they watch more stereotypical/sexualised content or is it their attitude (either natural or coming from family/peer socialisation) that make them select and look for more of this type of material?

Calculating indicators such as the SFI (Stereotyped Femininity Index) and SMUG (Stereotyped Media Content Group) for each girl in the study was helpful in order to gather an idea of the relationship between the two. Showing the two indicators through a bar chart helps visualise the relationship between media habits and overall embodiment of stereotyped femininity (fig. 6.5):

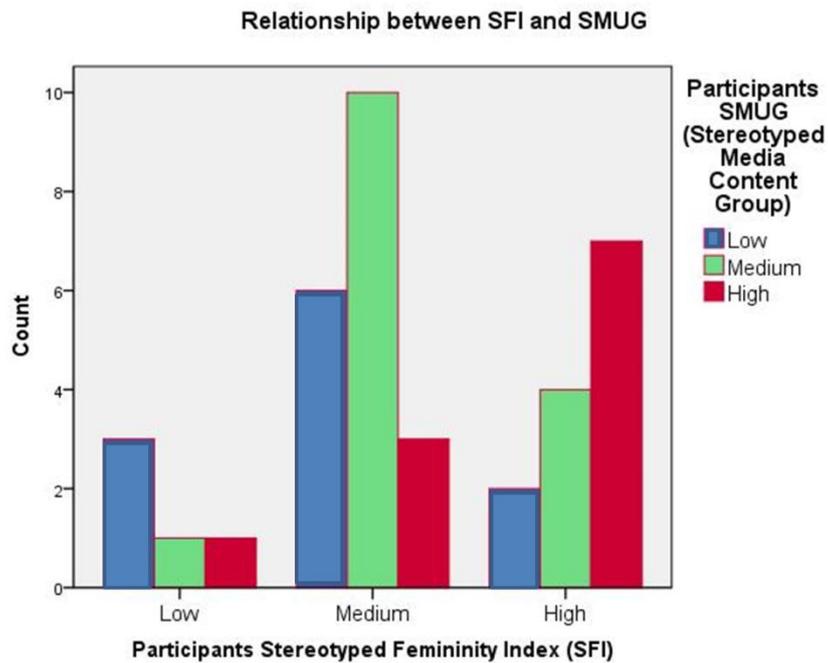


Figure 6.5 – Relationship between SFI and SMUG

Looking at the bar chart, there is visibly a trend where higher SMUG is linked to higher SFI, but there are exceptions. The negative case analysis (analysis of cases which behave against the more usual trend) shows that there are factors which influence how girls perceive, respond and interact with stereotypical or sexualised representations of femininity in media content. This means that, while the vast majority of girls accessing a greater amount of stereotypical/ sexualised content appeared to be more stereotypical in their embodiment of femininity (higher SFI), there can still be exceptional cases of girls with high SMUG who have a lower level of SFI, due to some contextual factor in their life mediating the effect of their media habits.

Actually only one girl in the total sample (Amber, age 10) showed a high SMUG paired with a low SFI so this could suggest a link between high SMUG and high SFI (although the number of girls with low SFI in this study was too low to advance any hypothesis in this respect). There is also the emblematic case of Meg - a girl expressing behaviour and demeanour distinctively counter-stereotypical, being also the only girl in the sample who never watches TV or surfs the Internet, except from rare occasions in school - which seems to confirm the influence of media. However, the results

cannot be definitive in establishing that watching/accessing more stereotypical and sexualised content cause girls to have an higher SFI, as one should consider the highly self-selective nature of modern media consumption: it is only normal to assume that girls with an higher SFI would look for more stereotypical content as this content best suits their tastes and fantasies.

In the literature, these findings seem supported by two correlation studies on college students (Ward and Rivadeneyra, 1999; Zurbriggen and Morgan, 2006) concluding that girls and young women consuming and engaging more frequently with mainstream media content - where stereotyped and sexualised portrayals of femininity usually abound - appear to strongly endorse the sexual stereotypes that portray women as sexual objects. Interestingly, both studies underscore the involvement of the viewer as a significant mediating factor affecting the correlation. In the present study the *involvement factor* (that is, girls actually *choosing* to watch a particular program and being actually *engaged* by its content) emerges also as crucial factor.

The link between media preferences and more gender-stereotypical attitudes and views was confirmed recently in an interesting Dutch study (Bogt, Engels, Bogers and Kloosterman, 2010) where exposure to and preferences for three important youth media (TV, music TV, internet) were examined in relation to adolescents' sexual attitudes and gender stereotyping (i.e., seeing men as sex-driven /tough and women as sex objects).

Multivariate structural analysis of data from a school-based sample of 480 13 to 16-year-old Dutch students revealed that preferences, rather than exposure were associated with attitudes and stereotypes. For both girls and boys, preferences for hip-hop and hard-house music were associated positively with gender stereotypes and preference for classical music was negatively associated with gender stereotypes.

Bogt et al. 2010:844

In this study, there was the exception of 2 girls with very low SMUG (little access to sexualised/stereotypical content) still behaving in a markedly stereotypical way and expressing fascination with sexualised representations of femininity coming from adverts, toys and playing practice. When one looks at the factors in these two exceptional cases (negative case analysis), it is clear that the low media consumption is compensated by other salient aspects in their life, such as family gender role

orientations and habitual playing practices (e.g. quoting Olga, one of the girls: "No, my dad never plays with me; if I was a boy he would play more as with my brother he's different. But I play a lot with my mum: make-up and dolls") which seem to encourage or push the girls towards a stereotypically-oriented embodiment of femininity. Furthermore, of course, the natural/innate attitude of the girls needs to be recognised.

More importantly, the findings of this study indicate that girls who have access to more diverse practices and perspectives regarding gender roles, mainly through their family and immediate environment, tend to be much less influenced in their behaviour by stereotypical or sexualised representations of femininity.

A girl who, for example, lives in a house where there is little or no emphasis on beauty and where gender roles are enacted in a less rigid manner, so that she has the chance to experience a variety of activities, playing and fantasising without being restricted to a more limited and stereotypically-defined gender role, will have a different perception and understanding of the stereotypical /sexualised representations of femininity in the media, and her life and behaviour will be influenced accordingly: in other words her pre-assumptions and interpretations shape the construction of meanings from media content.

In sum, the influence of media appears to operate through a nexus of mediating factors, just as Klapper (1960) postulated in his *phenomenistic* theory. This theory is often referred to as *reinforcement theory* because a key assertion is that the primary influence of media is to reinforce - not to change- existing attitudes and behaviours. The findings of this study seem to strongly substantiate Klapper's claims.

In this research, media content portraying stereotyped/sexualised femininity appears to be perceived by and influence girls very differently depending on their actual *positioning* (Hall, 1980) towards the content. This positioning is created in turn by the interplay of other (personality/identity and contextual) variables in their lives.

The findings also confirm the highly self-selective nature of modern media consumption, with girls starting to shape their media environment from an earlier age than ever before, due to the changes in the media landscape and the rapid proliferation of media formats and devices. In this regard, the *Media Practice Model* formulated by Steele and Brown (1995), after their extensive study of adolescents'

“room culture”, is another model which fits the research findings well. Just like in this study, the Media Practice Model emphasises media habits and preferences (selection of preferred media products) over mere ‘exposure’ and recognises the importance of personality/identity, environmental factors and media practices/habits in the strengthening or weakening of media effects (see Chapter 2, Part III).

Ultimately, both theories discussed above reinforce the notion that any simplistic explanation of media influence, without a close attention to the *context* in which individuals are situated or not, can never be adequate.

6.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERVENTIONS

The findings of this study emphasise the active role of consumers in constructing and manipulating meanings from adverts and media content. The centrality of girls’ own *positioning* towards portrayals of femininity in the media as a defining factor strengthening or weakening media effects has emerged in a clear, almost undisputable manner, from the conjoined analysis of their responses, personalities and context.

In the presence of an incessant and ubiquitous media-saturated environment constantly reinforcing a restricted and stereotypical view of femininity (“be sexy, be beautiful”) serving the interest of corporate economies, the importance of teaching a critical appraisal of media and marketing messages could not be too strongly emphasised. This teaching would offer a safe and supportive environment for young girls to engage in a critical discourse with the images of femininity presented in marketing and the media. Allowing girls to deconstruct media and marketing messages and reflect upon their influence and real motives, would leave them free to take up different ‘identity performances’ (which they would ordinarily reject otherwise as not being gender-appropriate) and to understand femininity as a much broader concept, outside the pre-fabricated box of commercial suggestions, finally disengaged from the ‘cult of appearance’ and unrealistic beauty standards so heavily pushed on them by the media.

One of the main implications from this study is then to underscore the urgency of appropriate interventions to ensure the provision of marketing and media literacy to all children, starting from primary schools. At present the teaching of this type of literacy to young children is effectively left to parents, who are often too busy or not educated enough themselves about the subject; but just like other literacies or maths this teaching require a thorough and specialist understanding of the subject (e.g. knowledge of how marketing and media messages are constructed).

The findings in this study suggest also that media messages do not seem to have the power to change individuals' attitudes and beliefs, but many girls are evidently less "buffered" than others against the relentless beauty pressure and potentially damaging values transmitted by media content. In the absence of a healthy critical stance and balanced guidance regarding the values they see represented in the media, many girls will absorb these limiting messages and apply them to their life and identity, with damaging consequences for their development and well-being.

6.7 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MARKETERS

This project entered the world of young girls to provide insight into the way they interact with media and marketing messages around them, with particular attention on their life context and how femininity is perceived, constructed and enacted by the participants. From a marketing perspective, one of the main intended outcomes of the project was to detect current gaps in the existing offer of products and services to pre-adolescent girls and – advocating the "biologist" perspective suggested in section 1.2 (Tucker, 1974) - to envisage and recommend marketing strategies which would be more ethical – rather than just profitable - with the "tweens" market.

Listening to participants' thoughts and feelings about adverts resulted invariably in a discussion around the products presented in them: this has allowed the researcher to gather rich insights into their preferences, desires and play practice, but also their general attitude towards the current gender-segregated and stereotypical orientation of marketing directed at them. The main findings suggest that marketers would actually benefit by considering the tween girls market as a much richer and diverse

universe to be explored, with many different interests and orientations, not just a pink and glittery world limited to certain activities. Marketers should think in expanding and diversifying terms, as there appears to be a significant segment of girls who would welcome a break from the pink princesses' legacy.

In this study, there were in fact at least a quarter of the sample expressing frustration with the "pinkification" of girls products ("I would buy it if it was not in pink, I would prefer black or dark purple but they never do it for girls...it's annoying!" "Why everything has to be in pink? I don't get it" "The problem is that I NEVER liked pink and I think this is unfair to lots of girls"). This suggests that reliance on a wider choice of colours and styles in the designing of girls' products would definitely satisfy a portion of currently unsatisfied consumers.

A minority of girls (roughly a fifth of the total sample) would admit an interest in boy-oriented toys/activities (i.e. constructions, building models, warriors, football and boxing). Some of these girls usually welcome the opportunity of playing with this type of toy with their brothers, but most of them would not buy or do not currently play with toys marketed at boys (particularly the girls who do not have brothers), not for lack of interest - they explained - but simply for fear of not conforming to certain gender roles: "You don't want to look weird" "...then you'll have all your friends whispering behind your back: 'That's for boys!'".

Interesting also, is the fact that most girls associate the princess' imagery with earlier year's toys (especially from age 9 onwards) and they are often adamant to distance themselves from this type of fantasy (e.g. "yes I was very into the princess thing when I was little, but NOT NOW of course!" "this advert is kind of weird because of the PRINCESS, normally you use princess for young children"). This seems to suggest that the use of princesses' fantasy to enthrall tweens to buy products could be generally counter-productive.

There is an overwhelming emphasis on beauty and fashion in the current products offered to tweens girls, with more and more brands starting to produce lines of lingerie and make-up products specifically targeted at tweens. From an ethical perspective, one should start to question how healthy it is to ingrain the need to use lingerie and makeup in girls, starting from very young age. The findings from this study show also that not all girls are interested in 'beautification'. A fair portion of participants (20% of the total sample) are not interested in make-up and actually resent the pressure to wear it, even at parties. Often, these are the same girls who

expressed counter-stereotypical orientations in some of their choices of toys, games and media programs, but found their needs unfulfilled by the current offer (e.g. Ruby complaint about not being able to find a girl's diary in dark colours is emblematic). Starting to market toys with a counter-stereotypical feel would suit this target market, but would also help broaden girls' perspectives about femininity and how to express it.

Some girls don't play with dolls: they love playing with animals, monster or surreal figures instead. In particular, the appeal of magic and monster' imagery in both toys and media programs seems to be now a well-established trend, already successfully exploited by the popular Monster High dolls and cartoon animation by Mattel (launched in July 2010) or the Twilight Saga movies series which started in 2008 and is still gaining fans today. This trend could be further extended to other product lines and media products.

The last few years have witnessed an increasing number of conscientious parents who deliberately wish to boycott the current gender-segregated and stereotypical trend affecting children's marketing and products in favour of counter-stereotypical or gender-neutral offering.

"...the harm that gender-specific toys could do to the development of a child shouldn't be downplayed. From a young age children take cues about their assigned gender roles from the world around them. Is it any wonder then, that with the deluge of guns, cars and war toys, so many men grow up feeling they need to be "macho" and "hard"? Or that the dollies, ponies, cooking and caring toys aimed at little girls may have contributed to the number of women in science, technology and engineering roles standing at only 13 per cent?"

Boyle 2013 - The Independent

The rapid success of the "Let toys be toys" campaign (Boyle, 2013), which recently collected ten thousand petition signatures to prompt UK's largest retailers "to remove gender labels and organise toys by genre, not gender", is a compelling proof of the growing frustration towards the rigid separation of children toys in either pink or blue aisles. A current survey organised by the same campaign in November 2013 has seen that already a good proportion of shops has responded positively to parents' pleas, with a reduction of 60% (compared to Christmas 2012) in the number of shops using 'girls' and 'boys' labels on products or separate pink and blue aisles.

As scientific findings and public awareness increases regarding the possible damage caused by gender segregation in marketing to children (along with the excessive

emphasis on beauty in girls' toys and children products), it is expected that more and more companies will be re-conceptualising their offer in more gender-neutral terms: ultimately, companies more in tune with parents' desires will have the upper hand as most of the products for girls of this age are still typically being purchased by parents, grandparents and adults in general. There are indications of this trend already happening: the recent success of *Toward the Stars* – a website started in US to then expand distribution worldwide in 2013 – offering a catalogue of gender-neutral and counter-stereotypical toys and products for girls (“A place full of gifts that inspire and enable girls to reach for the stars”) and *A Mighty Girl* - another website consisting of a large database of books, movies, music and other products guiding parents and girls through alternative, empowering and counter-stereotypical resources – are a response to this new trend. *Goldieblox* - an engineering toy for girls launched by engineer Debby Sterling after she successfully raised \$285,881 in funds through a crowd funding campaign supported by 5,519 backers to get the toy into production – with the company message being “To show the world that girls deserve more choices than dolls and princesses” and “Femininity is strong and girls will build the future - literally” (Murphy, 2013 -ABC News) is a clear sign of this new consumer trend. Another case in point is the success of *Nerf Rebel* (dart blasters and bow) for girls which only recently – January 2014 - appeared in the UK (the TV advert for this product would have actually been perfect for the advert-elicited sessions in this study, as back in 2010 the researcher struggled to find counter-stereotypical adverts). These types of products (engineering on one side and weapons on the other) were typically marketed only to boys until a year ago and they are now given a “girly” look and marketed to girls: evidence that marketers have identified a gap in the market represented by segments of girls who would happily play with boy-oriented toys and activities if only these toys were clearly marked or re-designed as girls' toys.

The researcher has also noted a new trend in advertising, with more brands – e.g. *Nike*, *Always*, *Pantene* - producing adverts that address openly the problem of gender stereotypes (to watch a collection of these adverts see <http://bit.ly/1qMkbya>). Only 3 years ago, attempting to find this type of message in adverts proved disappointingly unproductive. Through their huge popularity in social media, the latest empowering advert “Like a girl” by *Always* reached 17 million You Tube views in the first 4 days (see <http://bit.ly/1nLhkS0>) and effectively popularised a new hashtag (*#likeagirl*)

totalling more than 9 million interactions in tweets and other social media in less than a week. Apparently the cause of girls' empowerment is able to generate great "buzz" in the current digital era and it is likely that more and more brands will start paying attention to this trend and exploit this type of message in their campaigns.

Regarding styles and presentation of mainstream adverts – particularly fashion, perfumes and make-up ones - most girls participating in the follow-up interviews (n=11 out of 16) were aware of Photoshop manipulations in adverts (the following sentences are reproduced *verbatim* as they were written by the girls during online chat through Skype): "they look soooooo fake cuz if it's a face cream advertisement, their faces looks too white" "no way you can have eye lashes that long in the real world!" "fake lips, fake boobs, fake hair, fake everything!" When specifically asked about preference for either perfect or realistic beauty portrayals in adverts - the majority (13 out of 16, typically in the older group, age 10-11) expressed a clear desire to see more realistic beauty portrayals around them. In addition, the past few years have seen a growing discontent from parents and consumer action groups, with several campaigns against the extreme thinness ideal promoted by adverts and media.

There are three elements which consistently would make an advert attractive for the girls (at the point of wanting to watch an advert over and over): child empowerment, humour and music. Adverts portraying children in a leading or superior position - like the young girl detective questioning the father in the Haribo's "Interrogation" advert - were a great entertainment for all girls. Likewise, adverts containing popular music (i.e. "Pop Princesses" "Weight Watcher" "Vimto") or some hilarious twist (Nintendo DS "Build your own wedding", "Vimto", "Reeds.co.uk") were hugely popular, even in the case of adverts not targeted at children, like the Reeds or Weight Watchers ones.

Regarding portrayals of femininity in adverts and other media products, the findings from this and other studies (see for instance Gotz, 2005) suggest that many girls are increasingly identifying with characters and story lines which are counter-stereotypical or portraying girls/women as leaders, brave, cunning, assertive, strong, brainy or heroes (see the success of the latest Disney's movies *Brave* and *Frozen*, both starring strong and courageous women characters).

Perhaps the resounding question which should be asked at this point is:

What would actually happen if marketers, advertisers and media producers started to diversify their offer to girls by avoiding the division of toys in pink and blue aisles and by stopping the rigid stereotypes and hyper-sexualisation currently enforced on girls' products?

From an ethical and child developmental perspective, both girls and boys could simply feel more free to be whatever they wish to be, do whatever they wish to do, and buy whatever they wish to buy, following their natural inclinations, instead of trying to fit into a limiting category of preferences, attributes and behaviours which are commercially pre-defined. Balancing the current emphasis on beauty and fashion by offering products that focus on skills and are mentally or physically challenging would be highly beneficial for girls' self-esteem, their developing aspirations and their body image. From a marketing/profit perspective, those tween girls (and their parents) that are currently unhappy with the current offer, will be satisfied to see more variety and a widening of options, with consequent increase in profits.

To conclude, the findings from this study, along with evidence provided by the latest developments in both consumer groups' campaigns (i.e. *LetToysBeToys*; *PinkStinks*) and new products and adverts development (i.e. *GoldieBlox*, *Nerf Rebel*, *Always*), suggest that to force a stereotypical straitjacket on girls as a shortcut for profits is neither sensible, ethical, nor ultimately profitable in the long run.

6.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has definitive limitations. While the main methodological limitations have already been discussed in Chapter 4, this section will address some further limitations mainly pertaining to the validity and generalisability of findings, the nature of the investigation and the breadth of analysis applied to the data.

- The findings from this study should be regarded as in-depth situated knowledge about a particular group of participants in a particular country/region and socio-cultural context. Situational representativeness (Horsburgh, 2003), rather than demographic, is sought. Thus, the generalisability of this study should be viewed in logical terms, as generalization to a "theoretical

understanding of a similar class of phenomena” (Popay et al., 1998), rather than probabilistic generalisation to a population.

- The small sample of the study does not allow statistical inferences to be made from the data. Therefore any claim from “patterns of response” and links between variables generated from the analyses should be considered as tentative only and to be tested by further studies.
- With regard to the EGA analysis, it would have been ideal to have a greater number of girls showing a lower SFI (“tomboy” girls). In this project the number of girls in the lower SFI was considerably smaller than the girls with higher SFI scores (and it is probable that this would be the result in most cases as at this age girls seem to conform to predominant gender roles in their environment and in the media they watch/consume). This difference in the size of SFI groups does not allow a balanced assessment of outcomes.

6.9 IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCHER PRACTICE

This section aims to share some of the main challenges encountered by the researcher during her journey, with a discussion of the main learnings and implications relative to her personal research practice.

One major learning from the project is concerning the ability of knowing when to stop: stop reading, stop collecting data, stop analysing, stop writing.

Stop reading: Most books and resources for PhD courses would suggest to stop reading and accumulating new references at some point, but this is not easily done if interest for the topic involves the researcher at some emotional, almost therapeutic, level. The relentless reading of interdisciplinary literature throughout the project resulted in what is currently referred as “information overload”, with the researcher feeling overwhelmed by the amount of collected references, reflections and quotes on past researches, particularly when it was the time to collate, comment and summarise the material in a succinct and structured way.

Stop collecting: As the data collection delved more deeply into participants' contexts, the research became more and more a real insight into the world of these young girls, their media preferences, their relationships in the family and in the school, their different attitudes and tastes and their way to conceiving and enacting femininity in their everyday world. All these pieces of information became elements of a complex puzzle which the analysis needed to put together. The fieldwork with the girls was a fascinating and energising process, to the point that the researcher became almost addicted to it: the temptation to probe more into girls' lives was very strong. It was difficult to know when to stop collecting data: the realisation of having collected far more than it would be possible to analyse (in the time and word limits allowed for a PhD) came only towards the end of the third round of fieldwork (follow-up interviews).

Stop analysing: Similarly, with the analysis, it was difficult terminating the search for more ways to look at the data: the work in itself was entirely captivating and in great part guided by intuition. Often curiosity would send the mind on a trail to see whether a different insight would come through. There was a tendency to ask "Is this just my own interpretation of things? How can I double check whether this is true? What if I start focussing on this variable/outcome?" While that tendency can be seen as a healthy attitude when translated simply into a practice of double checking results, the continued striving to make the results more "objectively" evident, by devising new ways to look at the data, is risky. The risk is that an overly long and diversified process of analysis may confound readers instead of bringing more clarity. After all, the analysis and results need to be explained, discussed and summarised in an integrated ensemble and contained within the word limits of a standard PhD thesis. The results from different methods of analysis needed to be, in the end, an integrated whole in answer to the research questions. Ultimately it is believed that the broader perspectives added depth to the conclusions and that experimenting with multiple types of analysis within the same project should be warranted as long as not over-exercised at the expense of clarity.

Stop writing: If writing is a daily activity that helps to explore ideas or collect reflections over new reading, like in a research diary, then it can enrich the research outcome without risking overwhelming the researcher at the stage of preparing the final draft of a thesis. One problem experienced during this project was the excessive

amount of writing produced throughout the three years, which made more difficult and time consuming the final task of organising, prioritising and collating the material into final chapters, oftentimes frustrating the researcher with the feeling of not being able to include everything and resulting in much redundant work.

6.10 FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Regardless of the methodological and philosophical position of the study, it is clear how the complexity of the interplay of factors which intermediate media consumption can make it incredibly difficult to establish definite patterns and causal links between variables: it is like a huge puzzle.

Due to the small sample provided by this study, the empirical generalizability of the present findings can only be determined through consequential research. To use Deshpande (1983)'s words, this study is described in the spirit of *construct discovery* rather than justification.

Quantitative correlational studies could test the validity of conclusions regarding the protective factors discussed in section 6.4, by formulating hypothesis such as "the presence of factor X within the family correlates with girls being more critical towards stereotypical or sexualised representations of femininity".

The contribution made by this research is in the direction of pushing towards more *phenomenistic* - to use Klapper (1960)'s term - meaning holistic, in-depth and context-rich studies of girls' media experiences; such studies could be replicated in different contexts, age groups and countries. From a scholarly perspective this approach should help to locate important factors at play in the "media effects puzzle", thus working towards building new theories or confirming and refining old ones. Relating girls' ways of experiencing a particular media content to their life and context is important because we need to understand their experiences within their own frame of reference and their own life world if we really want to "get to the meaning" of their experience.

From a social impact perspective, this approach is more empowering because it puts girls from the start in the role of experts of their own world (Langsted, 1994) and it

can subsequently allow more empowerment through activities of reflection, validation and dissemination, so that the participants become co-researchers in the process.

With regard to social change and improving participants' lives, research in this field would benefit from implementing participatory action research (PAR) as a way to combining research endeavour with actual life-changing projects (i.e. providing media literacy), as all too often academic papers remain simply "papers", somehow trapped in the realm of intellectual and academic discussion, without generating any real social change. The new media landscape and the increasing use of social media will definitely open up innovative, creative and productive ways to explore children's lives and to implement action research, as the evidence provided by the success of several girls' projects in the US (e.g. *Girls Inc.*, *About-face*), Canada (e.g. *Project Girl*) and Australia (e.g. *Brave Girls Alliance*) has recently shown.

Another important direction for future research should be towards providing a longitudinal perspective, particularly in the delicate and controversial area of studies on media effects. As it is widely recognised,

Evidence from longitudinal studies is often critical to inform interventions in the area of health and wellbeing.

ESRC- Delivery Plan 2011-2015:6

By following the same individuals throughout a number of years, it would be possible to gain a much more integrated view of how media and adverts' selection, consumption, reception and influence evolve throughout the years.

Finally, as advertising has evolved through a proliferation of new formats, new research should include the most recently added media formats (i.e. *advergemes*) to investigate their effects and modalities of consumption.

6.11 FOLLOW-UP STUDY AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

The researcher is now preparing the grounds for a follow-up study with the same participants (20 girls and their parents have already informally agreed to participate in the project), which will allow addition of a longitudinal perspective to the present study, seeing how the girls progress through adolescence, how their choices regarding femininity change and how their media consumption interplays with this process.

As shown by important longitudinal research in this area (Mazzarella and Pecora, 1999; Currie et al, 2009) girls' perception, negotiation and enactment of alternative femininities can drastically change through adolescence: this long-term perspective is much needed to strengthen or disconfirm the validity of previous conclusions, particularly with regard to suggested contextual "protective" factors tentatively identified within the candidate's PhD study (a project which was limited by the time requirements for the course to one year of field work). While in the first stage the follow-up will gather further systematic information about participants' personality and context (similarly to what was done in this project to allow a comparison with the previous set of data), the second stage will be an exciting PAR project to actually empower the girls and impact real change in their life. The girls will be trained in a co-researchers capacity, with the provision of a built-in media literacy course which will enhance greatly their critical abilities towards media content and, more broadly, empower the girls through the envisioning of a more assorted range of discourses about femininity and gender.

Spurred by the results of this research, during the final year of study the researcher has started a blog and social enterprise – *Media Savvy Girls* - to expand the reach of the topics discussed in this thesis to a wider audience and raise awareness of the problematic lack of marketing and media literacy in the school curriculum. In its first 9 months of activity - thanks to social media and linking with other relevant organisations and campaigns - the blog has surpassed the 100,000 readers' mark, with 600 subscribers, and built a base of 10,500 following its Facebook page.

6.12 CONCLUSIONS

This study was a mixed-methods - though mainly qualitative - exploration of young girls' advertising experiences, which used a preliminary stage to collect standardised information about participants' personality and context in order to be able to contextualise their advertising experiences. Through a process of systematic focused comparison between specific patterns of response observed in particular subgroups of girls, the analysis was able to locate specific factors influencing girls' critical abilities towards stereotypical portrayals of femininity in adverts, overall providing a better understanding of how the complex interplay of contextual variables (e.g. girls' personality, family and peers relationships, media consumption, parental mediation, extracurricular activities) influences girls' positioning (Hall, 1980) towards femininity portrayals in adverts.

The focus of this study was very much on femininity: how femininity is perceived and constructed in the young participants' mind through the many images and messages abounding in the media, the many constant clues about femininity suggesting constantly how a girl should be, often in a limiting and stereotypical way.

In line with the conceptual framework, one of the main conclusions from this study is that *it is all about the context*, so that it would be simplistic to automatically associate the mere consumption (or exposure to) of a certain media-portrayed culture to a certain outcome (e.g. children sexualisation or body dissatisfaction).

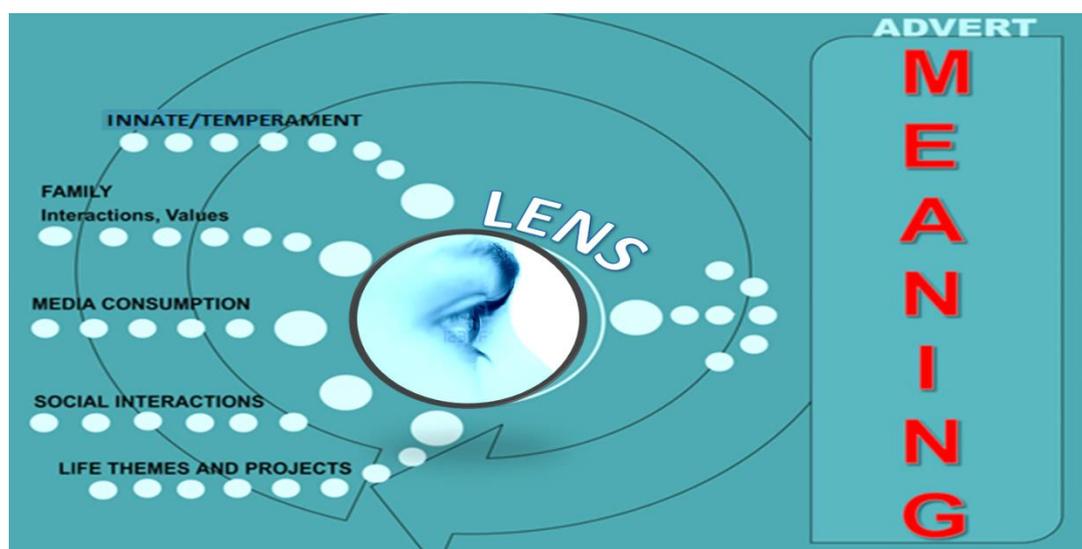


Figure 6.6 – Conceptual Framework

The main factors intermediating the effects of media and influencing the positioning of girls towards femininity presented in adverts seem to lie within the family: factors such as parental mediation, how gender roles are enacted in the family life (flexible versus rigid; stereotypical versus counter-stereotypical; traditional/conventional versus modern/unconventional), practices of play with siblings, relationship and bonds with brothers or sisters, how the girls related to each member of the family (particularly the father), and who is their main role model. Ultimately, the practices and discourses within the family seem to shape how each girl *positions herself* towards the femininity represented in adverts and other media. This is to say that the same amount of sexualised or stereotypical content watched influences different girls in different ways, depending of the *positioning* of each girl toward a particular type of image / discourse proposed by the media.

The assumptions about gender-role development made earlier in this study (mainly based on social cognitive theory – see Chapter 2, part III), recognise the presence of an innate propensity towards feminine or masculine traits in each individual, with experiential and environmental factors interplaying with these innate attitudes to shape each individual gender role. It emerged clearly that the defining element in the generation of media effects is not so much the amount and type of media content, but *how young girls position themselves towards femininity's portrayals in adverts* and other media representations. In other words, what are their pre-assumptions and mediated interpretations of the femininity portrayed around them?

Another important conclusion emerging from this study is that the ways girls interact with representations of femininity in adverts seem to be very much reflective of their actual embodiment of femininity (or *gender expression*): what the researcher has named as "*positioning-embodiment mirroring model*". According to this model, girls who are more stereotypical in their embodiment of femininity seem to perceive and respond to stereotypical or sexualised portrayals of femininity in accordance with the *dominant cultural code* (Hall, 1980): they are enthused by these images and they tend to emulate them or identify with them, watching attentively, taking suggestions and ideas from them and subsequently apply these ideas to their own life and dreams (what Hall (1980) called *dominant* reading/positioning or what Hirschmann and Thompson (1997) defined as *motivational* interpretative strategy).

Girls more fluid in their embodiment of femininity, in the sense of shifting constantly between stereotypical and counter-stereotypical expressions of femininity (what Currie et al. (2009) defined as *gamma girls* or *in-betweeners*) were the majority in the sample - a result which can make us feel optimistic. These girls would usually take a negotiated stance towards stereotypical or sexualised portrayals of femininity in adverts, tending to manipulate or customise/personalise meanings in the adverts to their own sense of identity. In some cases they would express a mild level of criticism, often directed to change an aspect of an advert to make it more fitting to their tastes and needs. This is what Hall (1980) called *negotiated* reading/positioning, while Hirschmann and Thompson (1997) would define it as *personalising* interpretative strategy.

Finally, the girls with a lower stereotypical orientation in expressing their femininity – definitely a minority in this sample – were often firmly critical (or completely rejecting) of stereotypical /sexualised representations of femininity in adverts. These girls would usually detach themselves from these portrayals, rejecting the values and meanings conveyed by the advert often through mocking and ridicule or by simply refusing to watch. This instance corresponds to *oppositional* reading/positioning in the words of Hall (1980) and *critical* interpretative strategy for Hirschmann and Thompson, 1997).

More importantly perhaps, through a context-rich approach and close attention to the social environment in which the girls are immersed - particularly family and peers interactions - the research was able to reveal the value of advertising as a cultural product in itself, completely disjoined from the item advertised. In other words, how advertising is used in social situations and in the *eisegesis* terms of communication suggested by Mick and Bull (1992) and confirmed by other context-rich studies (see the *advertising metaphor* discussed by Ritson and Elliott, 1999 in appendix 20; also Bartholomew and O'Donohoe, 2003; Lawlor and Prothero 2007), as means of communication and as an enjoyable - at times even delighting - experience. When advertising is not enjoyed (and there are many such instances of course) it is simply avoided through different coping strategies (e.g. a click of a button, a face buried in a pillow or even by leaving the room entirely).

Overall then, the findings seem to provide a picture of girls' interaction with media and adverts which inspires optimism and curbs alarmism (though an important exception is provided by the internalisation of narrow beauty standards and preoccupation with appearance evidently developing in many young girls, which should remain a major concern and call to action for advertisers and regulators).

The most significant conclusion of the study is perhaps to recognise the active and sophisticated role of modern young girls in shaping their own world (in both social and media spheres), along with their unbeatable positivity, resiliency, energy, pride and self-defining power characterising this phase of their life in constructing their own femininity among a myriad of social and media messages. In the words of Currie et al. (2009):

Girls produce identities and cultural meanings that draw from and reconfigure cultural notions of youthful femininity (or masculinity), improvising upon established notions, and sometimes challenging them.

Currie et al. 2009:167

Nonetheless, there is still much that can, and should, be done to help young girls navigate their media-saturated world to their advantage. In a time when consumers are easily connected and place increasing importance on businesses' ethical conduct and social responsibility (Creyer, 1997), the role of marketers in facilitating a more flexible, diverse and healthy envisioning of girlhood should be thoroughly emphasised.

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APPENDICES

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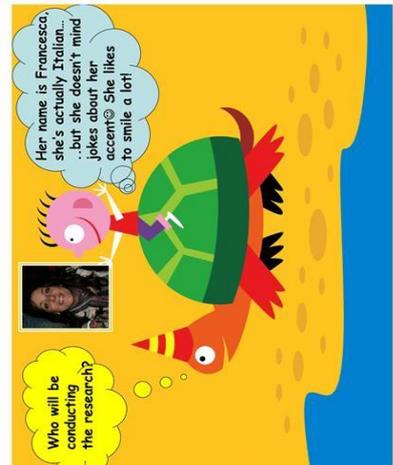
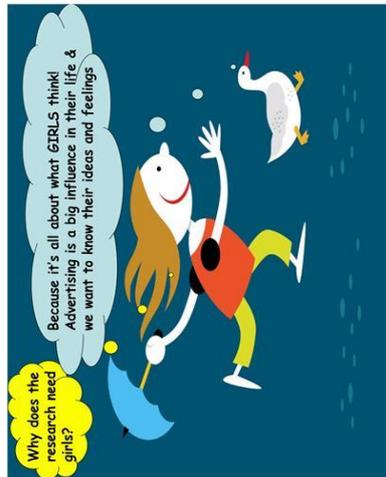
Appendix 25 – Selection of Participants through Maximum Variation Sample

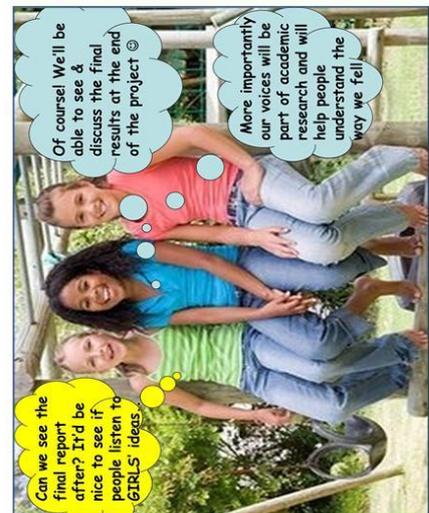
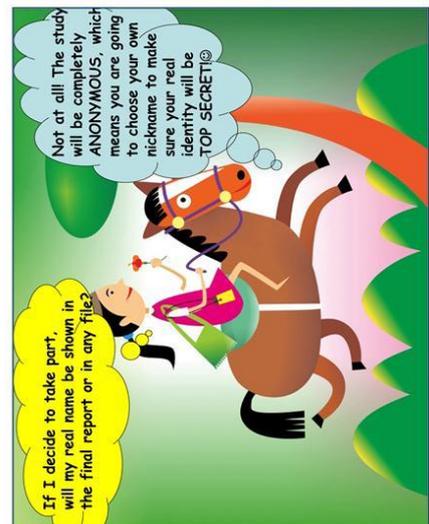
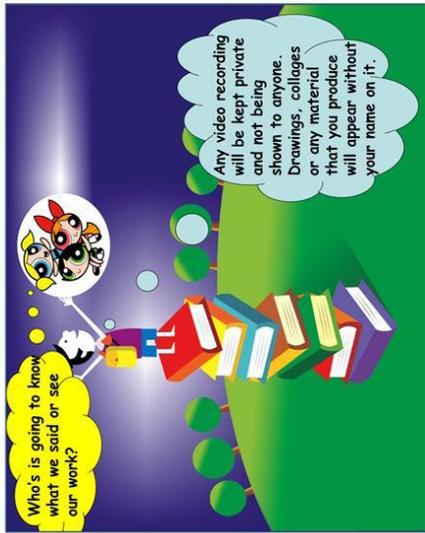
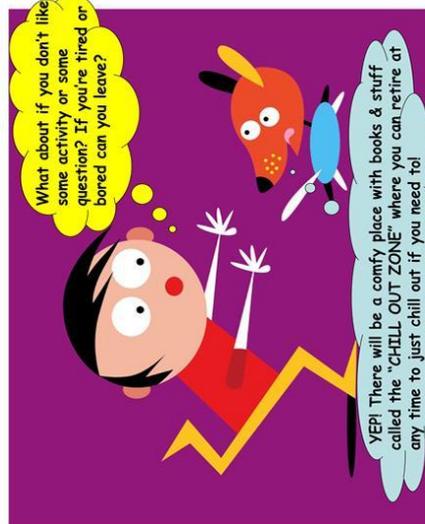
APPENDIX 1

Child-friendly Informative Leaflet

RESEARCH INFORMATIVE LEAFLET

PLEASE READ ATTENTIVELY AND FEEL FREE TO ASK ANY QUESTION!





APPENDIX 2

Child Consent Form

INFORMATION SHEET & CONSENT FORM For Participants 8 -11 Years of Age

Study Title: An exploration of young girls' advertising experiences.

The Researcher: Francesca Morosi (Nottingham Trent University)

Contact Details of Researcher's Supervisors:

Prof. Paul Whysall
Direct Line: 0115 848 2412
Email: paul.whysall@ntu.ac.uk



What is research?

Research studies help us learn new things. First, we ask a question. Then we try to find the answer. This can help us learn about how a particular situation (or "phenomenon") works. We can also learn why people do things a certain way or feel a certain way.

This paper talks about our research study. We want you to ask us any questions that you have. You can ask questions at any time.

There are a few things you should know about the study:

- You get to decide if you want to be in the study.
- **You can say 'No' or you can say 'Yes'.**
- If you say 'Yes', you can always say "No" later (until 3 months after the project began).
- No one will be upset if you say 'No'.
- No one should put pressure on you to say "Yes" if you are not interested.



Why are we doing this research study?

We need to hear your views, thoughts and feelings regarding girls in advertising. We are extremely curious about what young girls think about adverts directed at them.

In particular, we will look at the way girls are represented in adverts and you'll have the chance to discuss with your girlfriends and tell us what you think about the way girls appear in adverts, what they do and what they look like.



What would happen if I join this study?

If you decide to be in the study:

- We would need to ask you a few questions with the help of a questionnaire. A questionnaire is a piece of paper containing questions for you to answer. The researcher

- Questions will be easy to answer. An example of questions which could be asked is:
 - "Who do you live with?" "Do you have any brother or sister?" "Do you watch TV every day?" "What are your favourite programs?" "Do you have a favourite advert?"
- There will be a little questionnaire for your parents/guardians too (with similar questions regarding you, your family and your TV/internet's habits): you will need to bring it home and ask your parents to complete it, if they are willing to help with this research. You can return the questionnaire as soon as it's completed and hand it in to your teacher.
- After the questionnaire there will be other sessions (both individual and in group). Often during the sessions, there will be some pictures and video clips which we will use as a prompt for discussion. We will ask you to watch some adverts and tell us what you think of them.
- **Nobody will know your name or the name of your parents:** we will use a number and a nickname to identify your responses throughout the whole project.



Could bad things happen if I join this research?

There is no risk of harming yourself if you decide to participate in this study.

The researcher will visit your school and the session will be done in your classroom or other suitable room in your school. If any of the questions asked in the questionnaire makes you uncomfortable you can decide to simply leave the question blank.



If I join the study would it help me?

We think being in this study would possibly help you because:

- You will be able to reflect and consider your own thoughts and feeling regarding advertising messages which surround your everyday life
- You will be able to have your voice heard, by providing your point of view on things

We hope to learn something from this study. And someday we hope it will help other girls in some way. For example, there might be girls out there who have problems with some of the images or messages they see in the media (TV, magazines, billboards, internet). Your point of view will be important because it will help us to understand girls your age better!



Would I be paid if I do research?

No, you will not be paid.

To thank you for being in the study, we will give you a final certificate to remind you of your participation in this project.



If I have questions who should I ask?

You can talk to the researcher at any time (see contact details provided at the start of this form) and ask any questions you might have. Take the time you need to make your choice.

Child's Statement

The researcher has told me about the research. I had a chance to ask questions. I know I can ask questions any time. I want to be in the research.

Name of Child _____

Signature of Child _____

Date _____

Name of Researcher FRANCESCA MOROSI

Signature of Researcher _____

Date _____

APPENDIX 3

Parent Information Sheet and Consent Form

INFORMATION SHEET & CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS

This informed consent form is for parents/guardians of girls participating in the research titled:

Constructing Ideas of Femininity:

A Phenomenological Exploration of Young Girls' Advertising Experiences

KINDLY READ AND RETURN THIS FORM BY MONDAY 10th OCTOBER 2011

The Researcher: Francesca Morosi - francesca.morosi@ntu.ac.uk

Sponsor: Nottingham Trent University

Research Supervision Team - Contact Details:

Prof. Paul Whysall
Direct Line: 0115 848 2412
Email: paul.whysall@ntu.ac.uk

Dr. Polly Pick
Direct Line: 0115 848 2495
Email: polly.pick@ntu.ac.uk

Researcher Statement:

I am Francesca Morosi and I am a PhD Research Student supported by a scholarship by Nottingham Trent University. I am doing some research in the area of marketing ethics which might help practitioners and policy makers do more to help girls become and stay mentally and physically healthier.

Whenever researchers study children, we talk to the parents and ask them for their permission. After you have learned about the study, you can agree or not to let your daughter participate in the research. Your daughter will be asked for their agreement as well. Both of you have to agree independently before I can begin. Before you decide, you can talk to anyone you feel comfortable with.

There may be some words that you do not understand. If you have any questions you may ask them now or later, even after the study has started. If you wish to ask questions, you may contact the researcher or the supervisory team.

Information about the study:

It is possible that the current marketing and media pressure are not providing girls with a healthy view of how a girl can be or become, but more research is needed to understand HOW adverts actually affect girls and how girls interact with these messages. In my research I am exploring pre-adolescent girls (age 9-11)' thoughts and feelings about current advertising messages, with specific attention to the way girls are portrayed in these messages and on how this can affect girls' image, their identity and their gender construction.

In this first stage of the project the aim is to talk to some classes of Year 4 & 5 'girls, engaging them in group discussion about advertising portraying girls. There will be some game and exercises with the aim of making girls reflect on different ways to be a girl and express their feelings about adverts they see in their natural world.

A simple questionnaire about media habits, role models and some information about their life, will be distributed with a little section to be completed separately by parents. Questions have been constructed as not intrusive and can be left blank in case one finds them so. All data collected – as well as the name of collaborating schools - will remain completely anonymous.

We will not be sharing information about your daughter outside of the research team. The information that we collect from this research project will be kept confidential. Information about your child that will be collected from the research will be put away and no-one but the researchers will be able to see it. Any information about your child will have a number on it instead of her name. Only the researchers will know what her number is and we will lock that information up with a lock and key.

At the end of the study, we will be sharing what we have learnt with the participants. We will do this by meeting first with the participants. A written report will also be given which they can share with their families. We will also publish the results in order that other interested people may learn from our research.

This research proposal has been reviewed and approved by Nottingham Trent University 's Ethical Committee, which is a committee whose primary task is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm, by way of ensuring that every project passing approval is ethically sound.

PARENT CONSENT STATEMENT:

By signing this consent form you will be agreeing to understand the following:

- I understand the purpose of this research and I understand that my daughter will be discussing issues which may be sensitive to her.
- I understand that I have the right to withdraw my consent at any time.
- I understand that both myself and my daughter have the right to refuse answering any questions that may feel uncomfortable answering.
- I understand any names mentioned will be anonymised and all data will be kept securely.
- I understand that if any information regarding harm to vulnerable adults or children is disclosed the researcher has a moral obligation to follow the relevant child protection's procedure.

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily for my daughter to participate as a participant in this study and understand that I have the right to withdraw her from the study at any time.

Print Name of Parent/Guardian: _____

Signature: _____ (Parent/Guardian)

Date: _____

Print name of Researcher: _____

Signature: _____ (Researcher)

Date: _____

APPENDIX 4

Participants Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE

THERE IS NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWER! PLEASE BE HONEST!



ABOUT YOUR FAMILY

- 1) Who do you live with? Please explain, for example: "mum", "dad", "my mum and sister", "my auntie and my pet")

.....
.....

- 2) Do you have any brothers or sisters? (please tell us their name & how old they are)

.....
.....

- 3) Usually, which member of your family do you spend more time with?

.....

- 4) Who would you like to spend more time with? (please name one or two members of your family)

.....



TELEVISION

5) Do you usually watch TV (tick the relevant box)

Every day Most days 2/3 times a week Once a week Rarely Never

6) Do you mostly watch TV (tick one or two boxes):

Alone With brother/sister With parent/s With friends Other (please explain)

7) Please complete the sentences below:

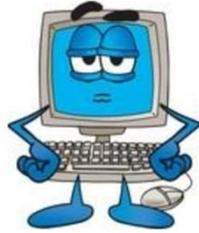
- My favourite TV channels are.....
 - My favourite TV programs are
-

8) Do your parents let you watch TV as much as you want? YES NO

9) If you could choose, would you watch more or less TV? MORE LESS SAME

10) Do you have a TV in your bedroom? YES NO

11) Who decides what you watch?



INTERNET

12) Do you use the internet in your free time?

Every day Most days 2/3 times a week Once a week Rarely Never

13) Most of the times, how do you get onto the internet?

At school At library Family PC My own PC Friends PC Mobile Phone Other

14) What do you more often on the internet? (you can tick more than one box)

Games YouTube Chat Facebook/My Space Browsing Music Videos Programs

15) Do you mostly use the internet: (tick boxes)

On your own With sister/cousin With friends With parents Other

16) Are you supervised by a grown up while you use the internet?

YES, ALWAYS MOST TIMES SOMETIMES RARELY NEVER

17) Can you name some of your favourite websites? (please name as many as you wish)

.....
.....



MAGAZINES

18) Do you look at magazines? (any sort of magazines, even your mum's ones)

Every day Most days 2/3 times a week Once a week Rarely Never

19) If you look at magazines, can you name some of your favourite ones or tell us which sort of magazines they are?

.....
.....
.....

20) If you look at magazines do you usually look at them (tick one or two boxes):

On your own With sister/cousin With parent/s With friends Other

21) Who normally buy the magazines you look at?

.....



FREE TIME/BEAUTY

22) Do you do any activity REGULARLY after school?

Yes

Sometimes

NO

Please explain which activity you practice regularly (if you don't have a regular activity, tell us what you would like to do):

.....

23) Do you practice any activity generally more popular among boys?

Yes

Sometimes

NO

Please explain which activity this is:

.....

24) Do you ever wear make-up?

YES please specify:

Quite a lot Sometimes Only on special occasions Only in private

NO please specify:

Don't like it Not allowed Other

25) Are you happy about the way you look?

Yes, a lot!

Yes, a bit

Not much

Only sometimes

Rarely

Never



PEOPLE YOU ADMIRE & GROWING UP

26) Is there a person you know (not a celebrity) who you really admire? (you can name more than one if you wish)

.....

27) Do you have a favourite celebrity? (tell us who it is and the things you like about him/her)

.....

.....

28) Please complete these two sentences:

"When I grow up I would like to be.....

.....

.....

"If I was a boy I could

.....

.....and nobody would tease me or tell me off about it!"



THUMBS UP, YOU'VE COMPLETED ALL THE QUESTIONS, THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

APPENDIX 5

Parents Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE TO BE COMPLETED BY A PARENT/CARER ABOUT YOUR DAUGHTER/WARD

FAMILY

1) Who does your daughter live with? (Please specify all people usually living with her)

.....
.....

2) Does she have any brothers or sisters? (please specify their age as well)

.....

3) Usually, which family member does she spend more time with?

.....

4) Which family member would you name as the closest one to her (someone she would confide in)?

.....

TELEVISION

5) Typically, does your daughter watch TV (tick one box)

Every day Most days 2/3 times a week Once a week Rarely Never

Please specify roughly the amount of hours per week:

6) Usually, does your daughter watch TV (you can tick more than one box):

Alone With brother/sister With parent/s With friends Other (please explain)

7) Would you like her to spend more or less time watching TV?

MORE LESS SAME

8) Most of the times, who decides what she watches?

.....

9) Does your daughter have her own TV or a TV in her bedroom? YES NO

INTERNET

10) Does your daughter use the internet in her free time?

Every day Most days 2/3 times a week Once a week Rarely Never

11) When you are aware of it, what do you normally see her doing on the internet?

Games YouTube Chat Facebook/My Space Browsing Music Videos Other

12) Does she mostly use the internet:

On her own With parents With brother/sister With friends Other

13) Do you trust her to use the internet without adult supervision?

YES YES, with safety filters NO, but it does happen NO

14) Have you ever caught your daughter watching or doing something you deemed inappropriate for her age on the internet? If so could you tell us briefly about it

.....
.....

MAGAZINES

15) Does your daughter ever look at magazines? (even mum's ones!)

Every day Most days 2/3 times a week Once a week Rarely Never

16) If she looks at magazines, which sort of magazines does she look at the most?

.....
.....

17) If she looks at magazines, does she usually look at them:

On her own With parent/s With brother/sister With friends Other

AFTER SCHOOL/FREE TIME

18) Does your daughter have any activity regularly arranged after school?

YES please specify what activity is and when she does it
.....

NO
.....

19) What would you say is the activity that your daughter mostly enjoys at the moment?
(you may name more than one if you wish)

.....
.....

ROLE MODELS

20) In your opinion, is there a person or a celebrity whom your daughter sees as a main role model at the moment (i.e. she copies this person’s behaviour/looks or she says that she dream about being like her/him)? (can be more than one person, for example: mother + a celebrity)

.....
.....

PERSONALITY/IMAGE

21) If you had to describe your daughter very briefly in terms of personality how would you describe her? (imagine you were talking with a friend of yours who doesn’t know her)

.....
.....

22) In your opinion, does your daughter care about her image/looks?

Yes, a lot!	Yes, fairly	Only sometimes	Not much	Not at all
<input type="checkbox"/>				

PARENTS OCCUPATION

23) Please state mother/father’s main occupation (please note that this question can be left blank should you find it too intrusive for any reason!)

.....
.....

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!
PLEASE RETURN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE BY THIS DATE
YOUR NUMBER WILL BE ENTERED IN A PRIZE DRAW FOR A £25 SHOPPING VOUCHER☺

APPENDIX 6

Slides for Projective Techniques



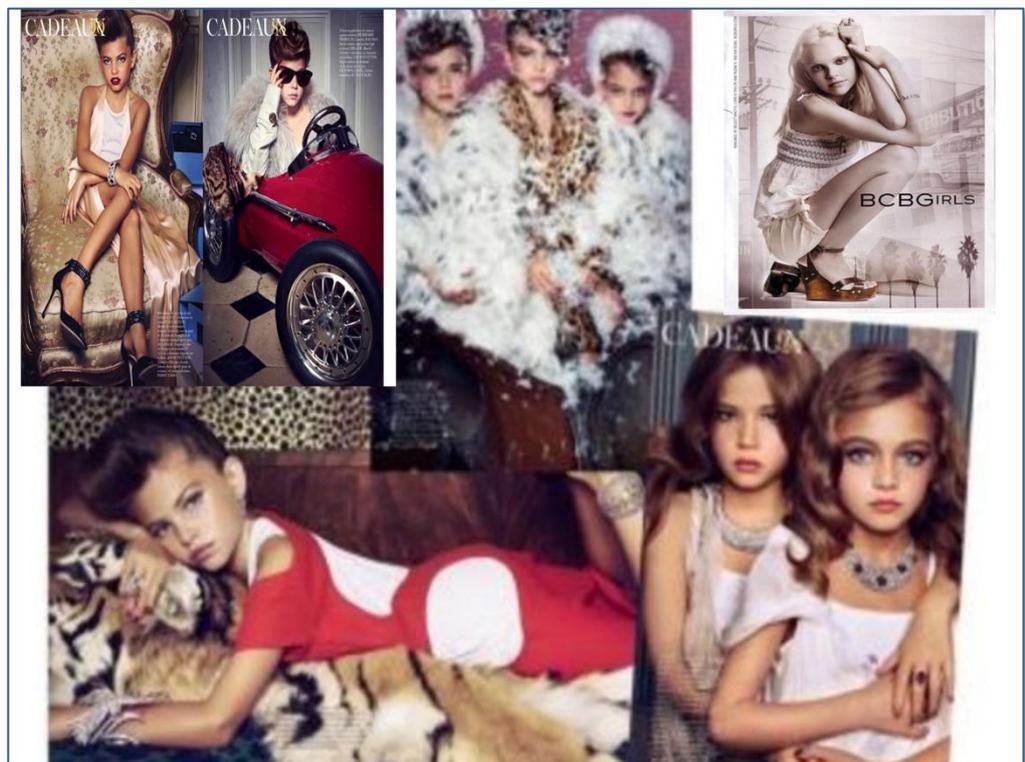
Slide A



Slide B



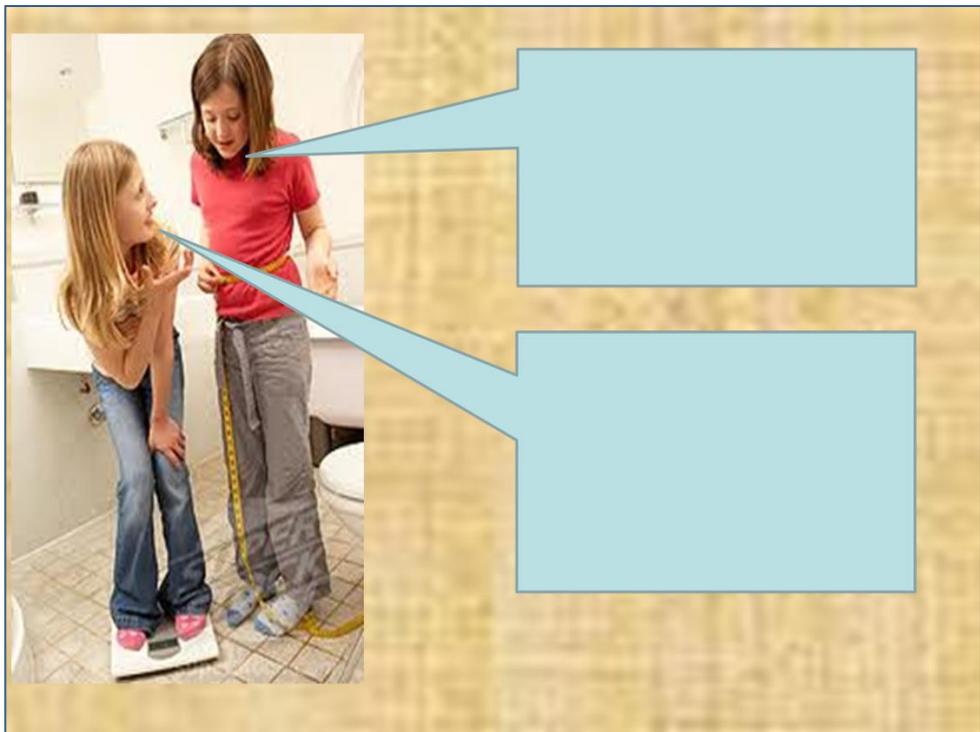
Slide C



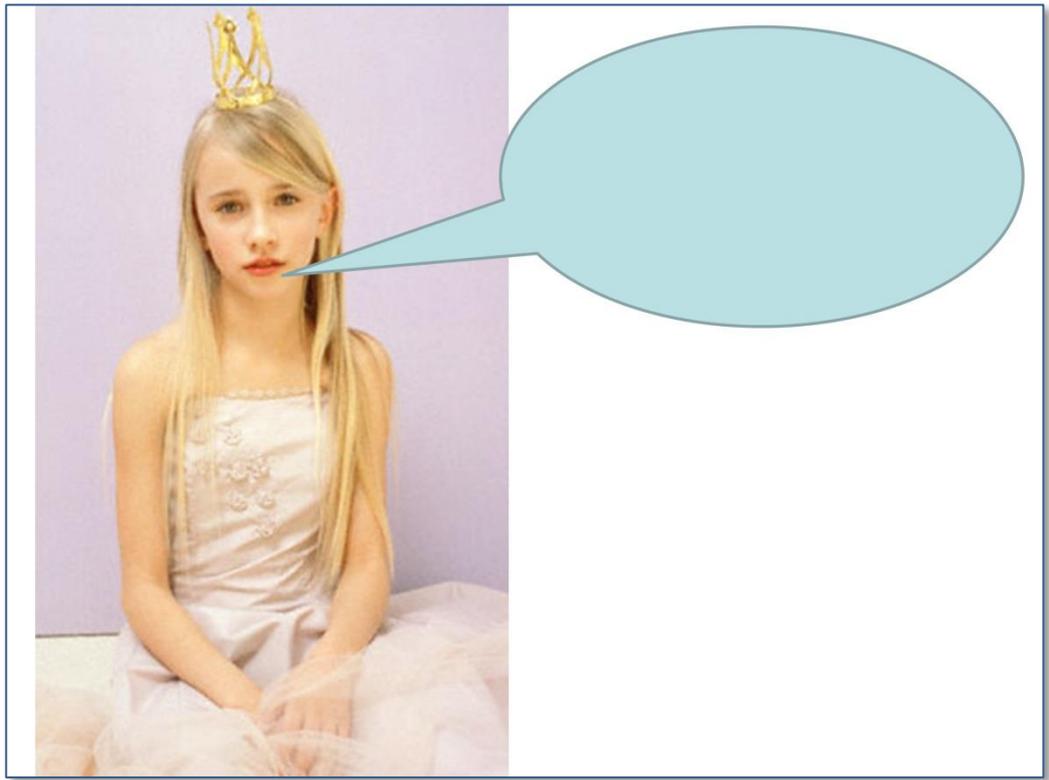
Slide D



Slide 1



Slide 2



Slide 3

APPENDIX 7

Slides used as a prompt in group discussion



Shopping Girl
DOMINGO AYALA COLLECTION
For women's secret

Imagine
Fashion Model

I Love Beauty
HOLLYWOOD
HOLLYWOOD
HOLLYWOOD

My Make-Up

Name
Erika

Stamps

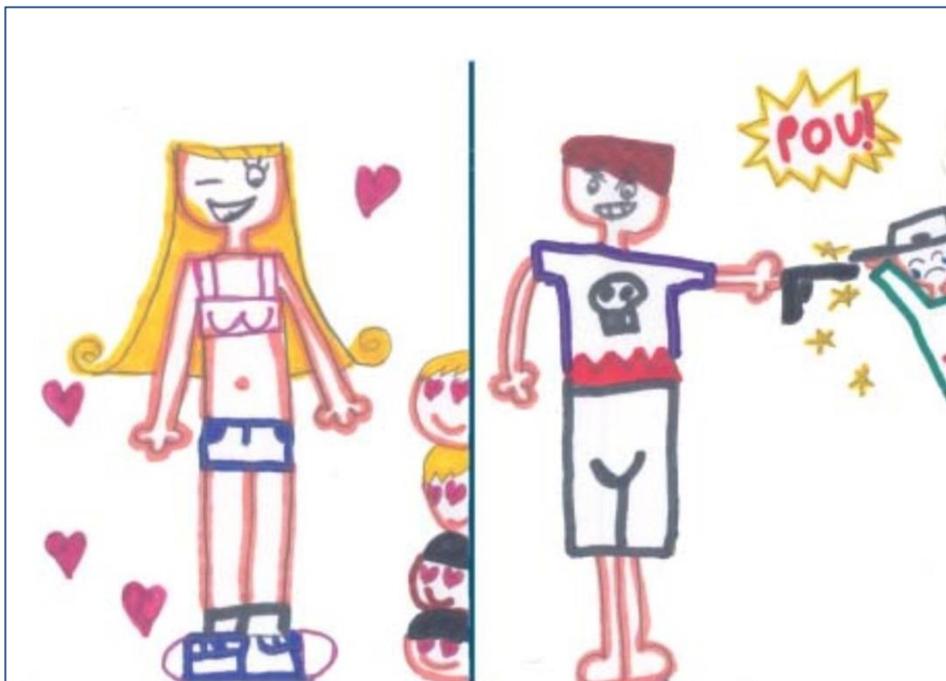
Budget
Around \$880.00

Profile
She is a weekend volunteer at an animal shelter.

That's why I'm here. Can you please find me a nice, stylish skirt to wear?

Imagine that these were all games for boys...

Slide E



APPENDIX 8

Adverts Full List and Thumbnails

TV ADVERTS	TYPE OF FEMININITY PORTRAYED	STEREOTYPICAL	AIMED AT CHILDREN
FIRST ROUND (researcher's selection)			
1- Bratz Masquerade	sexy, glamorous	YES	YES
2- Eurostar	simple, adventurous	NO	YES & NO
3- Zhu Zhu Pets	sweet, caring, playful	YES	YES
4- Pop Princess (pop music CD)	sexy, glamorous	YES	YES
5- Monster High Dolls (MATTEL)	dark, scary, sexy, glam	YES & NO	YES
6- Furreal Dog	trendy, playful, childish	YES	YES
7- Build Your Dream Wedding (Nintendo DS Game)	naughty, glamorous	YES	YES
8- Petit Filous 2011	simple, strong	NO	YES
9- Petit Filous 2012	simple, needing protection	YES	YES
10- Slide D – Collage of Vogue's Adverts	sexy, glamorous	YES	NO
SECOND ROUND (suggested by participants)			
11a - Haribo "Interrogation"	simple, assertive, strong	NO	YES
11b - Haribo "Experiment"	simple, clever, assertive	NO	YES
12- Weight Watchers "Do it our way"	fit, well groomed	YES	NO
13- Justin Bieber "Someday"	attractive	YES	YES
14- Vimto "Low rider"	sexy, glamorous	YES	YES
15- Reeds.co.uk	sexy bride	YES	NO
16- GirlTech Password Diary	attractive, trendy teen	YES	YES
17- Oreo "Twist Lick"	very young, cheeky	YES	YES
18- Dior "J'adore" (Charlize Theron)	sexy, glamorous	YES	NO
19- KFC "Lunch time is my time"	bossy, strong, loud	NO	YES & NO
20- Arumika	pretty, playful, fashionable	YES	YES
21- Chery Cole "Glammed" L'Oréal	sexy, glamorous	YES	NO
22- Katy Perry – Adidas	sexy, hip hop, sporty	YES	NO
MOST DISLIKED ADVERTS (participants refusing to watch): LELLY KELLY, BARBIE			

File Name: 1.Bratz® Masquerade™ Commercial - (2011)_(360p).flv
 File Size: 2.98 MB (3132400 bytes)
 Resolution: 640x360
 Duration: 00:00:30



File Name: 2.explore.flv
File Size: 2.42 MB (2546347 bytes)
Resolution: 400x300
Duration: 00:00:40

Media Player Classic



File Name: 3.popprincess.flv
File Size: 2.94 MB (3092204 bytes)
Resolution: 640x480
Duration: 00:00:30

Media Player Classic



File Name: 4.Zhu Zhu Babies Commercial Winter_Spring 2011 [www.keepvid.com].flv
File Size: 3.39 MB (3561968 bytes)
Resolution: 768x480
Duration: 00:00:31

Media Player Classic



File Name: furreal.flv
File Size: 6.34 MB (6649283 bytes)
Resolution: 640x480
Duration: 00:00:31

Media Player Classic



File Name: DSwedding.flv
File Size: 1.80 MB (1890188 bytes)
Resolution: 400x300
Duration: 00:00:30

Media Player Classic



File Name: Mattel_Monster High_[www.keepvid.com].flv
File Size: 7.44 MB (7804825 bytes)
Resolution: 640x480
Duration: 00:00:50

Media Player Classic



File Name: petitfilous_oldvers.flv
File Size: 1.26 MB (1323539 bytes)
Resolution: 400x300
Duration: 00:00:20

Media Player Classic



File Name: Petits Filous 20' UK • Yoplait - YouTube.flv
File Size: 1.11 MB (1164872 bytes)
Resolution: 640x360
Duration: 00:00:22

Media Player Classic



File Name: KFC Advert - Lunchtime is my time - 2011 - YouTube.flv
File Size: 1.52 MB (1597793 bytes)
Resolution: 400x300
Duration: 00:00:30

Media Player Classic



File Name: Harum!ka - YouTube.flv
File Size: 3.33 MB (3498144 bytes)
Resolution: 640x360
Duration: 00:00:32

Media Player Classic



File Name: Do It Our Way (Play) by Alesha Dixon feat. real members of Weight Watchers - YouTube.flv
File Size: 17.4 MB (18261288 bytes)
Resolution: 640x360
Duration: 00:03:14

Media Player Classic



File Name: Haribo Advert - Interrogation_(360p).flv
File Size: 2.58 MB (2708671 bytes)
Resolution: 626x352
Duration: 00:00:30

Media Player Classic



File Name: New HARIBO Advert 2012 - Just too good - YouTube.flv
File Size: 2.30 MB (2422355 bytes)
Resolution: 640x360
Duration: 00:00:47

Media Player Classic



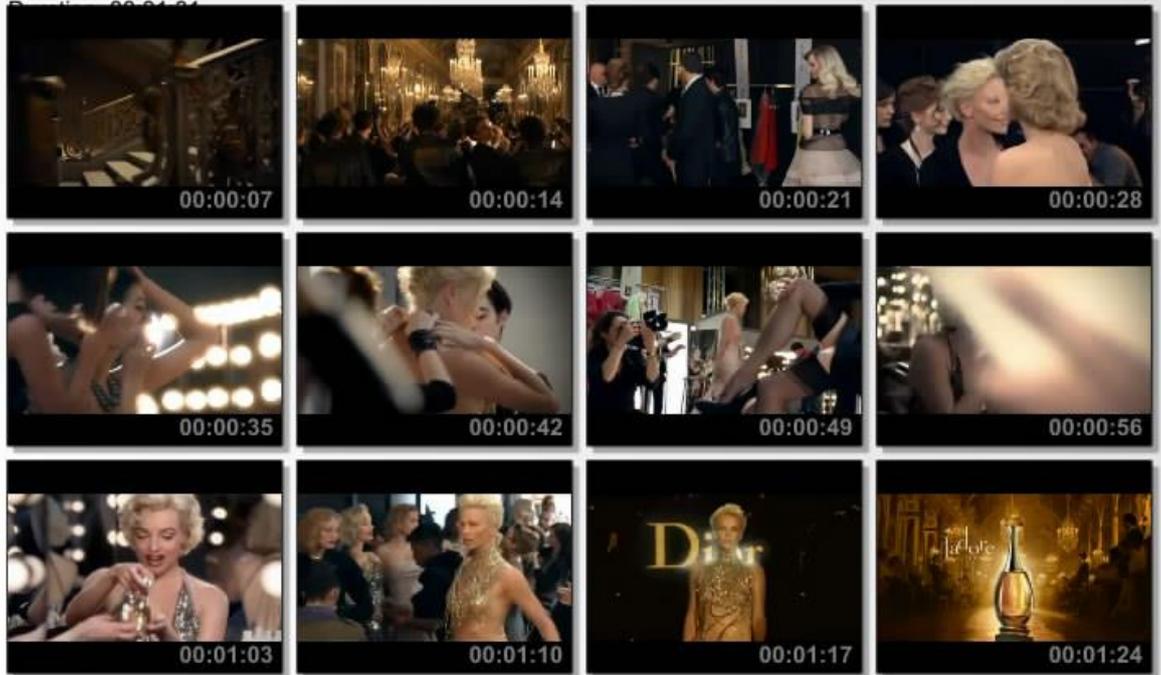
File Name: girl_tech.flv
File Size: 1.35 MB (1424099 bytes)
Resolution: 640x480
Duration: 00:00:20

Media Player Classic



File Name: Charlize Theron Dior Commercial 2011 New Sexy
TV Ad J'Adore Dior Parfume - Rue Faubourg Music 2011.mp4
File Size: 5.38 MB (5651259 bytes)
Resolution: 450x360

Media Player Classic



File Name: Official reed.co.uk TV advert 2012 - Super Reed - YouTube.flv
File Size: 2.90 MB (3051406 bytes)
Resolution: 640x360
Duration: 00:00:30

Media Player Classic



File Name: SOMEDAY by Justin Bieber Dream Shot - Missed Connections_(360p).flv
File Size: 2.09 MB (2196664 bytes)
Resolution: 640x360
Duration: 00:00:42

Media Player Classic



File Name: Vimto Lowrider advert 2011 Bounce n Boom (video) - YouTube.flv
File Size: 3.46 MB (3631261 bytes)
Resolution: 640x360
Duration: 00:00:31

Media Player Classic



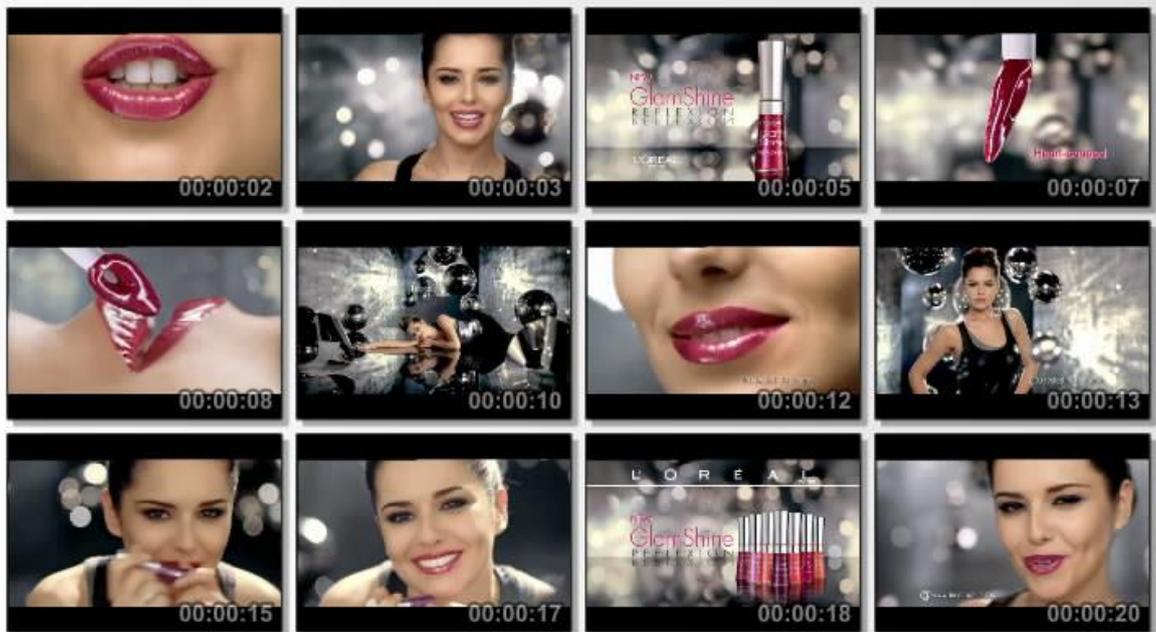
File Name: Katy Perry is all in -- Extended Version.mp4
File Size: 2.34 MB (2460532 bytes)
Resolution: 640x360
Duration: 00:00:33

Media Player Classic



File Name: Cheryl Cole - TV ad for L'Oreal Paris Glam Shine Reflexion Lip Gloss_(360p).flv
File Size: 1.09 MB (1151014 bytes)
Resolution: 480x360
Duration: 00:00:22

Media Player Classic



APPENDIX 9

Examples of Participants' drawings



Kirsty, age 8



Kim, age 9



Mary, age 9



Enri, age 9

APPENDIX 10

Picture example of post-it notes exercise



APPENDIX 11

CONSTRUCTION OF STEREOTYPED MEDIA USAGE GROUP (SMUG) INDEX

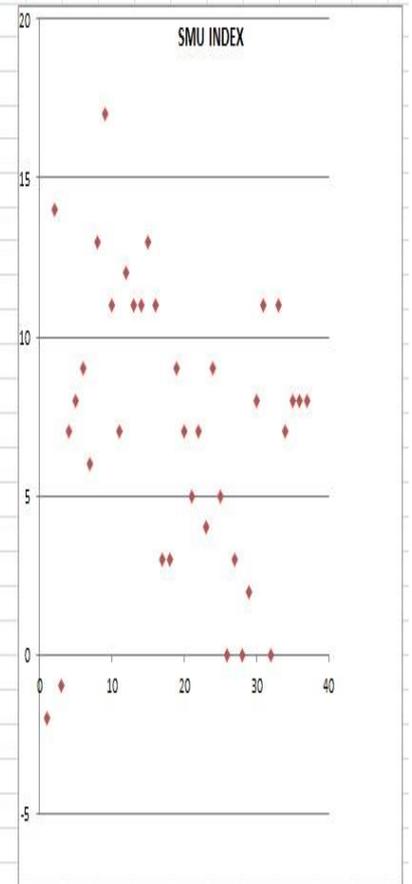
Table 1 - codified information about consumption of media

ID	Name	TV Exposure	Main TV channel	Disney Comedies	Regular Internet	Regular b&c Magz	Big Brother	Adult Celebs Magz	Girls Video Games	X Factor	You Tube Music Videos	Boyish TV & Games
N01	Meg	DVD	DVD	N+	N	N+	N	N+	N	N	N	Y+
N02	Becky	H	D+	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
N03	Olga	M/C	CN/B	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y
N04	Kirsthy	L/C	D	Y	Y+	N	N	N	Y+	Y	N	N
N05	Carly	M	D	Y+	N	N	B	N	Y+	Y	N	N
N06	Maddi	M	D+	Y+	N	N	B	N+	Y+	Y	N	N
N07	Enri	M	N	Y	Y	N	B	N	N	Y	Y	Y
N08	Gina	H	D+	Y+	Y+	N	N	B	Y+	Y	Y	N
N09	Kim	L	D+	Y	Y++	Y+	Y	Y+	Y+	Y	Y	N
N10	Kesha	M	CB/I	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y+	Y	Y	N
N11	Mary	M	N/MTV	Y	N	N	N	B	N	Y	Y	N
N12	Sandy	M	CB/I	N	N	Y+	Y	Y+	Y	Y	Y	N
N13	Lucilla	M	D/N	Y+	Y++	N	N	N	Y+	Y	Y	N
N14	Amber	H	D+/N	Y	Y+	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
N15	Carla	H	D/N	Y+	Y	N	B	Y	Y+	Y	Y	N
N16	Elisha	H	D+/N	Y+	Y	N	N	N	Y+	Y	Y	N
N17	Angel	L/CB	CB	N+	N	N	N	N	Y+	Y	N	N
N18	Leila	L	D/CB	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
N19	Emma	M	D/N	Y-	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
N20	Beth	M	D+	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
N21	Solange	M	D+	Y	N	N	N+	N	N	Y	N	N
N22	Jess	H	CB/N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
N23	Ruby	M	CB/P	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
N24	Hall	M	D/N	Y	Y+	Y+	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
N25	Lulu	L	DVD	N	N	Y++	N	N	Y+	N	Y	N
N26	Judy	M	P/N	N	N	N	N+	N	N	N+	N	N
N27	Roberta	L/C	CB/CN	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	N
N28	Charlette	L/C/E	DVD	N+	N+	N+	N	N	N	N	N	N
N29	Lorraine	L	CB/I	N+	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
N30	MJ	H/C	D/N	Y	Y	N	Y/N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
N31	Milly	M	D/CB	Y	Y+	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N
N32	Marta	L	ONK	N	N+	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
N33	Libet	M	D/CB	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y+	Y	Y	N
N34	Mandy	M	D/N	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N
N35	Emile	M	D+	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N
N36	Linda	M	D+	Y	N	N	N	YB	Y	Y	Y	N
N37	Victoria	M	D+	Y	Y	N+	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N

LEGEND		USAGE MEASURE		TV EXPOSURE COLUMN	
CB	CBBC	Y	YES	DVD	NO TV - ONLY DVDs
D / D+	DISNEY / DISNEY CHANNELS FANATIC	N	NO	L	LIGHT
P / MTV	POP GIRLS / MTV	Y/N	ONLY SOMETIMES	M	MEDIUM
N	NICKELODEON	Y+	YES A LOT	H	HIGH
CN	CARTOON NETWORK	Y++	"OBSESSIVE"	C	MOSTLY CARTOONS
B	BOOMERANG	N+	NEVER EVER	B	MOSTLY BRITISH PROGRAMS
I	ICTV	B	IN THE BACKGROUND	E	EDUCATIONAL / DOCUMENTARIES
DVD	DVDs				
ONK	OTHER NON-KIDS CHANNELS				

Table 2 – Calculation of SMUG Index

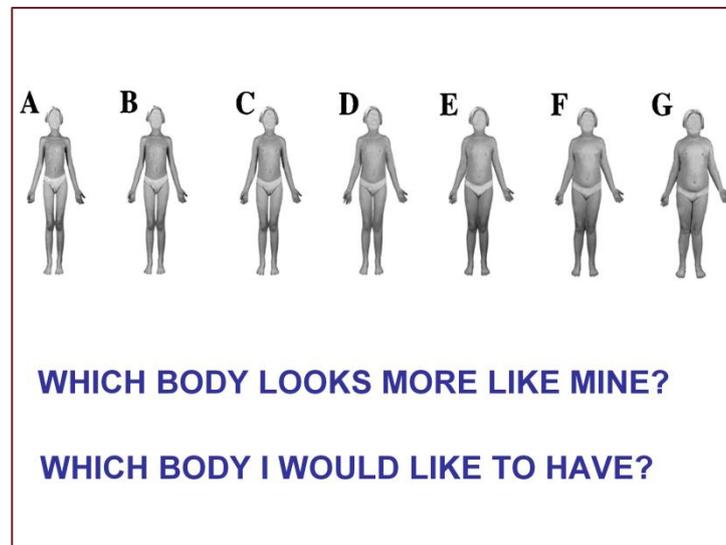
ID	Name	TV Exposure	Main TV channel	Disney Comedies	Regular Internet	Regular B&C Magz	EXPLICIT (i.e. Big Brother)	Adult Celebs Magz (OK)	Girls Video Games	X Factor	YOU TUBE MUSIC VIDEOS	BOY TV PROGR & GAMES	SMU INDEX	SMUG
N01	Meg	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-2	-2	L
N02	Becky	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	0	14	H
N03	Olga	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-1	-1	L
N04	Kirsthy	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	7	M
N05	Carly	1	1	2	0	0	1	0	2	1	0	0	8	M
N06	Maddi	1	2	2	0	0	1	0	2	1	0	0	9	M
N07	Enri	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	-1	6	M
N08	Gina	2	2	2	2	0	0	1	2	1	1	0	13	H
N09	Kim	0	2	1	3	2	2	3	2	1	1	0	17	H
N10	Kesha	1	1	1	2	0	0	2	2	1	1	0	11	H
N11	Mary	1	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	7	M
N12	Sandy	1	1	0	0	2	2	3	1	1	1	0	12	H
N13	Lucila	1	1	2	3	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	11	H
N14	Amber	2	2	2	2	1	0	0	1	1	1	-1	11	H
N15	Carla	2	1	2	1	0	1	2	2	1	1	0	13	H
N16	Elisa	2	2	2	1	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	11	H
N17	Angela	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	3	L
N18	Leila	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	3	L
N19	Emma	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	0	1	-1	-1	9	M
N20	Beth	1	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	7	M
N21	Solange	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	5	L
N22	Jess	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	7	M
N23	Ruby	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	4	L
N24	Hall	1	1	1	2	2	0	1	0	0	1	0	9	M
N25	Lulu	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	-1	0	5	M
N26	Judy	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-1	0	L
N27	Roberta	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	3	L
N28	Charlette	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	L
N29	Lorraine	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	L
N30	MJ	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	8	M
N31	Milly	1	1	1	2	0	2	0	2	1	1	0	11	H
N32	Marta	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	L
N33	Libet	1	1	1	1	1	2	0	2	1	1	0	11	H
N34	Mandy	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	7	M
N35	Emile	1	2	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	8	M
N36	Linda	1	2	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	8	M
N37	Victoria	1	2	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	8	M



APPENDIX 12

Body Image Slide

Adapted from Children Body Image Scale (Truby & Paxton, 2002)



Id	Name	Body Image	BI gap	Body Perception	Id	Name	Body Image	BI gap	Body Perception
N01	Meg	satisfied	D-D	accurate	N20	Beth	satisfied	B-B	accurate
N02	Becky	unsatisfied	B-A	accurate	N21	Solange	unsatisfied	C-B	underestim
N03	Olga	REVunsatisfied	A-C	accurate	N22	Jess	REVunsatisfied	A-B	accurate
N04	Kirsty	unsatisfied	F-B	accurate	N23	Ruby	unsatisfied	C-B	accurate
N05	Carly	satisfied	B-B	accurate	N24	Hall	unsatisfied	C-B	accurate
N06	Maddi	satisfied	C-C	accurate	N25	Lulu	unsatisfied	B-A	underestim
N07	Enri	satisfied	C-C	accurate	N26	Judy	unsatisfied	F-E	accurate
N08	Gina	satisfied	D-D	accurate	N27	Roberta	unsatisfied	C-B	underestim
N09	Kim	unsatisfied	C-B	accurate	N28	Charlette	REVunsatisfied	C-D	accurate
N10	Kesha	unsatisfied	C-B	accurate	N29	Lorraine	satisfied	B-B	accurate
N11	Mary	satisfied	D-D	accurate	N30	MJ	REVunsatisfied	D-E	accurate
N12	Sandy	unsatisfied	C-B	accurate	N31	Millie	unsatisfied	B-A	underestim
N13	Lucilla	unsatisfied	C-B	accurate	N32	Marta	unsatisfied	D-B	accurate
N14	Amber	unsatisfied	E-C	underestim	N33	Libet	unsatisfied	C-B	underestim
N15	Caria	unsatisfied	D-C	accurate	N34	Mandy	satisfied	D-D	accurate
N16	Elisa	unsatisfied	D-C	accurate	N35	Emile	unsatisfied	D-B	accurate
N17	Angel	unsatisfied	E-D	accurate	N36	Linda	unsatisfied	E-C	accurate
N18	Leila	unsatisfied	C-B	accurate	N37	Victoria	REVunsatisfied	C-D	underestim
N19	Emma	unsatisfied	D-C	accurate					

APPENDIX 13

Calculation of SFI (Stereotyped Femininity Index) from responses to Slide C



Slide C

Image No.	ImageName	Valence	Girl description
1	scientist	C	CLEVER, CURIOUS, LIKE EXPERIMENTS, INTO SCIENCE, GEEK
2	karate	C	FIGHTER, STRONG, FIT, INDEPENDENT, FEISTY
3	funny	N	CHECKY, FUNNY, CLOWN, SILLY, ENJOYS MAKING PEOPLE LAUGH
4	messy	N	MESSY, LIKES OUTDOOR, DON'T MIND GETTING DIRTY, ACTIVE
5	cheerleader	F	LIKES TO CHEER AND SUPPORT, POPULAR, INTO DANCE, DRESS UP IN CUSTOMS
6	climbtree	C	ADVENTUROUS, DARING, LIKE NATURE, TOMBOY, ACTIVE, EXPLORING
7	fashionista	F	INTO CLOTHES, FASHION CONSCIOUS, VAIN
8	supergirl	C	POWERFUL, STRONG, HERO, CONFIDENT
9	beautyprincess	F	PRINCESS, BEAUTIFUL, SPOILT, SHOWING OFF
10	studious	N	READING, STUDIOUS, DILIGENT, LIKE BOOKS, LIKES SCHOOL, CONFIDENT
11	shopping	F	LIKE SHOPPING WITH GIRLFRIENDS
12	creative	F	CREATIVE, LIKE WRITING, ARTISTIC, GREAT IMAGINATION
13	quads	C	ADVENTUROUS, BRAVE, LIKES ACTION, TOMBOY, OUTGOING
14	playguitar	N	ARTISTIC, MUSICAL, LIKES PLAYING INSTRUMENT
15	horseriding	N	LIKE HORSES AND OUTDOOR, NATURE/ANIMAL LOVER, ACTIVE
16	climber	C	DARING, SPORTY, FIT, ADVENTUROUS, ACTIVE
17	hairstyling	F	LOOKS & STYLE CONSCIOUS, INTO BEAUTY, WANTS TO LOOK HER BEST
18	goalkeeper	C	SPORTY, FAST, REACTIVE, TOMBOY, DON'T MIND GETTING DIRTY
19	nailpolish	F	INTO STYLE, EXPRESSES HERSELF, LIKES COLOURFUL NAILS
20	shoesgirl	F	INTO FASHION AND SHOES, SPOILT
21	gungirl	C	CRAZY, DANGEROUS, AGGRESSIVE, ANGRY, BRAVE

F = Feminine Stereotypical
 C = Counter-Stereotypical
 N = Neutral

8F 8C 5N

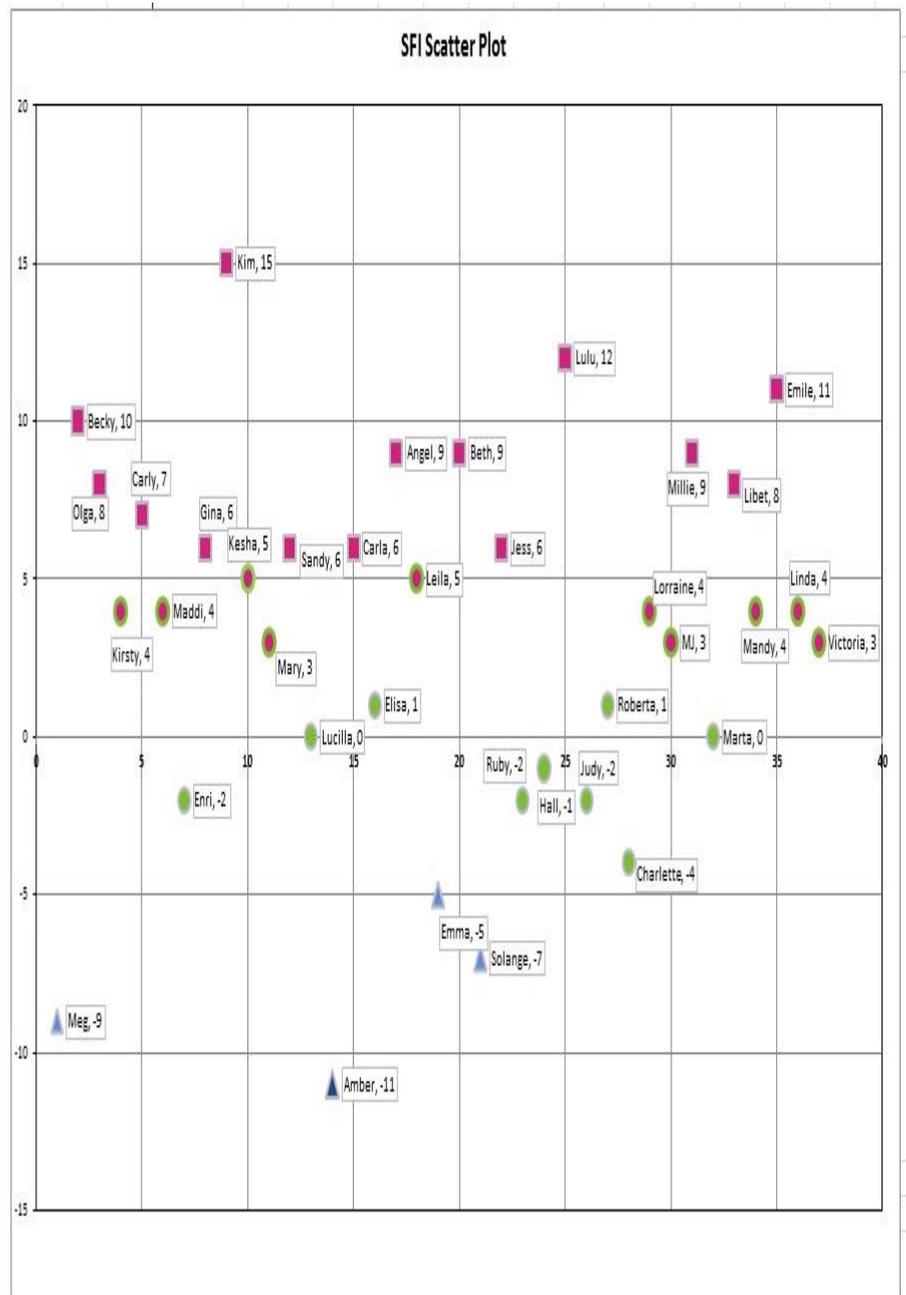
id	name	slideprefer	slidechoice	scientist	karate	funny	messy	cheerleader	climbtree	fashionista	supergirl	beautyprincess	studious	shopping	creative	quads	playguitar	horseriding	climber	hairstyling	goalkeeper	nailpolish	shoegirl	gungirl
N01	Meg	slide A	Easy	aspire	aspire	refuse	refuse	refuse	aspire	indifferent	identify	refuse	indifferent	refuse	identify	refuse	identify	refuse	indifferent	refuse	indifferent	refuse	refuse	indifferent
N02	Becky	slide B	Easy	refuse	aspire	indifferent	refuse	identify	aspire	identify	indifferent	aspire	identify	aspire	indifferent	indifferent	indifferent	identify	aspire	refuse	refuse	identify	refuse	refuse
N03	Olga	slide B	Easy	identify	aspire	refuse	refuse	identify	aspire	aspire	refuse	aspire	aspire	identify	identify	refuse	aspire	identify	identify	identify	refuse	identify	refuse	refuse
N04	Kirsty	both sides	Impossible	indifferent	aspire	indifferent	indifferent	aspire	identify	aspire	indifferent	identify	refuse	aspire	identify	indifferent	aspire	identify	indifferent	refuse	identify	indifferent	indifferent	refuse
N05	Carly	slide B	Easy	aspire	refuse	indifferent	indifferent	identify	aspire	identify	refuse	indifferent	indifferent	indifferent	identify	identify	identify	aspire	refuse	refuse	refuse	aspire	indifferent	refuse
N06	Maddi	both sides	Impossible	refuse	refuse	identify	indifferent	refuse	identify	refuse	refuse	aspire	refuse	identify	identify	aspire	aspire	aspire	aspire	refuse	refuse	indifferent	indifferent	refuse
N07	Enri	slide A	Difficult	aspire	identify	indifferent	indifferent	identify	identify	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	aspire	identify	aspire	aspire	identify	identify	identify	refuse	aspire	refuse	identify
N08	Gina	slide A	Easy	indifferent	refuse	aspire	aspire	identify	aspire	indifferent	refuse	refuse	aspire	aspire	identify	refuse	identify	indifferent	refuse	refuse	refuse	aspire	refuse	refuse
N09	Kim	slide B	Easy	indifferent	refuse	refuse	indifferent	identify	refuse	aspire	refuse	identify	indifferent	identify	aspire	indifferent	indifferent	indifferent	identify	refuse	refuse	identify	aspire	refuse
N10	Kesha	slide B	Easy	identify	aspire	aspire	indifferent	identify	aspire	identify	refuse	identify	indifferent	identify	indifferent	refuse	indifferent	identify	aspire	identify	refuse	identify	identify	identify
N11	Mary	slide A	Easy	refuse	aspire	refuse	refuse	identify	identify	aspire	refuse	refuse	identify	identify	aspire	refuse	aspire	aspire	identify	refuse	aspire	identify	identify	refuse
N12	Sandy	slide B	Easy	aspire	aspire	identify	refuse	identify	aspire	identify	refuse	identify	refuse	identify	aspire	refuse	identify	refuse	identify	refuse	refuse	refuse	identify	refuse
N13	Lucilla	both sides	Impossible	indifferent	refuse	indifferent	indifferent	indifferent	indifferent	indifferent	refuse	indifferent	indifferent	identify	identify	identify	indifferent	identify	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse
N14	Amber	slide A	Easy	identify	identify	refuse	refuse	identify	aspire	identify	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse
N15	Carla	slide B	Easy	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	aspire	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse
N16	Elisa	slide A	Easy	indifferent	refuse	refuse	refuse	indifferent	indifferent	indifferent	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse
N17	Angel	slide B	Easy	aspire	refuse	indifferent	refuse	aspire	aspire	aspire	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse
N18	Leila	slide A	Easy	refuse	indifferent	indifferent	refuse	refuse	indifferent	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse
N19	Emma	slide A	Easy	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse								
N20	Beth	slide A	Easy	aspire	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse							
N21	Solange	slide A	Easy	identify	aspire	indifferent	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse
N22	Jess	both sides	Impossible	indifferent	indifferent	indifferent	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse
N23	Ruby	slide A	Easy	refuse	aspire	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse						
N24	Hall	both sides	Impossible	identify	aspire	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse						
N25	Lulu	slide B	Easy	aspire	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse							
N26	Judy	slide A	Easy	indifferent	aspire	indifferent	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse
N27	Roberta	slide A	Difficult	identify	aspire	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse						
N28	Charlett	slide A	Difficult	identify	indifferent	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse						
N29	Lorrain	both sides	Impossible	aspire	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse							
N30	MJ	slide A	Difficult	identify	indifferent	aspire	aspire	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse
N31	Millie	slide B	Easy	aspire	aspire	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse						
N32	Marta	slide B	Easy	indifferent	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse							
N33	Libet	slide B	Easy	indifferent	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse							
N34	Mandy	slide B	Difficult	indifferent	aspire	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse						
N35	Emile	slide B	Easy	indifferent	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse							
N36	Linda	slide A	Easy	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse								
N37	Victoria	slide A	Easy	identify	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse	refuse							

	Stereotypical	Counter-stereotypical	Neutral	Beauty Princess
Identify	1	-1	0	2
Aspire	1	-1	0	2
Refuse	-1	1	0	-2

Points calculation according to choice expressed

id	name	scientist	karate	funny	messy	cheerleader	climbtree	fashionista	supergirl	beautyprincess	studious	shopping	creative	quads	playguitar	horseriding	climber	hairstyling	goalkeeper	nailpolish	shoegirl	gungirl	INDEX		
N01	Meg	-1	-1	0	0	-1	-1	0	-1	-2	0	-1	1	1	0	0	0	-1	0	-1	-1	-1	0	-9	
N02	Becky	1	-1	0	0	1	-1	1	0	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	-1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10	
N03	Olga	-1	-1	0	0	1	-1	1	1	2	0	1	1	1	0	0	-1	1	1	1	1	-1	1	8	
N04	Kirsty	0	-1	0	0	1	-1	1	0	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	-1	-1	0	0	0	1	4	
N05	Carly	-1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	7	
N06	Maddi	1	1	0	0	-1	-1	-1	1	2	0	1	1	-1	0	0	-1	1	1	0	0	0	1	4	
N07	Enri	-1	-1	0	0	0	-1	1	1	-2	0	1	1	-1	0	0	-1	1	-1	0	0	1	-1	-2	
N08	Gina	0	1	0	0	1	-1	0	1	-2	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	-1	1	6	
N09	Kim	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	15	
N10	Kesha	-1	-1	0	0	1	-1	1	1	2	0	1	0	1	0	0	-1	1	-1	1	1	1	-1	5	
N11	Mary	1	-1	0	0	1	-1	1	1	-2	0	1	1	1	0	0	-1	-1	-1	1	1	1	1	3	
N12	Sandy	-1	-1	0	0	1	-1	1	1	2	0	1	1	-1	0	0	-1	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	
N13	Lucilla	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	-2	0	0	1	-1	0	0	-1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
N14	Amber	-1	-1	0	0	-1	-1	1	-1	-2	0	-1	1	-1	0	0	-1	1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-11	
N15	Carla	1	1	0	0	-1	-1	1	-1	2	0	1	1	1	0	0	-1	1	-1	1	1	1	0	6	
N16	Elisa	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-1	0	-1	1	1	0	1	1	
N17	Angel	-1	1	0	0	1	-1	1	1	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	-1	1	1	1	0	1	0	9	
N18	Leila	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	-1	0	0	-1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	5
N19	Emma	1	-1	0	0	-1	-1	0	0	-2	0	1	1	-1	0	0	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	1	-5	
N20	Beth	-1	1	0	0	1	-1	-1	1	2	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	-1	1	1	1	1	1	9	
N21	Solange	-1	-1	0	0	1	-1	-1	-1	-2	0	-1	1	0	0	0	-1	1	-1	0	0	-1	1	-7	
N22	Jess	0	0	0	0	0	-1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	6	
N23	Ruby	1	-1	0	0	-1	-1	1	1	-2	0	1	1	0	0	0	-1	-1	1	-1	-1	-1	1	-2	
N24	Hall	-1	-1	0	0	-1	-1	1	1	0	0	0	1	-1	0	0	-1	1	-1	0	-1	1	1	-1	
N25	Lulu	-1	1	0	0	1	-1	1	1	2	0	1	1	1	0	0	-1	1	1	1	1	1	1	12	
N26	Judy	0	-1	0	0	0	-1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	-1	0	-1	0	0	0	1	-2	
N27	Roberta	-1	-1	0	0	-1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	-1	1	-1	-1	-1	-1	1	1	
N28	Charlett	-1	0	0	0	1	-1	1	-1	-2	0	1	1	-1	0	0	-1	1	-1	0	0	0	-1	-4	
N29	Lorrain	-1	1	0	0	-1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	-1	1	-1	-1	1	4	
N30	MJ	-1	0	0	0	0	-1	1	1	0	0	1	1	-1	0	0	-1	1	-1	1	1	1	0	3	
N31	Millie	-1	-1	0	0	1	0	1	1	2	0	1	-1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	9	
N32	Marta	0	0	0	0	1	-1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	-1	0	-1	1	0	0	-1	0	
N33	Libet	0	0	0	0</																				

ID	Name	INDEX	slideprefer	slidechoice
N01	Meg	-9	slide A	Easy
N02	Becky	10	slide B	Easy
N03	Olga	8	slide B	Easy
N04	Kirsty	4	both slides	Impossible
N05	Carly	7	slide B	Easy
N06	Maddi	4	both slides	Impossible
N07	Enri	-2	slide A	Difficult
N08	Gina	6	slide A	Easy
N09	Kim	15	slide B	Easy
N10	Kesha	5	slide B	Easy
N11	Mary	3	slide A	Easy
N12	Sandy	6	slide B	Easy
N13	Lucilla	0	both slides	Impossible
N14	Amber	-11	slide A	Easy
N15	Carla	6	slide B	Easy
N16	Elisa	1	slide A	Easy
N17	Angel	9	slide B	Easy
N18	Leila	5	slide A	Easy
N19	Emma	-5	slide A	Easy
N20	Beth	9	slide A	Easy
N21	Solange	-7	slide A	Easy
N22	Jess	6	both slides	Impossible
N23	Ruby	-2	slide A	Easy
N24	Hall	-1	both slides	Impossible
N25	Lulu	12	slide B	Easy
N26	Judy	-2	slide A	Easy
N27	Roberta	1	slide A	Difficult
N28	Charlette	-4	slide A	Difficult
N29	Lorraine	4	both slides	Impossible
N30	MJ	3	slide A	Difficult
N31	Millie	9	slide B	Easy
N32	Marta	0	slide B	Easy
N33	Libet	8	slide B	Easy
N34	Mandy	4	slide B	Difficult
N35	Emile	11	slide B	Easy
N36	Linda	4	slide A	Easy
N37	Victoria	3	slide A	Easy



Colour coding linked to low/medium/high embodiment of stereotypical femininity:

- Pink for girls in the **higher stereotypical** index group
- Green for girls in the **medium stereotypical** index group
- Blue for girls in the **lower stereotypical** index group

APPENDIX 14

Projective Slide No. 1 – Responses Table

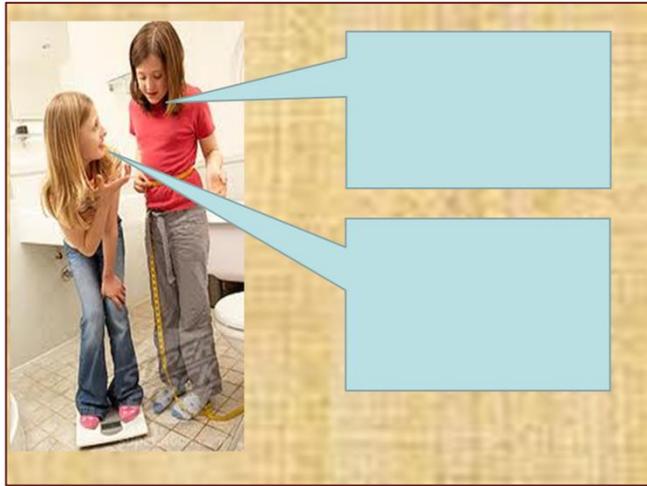


Original quotes from speech bubble completion task

id	name	slide 1	CODE SL1	id	name	slide 1	CODE SL1
N01	Meg	"What are they doing?" (her facial expression showing contempt)	Q/R	N20	Beth	"I wish I was them"	A/W
N02	Becky	"I wish I could be like them"	A/W	N21	Solange	(it's difficult to write anything as I never seen this before) "What are they doing?"	Q
N03	Olga	"I like the first one" (of the three girls in the picture)	A/L	N22	Jess	"They look pretty. Are they going to a party?"	Q
N04	Kirsty	"I want to be like them"	A/W	N23	Ruby	"They are very pretty but show off a bit. That is definitely not me"	C
N05	Carly	"Do I want to be like them?"	Q	N24	Hall	"I would like to be like them, but they are a bit over the top"	M
N06	Maddi	"I think these girls are spoilt"	C	N25	Lulu	"I would love to be them"	A/W
N07	Enri	"She is very pretty but I would want to do and be more my"	C	N26	Judy	"Ohh, I want to be like that"	A/W
N08	Gina	"I don't really want to be like them"	R	N27	Roberta	"I wish I could look like one of them, they are all very pretty"	A/W
N09	Kim	"I want to be one of those people"	A/W	N28	Charlette	"I do not want to be like them"	R
N10	Kesha	"I wish I was her" (referring to one of the girls in the picture)	A/W	N29	Lorraine	"A bit over the top!"	C
N11	Mary	"I wish I was like that"	A/W	N30	MJ	"I want to be like them"	A/W
N12	Sandy	"I wish I was that girl on the end"	A/W	N31	Millie	"Wow, I would love to be in a beauty pageant or on TV!"	A/W+
N13	Lucilla	"I want to be like that"	A/W	N32	Marta	"They look smart. They are fabulous"	A/L
N14	Amber	"They look stupid! DBI"	R	N33	Libet	"Show-offs!"	C
N15	Carla	"Popular, cute"	A/L	N34	Mandy	"They do look pretty. Maybe a bit too much for their age"	C
N16	Elisa	"They look cool, I love the outfits"	A/L	N35	Emile	"Wow, look at them, they look great!"	A/L
N17	Angel	"I think that the first girl is very pretty and I want to be like her"	A/W	N36	Linda	"A few girls showing off!"	C
N18	Leila	"They are pretty. I wish I was like one of them. I like their dresses"	A/W	N37	Victoria	"I really want to be like them"	A/W
N19	Emma	"It's weird!"	R				

APPENDIX 15

Projective Slide No. 2 – Responses Table

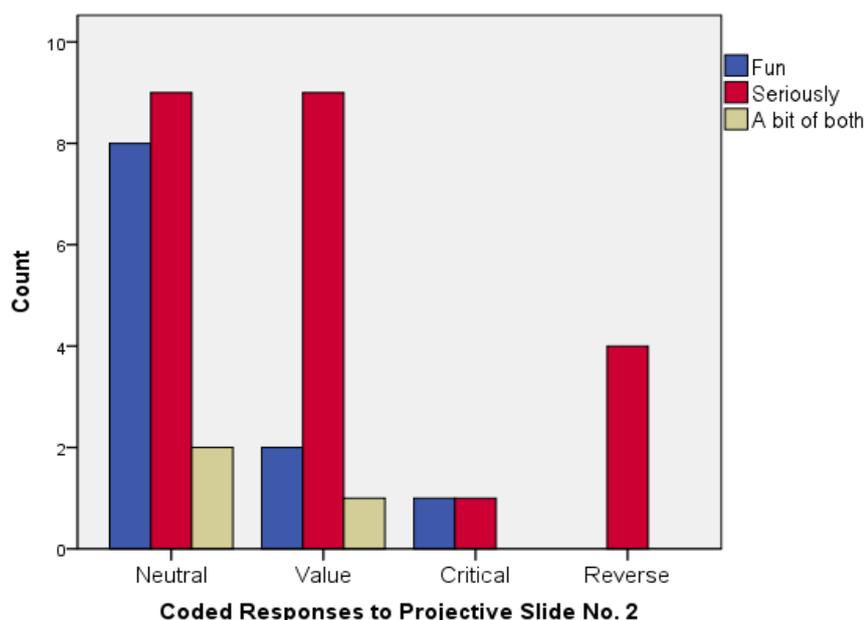


ID	Name	Slide 2	CODE SL.2	Serious/Fun
N01	Meg	(they are checking themselves) "How heavy am I?" "About 3 stones"	NEUTRAL	S
N02	Becky	(I do this with friends every day!) "Wow, you are skinny now" "So have you. You've lost weight"	VALUE	S
N03	Olga	(They check themselves, I never done this myself) "I think you have thin legs " "You have thin waist "	VALUE	S
N04	Kirsty	(they are doing it for fun) "Yeah, this is funny. Do you think we should tell mum?" "Mum will never know we're doing this"	NEUTRAL	F
N05	Carly	(they are doing it for fun) "Why are you so light?" "I can't believe that you're that long and tall?"	NEUTRAL	F
N06	Maddi	(they are doing it seriously. I did check my measurements once for my nanna making clothes) "I am 22 round my waist" "wow, I am 4 stones"	NEUTRAL	S
N07	Enri	"Hey look I am ...(<i>x stones</i>) weight. How heavy are you?" "I am ...(<i>x stones</i>) but it doesn't matter "	CRITICAL	F
N08	Gina	"How much do you weight?" "How much do you measure?"	NEUTRAL	F
N09	Kim	(I do this with Chloe all the time) "I am tall but I need to stop eating too much" "Look I am heavy"	VALUE	S

N10	Kesha	(they are doing it like a game) "You are perfect and slim " "So are you, thank you"	VALUE	F
N11	Mary	(they are doing it seriously) "I put on some weight Sophie" "I have lost some weight Lauren"	NEUTRAL	S
N12	Sandy	"Shall I weight you next?" "Yes please"	NEUTRAL	S
N13	Lucilla	"Look at what my waist measures" "Look how much I weight"	NEUTRAL	S/F
N14	Amber	"I think I am too skinny" "So am I"	REVERSE	S
N15	Carla	(they are doing it seriously) "I don't weight much. I am slim and fit" "I am slim and fit "	VALUE	S
N16	Elisa	(they are checking themselves) "What do I weigh? Is it good?" "Yes. Now I am going to measure you"	NEUTRAL	S
N17	Angel	(they are checking themselves) "Do you like measuring yourself? I don't" "Look at me, I do think it is great but only if it's a good result "	VALUE	S
N18	Leila	(they are doing it for fun. Never done myself) "I am... X inches around my waist. You try to see what you are" "I am x stones. What are you?"	NEUTRAL	F
N19	Emma	"Hey, I've grown a lot!" "So have I!"	REVERSE	S
N20	Beth	"Why are we doing this?" "Do you feel you are a bit too big?"	VALUE	S/F
N21	Solange	(they are checking themselves, never done myself) "I'm 67.5, what about you?" "We should not worry about our weight. I don't know why mum is concerned"	CRITICAL	S
N22	Jess	"I am getting slimmer! YAY!!" "Have you been eating lately? It does not matter how slim you are, just be yourself! "	CRITICAL	S
N23	Ruby	(they are doing it seriously, never done myself) "You are quite thin, unlike me. Some of my clothes don't fit me!" "I think you are a perfect weight. I think I may be quite skinny"	VALUE	S
N24	Hall	(they are checking themselves, never done myself) "I can't believe how big I am now!" "You, I weight quite a lot too" (happy as they are growing)	REVERSE	S
N25	Lulu	(they are doing it seriously. I never done this with friends but I do weight myself sometimes) "I am not at my target yet" "Me neither"	VALUE	S
N26	Judy	(they are doing it for real) "I am thin" "I am light weight"	VALUE	S
N27	Roberta	(they are doing it seriously. I've done it before) "Ohh, look at how much I weight" "Wow, I never knew I weight that much"	NEUTRAL	S

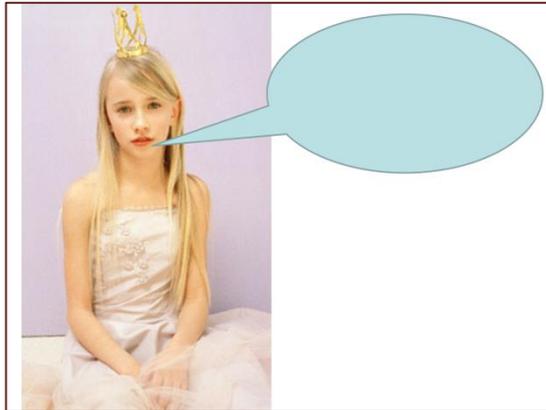
N28	Charlette	(they are doing this like a game) "This is so fun and funny" "Yes you are right, this is fun and funny"	NEUTRAL	F
N29	Lorraine	(it's all a joke probably, they commneting on their weight & measures) "I never knew that!" "Neither did I"	NEUTRAL	F
N30	MJ	(they are doing it seriously) "I am too skinny!" "Wait...let me measure your waist"	REVERSE	S
N31	Millie	(they are checking themselves) "Wow, this is the first time I measured myself, I never done it before" "Neither have I, I like it though"	NEUTRAL	S
N32	Marta	(they are happy to do this game) "Tell me your weight" "I weight X stones"	NEUTRAL	F
N33	Libet	(they are doing it seriously) "You are so thin" "No, you are!"	VALUE	S
N34	Mandy	(it' s probably half joke, half seriously. But I wouldn't like to be doing that) "Do you think I look ok?" "Yeah fine, what about me?"	NEUTRAL	S/F
N35	Emile	(It's all a game) "This is fun, I like this" "I know, it's great!"	NEUTRAL	F
N36	Linda	(They r doing this seriously) "This is how much you weight" "I am the same as you"	NEUTRAL	S
N37	Victoria	(They are doing it for fun) "Do you think I am heavy?" "No, don't be daft"	VALUE	F

Projective Slide 2 - Are they doing this for fun or seriously?



APPENDIX 16

Projective Slide No. 3 – Responses Table



id	name	slide 3	CODESL3	willing/forced	id	name	slide 3	CODESL3	willing/forced
N01	Meg	(it's a competition) "I wonder if I'm going to be chosen"	HOPEFUL	W	N19	Emma	"Another stupid context!"	RESISTANT	F
N02	Becky	"I don't like to be the odd one out. Everyone else leaves me out" (she's beautiful but other girls are envious)	SAD-FRIENDS	W	N20	Beth	bubble blank - couldn't do it	BLANK	N/A
N03	Oliga	(she thinks she's not pretty enough for the context) "I think I am fat. I wish I had big boobes"	WORRIED	W	N21	Solange	"Wait until my friends see me. I look stupid"	RESISTANT	F
N04	Kirsty	(it's a photo shoot, parents brought her but she's bored) "You'll pay and I don't want to do this"	RESISTANT	F	N22	Jess	"Great to be bold for the camera...mmm... Is this my normal look? I don't like this!"	RESISTANT	F
N05	Carly	"Why do I have to be like this now?"	RESISTANT	F	N23	Ruby	"Everyone thinks fashion people are horrible. But they aren't. My mum made me come, it isn't my decision"	RESISTANT	F
N06	Maddi	(the girl is going to a princess party) "I think I'll be the prettiest girl out of any of them. Oh no! they look better than me!"	WORRIED	W	N24	Hall	"I do like dressing up and I have entered the pageant because of my sisters, who won one. I am beautiful"	POSITIVE	W
N07	Enri	(it's a beauty contest) "I hope I win, it would be nice"	HOPEFUL	W	N25	Lulu	(she's ready for a beauty pageant) "I hope I win"	HOPEFUL	W
N08	Gina	bubble left blank- couldn't do it	BLANK	N/A	N26	Judy	(she's doing a beauty contest but she's not sure) "Why am I doing this?"	RESISTANT	F
N09	Kim	"I am worried to go onto stage with all those people looking at me"	WORRIED	W	N27	Roberta	"This is cool, I like being in photo shoots, but what is going to be for, maybe a magazine?"	POSITIVE	W
N10	Kesha	"I know I won but my friend is upset"	SAD-FRIENDS	W	N28	Charlette	This is really hard! bubble left blank	BLANK	N/A
N11	Mary	(the girl was ready for a wedding) "I am really upset that my sister wedding has been cancelled"	SAD-LOSING	W	N29	Lorraine	bubble left blank- couldn't do it	BLANK	N/A
N12	Sandy	(she's losing the contest) "I wish I could win sometimes"	SAD-LOSING	W	N30	MJ	(parents want her to do the contest, she won but she's not into it) "I really wish I was not doing this"	RESISTANT	F
N13	Lucilla	bubble blank- couldn't do it	BLANK	N/A	N31	Milie	"I love to dress up in fancy clothes"	POSITIVE	W
N14	Amber	"I don't want to do this"	RESISTANT	F	N32	Marta	bubble left blank- couldn't do it	BLANK	N/A
N15	Carla	bubble blank - couldn't do it	BLANK	N/A	N33	Libet	(she's a spoilt girl) "I won but my dad won't let me get something I really"	RESISTANT	W
N16	Elisa	bubble blank- couldn't do it	BLANK	N/A	N34	Mandy	"I look really pretty" (she's very into the part)	POSITIVE	W
N17	Angel	bubble blank - couldn't do it	BLANK	N/A	N35	Emile	"This isn't as bad as I thought. At least I look good"	POSITIVE	W
N18	Leila	"I hope I win this contest, it would be really cool if I won. Do you like my dress"	HOPEFUL	W	N36	Linda	"I wish my parents were here to support me"	WORRIED	W

APPENDIX 17

Post-it notes exercise: "E.T. comes to earth"

Group sessions 4/11/11 & 10/11/11

Name	Stereotypical	Neutral or Counter-stereotypical	Name	Stereotypical	Neutral or Counter-stereotypical
Meg		Girls are better than boys: full stop Girls rule and girls are clever The bad thing about being a girl: sometimes people insult me	Lucilla	Girls like fashion Girl like lipsticks Girl like GirlsGoGames.com Girls like writing Christmas and birthday cards Girls like hearts and flowers Girls like perfume and deodorants Girls love Disney channels and Nickelodeon Girls like Little Mix to Win	Girls love music Girl like their laptop Girls like Nintendo DS, 3DS, Wii, PSP, XBOX I hate Justin Bieber!
Becky	girls are always on their phone girls can be lazy all girls get stressed easily girls have fashion girls don't like getting told off girls care about fashion the most girls don't like being messy girls like to look pretty girls think boys are annoying girls don't like joggers or tracksuits girls are gobbs (loud mouths)		Amber		Girls like watching TV Girls like bikes & scooters Girls like Xfactor Girls like music
Kirsty	Girls like shopping Girls wear great clothes Girls scream quickly Girls care more about their hair Girls text a lot (that's good) Girls don't play football Girls don't like maths	Girls are better than boys	Carla	girls dress up in cute high heels girls are really pretty, nice and sweet girls have a great sense of style Most girls don't like football	Girls are not chickens
Carly	Girls like make-up . . . Girls have good hair Girls are clean Girls clean up while boys are sleeping Girls don't like going away from their family	girls are hard working girls don't stop dancing girls don't like plain stuff Girls are passionate	Elisa	Girls like looking good Girls like fashion	Girls don't like the news Girls like sleeping Girls like reading Girls like friends Girls like music and singing Girls love fruit Girls like dancing Girls don't like boys beating them up Girls like a bit football Girls don't like school
Enri	Girls do the cleaning up Girls are stylish Girls love being chatty All girls get stressed fast Girls don't like boys not paying attention to them Girls don't like getting freaked out	girls like to hang out with friends girls like sleepovers girls don't like Tv adverts girls don't like being rushed girls like singing	Angel	Girls love animals Girls like make-up Girls don't like to play football together Girls like shopping for clothes (I love Justin Bieber)	Girls like Britain Got Talent (I love swimming) (I love my family) (I like books)
Gina	Girls like cooking Girls are onto making and texting Girls like doing valentine cards Some girls like school All girls are always nice Girls like having boyfriend Girls like money	Girls like doing their best Girls like party Girls like cookies Girls like reading	Jess	Girls don't like boys Girls like make-up & fashion Girls like exchanging fahion Girls like caring for pets	Girls love staying up late Girls like funny stupid things like farts! Girls hate boys being bad losers Girls hate ghosts Girls love vampires girls
Kim	Some girl like some boy girls don't like their clothes wet or muddy girls like make-up girls are better than boys staring at them girls concentrate on their work girls like dressing up and high heels girls do not like shouting girls like to spend time with their boyfriend girls don't like wearing tracksuit or trainers girls don't like boys stuff	girls like dancing girls like odd things	Ruby	Girls can multitask Girls like chosng clothes in the shop	People think that I won't like some boys' toys, so I never get them Girls have better ideas Some girls have good ideas but boys always think they are bad ideas Girls like some boys' game but they never let you join in (Some girl think I am weird because I'm not really girly)
			Hall	Girls are better than boys because we can multitask Girls dress up at parties Girls wear make-up Girls have to do most the housework Girls can concentrate at school Girls like chatting with their friends	Girls can do some things that boys can do (Whenever we try to do things that boys do, they always say "you can't do it") Girls love drawing

Table I

E.T. comes to earth – Groups session 22/11/11

NAME	BETTER TO BE GIRL BECAUSE...	BETTER/EASIER TO BE BOY BECAUSE...
Leila	Girls do something better as they can concentrate better they can wear make-up they are more pretty	Boys don't have to have babies they don't have to wash as much hair they can be more lazy
Beth	Girls are more fascinating girls can wear make-up girls are clean and they don't get muddy they wear dresses and better clothes so they look better girls are more energetic girls are smarter than boys and more reliable	Boys don't have kids and go through all the pain Boys are very lazy
Solange	Girls are smarter than boys (fact)	Easier to be boys as they don't need to go through labour Boys can just be lazy Boys can burp louder and be gross
Hall	Girls are better than boys because we can multitask. Girls can dress up at parties and wear make-up	Girls have to do most the housework
Lulu	Girls are more sexy than boys completely Better to be a girl, the more sexier	Boys can be lazy and do nothing around the house
Roberta	Girls can look more pretty Girls can do more fun stuff like makeover & catwalk You can wear dresses, skirts & show off Girls get to care for a child more	They can laze around and play Playstation and Xbox It's better to be a boy because you don't get breast
Lorraine	Better to be girls because boys are weird It's better to be girl because boys are stupid It's easier to be girl because girls look better	It's easier to be a boy because they don't get notty hair It's better to be a boy because they can just laze around all day
Milly	Girls are prettier Girls have better voices They can stay at home with their children	Boys don't have to go through birth (pain) they can be lazy all the time if they burp no one will say anything they don't have to wash a lot

Table II

APPENDIX 18

Final Certificate given to Participants



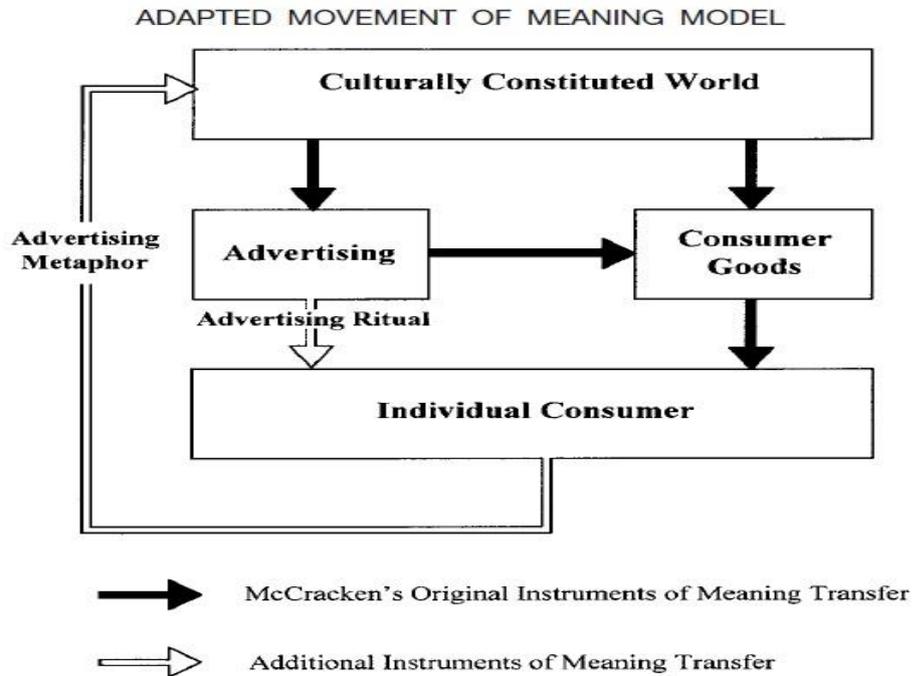
APPENDIX 19

Risk of Harm & Disclosure

	Situation	Proposed Action
1	One respondent makes embarrassing comments towards one or few participants during focus group discussion	The principle in this kind of situation is that the more attention is given to the comment the more it will hurt the person concerned. Therefore the proposed action is to try to distract the attention of the group from the comment itself by breaking away very quickly from the topic discussed (i.e. proposing a new idea or starting a new exciting task)
2	Respondent upset by a memory of past event during one-to-one interview	Try to end the discussion on a positive note, for example by praising the ability/maturity of the respondent to open up in such an emotional way during an interview
3	Respondent makes several negative comments about herself (i.e. her body, her personality or her abilities)	Try to make a constructive /objective/positive comment to end. For example ask the respondent to reflect on the fact that our own idea and perception of ourselves is mediated by our own experiences and often do not match what other people see/think about us
4	Respondent is talking about abuses she have suffered in the past	Not being a trained psychologist, the researcher will try to steer away the discussion from anything which could be too profound or upsetting to talk about for the respondent. A set of diverting questions will be prepared in advance to help in this situations
5	There is an argument between focus group participants and it could quickly degenerate into a fight	Similar action as for situation 1)
6	Respondent is talking about abuses she is currently suffering (i.e. in family or bullying at school)	Depending on how serious the issues are the researcher can either discuss the proposed action with the respondent or seek the supervisors and school's advice in case of more serious concern
7	The respondent show clear and serious concerns about her body, suggesting resorting to dangerous practices/activities as a remedy	Discuss matter with the child, providing useful information (i.e. leaflets and links) to prevent dangerous practices; seek supervisors or school's advice in case of more serious concern

APPENDIX 20

Meaning Transfer Model adapted by Ritson & Elliott (1999)



Reproduced from: Ritson M. & Elliot R. (1999), *The social Uses of Advertising: An Ethnographic Study of Adolescent Advertising Audiences*. Journal of Consumer Research, Vol.26

In McCracken's (1988, chapter 5) seminal model of the movement of meaning (see Fig. 1) advertising is defined as an "instrument of meaning transfer" that acts as a conduit by capturing cultural meanings and investing them into the consumer good through a process McCracken (1987, p.122) describes as "a die-casting mechanism." These tangible goods then act as way stations of meaning for the consumer who derives meaning from them through a variety of different product-related rituals. The fact that the advertising rituals enacted by the sixth formers occurred with absolutely no usage of the products featured in the ads suggests that McCracken's model, although insightful, may underestimate and oversimplify the role of advertising in meaning transfer (...). Although it quite correctly shows advertising as a contributory force in product-consumption rituals, **it fails to conceptualize advertising as a cultural product in its own right** (...) that can have its meanings consumed by the audience independent of the product that it features (...). Thus aside from contributing to product rituals by investing those products with symbolic meaning, the findings of this study suggest that the advertising text can also provide an independent source for rituals that are enacted in a variety of social contexts in order to confer meaning onto their participants and audience.

(...)

The existence of advertising metaphor suggests a second modification to McCracken's meaning transfer model (see Fig. 1). For McCracken (1988, p. 88), when the individual consumer transfers the meaning of the consumer good to their self-concept through product ritual, the flow of meaning has "completed its journey." Meaning, however, is created by the "continual circularity of significance" (Eco 1981, p. 198). As a result, **the movement of meaning is circular rather than vertical, and its location is transitory rather than terminal**. Advertising metaphor, shown in Figure 1, represents the final stage in this semantic circuit, as symbolic meanings are transported from culture, invested into the advertising text, extracted from that text by interpretation and ritual, and then finally reapplied to the cultural world through the metaphoric sense making of the interpreter.

APPENDIX 21

Fieldwork Sessions with Gifts' Audit Trail

 = a novelty rubber or glittery pen was given as a gift to participants after completing the session

Visit No.	Date	To see	Year	Type of session	No. of girls	Length of session	am/pm
1	23/09/11	Head Teacher	Head	initial meeting	0	20 min	pm
2	03/10/11	presentation to Y4	Y4	group session	5	20 min	pm
		presentation to Y5	Y5	group session	8	20 min	pm
3	11/10/11	Meg	Y4	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	pm
		Becky	Y4	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	pm
		Olga	Y4	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	pm
		Kirsty	Y4	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	pm
4	13/10/11	some Y5 girls	Y5	presentation to group	7	20 min	pm
		some Y5 girls	Y5	presentation to group	6	20 min	pm
		Y6 girls	Y6	presentation to group	11	20 min	pm
5	18/10/11	Carly	Y4	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	am
		Maddi	Y5	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	am
		Enri	Y5	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	am
		Y4 girls	Y4	observation during P.E.	all Y4	1hr	pm
6	20/10/11	Gina	Y5	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	pm
		Kim	Y5	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	pm
		Kesha	Y5	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	pm
7	04/11/11	Megan H	Y5	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	am
		Sandy	Y5	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	am
		Lucilla	Y5old	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	am
		Amber	Y5old	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	pm
		Carla	Y5old	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	pm
		various Y4	6	fun group session	8	1 hr 30min	afterschool
8	10/11/11	Elisha	Y5old	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	am
		Y5/6	Y5/6	observation playground	various	30 min	lunch break
		all girls	Y4/5/6	observation event	various	2 hrs	pm
		Angel	Y5old	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	pm
		various Y4	Y5	fun group session	7	1 hr 45 min	afterschool
9	11/11/11	Lucy B	Y5old	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	am
		various Y4/5	Y4/5	observation playground	various	30 min	lunch break
		Emma	Y5old	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	pm
		Beth	Y5old	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	pm
10	15/11/11	Solange	Y5old	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	am
		various Y4/5	Y4/5	observation playground	various	30 min	lunch break
		Jess	Y6	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	pm
		Ruby	Y6	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	pm
		Hall	Y6	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	pm
11	16/11/11	Lulu	Y5old	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	pm

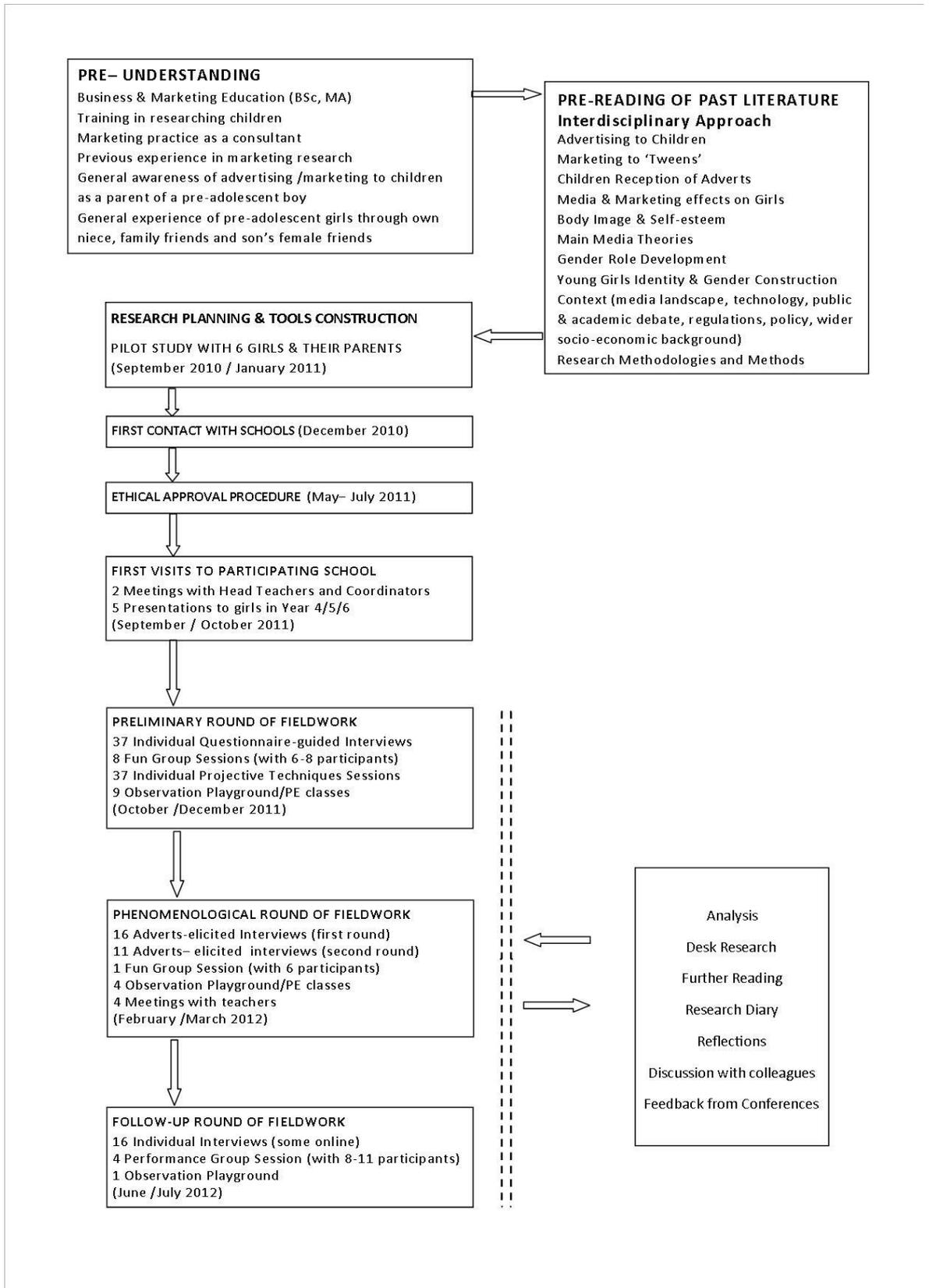
		Judy	Y6	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	pm
		Roberta	Y5old	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	pm
		Charlotte M	Y6	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	pm
		Lorraine	Y5old	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	pm
12	18/11/11	Megan J	Y4	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	am
		Millie	Y6	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	am
		various Y4/5	Y5/6	observation playground	various	30 min	lunch break
		Megan B	Y6	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	pm
		Libby	Y6	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	pm
		Madeline	Y6	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	pm
13	22/11/11	Linda	Y4	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	pm
		Victoria	Y4	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	pm
		Becky	Y4	Individual/projective	1	20 min	pm
		Emile	Y6	individual/questionnaire	1	20-30 min	pm
		various Y5	Y5	fun group session	8	1h 45min	after school
14	25/11/11	Olga	Y4	Individual/projective	1	20 min	am
		Kirsty	Y4	Individual/projective	1	20 min	am
		Meg	Y4	individual/projective	1	20 min	am
		various Y4/5	Y4/5	observation playground	various	30 min	lunch break
		Carly	Y4	Individual/projective	1	20 min	pm
		Enri	Y5	Individual/projective	1	20 min	pm
		Maddi	Y5	Individual/projective	1	20 min	pm
		various Y5/5older	Y5/Y5	fun group session	6	1h 45min	after school
15	26/11/11	Linda	Y4	Individual/projective	1	20 min	pm
		Victoria	Y4	Individual/projective	1	20 min	pm
		various Y5	Y5/6	fun group session	7	1h 45min	after school
16	29/11/11	Kesha	Y5	Individual/projective	1	20 min	pm
		Kim	Y5	Individual/projective	1	20 min	pm
17	01/12/11	Gina	Y5	Individual/projective	1	20 min	pm
		Mary	Y5	Individual/projective	1	20 min	pm
		Sandy	Y5	Individual/projective	1	20 min	pm
18	02/12/11	Lucilla	Y5old	Individual/projective	1	20 min	am
		Molly	Y6	Individual/projective	1	20 min	am
		PE class Y5 older	Y5old	observation during P.E.	all Y5	1 h	pm
		Libet	Y6	Individual/projective	1	20 min	pm
		Mandy	Y6	Individual/projective	1	20 min	pm
19	07/12/11	Elisha	Y5old	Individual/projective	1	20 min	pm
		Carla	Y5old	Individual/projective	1	20 min	pm
		Angel	Y5old	Individual/projective	1	20 min	pm
		Leila	Y5old	Individual/projective	1	20 min	pm
		various Y6	Y5/6	fun group session	6	1h 30 min	after school
20	09/12/11	MJ	Y5	Individual/projective	1	20 min	am
		Lulu	Y5old	Individual/projective	1	20 min	am
		Beth	Y5old	Individual/projective	1	20 min	am
		Solange	Y6	Individual/projective	1	20 min	pm
		Emile	Y6	Individual/projective	1	20 min	pm
21	15/12/11	Mary	Y5	Individual/projective	1	20 min	am

		Charlette	Y6	Individual/projective	1	20 min	am
		Marta	Y6	Individual/projective	1	20 min	pm
		PE class Y5	Y5	observation during P.E.	all 5	1hr	pm
		Emma	Y5old	Individual/projective	1	20 min	pm
		Carly	Y4	Individual/projective	1	20 min	pm
		various Y4/5	Y5	fun group session	6	1h 45min	after school
22	16/12/11	Jess	Y6	Individual/projective	1	20 min	am
		Lorraine	Y6	Individual/projective	1	20 min	am
		Judy	Y6	Individual/projective	1	20 min	am
		various Y5/6	Y6	observation playground	various	30 min	lunch break
		Roberta	Y5old	Individual/projective	1	20 min	pm
		Holly	Y6	Individual/projective	1	20 min	pm
		various Y6	Y6	fun group session	5	1h 45min	after school
23	01/02/12	Head teacher	Head	meeting Head Teacher	1	20 min	pm
		All school	Y4/5/6	observation event	6	1h 45min	pm
24	02/02/12	PE class Y4	Y4	observation during P.E.	all Y4	1 h	pm
		Meg+ Olga	Y4	couple/advert elicitation	2	20-30 min	pm
		Kesha+ Sandy	Y5	couple/advert elicitation	2	20-30 min	pm
25	03/02/12	various Y4/5	Y4/5	observation playground	various	30 min	lunch break
		Enri+ MJ	Y5	couple/advert elicitation	2	20-30 min	pm
		Becky + Kim	Y4-5	couple/advert elicitation	2	20-30 min	pm
		Kirsty+ Carly	Y4	couple/advert elicitation	2	20-30 min	pm
26	08/02/12	Emile+ Beth	Y5old	couple/advert elicitation	2	20-30 min	pm
		Elisha+ Amber	Y5old	couple/advert elicitation	2	20-30 min	pm
27	23/02/12	Lulu+ Leila	Y5old	couple/advert elicitation	2	20-30 min	pm
		PE class Y6	Y6	observation during P.E.	all Y6	1 hr	pm
		Carla+ Hall	Y6	couple/advert elicitation	2	20-30 min	pm
28	24/02/12	Ruby	Y6	individ/advert elicitation	1	20-30 min	pm
		Mandy + Libet	Y6	couple/advert elicitation	2	20-30 min	pm
29	06/03/12	various Y4/5	Y4/5	observation playground	various	30 min	lunch break
		Millie + Jess	Y6	couple/advert elicitation	2	20-30 min	pm
30	08/03/12	Roberta + Emma	Y5old	couple/advert elicitation	2	20-30 min	pm
		Lucilla+ Angel	Y5old	couple/advert elicitation	2	20-30 min	pm
		Judy + Charlette	Y6	couple/advert elicitation	2	20-30 min	pm
		Lorraine + Solange	Y5old	couple/advert elicitation	2	20-30 min	pm
31	09/03/12	Kesha +Sandy	Y5	couple/advert elicitation	2	20-30 min	pm
		Meg + Olga	Y5	couple/advert elicitation	2	20-30 min	pm
		Ruby	Y6	individ/advert elicitation	2	20-30 min	pm
32	10/03/12	Amber + Elisha	Y5	couple/advert elicitation	2	20-30 min	pm
		Becky + Kim	Y4	couple/advert elicitation	2	20-30 min	pm
		teachers Y4 /5	Y4/5	meeting with teachers	1+1	20 min each	after school
33	11/03/12	teachers Y5/6	Y5/6	meeting with teachers	1+1	20 min each	lunch time
		Kirsty+ Carly	Y4	couple/advert elicitation	2	20-30 min	pm
		Lulu+ Emma	Y6	couple/advert elicitation	2	20-30 min	pm
		Ruby+ Hall	Y6	couple/advert elicitation	2	20-30 min	pm
34	13/03/12	Millie + Jess	Y6	couple/advert elicitation	2	20-30 min	pm
		Lucilla+ Angel	Y5old	couple/advert elicitation	2	20-30 min	pm

		Lorraine + Solange	Y5old	couple/advert elicitation	2	20-30 min	pm
35	29/06/12	various Y5/6	Y5/6	observation playground	various	30 min	lunch break
		Olga	Y4	follow-up interview	1	30 min	pm
		Solange	Y6	follow-up interview	1	30 min	pm
36	30/06/12	Ruby	Y6	follow-up interview	1	30 min	pm
		Lulu	Y4	follow-up interview	1	30 min	pm
		Enri	Y5	follow-up interview	1	30 min	pm
		Kirsty	Y4	follow-up interview	1	30 min	pm
37	01/07/12	Carly	Y4	follow-up interview	1	30 min	pm
		Kim	Y5	online follow-up	1	30 min	evening
		Angel	Y5old	online follow-up	1	30 min	evening
		Lucilla	Y5old	online follow-up	1	30 min	evening
38	02/07/12	Carla	Y5old	online follow-up	1	30 min	evening
	(home)	Jess	Y6	online follow-up	1	30 min	evening
40	04/07/12	Millie	Y6	online follow-up	1	30 min	evening
	(home)	Becky	Y4	online follow-up	1	30 min	evening
		Lorraine	Y5old	online follow-up	1	30 min	evening
		Emma	Y6	online follow-up	1	30 min	evening
41	01/07/12	group after school	Y4	fun group performances	8	2hrs	after school
42	05/07/12	group after school	Y5	fun group performances	8	2hrs	after school
43	06/07/12	group after school	Y5/6	fun group performances	9	2hrs	after school
44	08/07/12	group after school	Y4/5	fun group performances	11	2hrs	after school

APPENDIX 22

Research Process



APPENDIX 23

Age of Participants

The age of participants reported in these tables represents their **average** age throughout the project according to their date of birth. The age composition of the sample for every stage is shown in percentages below each table.

* Note: At the time of the follow-up stage (June/July 2012) most participants reported in the table as age 8 were actually close to their 9th birthday.

TOTAL SAMPLE

Questionnaire
Projective
Group Sessions
N = 37

ID	NAME	AGE
N01	Meg	8
N02	Becky	8
N03	Olga	8
N04	Kirsty	8
N05	Carly	8
N06	Maddi	9
N07	Enri	9
N08	Gina	9
N09	Kim	9
N10	Kesha	9
N11	Mary	9
N12	Sandy	9
N13	Lucilla	10
N14	Amber	10
N15	Carla	10
N16	Elisa	10
N17	Angel	10
N18	Leila	10
N19	Emma	11
N20	Beth	11
N21	Solange	11
N22	Jess	11
N23	Ruby	11
N24	Hall	11
N25	Lulu	11
N26	Judy	11
N27	Roberta	11
N28	Charlette	11
N29	Lorraine	11
N30	MJ	9
N31	Millie	11
N32	Marta	10
N33	Libet	11
N34	Mandy	11
N35	Emile	11
N36	Linda	8
N37	Victoria	8

ADVERTS-ELICITED

INTERVIEWS

First Round

N = 31

ID	NAME	AGE
N01	Meg	8
N02	Becky	8
N03	Olga	8
N04	Kirsty	8
N05	Carly	8
N07	Enri	9
N09	Kim	9
N10	Kesha	9
N11	Mary	9
N12	Sandy	9
N13	Lucilla	10
N14	Amber	10
N15	Carla	10
N16	Elisha	10
N17	Angel	10
N19	Emma	11
N20	Beth	11
N21	Solange	11
N22	Jess	11
N23	Ruby	11
N24	Hall	11
N25	Lulu	11
N26	Judy	11
N27	Roberta	11
N28	Charlette	11
N29	Lorraine	11
N31	Millie	11
N33	Libet	11
N34	Mandy	11
N35	Emile	11

ADVERTS-ELICITED

INTERVIEWS

Second Round

N = 21

ID	NAME	AGE
N01	Meg	8
N02	Becky	8
N03	Olga	8
N04	Kirsty	8
N05	Carly	8
N09	Kim	9
N10	Kesha	9
N12	Sandy	9
N13	Lucilla	10
N14	Amber	10
N15	Carla	10
N16	Elisha	10
N17	Angel	10
N19	Emma	11
N21	Solange	11
N22	Jess	11
N23	Ruby	11
N24	Hall	11
N29	Lorraine	11
N31	Millie	11
N34	Mandy	11

FOLLOW-UP

INTERVIEWS

N = 16

ID	NAME	AGE
N02	Becky	8
N03	Olga	8
N04	Kirsty	8
N05	Carly	8
N07	Enri	9
N13	Lucilla	10
N14	Amber	10
N15	Carla	10
N17	Angel	10
N19	Emma	11
N21	Solange	11
N22	Jess	11
N23	Ruby	11
N25	Lulu	11
N29	Lorraine	11
N31	Millie	11

Age 8: 7/37 = 18.9%

Age 9: 8/37 = 21.6%

Age 10: 7/37 = 18.9%

Age 11: 15/37 = 40.5%

Age 8: 5/31 = 16.1%

Age 9: 5/31 = 16.1%

Age 10: 5/31 = 16.1%

Age 11: 15/31 = 48.3%

Age 8: 5/21 = 23.8%

Age 9: 3/21 = 9.5%

Age 10: 5/21 = 23.8%

Age 11: 8/21 = 38.0%

Age 8: 4/16 = 25.0% *

Age 9: 1/16 = 6.2% *

Age 10: 4/16 = 25.0%

Age 11: 7/16 = 43.7%

APPENDIX 24

Response to remaining adverts

ADVERT #15 - REED.CO.UK

Description: The advert – titled "Super Reed"- features the ex-Edinburgh fringe comedy trio "The Wogans" and portrays a superhero going around an office with the ability to instantaneously change people's jobs. The trio is wearing colourful fancy dress clothes and sings a catchy slogan. The main character (dressed in a superhero costume) approaches in turn every employee in an office ordering them into a new job (i.e. "You should be a Lolly Pop Man!") magically changing their dress or uniform according to their new role.

Sandy (age 9) seems fascinated by the main actor in the advert transforming a woman into a bride:

S: "Oh I love this advert, watch this! 'You should be my wife!' Wait, wait... now it comes 'You should be my wife!'"

Her friend **Kesha (age 9)** is not impressed by the advert and she expresses critical remarks which seem to suggest some parental mediation:

K: "Mhm...not that good (...) 'cause I mean it's too catchy and why would someone... I mean it's not real...kids may go on the website and think they got something and then it turns out to be something for adults so..."

She explains that she is not interested in "grown-up adverts" in general and she does not pay attention to them, "even the catchy ones" (in contrast with her earlier appreciation of the WW advert)

K: "It's not stuff for me so why bother watch it?"

ADVERT #16 – GIRL TECH PASSWORD JOURNAL

Description: A pretty teenager girl talks about the benefits of having a journal protected by a secret password of choice. The background is consistently flowery and pink – like the journal itself- and the advert shows other girls happily using the diary.

Ruby (age 11): "I like it because in my house if you write something is not really a secret- my mum doesn't really like secrets - but if I actually had a diary like this I would be able to have secrets and it'd be good 'cause my sister always tries to read my diary and she can still open it 'cause I haven't got a lock, but with this one it would only open with my word so I might actually buy that. The

problem is... I don't like it being PINK though, if it did actually come in purple or black or blue or a dark color I would buy it"

Then the girl expresses her frustration with the prevalence of the colour pink:

R: "I think girls adverts and stuff are always about pink, pink, pink and it's like annoying 'cause not all girls like pink ...like they may sell a doll and someone may actually like the doll but don't like the colour pink and it would be really annoying 'cause it's all pink, while people like different colours, so it's quite annoying how it usually is all pink"

FM: "Why do you think they do mostly things in pink for girls?"

R: "Because they think pink is a "girly" colour so most girls will like it. While if they do things in blue then girls who actually like pink, which is nearly all of them, they may not buy it, I think. But for me I never liked pink even when I was small so it's a pain..."

ADVERT #17 – OREO “TWIST LICK”

Description: A young girl (age 4-5) explains to her daddy how to properly consume an OREO biscuit. The attire, accent and mannerism of both the girl and her father suggest a typical upper middle class background. She addresses "daddy" with a stern expression and teacher tone, giving step-by-step instructions on how to proceed: "Now, daddy, I am here to explain to you how to eat an Oreos- don't laugh- it's very hard. First, you twist it, then... No! - stopping daddy from grabbing the biscuit - ... you lick it, yummmmm... you don't have to say mmmm, but I just can't help myself. Then you put them back together...- the girl whispering in her dad's ear at this point - because they are married, then you drop it in the milk and you eat it" The father asks "Can I try it?" but the girl replies: "I don't think you are ready yet". The advert's closing scene shows the father sneaking into the kitchen at night time to find the OREO biscuits with a note written by the daughter "HANDS OFF DADDY".

The advert was chosen and watched randomly by approximately half of the sample (N=10) in the second round. Despite most girls' positive appraisal of the advert, a surprising response comes from **Becky (age 8)**, perhaps due to her lack of identification with the character (upper middle class girl) who she finds downright annoying:

B: "I hate this one, it's so annoying. I can't stand the way she talks ...and then the girl saying the two biscuits sticking together "because they are married"...like the two biscuits making babies or something...that's disgusting! It shouldn't be an advert that children watch...!"

Her friend **Kim (age 9)** looks serious and she seems to agree with Becky by nodding her head.

APPENDIX 25

Selection of Participants

Through Maximum Variation Sample

